Gender and Empire in Turn-of-the-Century French Literature on China



A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval and Modern Languages (French)

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Hilary Term 2025

Some material from Chapter II has appeared in the following article:

Hsu, Michelle Chun-Han, 'Between the Picturesque and the Political: Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti's Play *La Fille du Ciel*', *Dix-Neuf* (17 December 2023), DOI: 10.1080/14787318.2023.2291594.

Thesis Word Count: 81,685

Short Summary

Gender and Empire in Turn-of-the-Century French Literature on China

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This thesis investigates how gender and empire inform the representation of China in turn-of-the-century French literature in ways that bring together nineteenth-century concerns with sexuality, quests for cultural otherness, and structures of domination at the cultural crossroads of fin-de-siècle France and Late Imperial China. I argue that gender dynamics negotiated within the textual practice of these empires produces hybrid forms of writing, whose generative and destructive processes have an ambiguous relationship with voices of authority. The production of knowledge and imagery related with China not only affirms the hegemonic process of domination and possession but also intervenes in the same process through transformation and perversion. Drawing on French literary studies and Chinese studies, I trace hybridity through intertextuality, use of Chinese in French texts, and French reception of Chinese culture, to round out a historically grounded interpretation. My reading engages literary genres ranging from novels, travel notes, and essays to plays and poetry. Interpreting the cross-dressing practice of Chinese boy actors as a form of gender artifice rather than anomaly, Chapter I considers how the homoerotic representation of these actors combines the decadent fascination with androgyny and intertextual references to Chinese plays. In the first part

of Chapter II, I analyse how *La Fille du Ciel* (1911), a play co-authored by Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti, engages Chinese political thinking while giving way to the picturesque in its stage production. In the second part, I read Victor Segalen's *Le Combat pour le sol* (1913) as a reaction to Paul Claudel's *Le Repos du septième jour* (1901) to assess their rivalling visions of China. Chapter III discusses the construction of authorial credibility in ethnography. Analysing the writing of Segalen, George Soulié de Morant, and Chen Jitong on Chinese theatre, I suggest their performance of ethnographic authority is shaped by historical circumstances. Chapter IV analyses novels on the erotic life of Empress Dowager Cixi in relation to masochism and the tradition of the *femme fatale*. The final chapter explores the Yellow Peril in terms of Western racial thinking, Arthur de Gobineau's race theory and literary work, and novels prophesying future wars. My reading reconciles Gobineau's pessimism concerning imperialist expansion and sympathies with imperialism in Yellow Peril novels.

Long Abstract

Gender and Empire in Turn-of-the-Century French Literature on China

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‘Gender and Empire in Turn-of-the-Century French Literature on China’ explores how ideas and practices revolving around gender and empire structure the representation of China in the literature of fin-de-siècle France. It considers the impacts of gender in the period, ranging from its function as a regulatory category in the construction of social hierarchy to its potential as a performative artifice that allows writers to situate themselves in relation to dominant norms. More than simply indicating the military and economic aggrandisement of nations such as Britain and France, the term ‘empire’ designates literary practices inextricable from imperialist cultural production and marked by the dynamics of gender, race, and class. ‘Empire’ can mean Second Empire, but under the French Third Republic it also means France’s colonial empire. The late-Qing imperium of China also plays a part in the multiple meanings of ‘empire’, as the structures of domination and control of these systems underlie the texts to be analysed. Entertaining these assumptions about gender and empire, this thesis investigates how French writers combine nineteenth-century preoccupations with sexuality and exoticism with knowledge and images of China at the crossroads of Sino-French cultural interaction.

To examine the myriad China*s* figuring in genres ranging from novels, travel notes, and essays to plays and poetry, in the period from the 1880s to the 1920s, I highlight how hybridity acts as both a significant process of cultural interchange and a critical concept to assess Sino-French intercultural contact in terms of its ambiguous relationship with imperial authority. I view the articulation of cultural difference as processes of hybridisation that reproduce dominant relations as well as contesting the very structure of domination that characterises intercultural contact. I follow Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity that opens up a space of translation and negotiation without being frozen in essentialising identities, while also respecting Anne McClintock's wariness for the abstracting tendency that reduces hybridity into a conceptual form disconnected from the specificities and torsions of history. I am convinced that historically grounded close readings of texts can invigorate the application of hybridity as a versatile language of critique.

The same critical vigilance applies to my response to Orientalism, a term Edward Said put forward to address the dominating systems of knowledge that colluded with the political, racial, and sexual asymmetry that has produced the very category of the Orient itself. In order not to inherit systems of mis-representation and exclusion, my treatment of Orientalist discourses prioritises their historical moment and how they relate to literary works. While paying attention to their connections to forms of political

asymmetry and Eurocentrism, I foreground individualised readings that locate nuances and contradictions within the production of Orientalist learning and images that resist coherence. This thesis seeks to avoid reductionism in literary criticism and the analysis of cultural interchange.

My overarching argument is that turn-of-the-century French literature on China performs rituals of truth, a process of hybridisation in which figures of authority and counter-authority pursue disjunctive directions. These figures affirm the coherence of imperial hegemony in forms of Orientalism on the one hand and, and on the other hand, they intervene in the reproduction of imperial norms through transformation and perversion. The idea of 'ritual of truth' is borrowed from Michel Foucault's reflection on the axis of power and knowledge, as it involves processes of validation, restriction, and exclusion that endow the discursive producer with intellectual credibility. Throughout my research, the question of 'what China means for French literature' points, via meandering paths, to the question of how forms of China came to be known, imagined, interpreted, reproduced, and propagated as such in French literature. Signifying both a ceremony performed according to a prescribed order and a series of actions regularly undertaken by someone, 'ritual' functions as one of the keywords for me to make sense of how French writers relate to China in terms of fin-de-siècle culture and select aspects of Chinese culture that they see as fascinating. Rituals of truth entail

the performance of knowledge, rendering the form and content of texts crucial to the intended presentation of China, at times as an object of curiosity, eros, beauty, and horror.

To support this argument, this thesis presents five case studies revolving around several interrelated issues in turn-of-the-century French literature on China. In Chapter I, I analyse how French writers relate cross-dressing Chinese boy actors to gender artifice and the decadent fascination with androgyny. I focus on how a novel by George Soulié de Morant centring on the life of a boy actor re-evaluates his underprivileged status in terms of artistic agency. In Chapter II, I examine how collaboration and competition among French writers shape their attempts to compose plays about China. In the first section of this chapter, I assess the interplay between Orientalist fantasy and references to late-Qing politics in *La Fille du Ciel* (1911), a play co-authored by Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti. In the second section, I demonstrate how *Le Combat pour le sol* (1913) by Victor Segalen is conceived as a makeover of Paul Claudel's play *Le Repos du septième jour* (1901), which Segalen sees as downplaying the aesthetic potential of China. Returning to writings on Chinese theatre, Chapter III explores the construction of ethnographic authority in Chen Jitong, Segalen, and Soulié de Morant as they position themselves as mediators of Chinese culture for the French reader. Their curation of varying degrees of authorial credibility constitutes the object of my analysis.

Focusing on the intersection of masochism and forms of Chinese cruelty, I analyse novels on the erotic life of Empress Dowager Cixi as a remake of the *femme fatale* enhanced by the sexual dynamics of masochism and tropes of *supplice chinois* as the novels' local colour in Chapter IV. In the final chapter, I examine representations of the Yellow Peril in the works of Arthur de Gobineau and novels that prophesy wars to come. By examining these texts alongside aspects of racial thinking and anthropology in the late nineteenth century, I suggest that the apparent contrast between Gobineau's pessimism about empire-building, and the pro-imperialist sympathies of yellow perilist novels, can be reconciled through their continuation of nationalism. I also investigate how individual leaders of the Yellow Peril acquire attributes of white masculinity and become a foil for a devirilised France in one of the yellow perilist novels.

My methodological toolkit draws on literary history, history and theories concerning gender and sexuality, and cultural studies. In this thesis, the chosen texts are primarily read as products of French literature, but many of them are engaged in an explicit dialogue with Chinese literature or China's cultural tradition. Thus, reading these texts necessitates extensive work on how they acquire meaning within the domain of French literary culture and through the convergence of French imagination and Chinese texts. This will allow for a thorough view of the workings of exoticism in relation to the historical moment that shapes the hermeneutic process of the texts.

History and theory concerning gender and sexuality undergird my analysis with regard to the formation of normative frameworks through which identities are articulated. This area of theory also sheds light on how discourses on medicine, gender, and race interact with the literary production of fin-de-siècle France. My reading follows the sense that the expansion of France's modern colonial empire is indispensable in understanding these phenomena, which are all too often conceived as essentially urban and metropolitan movements. Though China was not one of France's colonies and retained its sovereignty despite imperialist encroachment, it is nevertheless part of the exotic imaginary, with a distinct history of Sino-French cultural exchange. This distinct history leads to the ambiguity of terms such as 'empire' and 'imperial' that figure in this thesis, referring to the French empire as well as the Chinese imperium. In turn, the cultural texts of the Chinese empire undergo complex processes of hybridisation resulting in the works to be studied here. Availing myself of research in Sinology, such as the study on Beijing opera of Andrea S. Goldman and An-qi Wang, and what has come to be recognised as the transgender history of China, exemplified by the works of Matthiew H. Sommer and Howard Chiang, helps to piece together how Chinese cultural texts are distilled into the French representation of gender and sexuality in China, converging with the outward projection of fin-de-siècle French culture. A powerful support for cross-referencing analysis, their historiography turns what appears to be quizzically

bizarre into a lucid itinerary of the comings and goings of hybrid meanings across the French and Chinese domains. It also acts as headlights that locate the direction for future investigation building on the current study. These methods and branches of scholarship enable me to analyse processes of hybridisation within the historical context of fin-de-siècle France and aspects of late imperial Chinese culture, showing that turn-of-the-century French literature on China is multifaceted and characterised by hybridity and contradictions in its ideological position vis-à-vis imperialism.

My project's primary contribution to nineteenth-century French studies is like a ring road in construction. It assembles a series of connected pathways encircling areas attributed to/occupied by China in the literary imagination of fin-de-siècle France. These areas have often been analysed in single-author studies or comparative projects that look at a handful of prominent authors, exemplified by the landmark works of Yvan Daniel, Charles Forsdick, and Bei Huang, just to name a few. This is not to say epoch-stretching surveys are absent; au contraire, several useful anthologies and collected essays of critical works have been edited by scholars like Muriel Détrie. Extending the ongoing critical questioning of exoticism from its late twentieth-century revival as a language of critique constantly grappling with the baggage of colonial history, I seek to highlight the ideological and aesthetic crossover in works by less widely-known authors and works of less renown by established writers. These works reveal compelling

connections that are core to what we know defines the fin-de-siècle, namely concerns with decline, degeneration, perversion, an entropic view with the world, sexuality, and world-ending wars.

I bring together a wide range of materials not previously considered together, such as the intertextual references to canonical Chinese plays in a French novel on cross-dressing actors in Chapter I, the evocation of twentieth-century Chinese political thinking in a French melodrama in Chapter II, a Chinese diplomat's publications in French and confidential reports (in Chinese) destined to his chief in Chapter III, novels on the erotic life of the Empress Dowager Cixi alongside theories on masochism in Chapter IV, and last but not the least, race theory and literary works by Gobineau in dialogue with serial novels on the Yellow Peril in Chapter V. This gives various shapes to each chapter. Chapter I consists of an overview of gender crossing and homoeroticism to establish a valid framework to support the rapprochement between the effeminate boy actors of China and fin-de-siècle androgyny. This association is essential to reading gender artifice into the representation of boy actors and the novel's intertextual relationship with Chinese canonical plays. Chapter II is dedicated to plays on China, with a primary focus on *La Fille du Ciel* followed by a shorter section on two plays composed by Claudel and Segalen respectively. Chapter III analyses the construction of ethnographical authority in the writings of Chen, Segalen, and Soulié

de Morant. Chapters IV and V both start by establishing a historically grounded account of the subject as the foundation for the analysis of individual works. Building on the link between masochism and Chinese cruelty, Chapter IV pursues a bifurcated path to analyse how Chinese cruelty is mediated by French mass culture and explore the relationship between fictional Cixi and the *femme fatale*. In Chapter V, I first consider the discursive formation of the Yellow Peril foregrounding Gobineau's theorisation, and then go on to analyse how novels on future war deal with the same subject. Throughout these chapters, my dominant research techniques consist of intertextual cross-referencing, close-reading, historicism, and cross-cultural analyses to assess the representation of China in fin-de-siècle France. This research demonstrates strengths in its critical and comparative thinking about the turn-of-the-century literary field and its processes of hybridisation and transformation across boundaries of language and culture.

Acknowledgements

It is a humbling pleasure to recollect the help and kindness of many. The debts of gratitude, both academic and personal, which I have incurred in the pursuit of this DPhil project are beyond full enumeration. In any case, I should like to record here some of them.

I am indebted to the mentors who have guided my academic development: Duncan McColl Chesney, Ya-feng Wu, Vincent Lecompte, Antonella Tulli, Tim Farrant, and Dominique Combe. Had it been not for Duncan's lectures on European Literature and his unflagging support as my undergraduate advisor and friend, I would not probably have come this far. Massive thanks go to my supervisor, Jennifer Yee, whose time, advice, wit, humour, and encouragement have fuelled my growth throughout the years of DPhil. In my diary, supervision meetings often come with a smiling face doodled beside the event, as meeting her has always been heart-lifting. My Transfer and Confirmation of Status examiners, Andrew Counter, Patrick McGuinness, and Jane Hiddleston have been insightful readers of my as-yet half-baked thesis. Their feedback helped sharpen the focus of my research project.

I thank Wadham College for the grants and sustained provision of accommodation that saved me from the trouble of house-hunting during my studies. Other institutional assistance includes the scholarship offered by the Ministry of Education, Republic of

China (Taiwan) and the Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship awarded by the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange.

My recognition also goes to my friends who are fellow travellers in the journey of doing a PhD. Their support at various points of the thesis has been vitalising. I thank James Tzu-chun King, Ting-huang Tai, Yuan-bo Wang, Chi-ru Yang, Liang-kai Yu, Andrea Jung-an Liu, Jean Tzu-yin Chou, Yong-fang Hsu, Ofelia Huang, Hestia Zhang, and Marie Martine. Alongside research, I owe much to Oxford University Powerlifting Club, which helped me rediscover the working capacity of my body as the foundation of human activities, physical or intellectual. If I end up stronger in every sense of the word, it must have involved the handling, inspiration, and coaching that came respectively from Rhonda Tse, Gwen Marsden, and Norman Cheung. Being part of the women's team that contributed to Oxford's first victory in the Varsity in thirteen years has been an empowering experience, adding momentum to my pre-competition statement that I wished to use the Varsity as the last warmup to submit my thesis.

Amelie Hsieh, Jessica Tang, Esther Ya-Chouan Chang, and Esther Wei-yi Lin have been stalwart friends throughout the DPhil and my life. For her companionship through thick and thin, I cherish Casey Hsueh-ching Ho. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their love and support. I dedicate this thesis to the loving memory of my grandmother, who passed away shortly after the submission.

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Introduction

This thesis explores how gender and empire inform the representation of China in turn-of-the-century French literature. For terms as vast as 'gender' and 'empire', some qualifications are required to clarify how they work as my thematic coordinates. As I use the word 'gender', it means two things in particular. First, it means the cultural meanings surrounding a given sexed body, what Philippa Levine calls 'a hierarchical ordering of quality, skill, and usefulness' in the age of high imperialism.[1] In this sense, gender acts as one of the critical markers of difference for the social division of empires. It is a familiar point in modern scholarship to view colonial politics as revolving around the construction and control of exclusive categories of gender, race, and class, as these categories serve to distinguish the white colonist from the native so that the imperial hierarchy can operate on a stable identity and with legitimate progeny.[2] Anne McClintock even views gender dynamics as 'fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise'.[3] This understanding of gender pivots on the notion of identity as a regulatory device, a substantial model, and a fiction of coherence. It enables us to explain why the imperialist enterprise is upheld by a cult of masculine values,[4] and how colonial literature endorses imperialism through representations that

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[1] Philippa Levine, 'Introduction', *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 7.
[2] See Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 53-54, and Philippa Levine, 'Sexuality, Gender, and Empire' in *Gender and Empire*, pp. 134-155.

[3] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* ((London: Routledge, 1995), p. 6.

[4] Jean-Marc Moura, *La Littérature des lointains: Histoire de l'exotisme européen au XXe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998), p. 108.

enforce the coherence of gendered identities.

However, this view of gender may prove unwieldy when it comes to literary texts that deliberately syncretise norms and traditions drawn from both European and non-European societies, as a good many of the texts examined by this thesis shows. Representing gender mobility in cross-cultural contexts problematises, challenges, and subverts the prescriptive nature and mandate for coherence that the identity politics of empire seeks to propagate. In this context, rather than following the prescriptive norms of culturally constructed attributes, gender is a fluid process of signification. In this thesis, I explore less normative sexualities than those evoked by researchers such as Levine, Stoler, and McClintock, whose works provide an excellent paradigm for me to look at instances of the reversal and transformation of norms. My second acceptation of gender employs the notion of performativity theorised by Judith Butler,[5] who posits that the attributes and cultural signification shown by a body involve a stylised and ritualised form that seeks, through social dispensations, to become the essence of a substantial identity. This process is often betrayed by the very performative character and possibilities of gender manifested through moments of discontinuity and incoherence. Just as gender performance underscores action, the length of the acts, and an audience to accomplish its reception, a careful appraisal of the stylised and ritualised forms of gender in the works I examine follows what they do in the text, how they are shaped by and shaping their historical moment, and the kinds of literary culture to which they respond. Representing forms of gender and their practices in China allows

[5] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 183-193.

turn-of-the-century French writers to situate themselves in relation to dominant social and literary norms. In doing so, they also question these norms and probe into the implication of non-normative sexualities through the prism of China.

As European imperialism reached its apogee at the turn of the century,[6] this period of literature was marked by an acute interest in geographical and cultural otherness. 'Empire' not only means the significance of imperialist expansion in relation to the creation of the texts in question, but also highlights the notion that empire is a textual practice *per se*.[7] In turn-of-the-century France, empire draws unabashed cultural attention and plays a remarkable role in its literary practice in addition to the impacts of its military, economic, and political aggrandisement across Africa, the Pacific, and Asia. As a textual practice, empire foregrounds the kinds of writing centred around an imperial authority's position vis-à-vis its colonies and territories of interest, be it a colonial administrator's report, a travelling correspondent's article for readers at home, an ethnographer's treatise, a scientist's reports, or a missionary's chronicle, not to mention legal documents, popular literature, and attempts to write about non-European people and places drawing on any of these sources. Hallmarks of imperialist culture such as racial hierarchy, the division between the civilised and the barbarians, and the structure of representation that has since come to be termed as 'Orientalism' permeate the texts of empire, justifying (and sometimes contesting) its building, maintenance, and growth.

When applied conceptually to my exploration of this area of French literature,

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[6] See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1994 [1987]), p. 56.

[7] Moura, *La Littérature des lointains,* p. 68.

gender and empire provide thematic coordinates to facilitate some interrelated lines of inquiry. The first involves analysing the representation of Chinese gender-crossing in French literature to see how this aspect of exoticism engages fin-de-siècle discourses on sexuality and aesthetics. This approach to gender hinges on a literary-historical awareness of the intertextual relationship between French and Chinese literatures. Drawing on the critical traditions of French and Chinese studies, I examine relevant intercultural contexts to establish a historically grounded study of gender-crossing and intertextuality. My approach also takes a second line of enquiry, looking at empire as a hybrid textual practice. It has two primary concerns: first, I look at how French writers situate themselves in relation to the reordering of the social and sexual dynamics of Chinese society in response to the presence of Frenchmen. New relations with imperial men restructure the imbalances of the relations between prostitutes, cross-dressing actors, and noble women with the local patriarchy. I consider how structures of domination in French literature on China syncretise or transform different kinds of power relations, making literature a transgressive field of imperial culture. This connects to my second concern regarding empire as a field of critical engagement. Throughout the chapters that follow, I argue that gender dynamics, negotiated within the imperial textual practice, produce hybrid forms of cultural contact, whose generative and destructive processes entertain an ambiguous relationship with imperial authority in varying forms of Orientalism and cliché. In turn-of-the-century French literature on China voices of authority and counter-authority articulate cultural differences through forms of intellectual credibility, realigning the customary boundaries between sameness and difference. This mode of analysis raises questions about signification, displacement, and resignification: What does China mean to turn-

of-the-century French literature? How to make sense of China being articulated through voices situated in various places on the ideological spectrum? To what extent are these processes of hybridisation, adaptation, and fantasy effective? What kind of trajectories do they traverse?

China, One of the Orients

In his 1961 preface to *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Michel Foucault identifies the Orient as the conceptual split that throws the '*ratio* occidentale' into relief:

> …nuit du commencement, en quoi l'Occident s'est formé, pour lui tout ce qui n'est pas, encore qu'il doive y chercher ce qu'est sa vérité primitive. Il faudra faire une histoire de ce grand partage, tout au long du devenir occidental, le suivre dans sa continuité et ses échanges, mais le laisser apparaître aussi dans son hiératisme tragique.[8]

Conceived as such, the Orient is a cover-all concept crucial to the dichotomy in Western thinking. It is Europe's construction of the cultural and geographical Other, whose evolving meaning comprises at least three varieties—the Mediterranean and the Islamic world; the Byzantine world characterised by the Eastern Orthodox Church; and Far-East Asia.[9] China partakes in this process of identification and non-identification as one of the Orients, enlarging territories that are simultaneously geographical, intellectual, cultural, and political.

From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, China occupies a unique and contradictory place in the French imagination, thought of as both a museum

[8] Michel Foucault, 'Préface de l'édition originale (1961)', in *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, *Œuvres*, ed. by Frédéric Gros, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2015), I, p. 664.

[9] Jean-Marc Moura, *La Littérature des lointains*, p. 42.

of antiquated practices, beauty and cruelty, and a rival empire whose military reorganisation and modernisation inspires fears of a Chinese takeover. Therefore, 'China' means several things for turn-of-the-century French literature. It lies at the intersection of imperialist expansion and the vast body of Western scholarship and cultural conjecture about 'the Orient', which is itself an evolving concept. In terms of strategy, China involves a patchwork of semi-colonial territories that attract France's commercial, military, religious, and political interests.

From the Qing empire to the Republic, China did not become a colony subjugated entirely to any imperialist power, so that one might ask to what extent studies on colonial literature have any relevance in looking at it. Nevertheless, in what is known as the age of Unequal Treaties (1842-1946),[10] China was extorted for the concession of territorial rights, opening of ports, division of spheres of influence, construction of railways, and the practice of extraterritorial jurisdiction in a framework of military, economic and political asymmetries by countries including Britain, France, Germany, the United States, and Japan. These acts enabled them to extend their governmental, military, and mercantile interests beyond the colonies, facilitating the operation of 'informal empire'. Varying in shape, scope, and duration, informal empire involves 'the exercise of controlling influence by one group or polity over another, without an associated claim to political sovereignty or "ownership"'.[11] The French concession in Shanghai and the French-built Sino-Vietnamese railway are salient examples of

[10] See Wang Dong, *China's Unequal Treaties: Narrating National History* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005) and Wang Jianlang, *Unequal Treaties and China*, 2 vols (Honolulu: Silkroad Press, 2016).

[11] Poppy Fry, 'Informal empire', in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern World*, ed. by Peter N. Stearns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) in *Oxford Reference* (accessed 6 December 2023).

informal imperialism exercised by France in China.

In fact, the semicolonial status of China remains an area of contention in contemporary historiography, notably in Andre Gunder Frank's study of the nineteenth-century global economy. Frank holds a revisionist position regarding what is known as 'the Great Divergence' put forward by Kenneth Pomeranz, who uses the term to designate the dissymmetry of economic growth and geopolitical power between the West and East-Asia. Frank does not dispute the nature of this historic transformation; rather, he redefines its pace and situates it in a much later period, from the 1870s to 1913. He thus qualifies the view that the whole nineteenth century saw the takeover of the Asian powers, most notably India and China, by a West armed with industrialisation's boost of productivity. Rejecting China's semicolonial position as the essential condition to understand its role in the world economy and geopolitics throughout the nineteenth century, Frank argues for the continued integrity of China in terms of territorial sovereignty and its domestically oriented production across various sectors. He suggests that China's subjection to the West and Japan remained limited at the turn of the nineteenth century vis-à-vis its sheer mass of territory and population.[12] Maintaining that China's decline from a world-leading economic power to a semicolonial state should not be exaggerated, Frank stipulates that the Great Divergence between China and Europe 'began around 1860 and was signalled by rebellion domestically'.[13] To add to these concerns, throughout this thesis, the terms 'empire' and 'imperial' retain a certain ambiguity since they designate both the extra-

[12] Andre Gunder Frank, *Re-Orienting the 19th Century: Global Economy in the Continuing Asian Age* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 269-274.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

territorial ambitions of the French Third Republic and the Qing empire, depending on the context.

Though Frank treats the Western dominance over China with a pinch of salt, he acknowledges the importance of colonisation from the perspective of global economic history. For Frank, colonisation turbocharged the transformation of 'the global division of labour and system of world trade and payments into the hierarchical multilateral' system which substantially benefitted Britain, Western Europe and the United States from the 1870s to 1913.[14] We should also note that even if China was not defeated by forces of 'classical imperialism' in this period,[15] it ended up deeply scarred by the West's impact, which, as Philip Richardson has construed, 'could not have influenced the overall economic performance significantly one way or the other. It seemed that the major Western influence on China was on its psyche rather than on its pocket and that China's responses remained overwhelmingly directed towards solving problems in Chinese ways'.[16] This insight makes literary studies germane to the qualitative investigation of identity crises induced by imperialist expansion across Europe and Asia. As far as this thesis is concerned, the crises include China's compromised supremacy in East Asia's tribute trade system and France's national chagrin after the Franco-Prussian War. Whether and how China would regain its strength as a dominating power that threatens the Eurocentric world order remains an important issue in Western speculations.

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 182.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[16] Philip Richardson, *Economic Change in China, c. 1800-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 9.

For instance, novels about the Yellow Peril are great starting points from which to probe France's fears of national degeneration and reverse colonisation realised by a militarily and politically reorganised China. In those narratives, China is no remote territory whose presumed backwardness and archaic practices confirm the essentialist position that non-Europeans should be ruled by Europeans; instead, scrupulous descriptions and analyses based on military strategy, ethnography, and on-site observations are employed to persuade the readers, mostly young boys, that China will challenge white authority once it becomes as strong as the white empires. This brings together various quasi-scientific concepts about civilisation, race, and sexuality to legitimise the superior value of France. Turn-of-the-century French literature on China is very much about ordering raw data about China into the conventions of European narrative and utterance by individuals endowed with specialist knowledge and prestigious institutions of learning that exert a crucial influence on the rise of ethnography, archaeology, Sinology, historiography, and medicine. Yet not every distortion or transformation of China's cultural reality involves flag-waving, as the attitudes and responses to China in French literature are motivated by an exoticism susceptible to creative interpretations that cannot be constrained by the straightjacket of a unifying explanation. The degree of diversity necessitates a study of texts in their own right, in order to avoid rapid generalisations.

From Sinophilia to Sinophobia: the (Un-)making of an Exoticism

Scholars agree that Europe's attitude towards China changed in the nineteenth

century, a transformation known as the turn from Sinophilia to Sinophobia. [17] In the nineteenth century, the admiration of Chinese culture and chinoiserie prominent in the eighteenth century subsided,[18] eventually to be replaced by *japonisme*.[19] Perceived as an empire in decline, China opened up several treaty ports and saw the plunder of the Old Summer Palace during the Second Opium War (1856-1860).[20] From 1881 to 1885, the campaign led by the French Third Republic supplanted China's authority over Indochina, which was transformed from a Chinese tribute state into a French protectorate. In 1900, anti-Western sentiments in China culminated in the Boxer Uprising, which involved attacks against Westerners and triggered retaliation by an alliance of eight nations including France. In this period, reports of Chinese atrocities associated China with cruelty and the mastery of torture, exemplified by Octave Mirbeau's *Le Jardin des Supplices* (1899). In a Sinophobic mood, Pierre Loti regards the Chinese as innately cruel masters 'd'atroces raffinements chinois pour prolonger des paroxysmes de souffrance'. [21] Nevertheless, French scholarship about China flourished in the nineteenth century. In 1814, the first European professorship in

[17] Valuable scholarship on Sinophilia and Sinophobia include Zhang Longxi, 'The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Autumn 1988), p.123; René Étiemble, *L'Europe chinoise II: De la sinophilie à la sinophobie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); Michel Cartier, ed., *La Chine entre amour et haine: Actes de VIIIe colloque de sinologie de Chantilly* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998), especially Muriel Détrie's chapter, pp. 403-429; Yvonne Hsieh, *From Occupation to Revolution: China through the Eyes of Loti, Claudel, Segalen, and Malraux (1895-1933)* (Birmingham, AL: Summa, 1996), p. 11, and Lo Shih-lung, *La Chine sur la scène française au XIXe siècle* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015), p. 6.

[18] For example, China was thought of as a model for France to reform its method of census. See Étiemble, *op. cit.*, pp. 321-325. Another useful document for the representation of China in eighteenth-century France is Henri Cordier, *La Chine en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: H. Laurens, 1910).

[19] For the history of *japonisme*, see Sophie Basch, *Le Japonisme, un art français* (Paris: les Presses du réel, 2023).

[20] David Scott offers further historical accounts in *China and the International System, 1840-1949: Power, Presence, and Perceptions in a Century of Humiliation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

[21] Pierre Loti, 'Les derniers jours de Pékin' (1900), *Voyages* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2018), p. 1058.

Chinese had been established at the Collège de France.[22] The foundation of the Musée Guimet (1879) and the Musée Cernuschi (1898), whose collections of Chinese artefacts were considerable, testified to the French interest in Chinese culture. In short, the transition towards Sinophobia was a far cry from a black-and-white switch, and Sinophobia did not entirely supersede Sinophilia. Clinging too much to the idea of a clearly demarcated transition would leave us unable to explain contradictions. Turn-of-the-century French writing on China was conditioned by a shift of focus accompanied by other changing relations, such as imperialist advancement, academic appraisal, Europe's aesthetic representation, and mass-culture appreciation.

In this thesis, the ordering of chapters reflects this general trend of French engagement with China that shifts from Sinophilia to Sinophobia. However, this structure is not intended to suggest a straightforward chronological progression, but rather to present a spectrum of contrasting attitudes. Chapter I explores French representations of boy actors, framing their homoerotic appeal in a positive light. This constitutes a distinctly Sinophilic expression that celebrate the actors' technique and artistic agency. Chapters II and III examine the output of the aesthetic and ethnographic exploitations of Chinese culture in which China becomes the object of sustained cultural, political, and religious inquiry, serving as a site of epistemological and artistic fascination. By contrast, Chapters IV and V depict China as a locus of horror–sometimes sadistic, sometimes suggestive of reverse colonisation. These final chapters foreground Sinophobic tropes such as the Far-Eastern *femme fatale*, Chinese cruelty,

[22] See Pierre-Étienne Will, 'Jean-Piuerre Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832) et ses successeurs', *La lettre du Collège de France* (August 2015), URL: http://journals.openedition.org/lettre-cdf/2090 (accessed 9 October 2023).

and the menace of the Yellow Peril. This structural arc is designed to highlight the diversity of French responses to China, tracing a continuum that ranges from fascination to fear, from Sinophilia to Sinophobia.

For turn-of-the-century French literature, writing about China requires forms of intellectual credibility, as missionaries and merchants are joined by soldiers, diplomats, administrators, writers who knew Chinese, and French-educated Chinese intent on writing back to produce information about China. This body of *savoir* does not amount to scientific knowledge about China that presupposes a unified and coherent truth. Instead, it dissipates China into China*s* through open-ended interpretations. It consists of popular myth, sinologist learning, self-serving ideological pronouncements, and aesthetic experimentation that conglomerate into what has been said about China. In taking this perspective, my conceptual debt to Michel Foucault's thinking on the archaeological approach to discursive formation is evident. For Foucault, being an 'archaeologist' in the sense of new historicism rejects the assumption that there is *a* truth and a history of uninterrupted continuities to be retrieved as a single centre to draw around all phenomena and developmental succession towards a principle of cohesion. Instead, the archaeologist is to mine – in both senses of obtaining resources and destroying by means of laying explosive – the edifice of an established field and eventually undermine what has been believed to be true. This aims to advance an epistemological change within history, a change that no longer sees the individual subject and its consciousness as the foundation of history. As is discussed in the last chapter of *Les Mots et les Choses*, the linguistic turn in the twentieth century, psychoanalysis, and ethnology have decanted the human subject with regard to the varying forms of language, the laws of unconsciousness and desire, and how he

approaches to the Other's culture, beliefs, and practices.[23] In the belief that the radical thinking of the hermeneutics of suspicion has been opposed and contained by 'a recuperation process at work within',[24] Foucault presents his theoretical engagement with the use of rupture, discontinuity, gaps, and transformation in historiography. Envisioned as one of his 'livres-bombes', *L'Archéologie du savoir* disrupts notions of totality and serial development, systematically revoking the postulates and methodology of *histoire globale* with a view to another history of what has been said.[25]

In foregrounding ruptures, faults, gaps, and redistribution, Foucauldian archaeology probes into what is ostensibly homogeneous to analyse difference without compromising it for the benefit of unity.[26] For Foucault, the task of the historian used to be overcoming discontinuity from history by turning disorder into order and dispersion into cohesion. *L'Archéologie du savoir* reverses the position of discontinuity by placing it at the centre of historical analysis. In disarticulating unity exemplified by neat periodisation or conceptual shorthand, the archeologist's spade disfigures what passes as the natural given of an epoch and reveals what Foucault calls the discursive practice that produces and enshrines unity.[27] Viewing history as a discursive formation strips documents of the complacency that they serve as the 'heureux instrument' of a history that is intrinsically valid and entitled to recognition.[28] Foucault's archaeology

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[23] Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses* in *Œuvres* , I, pp. 1442-1457.

[24] See Alan Sheridan's detailed analysis in *Michel Foucault: the Will to Truth* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 91.

[25] Foucault introduces the idea of 'book explosives' in 'Dialogue sur le pouvoir' (1978), *Dits et écrits*, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), II, pp. 476-477. His rejection of unity is expounded in *L'Archéologie du savoir* in *Œuvres*, II, pp. 146.

[26] Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* in *Œuvres*, II, pp. 179.

[27] Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* in *Œuvres*, II, p. 188.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

takes history as one of the ways in which a society elaborates and makes sense of the sheer mass of documents inseparable from its development. The construction of a field of knowledge and identification of its object of study thus follow an *a posteriori* process. It is an attribution in hindsight and an accumulation of afterthoughts in concert.

How does this inform my approach to turn-of-the-century French literature on China? Foucault's idea of *raréfaction* as an interpretative method to 'weigh' the specific value of discursive statements is valuable for reading texts that seek to gain social, cultural, and political currency by representing and laying claims on China.[29] This method treats discursive statements as more than a message to be perused, but as a 'trésor inépuisable' from which new richness can be gleaned, 'oracles rétrospectifs' that renew the understanding of a given subject, and as a finite, desirable, and useful 'asset'.[30] By seeing discursive statements as assets, Foucault concludes that how discourse appears, how it comes into effect, and how it is appropriated involves from the outset the question of power, because an asset is, by nature, the object of power struggle. This vantage point enables us to grasp the cluster of relations that give rise to the discourse on China as a focus of intellectual attention, scientific enquiry, literary creation, Orientalist reverie, and means of personal and professional investment. The emphasis on multiplicity, specificity, and discontinuity sheds light on the kinds of elaboration and contention that can grow out of the polarity between Sinophilia to Sinophobia to understand the representation of China in turn-of-the-century French literature.

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[29] Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours* in *Œuvres*, II, p. 474.
[30] Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* in *Œuvres*, II, p. 129.

Stressing that power is productive of knowledge rather than simply repressive and negative, Foucault indicates that power 'produit du réel; il produit des domaines d'objets et des rituels de vérité'.[31] When applied to the French representation of China, power permeates the structure and process of domination and representation that give rise to the traffic of interpretation and tropes. Following Foucault's lead, Edward Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* are pioneering works that reflect on the discursive construction of Europe's knowledge about Asia and cultural practices in relation to imperial dynamics. Determining what could be thought and said about the Orient, Orientalism has several theoretical implications. First, Said's extension of Foucault's notion of discourse and power/knowledge equation brings to the foreground ideology as a form of cultural practice.[32] This induces the understanding that Orientalism is not only determined by Europe's projects of economic and military aggrandisement, but also generative of ideas, images, and practices that constitute a distinct cultural sphere.

Secondly, Said indicates that Western literary and academic knowledge colludes with European imperialism, as the putatively objective institutions and disciplines of learning are complicit and instrumental in the domination of colonial territories. Bringing what Said calls the 'codification of difference' to fruition,[33] Orientalism evinces the complicity between knowledge and politics. The codification of difference participates in universalising discourses in the form of evolution theories, racial

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[31] Foucault, *Œuvres*, II, p. 474.

[32] Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 159.

[33] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 135.

thinking, geography, history, and cultural commentary infused with categories such as the civilised, advanced, savage, primitive, degenerate, backward, natural, and unnatural. The drive for empire-building is one of the drives for knowledge, whose exercise of rituals of truth, ranging from Sinologist learning and ethnographical documentation to mass cultural representation, produce images of China. 'Ritual of truth', or 'ritual' simply, is a term used by Foucault in his *Surveiller et punir* and *L'Ordre du discours*.[34] It designates processes of validation, restriction, and exclusion that endow a speaker or a discourse with intellectual credibility. The ritual 'définit les gestes, les comportements, les circonstances, et tout l'ensemble de signes quoi doivent accompagner le discours'.[35] Viewing turn-of-the-century French literature on China in terms of rituals of truth enables us to capture the construction of images and meaning in relation to its network of reception.

The third implication stipulates that the process of hegemony operated by Orientalism can go on at the expense of the actual Orient being referred to, as the Orient is itself an Orientalist product, 'a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient'.[36] Said is so sure that he adds 'few surprises' will be encountered at the end of the phrase. In this thesis, I do not intend to dispute this contention in a systematic way, but many examples will speak for themselves in the following chapters, ranging from references to a specific reform of late-Qing China in a play co-created by Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti to the publications in French authored by a Chinese

[34] Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* in *Œuvres*, II, p. 474.

[35] Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours* in *Œuvres*, II, p. 242.

[36] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 95.

scholar-official based in the Qing embassy in Paris in the late nineteenth century. These examples are evidence that the Orient is not always the silenced Other. It suffices to say that turn-of-the-century French literature on China is one of the ramifications of Orientalism, yet this area of literature calls for a nuanced paradigm to assess its texts in relation to Orientalism. For instance, further work needs to be done to consider the interrelations between Orientalism and forms of counter-discourse, particularly the development of China's self-image in relation to the history of Sino-Western social, cultural, and political relationships. Xiaomei Chen's *Occidentalism* is one of the most relevant works that investigates the self-imposed Orientalism of China and the extent to which the appropriation of Western discourse can achieve an ideologically liberating effect on non-Western culture. If constructing the Western Other while positively identifying with the Orient 'has allowed the Orient to participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the process of self-appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western Others',[37] it makes sense to acknowledge a need to accommodate more historical specificity in order to optimise Orientalism as a critical model.

Foucault's approach to historiography helps us navigate the heterogeneous corpus to be analysed. For instance, Foucault introduces the 'sacrificial use' as one of the uses of history in 'Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire'. For Foucault, sacrificing the subject of knowledge means rejecting historical consciousness as neutral, universalising, and

[37] Chen Xiaomei, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023 [1995]), p. 5. Another example of self-identification involves the positive affirmation of the colour yellow as the Chinese skin colour in twentieth-century China. See Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 129.

rational, and revealing what lies behind the claims and credentials of truth. Forms and transformations of 'volonté de savoir', or the will to knowledge, entail 'instinct, passion, the inquisitor's devotion, cruel subtlety, and malice'.[38] This is not to say that I am boiling down my research to an investigation of the authors' personal obsessions and biographical peripeteia, but rather that I aim to foreground the kinds of relations, interests, and concerns that gave rise to their interpretation and invention of China. Drawn from works of less well-known authors that might appear obscure to the contemporary reader, my corpus, if properly analysed, helps connect the dots to illuminate the representation of China in French literature as a historically grounded process.

To better assess turn-of-the-century French literature on China in terms of gender and empire, Ann Laura Stoler's critique and colonial reading of Foucault's *Histoire de la sexualité* is invaluable. For Foucault, sexuality is neither subversive of nor opposed to power. Rather, power functions as the organising principle of sexuality, which is shaped by the socio-political construction of a historically specific moment. Stoler holds that the colonial context is crucial in conceptualising discourses on sexuality and bourgeois identity by engaging racial thinking and colonial politics. 'The sexual discourse of empire and of the biopolitical state in Europe were mutually constitutive'.[39] The premise that discourses produced in home society are not impermeable to the situation in overseas territories is fundamental to Stoler's

[38] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire', in *Œuvres*, II, p. 1302. The English translation comes from Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. by Donald Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 163.
[39] Stoler, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

elaboration of Foucault's account of sexuality. This understanding is germane to my methodology, as time and again we will see representations of China, particularly as it involves gender and sexuality, engage discourses originating in Decadence and the mass culture of Belle Époque France, resulting in interesting tropes that mark out the crossing of images and ideas.

Savoir is an interplay between subjective interpretation and objective pretensions. In this sense, it reflects the relationship between colonial literature and exoticism, which place different degrees of emphasis on literary subjectivity and realist techniques. In dating the etymology of the word *exotique* back to the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century,[40] Jean-Marc Moura highlights its penchant for foreignness, strangeness, and emotive effects of wonder provoked by these qualities. He identifies the prevalence of colonial literature with France's imperialist expansion from 1870 to 1914 and sees colonial literature as entering 'un antagonisme pris dans un rapport chronologique' with exoticism.[41] It is important to note that exoticism predates colonial literature as a tradition in French literature, although parts of later exoticism converge with the imperial culture which also includes colonial literature. Exoticism shares with colonial literature an interest in foreign subject matter as a source of inspiration, but it does not necessarily embrace the political and moral agenda of colonisation.

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[40] The first attestation of the word *exotique* is in the second chapter of Rabelais's *Quart Livre* (1552) in which Rabelais describes Pantagruel's voyage to the island of Medamothi, where Pantagruel contemplates the port and its 'marchandises exotiques et peregrines'. See Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mireille Huchon (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1994), p. 540.

[41] Jean-Marc Moura, 'Littérature coloniale et exotisme: Examen d'une opposition de la théorie littéraire coloniale' in *Regards sur les littératures coloniales, Afrique francophone: Découvertes*, ed. by Jean-François Durand, 2 vols (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), I, p. 25.

Stylistically, exoticism leaves ample leeway for imagination and literary subjectivity, which would be deemed as superficial in relation to colonial literature's pursuit of a metropolitan conception of scientific truth regarding the colonies and the colonised. So, what distinguishes exoticism from colonial literature consists of its defence of subjectivity, valorisation of imagination and refusal to conform to colonial ideologies.[42] This provides a useful rule-of-thumb to identify where exoticism swerves away from the course of colonial literature. In all, however, these literary tendencies create a mishmash of concerns more often than a clear-cut duo. This is probably why Moura has conceptualised three systems of exoticism in the period he studies, to account for the entanglement of exoticism with its imperialist siblings.[43] First, nostalgic exoticism prioritises the syncretism of cultural traditions and subjective expressions that posit an idealised other detached from the reality about which the European author is blasé because of its prosaicness. It is no wonder that Charles Baudelaire and the Stéphane Mallarmé of 'Brise Marine' are thought of as predecessors of nostalgic exoticism. Victor Segalen and Pierre Loti—despite Segalen's contempt for the latter—also join this system because of the enshrinement of their poetics in the various places that have engaged their imagination in the form of China, Turkey, Japan, Tahiti, and so on. Second, exotic adventure differs from nostalgic exoticism with its perceptible endorsement of imperialist expansion and justification of the *mission civilisatrice*. Moura is clearly in a mood of hospitality to include this into one of the systems of exoticism, which is more complex than the dualistic distinction in 'Littérature coloniale et exotisme'. Like colonial literature, exotic adventure displays a

[42] Moura, 'Littérature coloniale et exotisme', p. 36.
[43] Moura, *La Littérature des lointains*, pp. 93-115.

realist leaning centred on a sense of factualness and the cult of masculine values,[44] whereas nostalgic exoticism foregrounds imagination. The third system, termed ekphrastic exoticism, refers to the radical incorporation of non-European elements into some of the game-changing artistic expressions of Europe, such as primitivism, *japonisme*, and some of Segalen's poetic fusions exemplified by his *Stèles*. We can see whether exoticism and imperialist contents should stay under the same rubric remains a matter of open discussion. Separation and inclusion do not seem to involve a true/false question, as keeping both approaches valid can help us glean a disabused understanding of literature marked by imperialism and voices that endorse or undermine it. One cannot jump to the conclusion that authors of colonial literature robotically support imperialism, and that exoticism should be understood as being absolutely quarantined from imperialist ideology. The thorny question is how the present approach to exoticism as a historical form of writing and literary sensibility can avoid repeating patterns of thought through which structures of domination are reified in times when the quotidian process of hegemony was determined by the fact of empire.

Neither French nor Chinese, but Something Else: Negotiating Hybridity

The materials under consideration require us to bring in a distinct approach to exoticism. It would be inaccurate to identify my critical position as a form of enlightened relativism, because that would seem to imply an illuminated camp of postcolonialism triumphing over a dark side that must be tamed due to its backwardness and obsoleteness in a linear structure of historical development. I seek to avoid

[44] *Ibid*., p. 108.

producing the kind of critical language that reflects and reproduces structures of domination. Thus, it is necessary to employ a theoretical framework to address the conflictual structure inherent in exoticism, that is, the oscillation between the affirmation of authority and drives to undermine it. In his reflection on how residues of racialised and essentialist assumptions continue to affect contemporary revisions of the imagined past, Robert J.C. Young traces the concept of hybridity as one possible critical exercise to undo the authority of language by addressing its social and political dimensions as products of hybridisation. Young's reading of Homi K. Bhabha's proposal of hybridity as the effective language of critique is useful here to peruse the conflicting exoticisms present in turn-of-the-century French representations of China.

First and foremost, 'hybrid' signifies the grafting of plants, the interbreeding of animals, and the nineteenth-century debate on fertility, miscegenation, and its scientific and social consequences in terms of evolution theory, racial thinking, and colonial politics. Today, it also refers to vehicles that uses multiple distinct types of power to propel their movement, a new meaning that I find illustrative of the generative capacity of 'hybridity' as a critical concept. In the realm of linguistics, Mikhail Bakhtin holds that language is marked by hybridity rather than purity. This makes any enunciation 'a double-accented, double-styled hybrid construction' that bring together two different languages or cultural backgrounds in one utterance.[45] Bakhtin also transposes hybridity to the domain of cultural interaction, resulting in organic hybridity and intentional hybridity. In Young's exegesis, organic hybridity 'will tend towards fusion, in conflict

[45] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by Carol Emerson and Michael Holoquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 304.

with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity, a politicised setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically'.[46] Carrying Bakhtin's notions of hybridity to the dialogical situation of colonialism, Bhabha posits that an effective language of critique is characterised by hybridity, the constant interchange between sameness and difference.

> The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, the mercantilist and the Marxist, but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other* [Bhabha's italics], properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics.[47]

The space of translation opened by hybridity as envisioned by Bhabha paves the way for negotiation rather than negation, for Bhabha valorises the temporal dimension of negotiation that acknowledges the 'historical connectedness between the subject and object of critique so that there can be no simplistic, essentialist opposition between ideological miscognition and revolutionary truth'.[48] Driven by its heterogeneous sources of energy, hybridity allows us to think beyond narratives of domination, repression, and resistance by foregrounding sites of collaboration and contestation, hashing out forms of counter-authority to make sense of the interchange between indigenous and colonial cultures.

Chiming with Foucault's approach to historiography that dissipates unity into

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[46] Young, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[47] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 37.

[48] *Ibid*., p. 38.

interpretations, Bhabha's notion of hybridity projects an unrepresentable 'Third Space', which 'constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew'.[49] On the unrepresentability of the Third Space, Young rightly points out that the Third Space is a 'monstrous inversion' and a 'miscreated perversion of its progenitors' that exhaust the differences between them.[50] These descriptions vividly capture the paradoxical tendencies towards normalisation and transgression of imperial culture, of which turn-of-the-century French literature on China is a significant offshoot.

Understandably, it is counter-intuitive to say what I am working on is 'neither French nor Chinese'. Yet if the spirit of hybridity is carried to its logical conclusion, we can identify within turn-of-the-century French literature on China a proliferation of this monstruous and perverse 'something else' leading to a perpetually interstitial and liminal existence. It interrogates the possibilities of cultural contact and interchange, cutting across historical forms shaped by their cultural traditions as they merge with other forms to be interpreted anew. As a student of French literature and imperialism, I often find it tempting to divide my objects of critique into falsely disparate categories that allocate my data to the 'French' side and the 'Chinese' side, a two-fold drawer of concepts that seems to be a quick fix to conceptualise my thesis. But this conceptual division often impedes me from seeing the complexity involved in the creation, transformation, circulation, interpretation, and reception of tropes, meanings, and ideas.

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[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

[50] Young, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

After all, I do not wish to abandon nuanced readings of ambiguity vis-à-vis imperialism, cultural interaction, gender, race, and class in favour of unconscious flag-waving. Nor do I wish to celebrate a naïve picture of relativist and multicultural understanding that seems to hold up a messianic truth that can hardly stand the scrutiny of criticism. Turn-of-the-century French literature on China charts out a liminal space, in-between designations of texts and identities alongside the cultural interchange between France and China. It produces forms of cultural hybridity that entertain difference at the expense of an assumed coherent hierarchy.

I would like to argue that turn-of-the-century French literature on China consists of rituals of truth, a process of hybridisation in which figures of authority and counter-authority pursue disjunctive directions that affirm the coherence of imperial hegemony in forms of Orientalism on the one hand, and on the other hand, intervene in the reproduction of imperial norms through transformation and perversion. Driven by the dynamics of power and knowledge in the representation of the Other, French representations of China embody one version of a hybridity that carries with it the implicit mark of the dominant culture(s) that has given rise to it while also reinventing itself as an interstitial site of negotiation. Gender and empire constitute structures of representation and an ideological matrix vital to the confirmation and contestation of authority. If hybridity consists of the linkage of two or more distinct components into one, a careful examination of it historicises the agonistic situations that constitute many of the literary works I have sought to study. In hybridity, the binary structures – France and China, East and West, white and non-white, the norm and the degenerate – are perturbed, but the 'something else' that is produced is not in itself sufficient to offer a radical solution. The alienation of hybridity from essentialising categories and claims

of authentic truth comes from an awareness that political referents and ideological preferences are themselves constructed performatively. Negotiating hybridity enables me to explore difference – instead of its codification – as freely and wholly as the condition of critique allows throughout its process of signification.

While emphasising hybridity as one of the major theoretical approaches to gender and empire in turn-of-the-century French literature on China, I propose a reading that asks questions about literary history, fin-de-siècle sexual anxieties, and cultural studies. Gender and empire are used to analyse the predominance of identities, the transposition and transformation of structures of domination across linguistic and cultural contexts, and the relationship between literature, society, and politics. My method is to read a selection of texts as products of exoticist imagination and of their historical moment, and then to show them as part of the ideological matrix constituted by gender and empire. Even authors thought of as conventional or partisan did not merely parrot *doxa* revolving around class, race, and civilisation. They were very much shaping and shaped by the history of Sino-French cultural exchange and their own experiences across language, nation, and culture. I trace hybridity through intertextuality, use of Chinese in French texts – including French transliteration, self-styled spelling, and French translation of Chinese – and cross-cultural references that invest seemingly Chinese figures with meanings drawn from fin-de-siècle French culture. My use of literary history underlines reception and intertextual exchange to delineate how concepts and tropes get to be branded as Chinese by French literature. Researching into fin-de-siècle concerns with sexuality such as the pathological vision of female sexuality and the emergence of the discipline of sexology enables me to assess how writing about China has been implicated in the French fascination with sexual deviance. Cultural studies

brings to the foreground the intersection of theory, literature, and mass culture engaged in the representation of China. With a different level of emphasis, each chapter combines these approaches to examine the content, form, and context of the texts in focus.

Chapter Road Map

In this thesis, I bring together a combination of authors and genres with varying degrees of critical recognition. I have selected texts written within the historical span from the late 1880s to the 1920s, which corresponds to the period of the Great Divergence according to Frank. Within the corpus, well-known authors such as Arthur de Gobineau, Pierre Loti, Judith Gautier, Victor Segalen, Paul Claudel, and Octave Mirbeau appear alongside lesser-known or forgotten figures including George Soulié de Morant, Charles Pettit, Capitaine Danrit, Pierre Giffard, and one of the first Francophone Chinese authors, Chen Jitong. They contribute to various literary forms, ranging from novels, essays, plays, and travel notes to poetry and erotica. This means that my analysis covers a wide stretch of the literary and social spectrum, from the canonical to the popular, from the critically acclaimed to those who are remembered mostly because of their notoriety. The very heterogeneity of authors and genres attest to the volatile presence of China in French literature. China figures in competing regimes of writing and readership whose approach to the cultural other gives shape to the China measuring up to their taste and fantasies. I believe they deserve equal attention and historicist treatment, as they illuminate turn-of-the-century French representation of China from different angles.

Determining the corpus of this thesis necessarily involves a significant degree of

omission, given both the thesis' framework and the abundance of texts that engage with China. As previously noted, my principle of selection reflects a broader spectrum of turn-of-the-century French literature on China that ranges from Sinophilia to Sinophobia. While other works could have been analysed in light of these attitudes, they were ultimately excluded to maximise space for examining diverse modes of French engagement with China and the conditions under which such engagements acquire meaning. For instance, Claudel's essay collection *Sous le signe du dragon* (1909), intended as a manual for Europeans,[51] and his exclamation of 'comme j'ai aimé la Chine!' are clearly Sinophilic expressions.[52] However, they are less revealing than his play *Le Repos du septième jour* (1901), which more fully captures the literary rivalries that shape writings on China by imperial elites. In Chapter II, I will elaborate on this by discussing *Le Repos* alongside Segalen's play *Le Combat pour le sol* (1913).

The corpus also includes unusual or distinctive examples of this area of French literature. While cross-dressing and all-male spaces are commonly noted in travel writings on China, few authors fictionalise the lives of boy actors from the perspective of a sympathetic French narrator as Soulié de Morant does. He not only offers this perspective but also anthologises notable works of Chinese theatre, thereby creating a self-referential internal system. The inclusion of Chen Jitong raises questions about categorisation. Whether he qualifies as a 'French' writer remains debatable, yet his bilingualism and his publication history in France are direct outcomes of the French

[51] Paul Claudel, *Œuvres en prose*, ed. by Jacques Petit and Charles Galpérine (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1965), p. 1535, 1605.

[52] Cited in Bernard Brizay, *La France en Chine: Du XVII^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris : Perrin, 2013), p. 393.

presence in China and deserve critical attention. This Fujian-born writer sought to challenge conventional perceptions of China by writing in French, and the section on his work opens onto a broader problematic of cultural assimilation.

In this thesis, I analyse prose instead of poetry to emphasise the referentiality of the corpus. This means taking seriously the texts' claim to speak literally about China and prioritising their thematic content as much as, if not more than, their socio-political embeddedness. Rather than treating these depictions as pure fantasy or mere symptoms of French cultural and political circumstances, I seek to understand the truth claims they enact. The extent to which the texts hinge on literal references to China offers insight into how credibility is constructed through the ritual performance of local knowledge. This emphasis on referentiality—on the *aboutness* of the works—is central to my approach. It involves a close analysis of the thematic materials and cultural texts through which the authors assert their possession of knowledge. The novels, plays, and essays examined here all reflect some of what their authors believed, or once believed, to be part of reality, sealed within a performative framework of truth. Probing into their thematic aspects reveals the mechanisms behind these rituals of truth. Accordingly, poetry figures only marginally in this thesis, since it is precisely referentiality that poetry tends to resist or transcend. Greater emphasis would be needed to be placed on such poetry's relationship to broader currents in French literature, such as Symbolism, rather than on its capacity to negotiate the cultural boundary between France and China.

In Chapter I, I consider how the French representation of cross-dressing

actors in Late Imperial China combines the decadent fascination with androgyny with intertextual references to Chinese plays. Focusing on a novel narrated by a Frenchman sympathetic to cross-dressing male actors, I show how the male homoerotic culture of Beijing opera nourishes the French imagination of decadent sexualities and inspires an appreciation of gender artifice and artistic agency. My reading presents the Chinese cross-dresser as an androgyne empowered by his technical prowess. The representation of androgyny combines French and Chinese cultural traditions through intertextuality and transformation of metaphors, offering an alternative vision to racialised Chinese femininity associated with ornament and objecthood. I also demonstrate how the author entertains a delicate relationship with the subject matter intent on benefiting from its shock effect and niche details. This involves the performance of his credentials and specialised knowledge of the French imperial élite, who mediates the metropolitan reception of foreign cultures by virtue of his service and training.

Interested in how China engages French imperial élites through different relationships, in Chapter II I consider three plays on China produced by collaboration and competition between their authors. *La Fille du Ciel* (1911), co-authored by Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti, combines ideas for real-world political reform and love stories between Han and Manchu monarchs. I show how the play's engagement with Chinese political thinking is compromised by the performance's excessive use of picturesque devices. I evaluate the play's political allusion and picturesque style in terms of its authors' response to China and Belle Époque mass culture. In the last section, I demonstrate how Victor Segalen's *Le Combat pour le sol* (1913-19) grew out of his loathing for *Le Repos du septième jour* (1901) by Paul Claudel, of which Segalen had once been an admirer. Segalen deliberately presents his play as a makeover of Claudel's

work, which Segalen believes downplays the aesthetic potential of China. The ways in which these plays dramatise China complicate the relationships between fact, fiction, and fantasy, showing that rituals of truth on China are embedded in relations utterly distinct from scientific inquiry. They also illustrate the personal drama of French authors in the quest for cultural, geographical, and spiritual alterity.

Chapter III shows that attempts at demystifying China through ethnography often resort to the construction of authorial credibility. Ripe for discussion is the way in which ethnography engages writers who base their expositions on China on different forms of authority. I argue that the portrait of Chinese social morals provided by Chen, Segalen, and Soulié de Morant leads the reader into a realm of authorial interests and commitments that uses propositions on China as their expression. In the first section, I focus on writings published in French by Chen Jitong, a French-speaking military attaché of the Qing embassy in Paris. Intent on correcting French stereotypes of China, Chen enters the literary scene of Paris by manipulating his double identity as a dandy and a Chinese scholar-official in the run-up to the Sino-French War (1884-1885). Appealing to his native identity is crucial to the establishment of ethnographic authority in his *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, a riff on *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, to present a socio-cultural panorama of China in French. In the second section, I contrast Segalen's self-consciousness as an outsider to Chinese culture with Soulié de Morant's pose as a Sinologist in their description of playhouses and women in China. These attitudes can be gleaned from their conflation of the exotic and the erotic in the evaluation of Chinese mores.

In Chapter IV, I focus on the intersection of masochism and tropes of Chinese

cruelty through the representation of Empress Dowager Cixi in novels written by George Soulié de Morant and Charles Pettit. First, I consider the emergence of masochism as one of the forms of non-productive sexuality that emerges in fin-de-siècle medical and psychiatric discourses. Among the commentators on masochism, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari underline the socially determined aspect of masochistic desire. Their attention to the social and political power dynamics involved in masochism provides prompts to analyse masochism as an inverted form of masculine domination in the intersection of imperialism and cultural practice. Branding Cixi as a wanton dominatrix, Soulié de Morant and Pettit draw on aspects of Chinese cruelty to turn her into a *femme fatale*. I intend to show the extent to which the masochistic framework of representation recuperates tropes of Chinese cruelty as technologies of torture to combine pain and pleasure. I also suggest that novels on the erotic life of Cixi resort to the theme of *le supplice chinois*, a French-made cliché associated with Chinese cruelty to enhance the exotic subject's local colour.

Having briefly touched on how racial thinking is closely tied up with normative claims about the hierarchical vision of human difference in terms of sexuality in Chapter IV, I explore another product of racial thinking that demonises China in Chapter V: the Yellow Peril. I first examine the emergence of the term 'Yellow Peril' in relation to the history of Western race theory, nineteenth-century anthropology, and the writing of Arthur de Gobineau. Secondly, I explore the representation of the Yellow Peril across Gobineau's literary work and a selection of novels prophesying future wars, with a particular attention to the contrast between Gobineau's pessimism towards empire-building and the imperialist sympathies of yellow perilist novels. My reading reconciles the apparent contrast by highlighting the shared assumptions of racial

difference and fears of reverse colonisation. Examining some of the conventions of Yellow Peril narratives, I highlight a less widely recognised dimension of the Yellow Peril, suggesting that individual leaders, unlike the run-of-the-mill description of featureless hordes or effeminate Asian men, are given a virile depiction, along with other attributes that assimilate them into the norms of white masculinity, so that they appear convincingly perilous. To assess how this relates to the fin-de-siècle forecast of wars to come and the education of masculinity to relaunch imperialism, I discuss how aspects of French revanchism and the tradition of the *roman d'aventures* inform the representation of the Yellow Peril.

In Chapter V, I use the trope of 'empire redux' to designate both fear of rising East Asian powers and hope for a reinvigoration of Western empires. The idea of being brought back or revived very much captures the complex status of China in turn-of-the-century French literature. It is at times what must be exorcised, the demonic horde threatening to upset Western hegemony, and what inspires admiration and reveries of ineffable delights through its bizarre beauty and capacity for hybridisation. When driven out, it comes back via myriad passages and images that evince the porousness of the boundaries of language and culture. The chapters that follow trace some of the paths it has pursued.

Chapter I

Gender Artifice and Homoeroticism in Chinese Theatre Viewed by the French

Colonial dominance is often represented through a vocabulary of sexual symbols that feminises the Orient for Western power and possession. This view is further confirmed by Ann Laura Stoler's observation that 'the categories of coloniser and coloniser were secured through notions of racial difference constructed in gender terms'.[1] White supremacy, strategies of colonial rule, and sexual morality are asserted through 'the demasculinisation of colonised men and the hypermasculinity of European males'.[2] In France, this can be regarded as a continuation of the tradition of military virility which supports the *mission civilisatrice* to build the empire. Equally important is the long-standing French assumption that associates Asian colonies with male weakness and lack of masculinity.[3] What can be read between the lines of colonist discourse is a patriotic ideal of manhood exalted as the regenerative force of the French nation after 1871. In turn, the supine and feminine Orient provides opportunities for self-reproduction, enlargement, and multiplication.[4] This hierarchy pictures the

[1] Ann Laura Stoler, 'Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia', in *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*, ed. by Micaela di Leonardo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 85.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[3] One example is Albert de Pouvourville's *L'Annam sanglant* (Paris: Kailash, 1995 [Chamuel Éditeur, 1898]).
[4] Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, an advocate of French expansion, writes in 'De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes' (1874) that 'A society colonises, when itself having reached a high degree of maturity and of strength, it procreates, it protects, it places in good conditions of development, and it brings to virility a new society to which it has given birth.' Cited in Agnes Murphy, *The Ideology of French Imperialism: 1871-1881* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1968 [The Catholic University of America Press 1948]), p. 189.

territory to be conquered as feminine, and the native men are often represented in effeminate terms. It seems tempting to conclude that Orientalism is primarily the business of virile, heterosexual men, but this is not the case. Men involved in same-sex interests also have a say in Orientalism.

Writings on Indochina by authors including Claude Farrère, Jules Boissière, and Albert de Pouvourville explore homosexuality and androgyny in colonial settings. Recent literary studies suggest that their works already contain instances amounting to a tradition of 'critical Decadence' in which Decadent aestheticism or parodies of Decadence are used to destabilise colonialist discourse.[5] Similar operations can be found in turn-of-the-century French literature on China, in which the decadent appreciation of androgyny converges with the erotic connoisseurship of M-F cross-dressing actors popular in the Ming-Qing era. In this chapter, I consider the extent to which the gender prescriptions of imperialism give way to the appreciation of gender artifice of male cross-dressing in late-Qing theatre viewed by the French, with particular attention to George Soulié de Morant's *Bijou-de-ceinture ou le jeune homme qui porte robe, se poudre et se farde* (1925). I focus on how the 'exclusively male province'—or male-dominant province in the very least—of class and sexual asymmetries in Chinese theatre can be a propitious realm for writers exploring same-sex attraction or homosocial bonds. The exotic veneer of cross-dressing actors, their pale and lithe bodies, and the social tolerance for their patronage by upper-class males are foregrounded in *Western Queers in China: Flight to the Land of Oz* by David Emil Mungello, who reads queer utopianism into the intellectual and erotic connections

[5] See Wanrug Suwanwattana, 'Decadent Indochina and French Colonial Literature: 1880s to 1920s' (Doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2019) in ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (accessed 19 April 2022).

between Western writers and China from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century.[6] Having rightly pointed out that the appeal of boy actors smacks of 'houseboy subordination' linked to imperialist domination, Mungello suggests that China provides a realm of escape for Westerners to flee from homophobic oppression.[7] However, his evaluation that Soulié de Morant's 'flight to China' pursues 'the artistic freedom of a homoerotic culture' runs the risk of over-idealisation,[8] because the Frenchman's writing strategy does not seem to aim at his own liberation in any way. I argue that *Bijou-de-ceinture* is a performance of Orientalist knowledge and intertextuality that capitalises on the homoerotic culture of Late Imperial China as a source of shock effect that piques prurient curiosity along with its celebration of gender artifice. Soulié de Morant deploys the decadent appreciation of androgyny, French and Chinese intertextuality, and his knowledge of Chinese language and culture to turn the novel's protagonist, a cross-dressing actor, into a symbol of empowerment and artistic agency.

I will start by considering the Chinese theatre viewed by the French as a homoerotic space, and the ways in which colonial gender prescriptions concede to forms of gender crossing. Next, I read the cross-dressing actor in *Bijou-de-ceinture* as a Chinese androgyne constructed by Soulié de Morant to carry out a ritual of truth concerning Chinese culture and sexuality. I discuss how he maintains a calculated distance from the androgyne's narrowly codified and homoerotic milieu to position himself vis-à-vis homosexuality with tact. I also connect the author's construction of

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[6] For the association of L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* with queer utopianism, see Tison Pugh, '"There lived in the land of oz two queerly made men": Queer utopianism and antisocial eroticism in L. frank Baum's oz series', *Marvels & Tales* 22, (2), 2008, pp. 217-239. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/there-lived-land-oz-two-queerly-made-men-queer/docview/230782973/se-2 (accessed December 7, 2023).

[7] David Emil Mungello, *Western Queers in China: Flight to the Land of Oz* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), p. 4.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

the Chinese androgyne with the racialised idea of Asian femininity. Finally, I will show how French and Chinese intertextuality elevates the androgyne's status from a subaltern to an empowered artist.

I-1 Gender Crossing and Homoerotic Space

To maintain imperial authority and secure European identity in the colonies, 'the "embourgeoisement" of imperialism in the late nineteenth century enhanced expectations of hard work, managed sexuality, and racial distancing among the colonizing agents while opening a more intimate domain for the condemnation and reform within societies being colonised.'[9] Racial distinction was structured in gendered terms along with sexual scrutiny to police the boundaries of white identities. But there is a lot of interest in what was seen as an anomaly in the French colonies constituted by situations in which the sexed body does not fit with gendered behaviour in normative ways. Suffice it to evoke André Gide's homoerotic tourists in North Africa and the androgynous Indochinese viewed by French writers. Pornographic fantasies play a part in this uptick of interest in the sexualised Orient and deviant sexualities. The tropics and the Orient abound with 'lurid descriptions of sexual license, promiscuity, gynaecological aberrations, and general perversion marking the Otherness of the colonised for metropolitan consumption'.[10] Tahiti was dubbed as 'nouvelle Cythère' by sailors from the time of Bougainville's circumnavigation in the 1770s to that of Pierre Loti, whose *Le Mariage de Loti* (1878) associates the tropics with 'séduction,

[9] Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda' in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), p. 31.

[10] Stoler, 'Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power', p. 53. See also Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and pathology: Stereotypes of sexuality, race, and madness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 79.

trouble sensuel et désir effrénés'.[11] After all, imperial expansion itself provided 'sexual opportunities' for European men to release their sexual energy curtailed in home.[12]

In China, unlike Indochina or Polynesia, the French leverage over trade, territorial concessions, and cultural, social, legal, and technological transformations, though remarkable, did not supplant native sovereignty nor assume total control over society. French writers were free agents protected by extraterritoriality, which enabled them to inhabit, contemplate, intervene with, and document the homoerotic practices without subordinating themselves either to the local state power or to the call to assert European supremacy in terms of virility, order, and racial purity that dominated discourse in the colonies. This created a vantage point that allowed them to contemplate Chinese theatre with relative freedom. The gap between moral and legal exigencies is present in the writing of Victor Segalen, George Soulié de Morant, and Chen Jitong.[13] Their accounts reflect the internal social distinction of China and imperialist assumptions of sexual propriety, registering different sets of class and ethnic dynamics based on the cleavages between Manchu rule, Han subordination, and French exterritoriality.

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[11] Pierre Loti, *Le Mariage de Loti* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), p. 149. The reference to 'nouvelle Cythère' continues the trope used by Bougainville in his *Voyage autour du monde* (Paris: Libraires Saillant & Nyon, 1771), p. 209.

[12] See Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 58, and his 'Concubinage and the colonial service: The Crewe circular (1909), *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp.170-186.

[13] In his reading of Segalen's *René Leys* and Soulié de Morant's *Bijou-de-ceinture*, William Burgwinkle identifies the link between masculine subjectivity and colonial discourse and argues that questions of gender in these novels overturn the claims of 'reason' and 'naturalness' that support colonial ideology. See his 'Veiling the Phallus: French Modernism and the Feminization of the Asian Male', *Gender and Culture in Literature and Film East and West: Issues of Perception and Interpretation*, ed. by Nitaya Masavisut et al. (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 29-39.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reflection on the subaltern native women and the concept of 'double colonisation' are germane to the issue of class.[14] Double colonisation posits two levels of subjugation, that is, in the first instance, the native patriarchal system, and then, the patriarchy of imperialism.[15] It raises the awareness that being included into the expanding Western sphere complicates women's role and status in the traditional society that undergoes colonial transformation. To retrieve subaltern history, it is indispensable to recognise the double structure of patriarchal oppression. Such insight can be borrowed to analyse the Chinese boy actors who impersonate female characters for the pleasure of elite men. They were socially marginalised but at the same time coveted by an all-male audience for their effeminacy and talent. Turn-of-the-century French fiction depicts them as an object of curiosity yet simultaneously attributes some agency to them. Their subordination and gender mobility inspired French writers to marshal localised categories of race, class, and gender to envisage a hybrid sexual politics of empire. Certainly, this instance of literary imagination is not exempt from the operations of power-fantasy, but it seems to set up a position for the actor-actress to speak for themselves. In the opening of the novel, Bijou-de-ceinture reflects on the social ascension of his profession in relation to his career as well as the histories of modern China and Europe,[16] representing the subaltern voice in the novel.

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[14] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

[15] See Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford, ed., *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (Oxford: Dangaroo Press, 1986).

[16] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture, ou le jeune homme qui porte robe, se poudre et se farde* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1925), p. 19.

Chinese theatre possesses all the trappings of Orientalist fantasy in the eyes of French travellers, given its ornamental aspect, non-European tradition of dramaturgy and stylised performance, and notably the male cross-dressing that coincides with the racialised idea of yellow men as being effeminate. Male cross-dressing captures the attention of French writers and mediates their comprehension of the theatrical culture of Late Imperial China (c. 1550-1911) characterised by gender crossing and various state interventions. Centuries before, women were allowed to perform, but they were prohibited by Qing government statutes from entering and performing in theatres for moral reasons, since performance was associated with prostitution.[17] According to Matthiew H. Sommer, 'virtually all opera troupes had been unisex, with the vast majority being all male'.[18] Female roles were often played by boys aged from twelve to eighteen, and playgoers included men from all the social strata of Beijing.[19] Theatres in late-Qing Beijing were 'venues for male homoerotic indulgence as much as for enjoying dramatic performance'.[20] It is thus not surprising to find that male exclusivity is one of the features of Chinese theatre recorded by Chen, Segalen, and Soulié de Morant.

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[17] George Soulié de Morant, *Théâtre et musique modernes en Chine avec une Étude technique de la Musique chinoise et transcription pour piano par André Gailhard* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1926), XIV.

[18] Matthew H. Sommer, *The Fox Spirit, the Stone Maiden, and Other Transgender Histories form Late Imperial China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024), p. 33. See also Giovanni Vitiello, *The Libertine's Friend: Homosexuality and Masculinity in Late Imperial China* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 6.

[19] For a historicist construction of a male 'homosexual tradition' in China in dynastic order, see Bret Hinsch, *The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992). For an investigation into homoerotic sensibilities in late imperial China, encompassing Ming and Qing dynasties (c. 1550-1911), see Wu Cuncun, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

[20] Wu Cuncun and Mark Stenvenson, 'Chapter 3. Male Love Lost The Fate Of Male Same-Sex Prostitution in Beijing in The Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Cultures*, ed. by Fran Martin and Ari Larissa Heinrich (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p. 47.

Belonging to one of the lowest-ranking professions in China,[21] the actors are represented in terms of racial distinction and internal social stratification, closely associated with prostitution.[22] Therefore, they are doubly subjugated in the eyes of French writers, since they lie at the bottom of the local society and represent the populace deemed as inferior to Europeans according to the theorisation of racial hierarchy exemplified by Gustave Le Bon's *Les Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples* (1894).[23] In a portrayal of Chinese femininity in *Équipée*, Segalen notes that 'dans les meilleurs théâtres, ces rôles étaient justement tenus par des hommes: de jeunes garçons'.[24] Judith Gautier has made the same points in *En Chine* (1911).[25] Léon Rousset, a Frenchman who taught natural science at the Fuzhou Naval Yard from 1862 to 1874, even suggests that cross-dressing fulfils 'un but de moralité bien mal atteint'.[26] The performers' peripheral social status also figures in Chen's *Le Théâtre des Chinois* (1886): 'J'ai vu, aux abords des villes, ces êtres bizarres; ils semblent détachés de tout. Il n'ont ni foyer ni patrie; comme les troubadours ils sont errants.'[27] As a military attaché and diplomat representing China in Paris, Chen writes with delicate tact that reveals a certain anxiety to keep the French reader interested.[28] In pointing out that the

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[22] Sommer, *op. cit*., p. 34.

[23] Le Bon classes the Chinese as 'race moynne', which is above the primitive and inferior races but lower than the superior races in *Les Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1894), pp. 27-28.
[24] Victor Segalen, Chapitre XVIII, *Équipée* in *Œuvres*, ed. by Christian Doumet, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2020), II, p. 59.
[25] Judith Gautier, 'L'art dramatique', *En Chine (merveilleuses histoires)* (Paris: Les Arts graphiques, 1911), pp. 48-54.
[26] Léon Rousset, *À travers la Chine* (Paris: Hachette, 1886), p. 51.
[27] Chen Jitong (Général Tchang Ki-tong), *Le Théâtre des Chinois* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1886), p. 24. For an Indochinese counterpart of the performing troupe, see Jules Boissière, *Fumeurs d'opium: comédiens ambulants* (Paris: Louis-Michaud, 1911).
[28] '…et nos actrices…nous n'en avons pas. Vous voyez bien qu'il me fallait infiniment de précautions pour entreprendre un tel sujet, et lui conserver de l'intérêt, quand même.' in Chen, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

male-only practice occurs as a historically specific process rather than a matter of permanence,[29] Chen suggests that the ban-induced absence of women in turn becomes a mark of shame or unchastity that besmirches the artistic quality of Chinese theatre: 'La suppression du rôle de la femme sur la scène enlève évidemment à l'art dramatique une grande partie de son prestige, et, quant à la représentation, elle perd de son charme.' Not having women on stage compromises dramatic art, but in whose regard? Chen's devaluation seems to pre-emptively identify with the French reader's opinion rather than conveying his own, given that much of his writing seeks to represent Chinese culture as it is from an ostensibly authentic point of view, a point which I will further explore in Chapter III.[30]

In late-Qing China, it was fashionable for upper-class men to have relationships with boy actors.[31] The term that came to circulate widely, from the mid-Qing to the early Republican period, and which appears in Soulié de Morant's *Bijou-de-ceinture* to refer to the boy actors was *xianggong* (literally 'assisting lord' i.e. the sovereign's chancellor). In late-Qing theatre, *xianggong* 'denoted the boyactors who cross-dressed for young female (*dan*) roles on the public stages of Beijing *and* who were available as catamites. Without exception *xianggong* came either from utterly destitute families (in which case they had been sold at their parents' behest), or they were born into the

[29] 'Nous n'avons pas d'actrices. Cependant la scène chinoise n'a pas toujours été privée du concours gracieux et attrayant de la femme, et il fut un temps où les comédiennes montaient sur les planches. Aujourd'hui, les rôles de femme sont remplis par de jeunes garçons, […] Qu'il y ait peu ou point de décors, je suis certain que cette imperfection ne serait pas jugée très sévèrement par les Européens: après tout, la nature peut remplacer les toiles peintes. Mais de jeunes garçons pour représenter des femmes! des fausses femmes! n'avais-je pas raison de dire que nous devons avoir le culte passionné de l'art? Et il faut, en vérité, qu'il le soit ou que nos mœurs soient bien différentes de celles des Occidentaux!' in Chen, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[30] See Chen, *Les Chinois peints par eux-même* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1884), *L'Organisation sociale de la Chine* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1889), and *Mon Pays: La Chine d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1892).

[31] Wu and Stevenson, 'Male Love Lost', *Embodied Modernities*, p. 45.

profession through descent within an acting family.'[32] In other contexts, *xianggong* is a respectful way of addressing feudal chancellors and a way for women to address their husband in plays and novels in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. Thus, *xianggong* represents the double identity of prostitute and actor, placing the underprivileged boy actors in a symbolic network that is at times dignifying and endearing.

To make sense of the erotic connoisseurship of boy actors, Soulié de Morant compares them to the ephebes of ancient Greece. When the narrator is invited to a dinner party thrown by the minister, he is bemused by the company of boy actors summoned by the host to entertain the guests: 'Voulait-il donner en spectacle à ses hôtes les maladresses d'un étranger livré aux perfides avances d'un de ces petits êtres rusés, sans scrupules et sans retenue, que sont ces jeunes acteurs-actrices, les *siang-kong*, "seigneurs-qui-aident"'?[33] No matter whether the host wants to impress the Frenchman with pomp of any sort, the narrator lives up to the game by introducing *Diocleia*, the kissing contest evoked in Theocritus's *Idylls*, to the party. In the kissing contest, he who gives the sweetest kiss wins the prize of a garland of flowers. Before the narrator recites a passage of *Idylls* as part of the literati's drinking ritual,[34] the entering pageant of *xianggong* is compared to ephebes: 'Déjà entraient un par un de jeunes éphèbes en robes de soie de couleurs vives, aux longues nattes luisantes et bien tressées, à la frange élégante sur le tour de tête fraîchement rasé, mais au visage fardé,

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[33] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 56.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 63.

aux yeux animés d'une connaissance lascive.'[35] For the French narrator, *xianggong* morphs into the ancient Greek ephebe in an echo of another homoerotic tradition.

In late-Qing China, ethnic and cultural politics partake in theatrical transgressions that were homoerotically charged. In her analysis of the social and spatial dynamics of Beijing opera, Andrea Goldman indicates that 'to the spectators, most of these "transgressions" were playful and innocuous. To the state and other defenders of prescribed social norms, some of them were potentially subversive'. [36] For Manchu conquerors, male homoeroticism was potentially subversive, so the Han-identified theatrical practice and dramatic repertoire required censorship, and the libertine, indulgent, and even immoral connotations of play-going should be policed in order to maintain social order. Policing the homoerotic space of Chinese theatre also maintained the internal social order and the kind of morality that the ruling dynasty wanted to shore up.

To regulate theatres which were deemed as culturally, sexually, morally, and politically subversive, urban planning played a part in the deployment of state power. Qing China was an apartheid regime, in which the predominantly Han population was governed by the Manchu royalty and a mixed bureaucracy of Manchu, Mongol, and Han officials.[37] The ethnic boundaries were enforced by the urban planning of Beijing, whose city walls created barriers that concretised 'customary, legal, and symbolic notions of ethnic difference'.[38] French writers are aware of this feature. To visualise the layout of the city of Beijing as what conditions the racial, social, and cultural

[35] *Ibid*., p. 56.
[36] Andrea Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770-1900* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 63.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 68.
[38] *Ibid*, p. 69.

dynamics of the capital's urban life, Segalen's *René Leys* opens with a map of Beijing (Figure 1).[39] In the centre stood the Forbidden City, home to the emperor, his family, and a massive corps of staff and imperial cortège. The palace was surrounded by the Imperial City, which was composed of official organs of state power. The Imperial City is encircled by the 'Ville Tartare '(the Inner City, or 'Ville Intérieure 'in *Bijou-de-ceinture*), which contained Banner garrisons, official residence, and the Legation quarter. Although the layout of the city had been already ritually invested before the Qing dynasty, the ethnic segregation was introduced by the Manchu regime to divide the urban space. The adjacent 'Ville Chinoise' is the Outer City, which was the commercial hub of Beijing during the Qing rule. 'Playhouses, winehouses, and brothels for boy actresses clustered just outside the three southern gates in the wall of the Inner City.[40]'

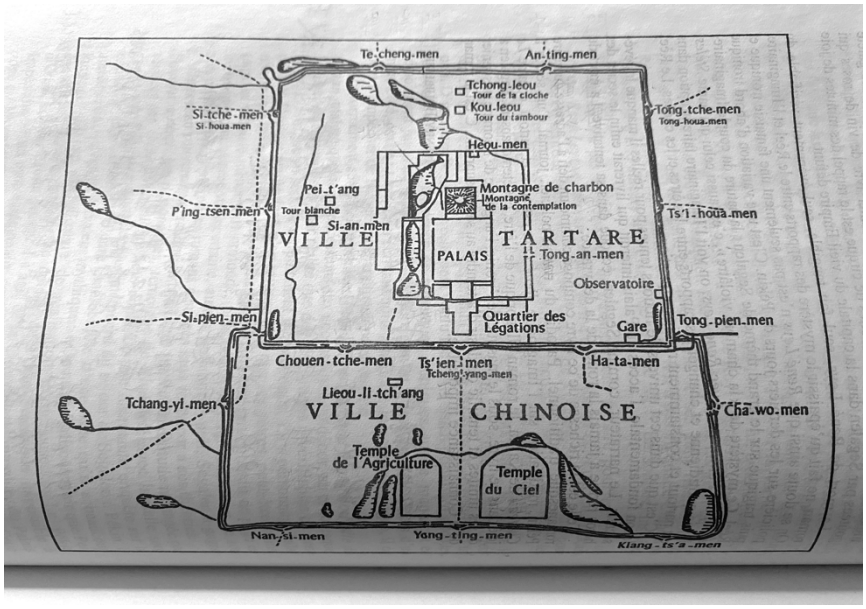


Figure 1. 'Carte de Pékin', *René Leys*, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Henry Bouillier, 2 vols (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), II, p. 456.

[39] See Segalen, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Henry Bouillier, 2 vols (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), II, p. 456. Another hand-drawn version of the map of Beijing (c. 1830-1870) preserved at the Library of Congress is available on *Reading Digital Atlas*: https://digitalatlas.asdc.sinica.edu.tw/map_detail.jsp?id=A103000147

[40] Goldman, *Opera and the City*, p. 69.

Theatres lie right in the capital amidst the urban hustle-bustle, whilst it is contained outside the architecturally demarcated officialdom of the Chinese empire. According to Goldman, 'playhouses were tolerated so long as they were confined to the Outer City. They were not permitted to operate within the Inner City, and high officials (whether Han, Manchu, or Mongol) and bannermen were forbidden to attend performances in commercial theatres'.[41] Despite this prohibition, playhouses crept into the Inner City, whose luminaries sneaked out to see plays from time to time. Thus, theatres present an example of the spatial application of state force, whose efforts to 'sanitise' its racial and cultural integrity were constantly threatened by the encroachment of the Han-identified cultural practice onto Manchu space and the moral corruption of the regime's elites brought down by Han mores.[42]

Both Segalen and Soulié de Morant were aware that Qing state power was zonally exerted throughout Beijing, where effects of ethnic segregations are acute. In a letter to Georges-Daniel de Monfreid in 1910, Segalen enclosed a hand-drawn map of Beijing (Figure 2) to indicate the locations of his former residence and the new house he was going to move into. As both places were in the Inner City, he gleefully added that 'Nous habitons naturellement en pleine ville tartare' to highlight how close he lived to the nucleus of the Chinese empire.[43] Despite the regulation exerted upon its subjects, the Qing court was itself a major patron of Beijing opera and it was common practice for outstanding actors to perform for the emperor and his entourage in the palace. The

[41] *Ibid*, pp. 70-71.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[43] Segalen, 'Lettre à Georges-Daniel de Monfreid' (21 June 1910), *Correspondance*, ed. by Henry Bouillier, 2 vols (Paris: Fayard, 2004), I, 1126.

exceptional entry of a cross-dressing actor into the Forbidden City figures in *René Leys* as one of the ways proposed by René Leys to 'Segalen' to slip into the palace:[44]

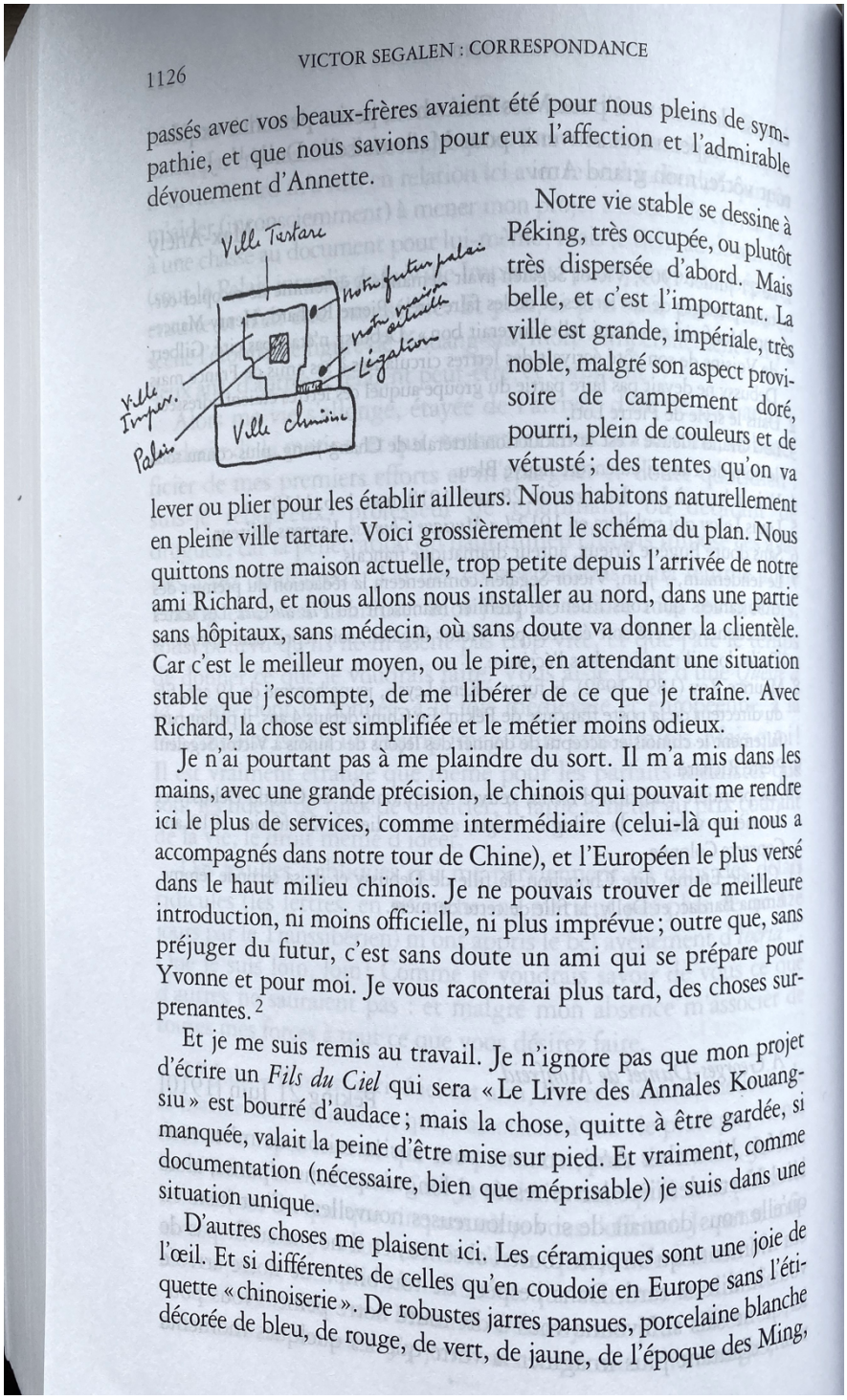
> — Quel moyen?
> — Ce…cet acteur costumé en femme mandchoue par grande exception…Voyons! vous m'avez mené au théâtre tout exprès pour me le montrer!
> — ?[45]

Although the proposal seems to be one of René's beguilements to attract 'Segalen's' attention, it evokes one loophole that would make it possible to cross the boundaries in an authorised disguise. In *Bijou-de-ceinture*, the distinction between the Inner City and the Outer City is translated into the distinct sounds characteristic of the two areas separated by 'l'épaisse muraille crénelée de la Ville Intérieure'.[46] After nightfall, the silence in the Inner City is punctuated by the calls and drumbeat of the patrolling night watch, whereas on the other side of the wall, cries, banter, laughter, and brawling in the gambling pit waft across the border, in stark contrast to the authoritative and orderly vigilance within. Moreover, the gates of the Inner City act like the valves of urban circulation: their positioning, opening, and closure reiterate the demarcation of borderlines. The gates of the Inner City are mentioned in the wake of Bijou-de-ceinture's suicide attempt through opium overdose under the pressure of abusive admirers.[47] To rescue the unconscious actor, the narrator rushes to the missionary hospital in the Inner City to fetch emetics and a caffeine injection and make it back to

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[44] To distinguish Segalen the narrator in *René Leys* from Segalen the author, 'Segalen' will be sued in subsequent passages to designate the narrator in the novel.
[45] Segalen, *René Leys*, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Henry Bouillier, II, p. 525.
[46] 'Et toutes les deux heures, les veilles sont ponctuées par les profonds grondements du Tambour Géant sur sa tour carrée. Et l'air transparent, tout pénétré de lumière astrale, est si pur, si léger, que l'on perçoit souvent, par delà l'épaisse muraille crénelée de la Ville Intérieure, les cris, les appels, les rires, ou les éclats des rixes dans les tripots des faubourgs.' Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 81.
[47] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 171.

the actor's house in the Outer City. The success of the narrator's aid thus hinges on the passage of the gates.



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passés avec vos beaux-frères avaient été pour nous pleins de sympathie, et que nous savions pour eux l'affection et l'admirable dévouement d'Annette.

Notre vie stable se dessine à Péking, très occupée, ou plutôt très dispersée d'abord. Mais belle, et c'est l'important. La ville est grande, impériale, très noble, malgré son aspect provisoire de campement doré, pourri, plein de couleurs et de vétusté ; des tentes qu'on va lever ou plier pour les établir ailleurs. Nous habitons naturellement en pleine ville tartare. Voici grossièrement le schéma du plan. Nous quittons notre maison actuelle, trop petite depuis l'arrivée de notre ami Richard, et nous allons nous installer au nord, dans une partie sans hôpitaux, sans médecin, où sans doute va donner la clientèle. Car c'est le meilleur moyen, ou le pire, en attendant une situation stable que j'escompte, de me libérer de ce que je traîne. Avec Richard, la chose est simplifiée et le métier moins odieux.

Je n'ai pourtant pas à me plaindre du sort. Il m'a mis dans les mains, avec une grande précision, le chinois qui pouvait me rendre ici le plus de services, comme intermédiaire (celui-là qui nous a accompagnés dans notre tour de Chine), et l'Européen le plus versé dans le haut milieu chinois. Je ne pouvais trouver de meilleure introduction, ni moins officielle, ni plus imprévue ; outre que, sans préjuger du futur, c'est sans doute un ami qui se prépare pour Yvonne et pour moi. Je vous raconterai plus tard, des choses surprenantes.[2]

Et je me suis remis au travail. Je n'ignore pas que mon projet d'écrire un *Fils du Ciel* qui sera « Le Livre des Annales Kouang-siu » est bourré d'audace ; mais la chose, quitte à être gardée, si manquée, valait la peine d'être mise sur pied. Et vraiment, comme documentation (nécessaire, bien que méprisable) je suis dans une situation unique.

D'autres choses me plaisent ici. Les céramiques sont une joie de l'œil. Et si différentes de celles qu'en coudoie en Europe sans l'étiquette « chinoiserie ». De robustes jarres pansues, porcelaine blanche décorée de bleu, de rouge, de vert, de jaune, de l'époque des Ming,

Figure 2. Segalen, 'Lettre à Georges-Daniel de Monfreid' (21 June 1910), *Correspondance*, ed. by Henry Bouillier, 2 vols (Paris: Fayard, 2004), I, p. 1126.

Michel Foucault's inclusion of theatre as one of what he calls the heterotopias is apt to explain the significance of theatre in terms of state-society relations. Being simultaneously liminal, central, and integral to the society, theatres in Beijing are heterotopias whose position structures the sexual and cultural politics associated with plays and boy actors. As is paradoxically defined, the term *hétérotopie* designates 'utopies effectivement réalisées'.[48] Heterotopias are liminal places that possess utopian ethereality and an actual presence in the society. Unlike a petrol station or a church, which serve a utilitarian function or stand for an institution sanctifying a set of beliefs and values, heterotopias are characterised by being in place and out of place at the same time. Their out-of-place-ness has numerous facets: the cemetery indicates the passage from life to death; the asylum and care houses accommodate the mentally ill and the old who are marginalised because of their delirium or decrepitude; and, the theatre 'fait succéder sur le rectangle de la scène toute une série de lieux qui sont étrangers les uns aux autres'.[49] Theatre opens up a gate that carries the audience elsewhere while being situated in their reality. It mixes being in the reality, phantasmagoria, and the mirroring effects of self-recognition.[50] Performing gender inversions and transgressions, Beijing theatre brings sexual heterodoxy to the foreground while entertaining a delicate relationship with cultural authority. Accommodating homoeroticism, this heterotopia serves the pleasure and bonding of elite men in Late Imperial China.

I-2 Androgyny in *Bijou-de-ceinture*: Assumptions and Social Transformation

'A man in hue, all hues in his controlling,
Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.'
Shakespeare, Sonnet 20

[48] Foucault, 'Des espaces autres'(1967, published 1984) in *Dits et Écrits*, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), II, 1575.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 1577.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 1575.

'L'art a créé un être surnaturel, l'androgyne, auprès duquel Vénus disparaît.'
Joséphin Péladan[51]

In *Bijou-de-ceinture*, Soulié de Morant presents the cross-dressing actor as an androgyne, a *fin-de-siècle* figure associated with the cult of art. Portraying the Chinese androgyne in such a perspective hybridises French and Chinese traditions, combining the native society's practice with the European vision of masculinity as well as aspects of gender mobility in decadent writing. Therefore, what lies at stake are the assumptions underlying the author's portrayal of the Chinese androgyne when he launched a literary career inspired by Chinese culture after his return to France. Narrated in the first person by a Frenchman, *Bijou-de-ceinture* tells the story of his friendship with a talented boy actor. The Frenchman's sympathetic observation of the actor's vicissitudes and development runs parallel with China's contact with Western powers and the 1911 revolution that topples the Qing empire and sets up the republic.[52] I argue that *Bijou-de-ceinture* constructs Chinese androgyny while maintaining a calculated distance from the homoeroticism it describes, to deliver a shock effect without associating the author himself with homosexuality. I situate androgynous representation in terms of the homoerotic culture of China, highlighting traces of displacement and transformation that result in the Chinese androgyne as a French-made hybrid. Through intertextual representation, *Bijou-de-ceinture* renews the image of cross-dressers by endowing them with artistic agency. I also consider the extent to which the blurring of gender boundaries creates spaces of ambiguity in the racialised idea of Asian femininity.

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[51] Joséphin Péladan, *Comment on devient fée. Érotique, Amphithéâtre des sciences mortes* (Paris: Messen, 1892), II, p. 305.

[52] For a general presentation of the novel, see Valérie Lavoix's preface to the reedition of *Bijou-de-ceinture* (Paris: Kwok On, 1993), pp. 5-13.

The notion of androgyny had evolved significantly since its earlier, mythic symbolism of primordial unity predating the separation of the sexes. Androgyny was privileged in the reflection on beauty since Winckelmann (and the reception of Winckelmann through Walter Pater and Théophile Gautier), whose account of the Greek ideal in art is charged with political and homoerotic content.[53] In Romantic mysticism, the unity of the sexes resurfaces in the dominant trait of androgyny which stands for the perfect form of humanity. Critics generally follow Mario Praz's observation that androgyny is the obsession of the whole decadent movement, but the way in which it developed, from the Romantic portrayal of the 1830s to the decadent representation of the 1880s to the early twentieth century, has provoked different interpretations.[54] This development, as Frédéric Monneyron notes, involves the loss of transcendence in androgyny and the bifurcation of figures including the androgyne (effeminate dandy and ephebe) and what Joséphin Péladan terms as the *gynandre* (laddish lesbian and tomboyish *femme fatale*).[55] It is important to note that decadent androgyny leads to 'une dégradation totale' of its Romantic precedent.[56] Underscoring the socio-historical context that brings about the decadent movement, Catherine Lingua construes decadence as an 'aventure esthétique' and 'révolte culturelle' which flees from the prosaic world in defiance of bourgeois pragmatism and normative masculinity

[53] It would be misleading to think the male body takes precedence over other bodily forms in Winckelmann. We should note that the gendering of aesthetic categories in Winckelmann does not follow a rigid male/female schema, nor does it insist on virility in spite of its tilt for male homoeroticism. See Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 105. For the reception of Winckelmann through Pater and Gautier, see Frédéric Monneyron, *L'Androgyne décadent: mythe, figure, fantasmes* (Grenoble: Université Stendhal, 1996), p. 67, 162.

[54] Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. by Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1951 [1933]), p. 332.

[55] Monneyron, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 10, 53.

and femininity.[57] In line with Lingua's account that the androgynous ideal shifts from the concern with unified completeness to a resolute quest for deviant sexuality, Jennifer Yee identifies the 'dégradation' as a fall into the erotic sphere.[58] Perceived as both downward (echoing with the etymological *cadere* in decadence) and reactionary, this movement transforms, according to George L. Mosse, the androgyne from 'a symbol of fraternity and solidarity' into 'a symbol of vice and sexual perversity'.[59] To hedge their conclusion, both Lingua and Mosse add that the longing for perfect harmony did not vanish completely along with the erotic turn.

My contention is that if the evolution of decadent androgyny is viewed not only as a continuum within the Western and French metropolitan literary tradition but also as a ramifying process concurrent with the expansion of the French empire and France's sphere of influence in non-/semi-colonies such as the case of China, the fall into eroticism does not seem an irrevocable move and may present some surprises in picking up other characteristics congenial to decadence, notably art. As dandies and aesthetes epitomised by Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray partake in the conceptualisation of the androgyne, it is not surprising to see sexual ambiguity portrayed as connected to aesthetic sensitivities and proclivities for the arts. Thus, it is fair to say Soulié de Morant is an eagled-eyed writer who picks up male cross-dressers of Beijing opera, who seem to offer a good means of fulfilling this. But how to present Chinese androgyny, which could be attention-grabbing and risqué, without being accused of immorality? The

[57] Catherine Lingua, *Ces anges de bizarre: regard sur une aventure esthétique de la Décadence* (Paris: Nizet, 1995), p. 20, 22.
[58] Lingua, *Ibid*., p. 56, Jennifer Yee, '"Indochine Androgyne": Androgyny in Turn-of-the-Century French Writing on Indochina', *Textual* Practice, 15.2 (2001), p. 272.
[59] George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 92.

scandal of André Gide's vindication of homosexuality in *Corydon* (1924) testified to French society's homophobic reaction, and Jean Cocteau's anonymously published semi-autobiographical novel *Le Livre Blanc* (1928) stood as another contemporary example of the moral censorship imposed on homosexuality.[60] The construction of Soulié de Morant's authorial persona as a self-proclaimed ex-consul in China plays an important part in mediating the homoerotic culture of Beijing opera for the French readership.

Soulié de Morant's calculated distance involved the maintenance of professional respectability shored up by his sinologist credentials, which turn out to be less impressive than it seems on closer inspection. Born in Paris in 1878, Soulié de Morant was a family friend and *protégé* of Judith Gautier, daughter of Théophile Gautier. He learned the Chinese language and culture with a Chinese house guest of Gautier's.[61] However, lack of a diploma and formal recognition of his learning would remain a problem throughout his career. In 1902, he worked for the *Compagnie de chemin de fer Hankou-Pékin* as an interpreter. Then, he received an interpreting job at the French consulate in Shanghai and was promoted to vice-consul at the consulate in Yunnan. This promotion did not integrate him into the French diplomatic corps, because the position of 'vice-consul' was created to encourage and reward the small number of qualified people to work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Despite the brevity of Soulié de Morant's exercise of interim consular authority that lasted for a few months,

[60] See Mungello, *Western Queers in China*, p. 34.

[61] The house guest who taught Soulié de Morant Chinese is widely identified as Ting Tun-ling, but Johan Nguyen has put forward an alternative suggestion. See Nguyen, 'George Soulié de Morant sinologue', *La réception de l'acupuncture en France: Une bibliographie revisitée de George Soulié de Morant* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012) , pp. 63-65. See also S. Von Minden, 'Une expérience d'exotisme vécu: le Chinois de Théophile Gautier', *L'Orient de Théophile Gautier, Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier* (1990: 12).

he maximised this record after his return to France in 1909. In the 1920s, he published dozens of books about China, covering subjects including Chinese theatre, literature, art, fiction, translation, leading up to his turn to acupuncture. The author was often presented as 'Consul de France, chargé de mission en Chine par le Ministère de l'instruction publique' on the book's title page.[62] Along with a group of experts in alternative medicine which was becoming popular in the 1930s and Yukikazu Sakurazawa, a Japanese advocate of a macrobiotic regime and a revised version of acupuncture, Soulié de Morant managed to introduce acupuncture, styled as '*acuponcture* chinoise',[63] into France and set up a practice in Neuilly-sur-Seine whose patients included Jean Cocteau, Colette, and Antonin Artaud. He was nominated, among some other seventy people, for the Nobel Prize in medicine in 1950.

Although the school of acupuncture created by Soulié de Morant has seen internal conflicts and separatism, it was not until the 1970s that the legitimacy of the 'vraie acuponcture chinoise' was disputed. The polemic involved the pro-Soulié-de-Morant Jacques-Emile Niboyet and the sceptical Nguyen Van Nghi, a Vietnamese acupuncturist based in Marseilles. In a nutshell, Nguyen noticed that the theory and practice of Soulié de Morant's school contained unexplained inconsistency and difference from the Chinese acupuncture he knew, but his doubt was trivialised because his Indochinese training was viewed by Soulié de Morant's disciples as a bastardised version of Chinese acupuncture.[64] The incident spurred on Nguyen's son Dr Johan

[62] Such is the case of *Théâtre et musique modernes en Chine* (1926).
[63] Related publications include Soulié de Morant, *L'acuponcture chinoise* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1932) and *Précis de la vraie acuponcture chinoise: Doctrine, Diagnostic, Thérapeutique* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1955).
[64] See Nguyen, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

Nguyen to initiate research into the government archives, which led to the deflation of some of Soulié de Morant's claims to his consulship and expertise in Chinese medicine.

It appears that Soulié de Morant pursued his aspirations with a certain guile to secure his position in the circle of French Orientalists. According to Nguyen's biography of Soulié de Morant, he attempted to apply for funding from the École française d'Extrême-Orient based in Hanoi in 1917 using the draft proposal that Segalen had submitted to carry out archeological projects in China in 1909 and 1914. The project was to establish a sinologist foundation in Beijing for archeology and the arts. The people in charge did not accept his proposal because Soulié de Morant was just an interpreting attaché at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and because Segalen had already submitted the proposal before.[65] This incident is telling about why the doors at the quai d'Orsay, the École des langues orientales, and French Sinologist academia in general, remained shut for Soulié de Morant despite his assiduous publications on China in the 1920s. And Chinese medicine, along with acupuncture, which was as yet unfamiliar to France, seemed to offer a back door for him.

Thirteen years before the publication of *Bijou-de-ceinture*, Soulié de Morant had written about cross-dressing in the chapter on Chinese theatre in his *Essai sur la littérature chinoise* (1912), but the practice was presented negatively:

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[65] This has, of course, infuriated Segalen, who wrote to his wife on the 28th of August in 1917: 'De mon passage à l'École d'Ex[trême]-Orient, j'ai, entre autres choses, appris que mon projet d'une mission archéologique permanente à Péking avait été copié et démarqué, dans ses propres termes, par Soulié, Vice-Consul, qui en février 1917, écrivait au Gouverneur de l'Indochine pour demander le patronage de l'École. C'est Finot, directeur, qui m'a mis au courant, et montré les pièces. Mais il avait aussi les miennes, prenant date, et n'a pas été dupe. J'ai repris l'affaire, sur le pied d'une Mission à Péking, réservée à Jean ou moi, c'est-à-dire, la suite officielle de nos missions. Jean verra ensuite s'il lui agrée d'accepter le marron du feu. Je le tire sans me brûler; mais ne songe certes pas à le croquer; seulement à poursuivre jusqu'au bout une idée qui est la mienne, et dont j'ai maintenant grâce à Finot, toutes les traces. Il doit me répondre une lettre non moins officielle approbative. J'écris à Jean, en le priant de s'en occuper un peu s'il passe à Paris, et à Pila [Fernand Pila, chef du bureau des services économiques aux Affaires étrangères] pour dénoncer Soulié.' in Victor Segalen, *Correspondance*, 2 vols. (Paris: Fayard, 2004), II, pp. 968-969.

> …tous les rôles féminins sont tenus par des jeunes garçons de huit à seize ans. La réputation de ces acteurs-actrices est détestable et l'on raconte sur eux les histoires les plus scandaleuses. Le métier de comédien, il y a quelques dizaines d'années encore, faisait tomber dans la 'classe vile'.[66]

If stories being told about the 'acteurs-actrices' are the most scandalous ones, what are we to make of *Bijou-de-ceinture*, which is written by the same man who made this evaluation? Despite Soulié de Morant's tendency of fabulating about his own achievements,[67] his evaluation on the actors' social marginality cannot be dismissed as wrong. What remains intriguing is the degree of literary sophistication that the author mobilises in the novel to turn the boy actor into an artistic androgyne.

Lastly, calling cross-dressing actors 'Chinese androgyne' raises questions concerning the Chinese tradition, diachronism, and Western conceptions of gender categories. Are we retroactively attributing contemporary, Western categories of thought to other cultures and to the past?[68] How to reconcile different conceptions and practices of same-sex desire and deal with the diachronic gap in which the medical, scientific, societal, political, and even ethical concepts surrounding terms such as 'homosexual 'and 'homosocial 'were in the making (in France) or simply lacking (in late-Qing China)? Ideally, none of these terms should be taken for granted and employed in a one-size-fits-all fashion, especially when European and non-European contexts are involved simultaneously here.

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[66] Soulié de Morant, *Essai sur la littérature chinoise* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1912), p. 238.

[67] Dr Johan Nguyen's archive-based biography, *La réception de l'acupuncture en France* is a useful study that debunks the inflated parts of his life and work. See especially 'Georges Soulié consul en Chine' (pp.31-62), 'George Soulié de Morant sinologue' (pp. 63-74), and 'La pratique de George Soulié de Morant' (pp. 143-160).

[68] 'We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterised—Westphal's famous article of 1870 on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth.' See Michel Foucault, 'The Repressive Hypothesis', *History of Sexuality 1*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 43.

Given the historical and cultural specificities in turn-of-the-century France and Late Imperial China, 'androgyny' seems to be tilted towards the French side when applied to describe the form of same-sex eroticism in the writing of Segalen and Soulié de Morant. Despite this, working definitions for 'androgyny', 'homosexual', and 'homosocial' are useful to designate the literary configurations of gender identity and sexual practice for the benefit of this study. This is not falling back to universalism, but to work out a way of addressing historicity while at the same time achieving generic references.[69] Throughout this chapter, I use the word 'androgyny' to refer to being partly male and partly female in appearance or of indeterminate sex, a rough definition based on which discussions of cultural context and appropriation will be elaborated. 'Homosexuality' is understood as sexual desire and practice involving two people of the same biological sex.[70] 'Male homosociality' and male homosocial desire is a concept put forward by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.[71] It designates bonds between men as a distinguishable strand in a broad spectrum connecting homosexuality and heterosexuality. This concept posits a broader structure revolving around mutual attention, identification, emulation, collaboration and competition between persons of the same sex.

Last but not the least, using 'androgyny' to describe Chinese boy actors cannot pass as unproblematic, even if the actors are characters in French fiction or reportage targeting a European readership. The overlapping system of references involving

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[69] For a balanced account of how to employ terminology across different cultures and ages in gender studies and the sexual culture of late imperial China in particular, see Vitiello, *The Libertine's Friend*, pp. 11-14.

[70] For the distinction between homosexuality and gay, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1990), pp. 16-17.

[71] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016 [1983]).

French literature and Chinese theatre creates space for comparison as well as confusion, as if two dinner parties were thrown in the same place but the hosts were absent, leaving two webs of relations intermingling with each other haunted by their original locus of signification. What is involved here is a process of perception, translation, and transformation of what strikes the authors as similar to androgyny. Despite this, some reference points are still needed to clarify what may seem an insurmountable distance between cross-dressing in Chinese theatre and androgyny. This distance arises from how cross-dressing functions and how it is related to the actor's gender identity in Chinese theatre. In *Gender, Politics and the Performance Culture of Beijing Opera* (2020), Anqi Wang indicates that the interpretation of a character in a play is mediated by the specialisation of roles, which are assigned to novice actors based on the sound of their voice and physique regardless of their sex.

> In the acting process of 'actor→role→character in the play', the true sex of actors in traditional Beijing opera is completely subsumed under the technical training based on the assignment of roles. In the theatre of Beijing opera that revolves around the actor, their singing, speech, and performance are the focus of attention, and gender does not strike actors, playwrights, and the audience as particularly problematic.[72]

What is a role in Beijing opera? Each theatrical role is constituted by a stylised programme of singing, reciting, acting, and acrobatics, and performers wear distinct facial make-up and costume to represent gender, age, status, and personality. For instance, a lively and sometimes coquettish young lady (*huadan*, 'flower female role') is distinguished from a dignified woman (*qingyi*, 'verdant-clad'), and a young man

[72] '在「演員→腳色→劇中人」的扮演流程中，傳統京劇演員的真實性別，完全被覆蓋在腳色分工的技藝訓練之下。在「演員」為中心的京劇劇場裡，唱念表演是焦點，無論演員、編劇、觀眾都沒有特別性別問題。' Translations are mine unless otherwise specified. See Anqi Wang, *Gender, Politics and the Performance Culture of Beijing Opera*, 《性別、政治與京劇表演文化》(Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2020), p. 127.

(*xiaosheng*, 'little male role') differs from a military man (*wusheng*, 'martial male role'). Therefore, specialising in a role is essential for an actor's professionalism, and the actor must be fluent in the stylised delivery and performing vocabulary of a certain role before assuming a character in play.

Moreover, the specialisation of roles is unrelated to the actor's biological sex, so much so that the meaning of 'cross-dressing' in Chinese theatre is radically different from Raoule de Vénérande's dressing style in *Monsieur Vénus* or Portia's disguise as Balthazar in *The Merchant of Venice*. In the terminology of Chinese theatre, the closest equivalent to cross-dressing is *fan-chuan* (反串, 'reversely play'), but instead of signifying portraying a character by a performer of the opposite sex, it means playing a role other than the performer's specialisation. Today, *fan-chuan* also takes on the broader meaning of cross-dressing outside its original context. Take Bijou-de-ceinture for example: if he interprets *laodan* ('old female role') instead of *qingyi* which is his specialisation, this act constitutes 'cross-dressing' in the strictest sense regardless of his sex, because the line is drawn between the role's age and style of performance. Throwing questions arising from terminology into relief enables us to distinguish the nuances being overshadowed by concepts originating from the Western paradigm. Looking at these category shifts is useful to assess the transformation of aspects of Chinese culture in turn-of-the-century French literature.

I-2-a Assumptions and Social Transformation

In *Bijou-de-ceinture*, the performance of femininity hybridises decadent sensibilities and Sino-French intertextuality. In what follows, I show how androgyny in *Bijou-de-ceinture* inflects homoeroticism and the racialised idea of effeminate Asian men with a twist. The twist consists of a renewal of the Chinese tradition of

homoeroticism and an emphasis on the androgyne's artistic vocation through the novel's intertextual engagements with Chinese literature. Steeped in a certain misogynism, the world of *Bijou-de-ceinture* envisages cross-dressing actors as an improved surrogate for women, because their 'femininity' is deemed refined and aesthetically superior to biological femininity. The femininity performed by cross-dressing actors in *Bijou-de-ceinture* is artificial, politically and culturally sanctioned, and artistically empowering. This does not conflict with the eroticism of decadent androgyny; instead, it gives sensuality a utopian anchorage, for we should note that the androgynous ideal comes above all from a reflection on art, and the androgyne has been identified as the 'sexe artistique par excellence'.[73] Fallen it may have; through art, it can rise again. The artistic androgyne does not imply a non-sexual sensuality, for in the novel it inhabits a homoerotic milieu symbiotic with the sex industry. Rather, it is illustrative of the tension between nature and artifice as expounded by Baudelaire's 'Éloge du maquillage' (1863). In his dismissal of nature as crude and hideous, Baudelaire redefines virtue as being artificial. Virtue, he claims, is '*artificielle*, surnaturelle, puisqu'il a fallu, dans tous les temps et chez toutes les nations, des dieux et des prophètes pour l'enseigner à l'humanité animalisée, et que l'homme, *seul*, eût été impuissant à la découvrir.'[74] Here, it is man-made efforts that go beyond the appearance and limits determined by nature. For Soulié de Morant, the artistic androgyne rises above the banality of the natural and assuming a distinguished role for his nation, however socially underprivileged he has been.

[73] Monneyron, *L'Androgyne décadent*, p. 59; Lingua, *Ces anges de bizarre*, p. 38.
[74] Baudelaire, 'Éloge du maquillage', *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1976), II, p. 715.

The conception of the artistic Chinese androgyne involves not only the assumption that art is superior by being unnatural and man-made but a form of self-glorification of the author, who discerns an exotic rarity endangered by Western assimilation and sets out to preserve its authentic beauty. In fact, it would be inexact to hold decadent literary culture entirely responsible for the slippage of Bijou-de-ceinture into androgyny through Soulié de Morant's novel. This is especially true regarding the casting of Bijou-de-ceinture as an artistic androgyne. The association of androgyny with artistic pursuits idealises Chinese boy actors and opposes their sexuality to the reproductive norm. The alternative sexualities presented by the homoeroticism of late-Qing theatre seem readily appealing. In the introduction to the novel, Soulié de Morant's exaltation of male cross-dressers rejects reproduction, which is transcended by the purity of Art resplendent in charm and grace:

> Il semblait que l'on admirât la Grâce même, dégagée d'attributs réalisateurs; le Charme, la Séduction dans leur essence ; le Raffinement, l'Harmonie de la voix et de l'esprit ; l'art de donner la joie par un regard, une parole, un geste.
>
> Il semblait que la fallacieuse pensée de la reproduction fût nettement écartée, laissant seul notre amour naturel pour la Beauté…[75]

On the one hand, Soulié de Morant vindicates the artistic dignity of Chinese cross-dressers, and on the other hand, by enlisting (or advertising) his ethnographical work, he brands his project as a safeguard for the Other's culture, which is menaced by the cultural homogenisation brought about by imperialism:

> Le centre de ce monde étrange était le théâtre. Dans un récent ouvrage, le *Théâtre et la Musique modernes en Chine,* je décris le bouleversement qui s'opère dans la vie des artistes dramatiques, dans les scènes, les costumes encore éblouissants, les pièces même ; et je transcris la musique de quelques opéras célèbres, avant que tout cela sombre dans la banalité internationale.

[75] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, XIII.

> Mais ici, c'est l'âme des acteurs que je voudrais faire revivre, leur âme parfois d'une noblesse admirable, mais toujours d'une subtilité passionnée, émouvante, raffinée, comme pétrie et modelée par la poésie délicate et les sentiments magnifiques des héros qu'ils personnifient depuis leur plus tendre enfance.[76]

The 'banalité internationale' clearly refers to the cultural homogenisation engendered by imperialist expansion across the world, including material culture as well as democracy. If cultural homogenisation encroaches the condition of cross-dressers, it is also by dint of the spread of democratic ideas that actors gained cachet since their art was thought of as constitutive of the new national identity.[77] It would be interesting to see to what extent Soulié de Morant's support for the Republican revolution contradicts his alleged aversion for the 'banalité internationale' of social arrangement and artistic expression. Soulié de Morant is egalitarian enough to make Bijou-de-ceinture remark that 'Dans notre Chine, avant la Révolution de 1911, tout était pour les courtisans et les hauts magistrats. Aujourd'hui, nous avons atteint la période que vous avez déjà traversée: les artistes sont entourés d'une auréole d'admiration et de fortune.'[78] However, we should not overlook the fact that the author has embroidered the chronology of his service in the French consulate in Shanghai to cast himself as one of the revolution-sympathetic Europeans who gave a hand to Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), leader of the revolution and 'Father of the Nation' for the Republicans (and today's Taiwan).[79] In other words, the author has presented a narrative that does not hold water in terms of dates but more or less glorifies himself as a revolutionary visionary.

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[76] *Ibid*., XIV.
[77] It suffices to evoke Mei Lan-fang (梅蘭芳, 1894-1961), an iconic actor of Beijing opera who toured the US and Europe to promote Chinese culture in the 1930s.
[78] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 19.
[79] See Nguyen, 'George Soulié protecteur de Sun Yet-sen', *La réception de l'acuponcture en France*, pp. 35-40, and Soulié de Morant, *Soun Iat-sènn* (Paris: Gallimard, 1932).

Therefore, Soulié de Morant's pro-Republican sentiments need to be treated with a pinch of salt. In this regard, Segalen's hostility towards the revolution seems more consistent: he considered it to be a negative consequence of Western influence.

In addition to assumptions about French decadent literary culture, Westernisation, and the author's self-styled guardianship of native culture on which the artistic androgyne is based, the novel reflects the social transformation of Late Imperial China through the increasingly obsolescent practice of male cross-dressing. To highlight the uniqueness of the Chinese androgyne, Soulié de Morant situates its cultural habitat, Beijing, in opposition to Shanghai, whose young, ostentatious, mercantile ethos stands in contrast with the old capital steeped in history, tradition, and politics. As the imperial regime crumbles in China, social conventions are loosened, and the male exclusivity of Beijing theatres is encroached by the inclusion of women spectators and performers, the latter epitomised by *guanren*, courtesans who entertained social gatherings with conversation and song in regions south of the Yangzi River i.e. Jiangnan. Although it is true that the gendered boundaries of theatre became porous in the final days of the Qing dynasty, we need to distinguish this from Soulié de Morant's description, whose misogyny is nostalgically defensive of the homosocial order of the old regime as he sees it, which is not entirely the same as what is construed by modern historians. Through the response of Bijou-de-ceinture to the narrator, who is taken aback by the sight of women in the audience, the author suggests that women's entry to theatres signals the demise of tradition:

> Mais tout le côté droit du balcon était rempli de femmes, la plupart couvertes de bijoux. Sous les ailes, il y avait aussi des femmes mêlées aux hommes…Quel changement !…
>
> Je lui montrai d'un signe les beautés alignées au balcon et demandai :

— Est-ce donc permis, maintenant ?

Il haussa les épaules et dit :

— Toutes nos traditions s'effritent. Et les spectatrices se soucient peu du talent d'un acteur: elles apprécient seulement sa beauté, et veulent qu'il soit mâle, même dans les rôles féminins. Nous avons des théâtres où ne jouent que des femmes. Leurs railleries piquantes sur les *siang-kong* dissolvant l'enthousiasme des hommes. Les raffinements de nos mœurs ne sont plus…Pour les festins même, l'on fait venir bien souvent des séduisantes *Kouann-jenn* appelées des régions du Sud, de Yang-tcheou, de Sou-tcheou. Leurs chansons nasillardes ont le charme de l'exotisme. Leurs blandices apprêtées attirent les esprits superficiels et grossiers de ceux qui nous gouvernent et s'enrichissent aujourd'hui. Les charmes de leurs corps font oublier le vide de leurs esprits et l'insécurité de leurs cœurs…Quand la boue de matérialisme qui empâte l'univers tombera-t-elle au fond de la source, laissant de nouveau transparentes et limpides les eaux pures de la délicatesse intellectuelle et de la grâce des sentiments ?[80]

This provokes several contentions. First, Bijou-de-ceinture deprecates the female audience for their shallow appreciation of the appearance of boy actors, but I will show later that the appreciation of 'male beauty' (*nanse*, 男色) is essential to the homoerotic tradition of Chinese theatre, not a female predicament. Second, Suzhou (Sou-tcheou in the novel) from which these courtesans hailed is situated in Jiangsu, the province known for the largest number of scholars who obtained the highest scores in the highest level of imperial examination. To cater to the clientele that contained not only merchants but also scholars, these courtesans were known for their education which cannot be reduced to the emptiness of mind as suggested in this passage. Therefore, the blame that southern courtesans 'ne connaissent rien des efforts vers l'art et la beauté' is not convincing.[81] Third, 'l'insécurité de leurs cœurs' is only supported by the narrator's reported rumour, which says these courtesans would fake true love in order to get ransomed for marriage, after which they would elope with a beau who would beat the

[80] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 246.
[81] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 187

cuckolded husband if the husband comes to find them.[82] Given that this accusation is ungrounded within the novel itself it seems that this passage articulates not so much a Chinese actor's opinion as a European misogynistic commonplace consonant with songs like 'La donna è mobile' ('Woman is fickle') in Verdi's *Rigoletto* (1851).

Fourth, the indictment for materialism that reflects the deterioration of the old regime's cultural refinement implies a crass arrivisme stereotypically attributed to turn-of-the-century Shanghai, which is utterly different from the cultural prestige of Suzhou and other regions of Jiangnan. Conscious of Shanghai's arrivisme, the author strengthens the link between the novel's misogyny, Shanghai's mercantilism, and bourgeois-identified charlatanism. The narrator presents Shanghai as lacking artistic sophistication, where dramatic art no longer lies at the heart of urban entertainment: 'la littérature et la poésie cédaient le pas à des soucis plus immédiats.'[83] 'L'on parlait d'affaires et de politique plus que de poèmes ou d'œuvres d'art. Et l'on passait les nuits à jouer des fortunes autours des tables de *ma-tsio*, "les oisillons dans le chanvre", que les Occidentaux connaissent maintenant, et appellent, on ne sait pourquoi, *mah-jongg*.'[84] In brief, cash capital overtakes cultural capital as the nucleus of urban entertainment in the Shanghai of *Bijou-de-ceinture*. The social transformation in *Bijou-de-ceinture* is imbued with misogyny based on a biased understanding of homoeroticism in Chinese theatre and a perception of Beijing-Shanghai rivalry, along with other regional differences.

I-2-b Re-Imaging Chinese Homoeroticism and Racialised Femininity

[82] *Ibid*.
[83] *Ibid.*, p. 186.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 187.

In this section, I discuss how *Bijou-de-ceinture* reimagines and re-images male homoeroticism in relation to the cultural tradition of China as part of its approach to gender artifice. I consider the life of Chinese male cross-dressers from low-class backgrounds and destined, as aesthetic objects, for the admiration and consumption of a male-only audience. In the novel, these actors are somatically and spiritually invested with cultural capital, namely the dramatic tradition and technique, such that the masculinity of those who impersonate female leads metamorphoses into a femininity considered to be superior to the biological female. By reference to Baudelaire's notion of artifice as being 'surnaturel', I identify a certain rapprochement between this notion and the novel's representation of 'femininity' through the cross-dressing androgynes. Their practice goes beyond Baudelaire's claim that a woman 'doit se dorer pour être adorée' because the process involves the crossing from the natural to the 'surnaturel', from the masculine to the feminine, and from social subjugation to a budding sense of artistic dignity.[85]

Although *Bijou-de-ceinture* creates a fictional space for the articulation of their subjectivity, the result reflects the author's own assumptions and the influence of French literary culture. Their aesthetic appeal is predicated in part on the homosocial structure of urban leisure imbued with misogyny. This misogyny is on the one hand linked to the European literary cliché that women are fickle and unfaithful; and, on the other hand, it is critical about the reproductive norms of heterosexuality, to which the Chinese androgyne offers an alternative:

> Ce fut comme si, ayant soulevé le sombre linceul d'hypocrite contrainte et de mécontentement qui pèse lourd sur l'Europe, je retrouvais la civilisation antique, libre et saine, que nous font entrevoir les romans et

[85] Baudelaire, 'Éloge du maquillage', *Œuvres complètes*, II, p. 717.

> poèmes grecs échappés à l'attention destructrice des Barbares puritains.[86]

Soulié de Morant's recourse to an ostensibly antiquated homoerotic and libertine world seeks possibilities of liberation from the domination of pudeur, echoing Eugénie's remarks in Marquis de Sade's *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*: 'en laissant errer cette imagination, en lui donnant la liberté de franchir les dernières bornes que voudraient lui prescrire la religion, la décence, l'humanité, la vertu, tous nos prétendus devoirs enfin, n'est-il pas vrai que ses écarts seraient prodigieux?'[87] In expanding the libertine 'imagination', *Bijou-de-ceinture* swerves from gender prescriptions and fuses images of carnal indulgence drawn from Chinese and Western traditions. Its title provokes the behavioural pattern assigned to 'young man' by specifying that the hero is a 'jeune homme qui porte robe, se poudre et se farde'. Then, the novel unfolds a homoerotic environment where theatres, brothels, restaurants, and state power operate symbiotically to the wonderment of the French narrator, who also witnesses the chaos of the Boxer Uprising. The Boxer Uprising was a xenophobic and superstitious movement that provoked violent assaults on foreigners in China and led to a multinational military coalition in retaliation against the Boxers and the Qing government's quiescence. Thus, established social order and mores in Beijing collapsed during the coalition's campaign which occupied the city in 1900. In *Bijou-de-ceinture*, Beijing's district of theatres and brothels becomes a playground for foreign soldiers to release libidinal prohibition. 'Les étrangers, eux aussi, délivrés des restrictions artificielles de leurs lois et de leurs éducations, obéissaient de nouveau à tous les

[86] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, XII.
[87] Marquis de Sade, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) [1795], p. 103.

instincts, à tous les désirs que leur Créateur avait mis dans leur âme immortelle, et persistaient, selon le terme du bon pasteur, à se rouler dans la souillure de leurs stupres.'[88] The narrator reports that Beijing is transformed into a 'paradis de toutes les libertés' and the military chaplain is compelled to warn his comrades of the retribution 'que l'Éternel fit subir à Sodome et Gomorrhe'.[89]

The sexual encounter enabled by imperialist warfare depicted by *Bijou-de-ceinture* introduces a libertinage that backfires on the civilisational containment of libido to the male homoerotic sphere of Chinese theatres. The novel also re-imagines the physical and affective values attached to fruit to symbolise sensuality and sexuality. In a convivial setting when the distinction between the homosexual and the homosocial is blurred, the minister makes a statement to extol the virtues of boy actors. He believes that only men can provide men with real company, including both sensual and spiritual pleasures, without the preoccupations of reproduction and heredity. To explain the idea to the narrator, the minister compares the love of women to peaches and the love of men to apples:

> L'amour de la femme est en tous points pareil à des pêches empourprées par le soleil. Leur douceur, leur éclat, leur velouté nous tentent et nous enivrent de désirs. Mais, sous la dent, elles perdent aussitôt leur fermeté, et fondent. Bientôt, dans la bouche, il ne reste plus qu'une eau tiède et douceâtre.
> — Et l'amour des hommes ? questionnai-je.
> — Ah ! l'amour des hommes ! s'écria-t-il presque lyrique, je le comparerai à la pomme dont l'aspect est sans finesse, sans velouté, sans mystères. Mais sa fraîcheur croquante et un peu sèche irrite le goût même qu'elle le satisfait. Elle ne fond pas, amollie, mais est de plus en plus ferme jusqu'au moment où elle n'est plus.[90]

[88] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 238.
[89] *Ibid*., pp. 238-239.
[90] *Ibid.,* pp. 76-77.

The minister's misogyny entails an idiosyncratic imagery that is neither consistent with the Western tradition nor with the Chinese one. Here, the symbolic value of the apple that is often associated with Eve is given to men's love, whereas peach, whose blossom symbolises love in classical Chinese poetry, is attributed to women's love. The apple's crunchiness and acidity is contrasted with the softness of the peach, suggesting a wishy-washy character. However, gendering apple and peach in such manner redistributes the meaning associated with masculinity and femininity. The problematic of the peach resurfaces with the mise en abîme of *The Peach Blossom Fan*, so I will discuss the image of peaches in the next section. Here, I focus on how associating men's love with an apple diverges from the Chinese tradition.

Recent efforts to historicise Chinese sexual culture demonstrate that male homoeroticism has retained a long presence throughout Chinese history, so credit can be given to Soulié de Morant's appeal to a 'civilisation antique'. There are several canonic idioms in Chinese that derive from ancient texts to refer to male homosexuality, notably (among others) 'cut sleeve' (*duanxiu*, 斷袖) and 'shared peach' (*fentao,* 分桃). 'Cut sleeve' stems from the infatuation of Emperor Ai (r. 7 BC-1 BC) for a favorite named Dong Xian, who one day fell asleep while resting his head on the emperor's sleeve. To avoid disturbing Dong, the emperor cut the sleeve of his own robe.[91] 'Shared peach' comes form a philosophical text which dates to the third century BC. As the story goes, Duke Ling of Wei (*Weiling Gong*) was offered half of a peach of which his favorite Mizi Xia had just eaten the other half and found exceptionally sweet. The Duke

[91] See Ban Gu (班固), 'Biographies of Flatterers and Favorites' (*Ningxing zhuan*), *Book of Han* (*Hanshu*), 《漢書・佞幸傳》. The text is available online in *Chinese Text Project* (https://ctext.org/han-shu/ning-xing-zhuan/zh).

was first touched by the offer, but blamed the favorite later for the same offer when he became not as beautiful as before.[92] Also, male homosexuality played a role in shaping Chinese social conventions and spurring artistic creation,[93] exemplified by fictions and a literary genre called 'flowers' registers' (*huapu*, 花譜), a catalogue that circulated judgements on the beauty and artistry of boy actors (most of whom played female lead (*dan*) in all-male troupes.[94] In these comments, sensual appeal i.e. the appearance of boy actors sometimes overrides artistic talent or technical prowess, so the artistic purity and aesthetic transcendence ascribed to Bijou-de-ceinture are elements of novelistic construct.

Although 'shared peach' refers to male homosexuality because of the fruit's tastiness that motivated the favorite to share it with the sovereign, not because of any intrinsic or metaphoric value of the fruit or the plant itself, the idiom enforces the association of peach with romantic love and takes on a male homosexual overtone when the fruit is combined transitively with the verb share. The minister's accolade of male love compared to an apple presents a significant detour. It is likely that Soulié de Morant was unaware of the idiom, or he broke the rhetorical convention deliberately.

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[92] Han Feizi (韓非子), 'On the Difficulty of Lobbying' (*Shuonan*), *Han Feizi* 《韓非子・說難》. The text is available online in *Chinese Text Project* (https://ctext.org/hanfeizi/shuo-nan/zh).

[93] Hinsch, *The Male Homosexual Tradition in* China, p. 4.

[94] For instance, *Pinhua baojian* ('The Precious Mirror of Ranked Flowers'), a novel published in 1849, features the relationship between literati and boy actors. 'One of the central concerns of the *huapu* was to identify exactly which feminine traits each *dan* displayed, both on and off stage'. See Wu Cuncun and Mark Stenvenson, 'Male Love Lost The Fate Of Male Same-Sex Prostitution In Beijing In The Late Nineteenth And Early Twentieth Centuries', *Embodied Modernities*, p. 47. More specifically on *huapu* as a literary genre, see Wu Cuncun and Mark Stevenson, 'Speaking of Flowers: Theatre, Public Culture, and Homoerotic Writing in Nineteenth-Century Beijing', *Asian Theatre Journal,* Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 2010), p. 102, and Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities*, p. 108. For the historical development of *huapu* at an earlier stage, see Chang Yuan, 'Theatrical Huapu in mid-Qing Beijing and the Construction of Femininity and Masculinity', 清中期北京梨園花譜中的性別特質建構, (unpublished [doctoral dissertation], National Taiwan University, 2010).

In both cases, the attention is drawn to the constructed nature of sexualities and how sexualities take shape through the passage from bodily practice to verbal practice.

To make sense of the racialised embodiment of the Chinese androgyne, Anne Cheng's recent monograph, *Ornamentalism*, provides a pertinent model. Employing a feminist approach, *Ornamentalism* analyses the construction of East Asian femininity in terms of objecthood through literature, crafts, fashion, and visual culture.[95] Cheng posits that the ornamental thingness of the body of the 'Yellow Woman' subverts the conventional vision of the biological or anatomical body by its peri-humanity that necessitates another ontological conception of what it means to be alive, embodied, and gendered as feminine.[96] What the Chinese androgyne and the Yellow Woman have in common is their derivation from nineteenth-century racial categories and their highly fabricated nature and association with intricate ornaments. Naming the novel as 'Bijou-de-ceinture' highlights the ornamental dimension, embodying a form of programmed femininity, heavily invested with artifice which accounts for their over-sophistication, decadence, and objectification. Valorised by French fiction, the Chinese androgyne is meant to eclipse women for the homoerotic appreciation of male opera aficionados and benefit from the democratisation of the Republic of China. If the Yellow Woman is an 'embroilment with the ornamental and the Oriental', whose being synthesises the East Asian female body, art, and commodity,[97] the Chinese androgyne sublimates the Yellow Woman's femininity by completely dislodging its gender as a cultural construction from biological determinations.

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[95] Anne Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 98.
[96] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[97] *Ibid*, p. 3.

Dating back to the third century AD, male cross-dressing can be viewed as a perennial tradition in Chinese culture.[98] The Chinese term for the young female role *dan* (旦) even contains an etymological trace that indicate the confusion and co-presence of both sexes in performance and prostitution. According to Yong-yih Tseng, an academician of Academia Sinica, *dan* is very likely to have been the normalised orthographical error of *jie* (姐), a historical colloquialism for female prostitutes, through centuries of linguistic diffusion and exchange between theatres and popular entertainment.[99] Why the female role is called *dan* and the way in which the character takes on the meaning to represent the personage reflect women's historical involvement in the profession. In reconstructing the role's morphological evolution, Tseng demonstrates that the very name for the female role in Beijing opera, a predominantly male cross-dressing institution, has its roots in entertainment and sex services provided

[98] See Chen Shou (陳壽), 'Book of Wei' (魏書) in *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (三國志): '[the king of Qi named Fang] summoned young performers including Kuo Hwai and Yuan Xin to frolic nakedly in front of the Palace of Lotus, […] and the king also commanded from the Lookout of Guangwang [Lookout of Ample View] Hwai and Xin to impersonate diabolic women from eastern Liao. The impersonation went to such an excess that passers-by covered their eyes and the king drank and laughed on the Lookout.' ('[齊王芳]日延小優郭懷、袁信等於建始芙蓉殿前裸袒游戲，[...]又於廣望觀上，使懷、信等於觀下作遼東妖婦，嬉褻過度，道路行人掩目，帝於觀上以為讌笑。) This passage is cited in Wang, *Gender, Politics and the Performance Culture of Beijing Opera*, p. 3, and Tseng Yong-yih, *On Chinese Opera*《說戲曲》(Taipei: Lianjing [聯經], 1976), p. 33. The text of *Records of the Three Kingdoms* is in the public domain and can be found in: https://ctext.org/text.pl?node=602095&if=gb

[99] Tseng's research bridges the gap between the institutionalisation of roles in Beijing opera and their philological origin in popular culture. The derivation of *dan* (旦) from *jie* (姐) could have followed two probable paths, either through assimilatory simplification ('形近') or through erroneous change ('訛變'). Historically, a female prostitute was called *jier* (姐兒; 兒/r functions as an endearing and colloquial particle without any meaning). Assimilatory simplification assumes that *jie* (**姐**) was simplified as *qier* (**且兒**), which then was mistaken for *dan-r* (旦兒) or simply as *dan* (旦) in writing. Erroneous change posits that *jier* (**姐兒**) may have been first mistaken for *dan-r* (妲兒) then simplified as *dan-r* (旦兒)/*dan* (**旦**), basically the same result. For more details in textual references, see Yong-yih Tseng (曾永義), Handout for Lecture 9 'On Roles' (腳色論), *Chinese Opera Studies* (戲曲學), *National Taiwan University Open Courseware* (2017), pp. 5-6. URL: http://ocw.aca.ntu.edu.tw/ocw_files/105S103/105S103_CT09L01.pdf

by women. Both the term *dan* and cross-dressing are cultural fabrications that encapsulate a history of inclusion and exclusion at the discretion of state power.

Nevertheless, the Chinese androgyne differs from the Ornamentalist objecthood which Cheng argues to be the source of the Yellow Woman's subversion. 'Simultaneously consecrated and desecrated as an aesthetic object', [100] the Yellow Woman possess an unstable objecthood that partly depends on the others' interpretation, whereas the androgyne's feminisation is only possible thanks to the technical command of a ritualised theatrical vocabulary of face paint, costume, singing, choreography, and poetry. I argue that the Chinese androgyne, in contrast with the Yellow Woman, stands as an aesthetic *subject* that is simultaneously consecrated and desecrated. Its consecration derives from its artful performance of femininity, and its desecration involves its subjugation within the internal hierarchy of the Chinese society as well as the double subjugation under the French gaze. The Chinese androgyne is a hybridised product of femininity performed through the cross-cultural encounter of Frenchman in Late Imperial China.

In *Bijou-de-ceinture*, effeminacy is a culturally sanctioned technique permeated with artistic agency. The hybridity of the Chinese androgyne in the novel contains misogyny directed against women, clearly a sign of 'double colonisation', but I suggest *Bijou-de-ceinture* can be read as a textual monument in honour of the form of art practiced by Chinese boy actors. As the next section on intertextuality will show, they acquire, inherit, and vivify an artistic tradition through physical and mental labour, and the novel monumentalises their practice in defiance of its dissolution along with social transformation and modernisation. Although not every element of the portrayal of the

[100] *Ibid* p. 3.

Chinese androgyne conforms to the historical reality the novel claims to depict, it eulogises a bygone era that accommodates what appears to be a sexual anomaly for the turn-of-the-century Europeans through institutional codification.

I-3 Intertextuality in *Bijou-de-ceinture*

In what follows, I discuss the artistic agency of the Chinese androgyne through the novel's invocation of canonical Chinese plays, an intertextual device to 'consecrate' the actor's artistic vocation. I begin by the explicit reference to *The Peony Pavilion* (1598) by Tang Xian-zu, which will be followed by an analysis on the novel's encoded riff on *The Peach Blossom Fan* (1699) by Kong Shang-ren. In arguing for the aesthetic subjectivity ascribed to the Chinese androgyne, who plays a key role in bringing these texts to life again through intertextual bonds, I consider how references to the Chinese canon traverses linguistic and national boundaries and how such a reanimation empowers subjugated bodies.

Toward the end of the novel, Bijou-de-ceinture invites the narrator to a performance that stars the actor as the heroine of *The Peony Pavilion*. After a summary of the play, the narrator contemplates the development of Bijou-de-ceinture who, he thinks, has matured rather well, building on his juvenile talent to attain a higher level of virtuosity.[101] *The Peony Pavilion* tells the story of Du Li-niang, daughter of a regional governor. On a spring day, she takes a walk in the garden, falls asleep, and has a dream. In her dream, she falls in love with a young scholar named Liu Meng-mei whom she has never met in real life. After Li-niang wakes up, she pines for the oneiric romance and wastes away. Shortly before she dies, she paints a self-portrait in defiance of the transience of life and tucks the painting under a rock in the garden. Saddened by

[101] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, pp. 248-249.

Li-niang's decease, the family buries her in the garden and leaves the property, which is turned into a Taoist monastery. In the underworld, the official reckons that Li-niang's time is not over yet and she is destined for a romance, so he sends Li-niang back to the world. Meanwhile, Meng-mei comes to the capital to sit the imperial examination, takes residence in the monastery, accidentally discovers the painting (which he thinks is a Buddhist adoration piece in the first place), re-encounters Li-niang's ghost, and consummates with her. With the help of a Taoist nun, the couple dig Li-niang's grave open and reanimate Lining fully. As Meng-mei presents himself to Li-niang's father, the governor is unconvinced by Meng-mei's claim to be his son-in-law and sentences him to decapitation. The young man is saved in the nick of time by imperial convocation, for he has ranked at the top of the examination. Taking charge of the case, the emperor uses an exorcist's mirror to verify Li-niang's humanity. After the verification, the family celebrates the reunion and the couple's marriage.

The narrator admires the play's romantic import whose emotional intensity surmounts the termination of death. As he takes in the play, he goes on to muse that an untouched soul is not different from being interred and each new love makes one feel resurrected: 'Quand le sentiment ne nous a pas touchés, notre âme n'est-elle pas endormie en nous comme au fond d'un tombeau? Chaque nouvel amour n'est-il pas une véritable résurrection ?'[102] In the belief that the play boasts an élan to rise above reality,[103] the narrator congratulates Bijou-de-ceinture, whose maturity, rather than diluting the play's passion with a mutated voice, enhances it masterfully:

> Bijou-de-ceinture animait cette ombre impalpable d'une vie mystérieuse et bouleversante. La maturité de ses années, loin de lui

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 249.
[103] 'La poésie des idées, la douceur de la musique, dans ce premier duo d'âmes énamourées, emportaient aussitôt l'esprit loin des réalités pénibles.' in *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 248.

> avoir enlevé la puissance ou la fraîcheur de son chant, lui donnait des accents de passions dont la salle entière était enivrée. Il avait cet ascendant complet de notre âme profonde que seuls possèdent les plus grands artistes.[104]

The invocation of *The Peony Pavilion* connects the romantic jouissance that is humanly impossible in the real world with Bijou-de-ceinture's prowess. More importantly, Chinese literature as Soulié de Morant sees it celebrates love and feeling, so the play is decidedly a manifestation of *Amor omnia vincit* for him. 'Les Chinois', as he claims in *Théâtre et musique modernes en Chine* (1926), where both *The Peony Pavilion* and *The Peach Blossom Fan* figure in the section 'Pièces anciennes',[105] 'ont une variété infiniment plus grande de sujets, car ils montrent les conflits que peuvent soutenir chacun de nos sentiments élevés dans la lutte pour la vie; et le sentiment élevé est toujours vainqueur.'[106] On the same page, he characterises the theme of love in Chinese drama as follows: 'L'amour, vainqueur de tout et fier de sa faute.'[107] The fault to be proud of appears in the death of Du Li-niang, who, according to the flower god who makes a case to the official for her entry to the underworld, 'died of voluptuous

[104] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 249.
[105] Cf. 'La plus célèbre pièce est le Moutann ting Roannroun tsi ('Mémoires de l'âme revenant au Pavillon des Pivoines'), 55 scènes (tissu), par Trang Siènntsou. Elle est encore jouée très fréquemment, et les éditions se succèdent sans interruption. La musique, toute fixée par les disques Pathé, est particulièrement douce et harmonieuse. Le sujet est étrange pour des Occidentaux: Li-niang, fille d'un gouverneur, prend des leçons de littérature avec un vieux lettré (sc. 7). C'est au printemps, par un jour chaud. Elle va dormir dans le Pavillon des Pivoines, au fond du jardin. Là, elle rêve d'un étudiant qu'elle n'a jamais vu, et s'éveille 'folle d'amour' (sc. 10). Elle meurt d'amour et est enterrée près du pavillon. Le Gouverneur est transféré dans une autre ville. Trois ans après, un étudiant, Léou Mong-mei 'Prunier-de-rêve', vient dans le pavillon, s'y endort et rêve de Li-niang qui se donne à lui, car c'était de lui qu'elle avait rêvé (sc. 23). Sur l'ordre de la jeune fille, la tombe est ouverte et le corps revit (sc. 32 et 35). Le lettré va rejoindre son beau-père, mais est arrêté comme espion (sc. 38). Cependant Li-niang voit sa mère (sc. 48); le vieux professeur vient accuser Mong-mei de violation de tombe: mais le lettré est reçu premier aux examens, et convoqué par l'Empereur (sc. 53). Li-niang explique tout: ils se marient.' in Soulié de Morant, *Théâtre et musique modernes en Chine*, p. 27.
[106] Soulié de Morant, *Théâtre et musique modernes en Chine*, p. 32
[107] *Ibid.*

pining'.[108] In interpreting Du Li-niang on the stage, Bijou-de-ceinture dies, descends to the underworld, returns to world to go through the peripeteias leading up to reunion. His art involves a rejuvenating journey that intoxicates the audience and inspires the narrator.

For the contemporary reader, it takes some Ovidian imagination to apreciate the gist of the play, but turn-of-the-century French literature is not short of themes of reanimation. Most saliently in *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), Rachilde envisions reanimation through Raoule de Vénérande's kissing of the wax model adorned with the teeth, nails, and hair of the cadaver of Jacques Silvert. Switching between mourning and men's clothes, Raoule de Vénérande kneels beside the bed and kisses the model, triggering 'un ressort, disposée à l'intérieur des flancs, correspond à la bouche et l'anime'.[109] Here, the reanimation of the beloved is reduced to a mechanical process triggered by the sexually polymorphous lover's kiss. Placed at the ending of the story, the scene does not seem to suggest any tragic-comic twist of fate. Instead, its laconism produces shock and even grotesque aversion. A more Romantic version of reanimation would be the female vampire Clarimonde in Théophile Gautier's 'La Morte amoureuse' (1836). In affirming that 'l'amour est plus fort que la mort', Clarimonde ascribes her resurrection to the power of her will.[110] *Monsieur Vénus* and *The Peony Pavilion* share a sense that forms of reanimation empower subjugated bodies. Transposed to the fetishised mannequin, Jacques Silvert's enslaved androgynous body is switched on

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[108] 'This lady died of voluptuous pining.' in Tang Xian-zu, Act 23 'The Infernal Trial' (*Mingpan*, 冥判), *The Peony Pavilion*《牡丹亭》(Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe [人民文學出版社], 1963), p. 112

[109] Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus* (Paris: Félix Brossier, 1889), n. pag.

[110] Théophile Gautier, *La Morte amoureuse, Avatar et autres récits fantastiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981 [1836]), p. 103.

through kissing, which instrumentalises it to suggest a mechanical body. More than a toy to satisfy nostalgia and carnal pleasure, it is a literary device capable of explosive provocation. In interpreting plays, Bijou-de-ceinture's artistic agency consists of arousing the affect and aesthetic satisfaction in the audience by animating texts and lyrics that are meant to be executed by the actor. In this moment, his body is no longer an object for the erotic consumption of elite men but an aesthetic medium in coordination with his gender artifice and technical command of the textual, musical, and choreographic repertoire. The stage execution necessitates his aesthetic subjectivity to mobilise these elements together as a whole piece. In the previous section, I have discussed how different forms of libertinage converge in Beijing, depicted by the author during the coalition campaign to crush the Boxer Uprising, and how the author situates the narrative in the middle of social transformation. In arguing for the androgyne's artistic agency, I also want to show that the novel's intertextual engagement celebrates soft power in contrast to imperial violence. Through the mise en abîme, *Bijou-de-ceinture* exercises soft power to explore the thematic intersections of French and Chinese literatures. The soft power exercised by Bijou-de-ceinture sublimates the androgyne's sexuality through intertextual invocation and artistic subjectivity.

If the theatrical practice of Bijou-de-ceinture can be read as a cultural monument, its inextricability from sexual exploitation during the Chinese old regime also provides opportunities of resistance or redemption. Under the old regime, his class ascension depends on imperial favour and aristocratic patronage.[111] In the Republic of China

[111] 'Le *Tsing-pao*, *La Gazette de la Capitale*, le texte d'un bref décret conférant à Bijou-de-ceinture le titre nobiliaire mandchou de *bei-dze* qui lui donnait le droit d'assister sans convocation aux audiences impériales, et lui conférait le rare privilège de pouvoir toucher le Corps Sacre sans encourir la mise a mort immédiate prévue par les Rites en pareil cas.' in Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 176.

inaugurated in 1911, mass admiration and the democratic ethos promote his status as an artist: 'Depuis la Révolution de 1911, notre époque, heureusement pour moi, admire avant tout les artistes. Ma photographie est dans toutes les devantures des boutiques, à côté de celle du Chef de l'État.'[112] That is, his agency takes on an iconic influence to represent cultural refinement and national identity.

The Peach Blossom Fan (1699) maps the romance between Hou Fangyu and Li Xiangjun onto the political struggles of Southern Ming, a series of dynastic rump states that resisted the Qing forces following the fall of Beijing and the northern part of the empire until 1645. Hou Fangyu is a member of a reformist society based in Nanjing, the rump state's capital. Hou falls in love with Li, a singing courtesan, and gives her a fan as the token of their love. As Hou's political enemy gains imperial favour in Nanjing's court, Hou is forced to flee but gets imprisoned subsequently. Li is betrothed by Hou's foe to someone else, against her will. A group of men are sent to take Li away, Li fights against their coercion and hurts her head. The group takes another courtesan as Li's surrogate and leave. Seeing that her fan is stained with her blood, a friend of Hou and Li paints the red blotches into peach blossoms with green budding leaves. This can be interpreted as a re-enforcement of the token, for peach blossom symbolises love, and beauty in one's prime in Chinese literature. However, Li's narrow escape does not prevent her from being selected for the imperial troupe, which is preparing a play written by Hou's enemy, which has pleased the Southern Ming emperor. As the Qing army storms their way south, Southern Ming fails to defend Nanjing and so the whole court (with Hou as a prisoner and Li as one of the performers) must retreat. When the procession reaches a Taoist monastery in the mountains, Hou and Li run into each other

[112] Soulié de Morant, *Bijou-de-ceinture*, p. 240.

in the middle of a mourning ceremony for those who have died for the rump dynasty. Their emotional intensity is chastised by the hosting Taoist priests as mawkish vanity, dwarfed by the toppled state and political disorder. A priest tears the fan into pieces to reflect the regime's destruction and channels the couple's passion to monasterial devotion so that they both renounce secular life.

In *Bijou-de-ceinture*, references to *The Peach Blossom Fan*, never made explicit, revolve around a series of actions triggered by the threat of Prince Li to possess Bijou-de-ceinture, whose favour accorded by the Empress Dowager is on the wane. This jeopardises the actor's place in the palace. Prince Li has been portrayed as a villain who has made several attempts to possess Bijou-de-ceinture by force. This time, the prince introduces a dagger to coerce Bijou-de-ceinture into choosing his protection instead of dying on the spot. Prince Li is unaware of Étoile-de-sagesse, another cross-dressing actor and a passionately (but platonically) close friend of Bijou-de-ceinture, who is also in the room. Étoile-de-sagesse tries to disarm the prince but his failure leads to a wrestle in which the stout prince gains control. Bijou-de-ceinture picks up a bronze artefact and knocks out the prince. During the wrestling, the prince cuts Étoile-de-sagesse's wrist, and the bleeding wound stains the actor's fan, upon which he was thinking of writing a poem before the prince's entrance. Bijou-de-ceinture and Étoile-de-sagesse take the dagger and the prince's golden badge to flee the palace, and the bloodstain on the fan is transformed into a crimson peach blossom by the agile hand of Étoile-de-sagesse himself.[113] Knowing that they have become wanted fugitives, the two actors separate from each other in Tianjin. The incident is reported by Bijou-de-ceinture to the narrator who is concerned about the whereabouts of Étoile-de-sagesse, adding that 'il vit

[113] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

toujours, puisque lui-même a délicatement ajouté aux touches roses le dessin de fleurs de pêcher, symbole de passion.'[114]

Since both Étoile-de-sagesse and Bijou-de-ceinture are actors versed in the repertoire of Chinese drama, they must know the plot of *The Peach Blossom Fan* by heart. Soulié de Morant deploys the mise en abîme to associate the bond between Bijou-de-ceinture and Étoile-de-sagesse between that of Hou and Li. In a section on the play in *Théâtre et musique moderne en Chine*, he writes that 'Le titre de la pièce vient d'un éventail que la jeune femme, en se dégageant de l'étreinte de Yuann, a taché de son sang: un peintre, en ajoutant des branches et des feuilles, a transformé les gouttes de sang en fleurs de pêcher, symbole d'amour'.[115] The fan is likely to derive from the play, because the fan is compared to a blade in the play and the object is itself a weapon in Chinese martial arts. This link is strengthened by a minor character's comment that 'the fan with poetic inscriptions acts like a blade to protect oneself'.[116] It would be a mistake to see the comparison as solely an inspiration for the villain's weapon. In the play, the fan symbolises Li's commitment to her feelings for Hou that is as powerful as a defensive weapon. Clearly aware of this, Soulié de Morant transposes the plot and the martial and aesthetic value of the fan to valorise the homosocial or homosexual bond between the two actors. The token of love serves as an aesthetic remedy for injury and a sign of resistance against oppression. Making a pitch for a well-informed ear to catch the distant echo of a poetic realm that enshrines lyric love within peach blossoms, the

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[114] *Ibid.*, p. 194.
[115] Soulié de Morant, *Théâtre et musique modernes en Chine*, p. 30.
[116] '一柄詩扇，倒像一把防身的利劍' in Act 22 'Defending the House' (*Shoulou*, 守樓) in Kong Shang-ren, *The Peach Blossom Fan* 《桃花扇》(Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe [人民文學出版社], 1961), p. 144.

token, now recast in French prose narrative, articulates homoerotic desire in tandem with the quest for beauty. More than a wink, this encoded gesture introduces a form of complicity for the small number of readers of the novel who are culturally and linguistically bilingual.

In the preface to *Ornamentalism*, Anne Cheng asks: 'What does it mean to survive as someone too aestheticised to suffer injury but so aestheticised that she invites injury?'[117] Her question, though intended primarily for the Yellow Woman, is valid for the Chinese androgyne whose art is dedicated to the performance of femininity. *Bijou-de-ceinture* encapsulates the precariousness of the androgyne's injury because of his doubly colonised status in a China facing Western encroachment. However, the novel also delineates the trajectory through which the androgyne rises to exercise his artistic agency in a new era. What has been a Jack-in-the-box inciting lewd interests that defy European bourgeois morality turns out to be an artist who continues and safeguards national cultural heritage. To recognise the intertextuality of *Bijou-de-ceinture* requires sufficient curiosity, cultural capital, and care to support the hermeneutic task. The life of Bijou-de-ceinture is entwined with the political upheavals of late-Qing China, imperialist machinations, Orientalist appreciation, Ornamentalist aestheticisation, and the native homoerotic culture of theatre at a critical moment of transformation. Bearing the androgyne's object-/ornament-identified name, *Bijou-de-ceinture* is a fictional investigation into the constructed nature of gender identities and sexualities as being multiply appropriated, institutionalised, and sublimated through intertextual invocation. If it fulfils the goal of decrying bourgeois hypocrisy as stated by the author in the preface, it is by recapitulating the precept of *l'art pour l'art*: 'Il n'y a de vraiment

[117] Cheng, *Ornamentalism*, xi.

beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien'.[118] Unconcerned with reproduction, morality, and utility, the artistic agency of Bijou-de-ceinture is inseparable from his strivings to inherit and reanimate the cultural tradition of cross-dressing.

[118] Théophile Gautier, 'Préface', *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (Paris: 1973 [1834]), p. 62.

Chapter II

Dramatising China through Romance, Politics, the Sacred, and the Profane

In this chapter, I explore the extent to which romance, politics, the sacred, and the profane partake in French plays about China mingling knowledge, ideas in actual debate, and fantasy. What matters is often not the degree of one's proficiency of Chinese language and culture but the kinds of manipulatable relations one possesses to bear relevance to the China conjured up by an evolving collective imaginary. In other words, a high degree of cultural assimilation is but one of the passports to access the domain as a legitimate contributor. Positioning oneself in relation to the social network of Orientalists is crucial to the conception of the plays to be examined, particularly as it involves strategies to present oneself as non-initiates fluent in details about Chinese culture. I focus on the collaboration of Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti in writing *La Fille du Ciel* (1911) and the rivalry between Victor Segalen and Paul Claudel that gives rise to *Le Combat pour le sol* (1913), Segalen's attempt to outdo Claudel's *Le Repos du septième jour* (1901). This is not to rely on biographical determinism to read texts, but to see how the drama in these authors' life seep into the plays' components and aspirations, some attained, and some never achieved.

In sections on *La Fille du Ciel*,[1] I use the picturesque and the political to show how the play combines Orientalist fantasy and late-Qing politics over a long course of collaboration between Gautier and Loti. Conceived as a French melodrama, the play makes the rift between imaginary narrative and political debate narrower than one might expect, but the picturesque tendency of its performance eventually submerges the political subtext. The section on *Le Repos du septième jour* and *Le Combat pour le sol* revolves around the truth about the aesthetic potential of China's spiritual world discovered through playwriting. This becomes an object of contention for French practitioners of exoticism to dramatise the Chinese empire as a mechanism inseparable from the emperor's domestic, spiritual, and sexual life. I show how these plays reinvent forms of worship essential to the governance of imperial China and reflect the literary rivalry between their authors.

II-1 Between the Picturesque and the Political: Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti's Play *La Fille du Ciel*

In the late 1890s, China was in political upheaval. The contact with Western powers brought about attempts at reforming the country. A host of political questions

[1] Sections II-1, 2, 3, and 4 have been published in the form of a peer-reviewed article titled 'Between the Picturesque and the Political: Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti's Play *La Fille du Ciel*' in *Dix-Neuf* (17 December 2023), DOI: 10.1080/14787318.2023.2291594

were under debate, and some of them appear as background in *La Fille du Ciel* (1911), a play co-authored by Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti. The play has received less attention than their other works such as Gautier's *Livre de Jade* (1867) or Loti's *Les derniers jours de Pékin* (1902), probably because its premiere in New York, with American actors, was regarded as a fiasco. It can be easily cited as an example of the defects of Gautier and Loti's exoticism, since the former never set foot in China despite her interest in the Chinese language and Chinese culture, and the latter possessed little knowledge of the Chinese language and its culture despite the fact that he sojourned in Beijing as a military envoy after the Boxer uprising in 1900. I will argue, however, that *La Fille du Ciel* is not simply the product of Orientalist exoticism. It celebrates the political thinking of Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858-1927), a late-Qing reformer whom Gautier admired and represents as the emperor's righthand man in the play. The romantic encounter between the Manchu emperor and the Han empress extols the cultural nationalism upheld by Kang, but this egalitarian vision of China as a modern nation-state is muddled by the play's histrionics.

To support this claim and examine how dramatic style and stage adaptation adumbrate political allusions in *La Fille du Ciel*, I analyse how the play oscillates between the picturesque and the political, contrasting modes that characterise China's hold on the French literary imagination, and how its performance tilted toward the

picturesque. At the most basic level, this will account for how the political subtext of *La Fille du Ciel* gets overdetermined and stifled by the attention-grabbing Orientalist mystique. To go deeper into the matter, the conceptual framework is linked to France's ambivalence towards things Chinese, which can be productively summarised as Sinophilia and Sinophobia, which I have discussed in the Introduction. The picturesque and the political also partake in the Belle Époque cult for larger-than-life female character-types 'as a theatrical conceit' in the performance of gender identities.[2] In what follows, I will present the cultural exchange between France and China, characterised by the double influence of Sinophilia and Sinophobia, as the necessary context of the creation of *La Fille du Ciel.* Then, I will demonstrate how the play attempts to offer itself as an Orientalist entertainment while still alluding to real-world Chinese politics through a genre in which one would not normally expect to encounter issues of actual political reform. However, the play invokes Kang's political ideas through amorous terms which obfuscate the meaning of those ideas. As a result, and given the commercial nature of *La Fille du Ciel*, the learned assimilation of reformist ideas give way to the hypertrophy of the picturesque, which overrides the political. I will show how this bears the stamp of local colour, a notion complicit in the prevalence

[2] Emily Apter, *Continental Drift: from National Characters to Virtual Subjects* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 131.

of the picturesque in theatrical practice. Finally, I will identify this complicity with aspects of the celebrity culture of Belle Époque France.

II-2 At the Crossroads of Sinophilia and Sinophobia: *La Fille du Ciel* in Context

La Fille du Ciel was conceived at the crossroads of Sinophilia and Sinophobia, two opposing European attitudes towards China that drove the development of *chinoiserie*, sinology, Orientalism, and notions of the Yellow Peril. *La Fille du Ciel* is set in an imaginary period in which China is divided between the Manchu-led Qing and a Han Chinese regime occupying Nanjing, a situation reminiscent of the Taiping rebellion which occurred from 1851 to 1864. The protagonist is the Manchu emperor Guangxu, whose righthand man is Puits-des-bois, a rendering of the real-life minister Kang who launched a series of abortive reforms in 1898, which were blocked by other factions of the Court headed by the empress dowager Cixi. In the play, the emperor visits the rebel capital Nanjing in disguise as a regional lord, in the company of Puits-des-bois, to pay tribute to the Han empress, la Fille du Ciel. He falls in love with her, but his identity is revealed when the Qing army is about to seize Nanjing. A captive brought to Beijing, the empress refuses the emperor's proposal of marriage, presented as a reform for the empire's benefit. Though she loved the emperor as long as he kept his Chinese disguise, she prefers to take poison conserved in a golden caddy tied to his

belt. Heartbroken, the emperor kneels in front of the empress's body and bids the crowd to prostrate themselves.

Before *La Fille du Ciel*, most of Loti's theatrical projects were adaptations of his own work such as *Pêcheur d'Islande* (1893), *Le Roman d'un spahi* (1897), and *Ramuntcho* (1908).[3] *La Fille du Ciel* was one of his rare attempts at an *ad hoc* piece for theatre. Gautier was a more experienced playwright than Loti, as well as having written Chinese-inspired novels, translations, and articles on the cultures of China and Japan. She had had plays produced in playhouses including the Mathurins, the Vaudeville, and the Odéon before collaborating with Loti.[4] They had known each other in shared social circles, notably at a masquerade held by Juliette Adam in 1887. Judith attended dressed as Cleopatra and Loti as Osiris.[5]

What brought them together to write *La Fille du Ciel*? In spring 1903, Sarah Bernhardt asked Loti to write a 'pièce chinoise'.[6] Loti obtained Gautier's agreement to

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[3] Christian Genet and Daniel Hervé, *Pierre Loti l'enchanteur* (Gémozac: La Cailleriue, 1988), pp. 417-432.

[4] Agnès de Noblet, 'Une collaboratrice de Pierre Loti, Judith Gautier', *Revue Pierre Loti* (Oct.-Dec. 1985), No. 24, p. 174.

[5] Allain Quella-Villéger, *Pierre Loti: le pèlerin de la planète* (Paris: Aubéron, 2005 [1998]), p. 187.

[6] Yvan Daniel, 'Les "affaires de Chine" sur la scène dans *La Fille du ciel* de Judith Gautier et Pierre Loti', *Médias 19* (2012), URL: http://www.medias19.org/index.php?id=2997 (accessed 5 November 2022). Subsequent references to this article all come from this source, which is an online publication without pagination.

collaborate with him and Bernhardt was initially happy with the arrangement. The actress specified that there should be 'une impératrice dans le genre de la vôtre [Gautier's], galante, glorieuse et sanguinaire'.[7] To characterise the play in broad brushstrokes, Loti indicated that 'ce sera bien enfantin, bien mélo; mais elle le veut. Les temps futurs sauveront un peu tout cela du ridicule, et puis vous y mettrez votre connaissance de la vieille Chine réveillée'.[8] One can infer from their correspondence that Gautier produced substantial parts of the play, including most of the prose and verse in the script, while Loti was responsible for the décors i.e., the 'Tableaux' in the script and stage production, which draw on passages from *Les derniers jours de Pékin*. In August 1903, Gautier expressed her concern about time pressure given the ongoing revolutionary movements in China: 'des événements peuvent surgir qui nous rendraient plus opportuns ou peut-être moins'.[9] This shows that Gautier wished to 'keep abreast of' ongoing events through certain allusions in the play. To the detriment of the play's progress, however, Loti's itinerant life spent in Paris, Rochefort, and Istanbul made his

[7] Letter from Loti to Gautier, 21 April 1903, fonds Daniel Halévy, Médiathèque de Rochefort-sur-Mer (DH417), cited by Daniel 2012.

[8] Daniel, 'Les "affaires de Chine"'.

[9] *Ibid.*

communication with Gautier difficult, as did his disapproval of some of her ideas.[10] Dissatisfied with a draft shown to her in May 1904, Bernhardt declined to star in the play that she had commissioned and, ironically, accepted a play by Catulle Mendès, Gautier's ex-husband, in 1906.[11] The actress sent a telegram to Loti explaining that the play 'a un premier acte très bien, un deuxième acte injouable, un autre acte où la reine a quatre monologues et le dernier acte beau, mais trois fois trop long'.[12] The play was offered to a number of theatre managers from the Comédie Française to the Vaudeville and the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin, but none of them showed interest in staging it.[13] Gautier and Loti eventually completed *La Fille du Ciel* without Bernhardt, for whom the play had been conceived. Having been left in abeyance for several years, it was first published serially in the *Revue des deux mondes* from March to May 1911. It premiered not in France, but at the Century Theatre, New York in October 1912, in an English translation by George Egerton, starring Viola Allen. It stayed on the programme for about eight months.[14]

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[10] For an account of the play's long gestation, fraught with wrangling, see Michael G. Lerner, *Pierre Loti's Dramatic Works* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), pp. 51-66, and M. Dita, *Judith Gautier: sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1939), pp. 158-167.

[11] Joanna Richardson, *Judith Gautier: A Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1986), p. 182.

[12] Jacques Evrard, 'Pierre Loti à Constantinople', *La Liberté* (6 December 1926), p. 5.

[13] Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

II-3 'Galante, glorieuse et sanguinaire': Invoking Chinese Cultural Nationalism through Melodrama

In her biography of Judith Gautier, Joanna Richardson rightly surmises that *La Fille du Ciel* is conceived to follow the footstep of dramatist Victorien Sardou, who composed *Cléopâtre* starring Bernhardt in 1890, as the play 'has the grandiose melodrama of Sardou, the visual magnificence of the Yellow Empire', and it was 'written as a vehicle for Sarah Bernhardt, who moved strong men to tears when she died on stage; but—at least in France—only Sarah could perform it'.[15] However, this point of departure does not exclude the play's absorption of ideas drawn from actual debates on politics in China. *La Fille du Ciel* alludes to real-world politics through melodrama. Indeed, the play fulfils the formal requirements and emotional appeal of melodrama. According to Anne Vincent-Buffault, melodrama features spectacular stage effects, the use of music to enhance emotional intensity, and moralised feelings.[16] *La Fille du Ciel* takes place in the courts of Nanjing and Beijing, revolving around royal ceremony, gallant conversations, brutal battles, a failed proposal, sacrifice, and the protagonist's suicide. Oriental music, the banter of Puits-des-bois, and other minor characters provide comic mediation. Emotionally provocative scenes range from the

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[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Anne Vincent-Buffault, *Histoire des larmes: XVIII^e^-XIX^e^ siècles* (Paris: Payot, 1986), p. 315.

empress's choice of poison conserved under the emperor's belt to her final fall, followed by mass prostration including the emperor himself. The text promises terror, pity, and tenderness aplenty.

Yet, in the play's preface, Gautier indicates that Kang's advice represents 'une réconciliation pacifique et sincère entre les deux races ennemies'.[17] Implicitly, this refers to Kang's conception of China as a modern nation-state based on equality among different ethnic/religious groups during the Hundred Days' Reform (June-September 1898). In the play, the minister Puits-des-bois accompanies the emperor to visit Nanjing incognito and provides him with confidential assistance. With this storyline, Gautier celebrates the advice offered by Kang in reality. To probe into the political allusions in *La Fille du Ciel*, it is necessary to traverse the melodramatic surface to understand how the play invokes Kang's political thinking in amorous terms.

La Fille du Ciel enacts a form of political discussion softened by the accoutrements of melodrama, given the play's use of a love story to propound an unfulfilled idea for China's political reform, and to piggyback on political convulsions ranging from the Taiping uprising to revolutionary movements that came to overthrow the Qing dynasty in 1911. The play's political allusions and resonance with headline stories from China

[17] Judith Gautier and Pierre Loti, 'Avant-propos', *La Fille du Ciel: Drame chinois* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1911), iv.

reflect the breadth of Gautier's interest in China, which goes beyond literary studies and reaches contemporary politics. Having identified the play's pacifist position regarding the Manchu-Han tension in China, Michael Lerner is right in surmising that 'the analysis of the real issues at stake and fuller characterisation have been subordinated to the interests of sensational theatrical presentation, whether spectacular, emotional or horrific', but dismissing the play as 'shallow melodrama' overlooks the very way in which the play interprets the political argument at stake,[18] that is, representing ethnic reconciliation and national unification in terms of romance. I read the play as a clash of contradictory interests, represented by the picturesque and the political, in which exoticism and political discourse are understood in uneven terms. Had it not been for Bernhardt's withdrawal, could *La Fille du Ciel* have used her fame and the popularity of melodrama as a springboard to discuss Chinese politics? What are we to make of the relationship between melodrama and the political import of the play?

Melodramatic elements are fleshed out in *La Fille du Ciel* to such an extent that one critic complained that its men and women 'indulge in too much gallantry'.[19] Gallantry characterises the Manchu emperor's devotion to the Han empress. In a

[18] Lerner, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

[19] William Schwartz, *The Imaginative Interpretation of the Far East in Modern French Literature: 1800-1925* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1927), p. 57.

revealing conversation, the disguised emperor declares that he would rather be the Tartare emperor (that is, his real self) so that he could consign the whole realm to her:

> L'empereur: Ah! Que je souhaiterais être l'Empereur tartare qui règne à Pékin!…
> L'impératrice: Quelle sombre et étrange idée! Vous souhaiteriez être mon plus mortel ennemi? Pourquoi donc?
> L'empereur: Pour tenter de mettre la Chine entière à vos pieds, vous rendre votre bien, et devenir, après, votre sujet le plus fidèle.[20]

Earlier in the play, Puits-des-bois observes that his master is 'comme la lyre sacrée dont les cordes frémissent au moindre souffle'.[21] He devotes himself to the empress as much as the empress refuses any reconciliation with Manchus. This is demonstrated through how their definition of 'noble' differs. For the emperor, their marriage will become 'l'unique gloire de mon règne, de restaurer la noble tradition chinoise, en fusionnant nos deux peuples pour jamais'.[22] The 'noble tradition' probably refers to the marriage alliance as an appeasement strategy adopted by various dynasties with neighbouring peoples (often nomadic as was the case of the Han dynasty). He also defines their union as their 'missions surhumaines', a destiny hinging on the empress's consent.[23] Finally, he suggests that their union will engender a new China, which will gain vitality and

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[20] Gautier and Loti, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 41.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 208.

dominate the world.[24] So, the consummation of his love will bring about a revitalised nation.

If appeals to nobility facilitate the emperor's gallant pursuit, nobility means patriotic zeal for the Fille du Ciel, intent on doing honour to the Han nation. As the Manchu army storms the palace, the empress is cast as an indestructible warrior who rejects the act of prostration and commits her life to defending the Han nation. She declares that 'nous voici tous égaux. Il n'y a plus qu'une seule et même grandeur, celle que nous donne, pareillement et à tous, la noblesse du sacrifice'.[25] The 'indéracinable haine de race' that founds her desire to vindicate the Han nation remains consistent throughout the play, despite her feelings for the emperor.[26] This is not to suggest that she is completely unresponsive to the emperor's love. Her share of the play's romance lies in her acknowledgement of their feelings for each other: 'nous étions comme deux astres, séparés par l'incommensurable abîme, mais qui se jetaient éperdument leur lumière'.[27] Her passion, courage, and suicide tick all the boxes for 'galante, glorieuse et sanguinaire'. Moreover, it has already been pointed out that *La Fille du Ciel* plays out the tradition of *dilemme cornélien* in French theatre, a plot device that introduces

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 209.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 221.

two conflicting interests impossible to resolve, such as love and honour, or desire and duty.[28] There is a sense in which Gautier and Loti try to juggle with the degree of otherness and familiarity by mixing themes central to the play. Mapping the romance between the sovereigns of two nations warring against each other onto this dilemma seems to be a strategic move to familiarise the audience with the play's core tension.

Consonant with this is the resemblance between the Fille du Ciel and Joan of Arc in intertextual characterisation. Since the play was conceived to be performed by Sarah Bernhardt, it makes sense to seek forms of continuity with her interpretations of Joan of Arc in plays by Jules Barbier (1890) and Émile Moreau (1909). In the *La Fille du Ciel*, the empress is portrayed in the same way as the 'filles-fétiches' of the Boxers in Loti's *Les derniers jours de Pékin* and women revolutionaries in 'L'Âme chinoise', a political commentary written by Gautier in 1919. Both Loti and Gautier compare these figures to Joan of Arc, and the Fille du Ciel is represented in the same terms. When the Manchu emperor meets the empress as a prisoner in Beijing, he alludes to her valour in the battlefield:

> Dites que vous avez été héroïne sublime, la grande impératrice guerrière, la déesse des combats qui défiait les flèches et la mitraille, celle qui revivra éternellement dans les poèmes et l'histoire![29]

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[28] See Daniel, Yvan and Martine Lavaud, eds., *Judith Gautier* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2020), pp. 97-108, 135-150.

[29] Gautier and Loti, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

In Act IV Scene 1, commoners at an execution site in Beijing also recall that 'les balles, la mitraille, tout cela passait au travers d'elle, comme au travers d'une ombre'.[30] This echoes the image of Joan of Arc, used by Loti to describe the 'filles-fétiches' of the Boxers in *Les derniers jours de Pékin* and by Gautier to describe women revolutionaries in 1911 in 'L'Âme chinoise' (1919). In 'Les deux déesses des Boxers', Loti records his visit to a hall where two women shamans are detained. Seated in a room strewn with 'leurs atours de guerrières et de déesses', they collapse into a state of consternation and are described as follows:

> elles étaient des espèces de Jeanne d'Arc […] elles étaient des filles-fétiches que l'on posait dans les pagodes criblées d'obus pour en protéger les autels, des inspirées qui marchaient au feu avec des cris pour entraîner les soldats. Elles étaient les *déesses* de ces incompréhensibles Boxers, à la fois atroces et admirables, grands [*sic*] hystériques de la patrie chinoise.[31]

It was believed that the martial arts and magic practiced by the Boxers could protect the human body from weapons of all sorts, including European guns. Depicting the empress as imperishable in the hail of bullets makes a clear reference to this. In her later article 'L'Âme chinoise', a political commentary about the Hundred Days' Reform and the 1911 revolution, Gautier writes that Chinese women want to sacrifice their life for the Republic and she compares them to 'des Jeanne d'Arc, sans mysticisme, [qui] ont

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

[31] Pierre Loti, *Les derniers jours de Pékin* in *Voyages* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2018 [1901]), p. 1042.

plusieurs fois sauvé des villes et des provinces'.[32] In nineteenth-century France, Joan of Arc was a heroine and symbol of national unification in the social climate bearing the brunt of the Franco-Prussian War and the Dreyfus Affair. Playing this role was essential to Bernhardt's rise to a national icon. The intertextual connections between between La Fille du Ciel and Joan of Arc can be understood as primed and ready, but never activated because Bernhardt stopped short of giving the performance that would have materialised them. But the message seems clear enough: just as the Fille du Ciel sacrifices herself for her nation, women revolutionaries die for the Republic and the detained shamans are ready to receive divine inspiration overcoming the fear of death—are they not all, in a way, daughters of heaven whose images are mapped onto Joan of Arc by French writers to make sense of Chinese patriotism? Some broader implications of this use of a figure from France's own nation-building narrative can be teased out, gesturing towards a transcultural and strategic rapprochement to make it easier to sympathise with the Fille du Ciel.

Melodrama goes as far as obfuscating the link between Puits-des-bois himself and reformist ideas at the first glance. In the play, he often reminds the emperor to behave decorously (like a subject) in Nanjing and to diminish ethnic antipathy through

[32] Gautier, *Les Parfums de la pagode* (Paris: Charpentier, 1919), p. 170.

instigating Han-Manchu intermarriage. He prioritises the emperor's bloodline over his own influence in the hope of promoting Han-Manchu union: 'Moi, je construis l'avenir dans des écrits, prophétiques peut-être, mais je laisse aux générations prochaines le soin d'accomplir l'œuvre. Tandis que vous, c'est votre propre sang que vous offrez en sacrifice, pour fléchir la haine invincible'.[33] As a result, Puits-des-bois is less the political visionary presented in 'L'Âme chinoise', and more the facilitator of gallantry. If the play can be summarised as 'Guangxu fails to woo the Fille du Ciel after she finds out who he really is', romance seems to outweigh the celebration of Kang's agenda. In her writing on Chinese politics, Gautier seems keen on teaching the French public about the geopolitical events in China, but the message becomes less straightforward and loses ground to the efforts to please the audience.

Gautier acknowledges Kang's significance, but the superimposition of different temporalities to which the play refers buries his significance in entangled historical references. In 'Les "affaires de Chine', Yvan Daniel has indicated that *La Fille du Ciel* confounds or superimposes three periods of Chinese history i.e. the Taiping Rebellion under the reign of emperor Xianfeng (1831-1861), the Hundred Days' Reform (1898) under Guangxu's reign, and the Boxer uprising in 1900. In the same article, Daniel also

[33] Gautier and Loti, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

notes that the play's 'fausse historicité' echoes international news items over recent decades. However, this view essentially says historical allusions ring a bell with the audience familiar with what is on the news, but it does not explain how the mixture of periods works in the play. In *Le Dragon impérial* (1869), Gautier had already imagined a Chinese insurrection against the Manchu reign by transferring an uprising reminiscent of the Taiping Rebellion to an earlier period of the Qing Dynasty in the novel, but the uprising provides not so much a means of introducing allusions to real-world political thinking as a background for the development of feuilleton-style adventures.[34] In *La Fille du Ciel*, the Taiping Rebellion sets out the political conditions for a Han regime to co-exist with the Qing. In reality, Kang's advocation for Han-Manchu equality came to prominence during the Hundred Days' Reform, but this reference is mediated through Gautier's interpretation of Kang's proposal. Finally, the imperial palace in Beijing, as Loti experienced it in 1900, serves as a model for the play's tableaux and layout.

Gautier interprets the Taiping Rebellion and the Revolution as a consistent Han antipathy against the Manchu. Such a view oversimplifies the matter. Projecting Kang's egalitarian ideal into an uprising half a century earlier, and proposing ethnic union

[34] For more detail about the composition of *La Dragon impérial*, see Daniel *Littérature française et culture chinoise* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2010), pp. 35-43.

through a reshuffled historical framework, does little to clarify the matter. Thus, it is necessary to consider Kang's political thinking in relation to the Hundred Days' Reform. The Hundred Days' Reform was an initiative to modernise China's education system, economy, political system, and army. Before it ended, some of the goals had been put in place while some had not. Among those that remained un-realised were constitutional monarchism and ethnic equality between the Manchu in power, Han, Mongols, Tibetans, Muslims, and other peoples. This was a period in which intellectuals started to conceive of China as a nation instead of the possession of imperial dynasties. They realised that the Chinese nation did not really have a name and a defined body of members except the names of dynasties. China, as Kang regrets, 'assumes the order under Heaven but only has names for its dynasties and no name for its nation '([1907] 1981, I, 611-612).[35] The absence of a nation points to the fact that 'China' has long been the private possession of ruling families instead of a country, a public and national concept.[36]

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[35] The quotation「以天下自居，只有朝號而無國號」is translated into English by me.

[36] This is exemplified by Liang Qichao (梁啟超), Kang's disciple, who writes 'if you ask what the nation's name is, there is no answer. The so-called Tang, Yu, Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, Song, Qi, Liang, Chen, Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing are but the name of dynasties. A dynasty is the private possession of a family, whereas a nation is the public belonging of people '(「而問其國之為何名？則無有也。夫所謂唐虞夏商周秦漢魏晉宋齊梁陳隋唐宋元明清者，則皆朝名耳。朝也者，一家之私產也；國也者，人民之公產也。」) in Liang Qichao (梁啟超), 〈少年中國說〉 ('On Young China'), 《清議報》35 vols. (11 January 1900), pp. 2270-2271.

Therefore, to reform China is to reach a new conception of what China consists of as a modern nation-state. This is not just about finding a name to baptise the nation, but a renewal of historiography and discursive strategies for the self-representation of an imagined community, whose identity, as Benedict Anderson argues, is 'to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined'.[37] Among the eminent thinkers in China's nationalistic debate were Kang and Zhang Taiyen (章太炎, 1869-1936), who respectively put forward a proposal to name the country and define the Chinese nation. For Kang, both Manchu and Han are natural members of China thanks to the acculturation of Confucianism, so there is no need to maintain the distinction within the concept of Chinese nationhood.[38] He suggested that ethnic categories should be eliminated so that China can 'unify as one and eradicate suspicion and rancour for good' and 'become strong together and empower China'.[39] In contrast, Zhang believes the Han nation is the only legitimate subject of China and both concepts are pretty much synonyms designating the same

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[37] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 6.

[38] Kang Youwei (康有為), 〈海外亞美歐非澳五洲二百埠中華憲政會僑民公上請願書〉(1907),《康有為政論集》ed. 湯志鈞 (北京: 中華書局, 1981), I, pp. 611-612.

[39] These are Kang's statements (「合同而化，永泯猜嫌」and「團和大群，以強中國」) cited from Shen Sungchiao (沈松僑), 'The Myth of Huang-ti (Yellow Emperor) and the Construction of Chinese Nationhood in Late Qing '〈我以我血薦軒轅——黃帝神話與晚清的國族建構〉, *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*《台灣社會研究季刊》(December 1997), No. 28, pp. 1-77.

group of people. In this sense, the boundaries of the 'Republic of China' should be delineated along lines of ethnicity. For Zhang, this is because identical culture is a result of identical ethnicity; if peoples other than Han accept Han assimilation, they must adopt Han language and culture altogether.[40] Based on these formulations, Kang supports constitutional monarchism while Zhang advocates revolution fuelled by anti-Manchu sentiments. In a study on the construction of Chinese nationhood, Shen Sung-chiao identifies Kang's political thinking as 'cultural nationalism' which uses cultural identity as the source of nationalistic alignment, and Zhang's version of Chinese nationhood is regarded as a form of 'racial nationalism', which draws on racial distinction as a source of identity.[41] Although Zhang's thought is Han supremacist and influenced by social Darwinism, his ideological position should be contextualised within the practical concerns of the revolution, which needed to pitch its causes to maximise mass support.

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[40] Zhang Taiyen (章太炎), 'Explaining Republic of China '〈中華民國解〉 , 《民報》(1907), No. 15, pp. 1-17.

[41] In 'The Myth of Huang-ti (Yellow Emperor) and the Construction of Chinese Nationhood in Late Qing', Shen borrows the concept 'cultural nationalism' from John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp. 12-13. Hutchinson divides nationalism into political, or civic nationalism and cultural nationalism. Shen also indicates that 'racial nationalism' is a notion put forward by Frank Dikotter in his 'Culture, "race" and nation: The formation of national identity in the twentieth century China, '*Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 49 (January 1996), pp. 590-605.

The essays in Gautier's *Les Parfums de la pagode* (1919) articulate her view of political events in China and show that her sources of information exceeded reading knowledge, private lessons given by Ting Tungling, and Orientalist rêverie.[42] In 'L'Âme chinoise', Gautier on the one hand sympathises with the Han Chinese as being dispossessed of their sovereignty over three centuries, and, on the other hand, she extols Kang as 'l'illustre réformateur' who brings the country 'un léger espoir d'un rapprochement pacifique'. The article displays ambivalence toward the potential conflict between the revolution's use of anti-Manchu ideology and Kang's monarchist, moderate approach to political reform and pacifism.[43] This ambivalence is characterised by Gautier's profession of sympathy: 'J'éprouvai toujours un sentiment pénible quand je voyais traiter de rebelles les partisans de tout un peuple qui voulait reconquérir son autonomie et reprendre ses droits usurpés'.[44] She sees the dispossessed Han as undergoing 'crises héroïques' that Europe deliberately ignores, and seems to interpret Kang's reform as an alternative that can avoid bloodshed. For Gautier, Kang's

[42] Judith Gautier owed her knowledge of Chinese to Ting Tung-ling (also spelt as Ding Dunling), a diasporic Chinese man of letters who was accommodated by Théophile Gautier and acted as tutor to Judith and her sister Estelle. Judith's Chinese connections also involved her friendship with ambassadors sent to Paris by the Qing government. Shi (2020) and Shen Dali (Daniel and Lavaud 2020, 97-108) did useful work on this subject.

[43] Gautier, *Les Parfums de la pagode*, p. 165.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

cultural nationalism can 'effacer l'antique rancune, réconcilier Chinois et Mandchous'.[45] Consequently, without compromising her admiration for both Kang and revolutionary fervour, Gautier's ambivalence allows her to cheerlead both Kang's political ideal and the 'enthousiasme extraordinaire' dominating Republican China. 'L'Âme chinoise', written after the 1911 Revolution, nods knowingly to the Republic by affirming that 'la volonté du peuple, c'est la voix du ciel', whereas *La Fille du Ciel* transposes the febrile politics of late-Qing China into a picturesque realm where romance, grandeur, and sacrifice are means of exploring concepts of national unification.[46]

II-4 The Hypertrophy of the Picturesque

Although performing Orientalist characters largely affirmed existing power relations of gender and colonisation in Belle Époque Paris, it also gave license to unconventional sexuality and expressions of femininity as an artistic channel. This constituted the cultural habitat in which *La Fille du Ciel* was conceived. Removed from this habitat, its adaptation (translated as *The Daughter of Heaven*) in New York was considered by *The New York Times* to be 'rich in spectacle, but dramatically

[45] *Ibid*., p. 165.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

deficient'.[47] Even if 'effective scenic pictures', 'gorgeousness of dress', and 'the swish of many coloured silks' seem to praise the sensual aspect of the performance, the play fared less well 'with acting that failed to convey any special sense of color—an overplus of mechanical noise called music'. Lamenting the weak dramatic pulse, the critic concludes that 'if the play has any special merit as literature the fact is not apparent in the theatre'.[48] I would like to suggest this is symptomatic of the picturesque, whose excessive use in a culturally and linguistically displaced context becomes the seed of the play's failure, because had it been staged in the way it was originally conceived, the political subtext could have remained intelligible because the intertextual references were easier to access for certain spectators. The French public may not have had first-hand experience of China, but the allusions would have been recognised by those who stayed in the loop of international news.[49] Counting on this, Gautier's interpretation of late-Qing political struggle is welded together with an entertaining form for the French audience, but fell flat for its American audience.

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[47] 'Loti-Gautier Play at Century Theatre: "The Daughter of Heaven" Rich in Spectacle, but Dramatically Deficient", *New York Times* (13 Oct. 1912), *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, p. 17 (accessed 19 January 2023).

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[49] Eminent commentators include Sir Robert Hart (1835-1911), a British diplomat and official of China's Imperial Maritime Custom Service, whose 'La Chine, les réformes et les puissances' was published in the *Revue de Paris* (1 May 1901), alongside a selection of Chinese poems translated by Judith Gautier titled 'Poèmes chinois de tous les temps'.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the play's made-and-staged-in-France version could absolutely overcome the internal conflict between the picturesque and the political. Just like the genre of historical novels, *La Fille du Ciel* falls prey to what Claudie Bernard calls the 'tentations romanesques' which arise in the combination of fact and fiction.[50] As is discussed in the last section, the play's melodramatic elements consist of romance, equivalent to the 'sentimental' and love in Bernard's appraisal. Love can illustrate socio-political conflicts, but it can also drown them in lyric or melodramatic intoxication.[51] Another pitfall is the picturesque, which Bernard equates to *couleur locale*. A corollary of the quest for geographical, cultural, and human otherness, the French term *pittoresque* is bound up with this notion of *couleur locale*,[52] both terms being associated with discourses on the aesthetic effects of painting. *Couleur locale* originally designated the colour proper to an object independent of the influence of its surroundings. Through centuries of metaphoric transfer, *couleur locale* comes to

[50] Claudie Bernard, *Le Passé recomposé: Le roman historique français du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1996), pp. 70-71.

[51] *Ibid*., p. 71.

[52] The ninth edition of *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defines couleur locale as 'détails pittoresques, qui donnent l'image distinctive et vivante d'un pays, d'une région, ou encore d'une époque révolue. URL: https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9C4539 (accessed 22 September 2023).

signify the distinctive features characteristic of a given time or place in visual, musical, and verbal representations.[53]

If local colour can be understood as what makes an object of representation distinctive, the picturesque emphasises the detail and the effect of vividness achieved through the use of local colour. For instance, Gautier considers the ceremonial reception of a Manchu prince she attended in Paris in 1905 to be 'très pittoresque' as the outfit of Qing artillery officers mixes European apparel, embroidered dragons, and Manchu braids. Something about the pomp impressed Gautier by its power to invoke China through metonymy.[54] However, such a belief in 'distinct' features is impregnated with what Vladimir Kapor identifies as the 'relativist trap' and 'referential fallacy'.[55] In the 'relativist trap', the object in question does not possess any distinctness per se; rather, its distinctness comes from the essentialising gaze of a group which authenticates their own perception and judgement through consensual practices. The 'referential fallacy' assumes 'there is such a thing as a distinguishing set of features intrinsic to any one

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[53] The inter-artistic shift in meaning of *couleur locale* is manifest in the term's entry in the seventh edition of *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1878), which reads 'par extension il se dit, en Peinture, dans la Littérature et même dans la Musique, de la fidélité avec laquelle on représente certains détails caractéristiques d'un pays, d'une époque'. URL: https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A7C3132 (accessed 22 September 2023).

[54] Gautier, *Les Parfums de la pagode*, pp. 158-162.

[55] Vladimir Kapor, *Local Colour: A Travelling Concept* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 76-77.

place, a belief that has frequently led both writers and literary critics to think that local colour might best be seized empirically'.[56] The concept of *couleur locale* came to prominence in the aesthetic debates of literary circles in nineteenth-century France, replacing the Classicist norm of unities in theatrical representation with the Romantic pursuit of the *vérité*, advocated by Victor Hugo in *La Préface de 'Cromwell'* (1827) and Benjamin Constant in 'À l'occasion d'une tragédie allemande de M. Robert intitulée *Du pouvoir des préjugées*' (1830).[57]

Local colour became a sought-after quality embodying culturally conditioned otherness in painting, music, literature, and theatre. *L'Art de la mise en scène* by Louis Becq de Fouquières provides a pertinent example:

> La couleur locale n'a de prix que lorsque c'est celle-là même que peut imaginer le spectateur. Si on s'ingéniait à monter un drame chinois, se déroulant par example à Pékin, il est clair que ce qu'il y aurait de plus simple serait de nous montrer des kiosques, des arbres, des Chinois et des Chinoises de paravent, car ce sont ceux-là seulement que nous connaissons et qui ont à nos yeux le plus pur caractère chinois. Or, tout ce qui nous est étranger est, à un degré quelconque, un peu chinois pour nous.[58]

Bearing the pretension to accuracy and authenticity, local colour is the open-sesame for exotic enchantment in theatre, but it can be illusory and self-excusing by giving too

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[56] Kapor, *Local Colour*, p. 77.

[57] *Ibid*., pp. 102-105.

[58] Louis Becq de Fouquières, *L'Art de la mise en scène* (Paris: Charpentier, 1884), pp. 99-100.

much leeway to picturesque representations. It also shapes the expectation of the general public. In her analysis of the reception of Gautier's *L'Usurpateur: Épisode de l'Histoire japonaise (1615)* published in 1875, Elizabeth Emery is right in acknowledging that writers like Gautier are able to situate their stories in carefully arranged frameworks of history, but if the reader does not recognise the intertexts in question, the particular references will be taken as local colour.[59]

Effectively, the reception of *L'Usurpateur* is analogous to *La Fille du Ciel*. Unfamiliar with the 'real' figures and events in the history of Japan and its culture depicted in the novel, the French reader is led to focus on what they can recognise, that is, the vividly painted literary 'tableaux' that recall the *ukiyo-e* prints fashionable in the 1880s.[60] Even if Gautier underlined the 'Histoire' at stake, her contemporaries interpreted the novel in terms of the feminised aesthetics associated with *japonisme*. In the case of *La Fille du Ciel*, the analogous insensitivity to culture-specific referents like the Hundred Days Reform and the involvement of Guangxu Emperor and Kang merges these figures with the picturesque, instead of signalling the historical specificity presented through intertextuality. In 1887, Gautier renamed *L'Usurpateur* as *La Sœur*

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[59] Elizabeth Emery, "*L'Usurpateur* ou *La Sœur du soleil*? Judith Gautier et la fabrication de l'histoire japonaise." *L'Histoire feuilletée: Dispositifs inter textuels dans la fiction historique du XIXe siècle*, ed. by Claudie Bernard (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2022), p. 49.

[60] *Ibid.*

du Soleil, veering away from the aura of *Histoire* to an ostensibly more profitable profile. Also denoting a female figure belonging to the celestial, *La Fille du Ciel* presents another of Gautier's attempt at a 'version romanesque alternative'.[61]

Furthermore, the complicity of local colour in the picturesque hypertrophy is not confined to the stage; it goes beyond aesthetic debates by bordering on life practices.[62] In his analysis of references to local architecture and culinary specialties in Théophile Gautier's *Voyage en Espagne* (1843), Kapor shows that the quest for local colour leads to 'the materialised picturesque which can be eaten or stepped into'.[63] It is not enough to contemplate a painting or a play which confirm the stereotypical collective imaginary conjured up by the subject matter. The picturesque engages lifestyle and behavioural simulation. The *fête chinoise* organised by Pierre Loti very much symptomises 'the materialised picturesque' which lies at the heart of *La Fille du Ciel*'s poetics. Taking place in Rochefort, 11 May 1903, it was a house party that involved a procession featuring an Annamese impersonation of Wu Zetian, a seventh-century empress, tea tasting, opium smoking, and a visit to the illuminated gardens, respecting a dress code deemed to be Chinese.[64] Among the guests were Judith Gautier, local officials, the

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[61] Emery, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[62] Kapor, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 137.

[64] Genet and Hervé, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

chief doctor of the French navy, and two Chinese attachés from the Qing embassy. Gautier and Loti met in person for the first time since their agreement to co-author the play in April 1903. Gautier's 'Une Fête chinoise chez Pierre Loti', collected in *Les Parfums de la pagode*, was first published as an article in *Fémina* on 15 June 1903.[65] In the article, Gautier congratulates the attendees for their cultural fluency, identifying them as 'des gens avertis qui ont couru le monde et pour qui l'Extrême-Orient n'est pas un mythe', whereas the actual Chinese envoys 'ont presque l'air moins chinois que les autres' and Japanese costume was admitted as Chinese.[66] Acting as an instance of the 'playful European mimicry', the materialised picturesque realised by the *fête chinoise* underlies the gestation of *La Fille du Ciel* as a participative quest for human alterity.[67] Preceding the writing of *La Fille du Ciel*, this Chinese-themed cosplay party fosters a vision in which boundaries between fact and fiction, and life and art, are blurred.

The materialised picturesque conforms to the Belle Époque model of celebrity that revolves around what Rachel Mesch calls 'the performance of otherness'.[68] The

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[65] *Fémina* and *La Vie Heureuse* were two women's magazines that fashioned and circulated models of French femininity associated with Belle Époque challenges to gender norms. See Rachel Mesch, *Having It All in the Belle Époque: How French Women's Magazines Invented the Modern Woman* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[66] Gautier, *Les Parfums de la* pagode, p. 143. Camille Pert maintains a similar position in 'Une fête chez Loti', *Gil Blas* (14 May 1903), *Gallica*: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7546498p/f2.item

[67] Mesch, *Having It All in the Belle Époque*, p. 91.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

exoticism of Loti and Gautier shares some of the authorial performativity of women writers such as Myriam Harry and Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, famous for their Orientalist photographic poses for women's magazines including *Fémina*. In this respect, Mesch indicates that the East functions as 'a shared landscape for uninhibited exploration and orientalising mimicry that always inevitably reinforce existing power structures'.[69] Performers such as Sarah Bernhardt, Cléo de Mérode, Ida-Rubenstein, and Sara Yacco impressed French popular culture with roles or gender identities marked by behaviour deemed too masculine or unbecoming of a lady as well as the character of dominatrix mapped onto a will to power. According to Emily Apter, the parade of personalities performed by these actresses fabricates portmanteau identities that conflated feminist, exotic, and queer profiles in Parisian identity politics. Though techniques other than local colour have been employed to make their work interesting,[70] it cannot be denied that Gautier and Loti looked to capitalise on Bernhardt's stardom and mass publicity for the success of *La Fille du Ciel*, whose heroine seemed likely to become a peer of figures like Cleopatra, Thaïs, and Salome.[71] Gautier and Loti's own participation in the

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[69] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[70] Apter, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

[71] Marcel Proust extols the extraordinary achievement of Bernhardt's acting and identity-performance in *À la recherche du temps perdu* in *Œuvres*, ed. by Jean-Yves Dadié (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1987), I, p. 74. Apter comments on this in relation to Belle Époque media darlings and social phenomenon in *op. cit.*, p. 154.

fête chinoise confirms the influence of Orientalist femininity on turn-of-the-century society as a theatrical conceit reproducible in real life. The party as a mass-media spectacle presents a foretaste of what *La Fille du Ciel* could have contributed to the Belle Époque imaginary of otherness, and it also reveals the motivation of Loti's gesture, aptly surmised by Mesch as 'trying to "be" Sarah, by "being" Sarah Bernhardt "being" Cleopatra 'in search of his version of Orientalism.[72]

If Judith Gautier is caught between solid engagement with the Orient and romanticisation which led to the melodramatic muddling of political subtexts in *La Fille du Ciel*, Loti wavers between his contrasting feelings toward China, recorded in *Les derniers jours de Pékin.* The contrast feeds into the play to oppose the picturesque Han capital of Nanjing to the brutality of Beijing under the Manchu rule. In *La Fille du Ciel*, elements borrowed from *Les derniers jours de Pékin* conjure up the imperial garden of Nanjing, the throne room in both capitals, and perhaps most importantly, scenes of execution and battlefields. Loti's book documents Beijing and its surroundings when an international coalition retaliated against the Boxer uprising and xenophobic attacks in 1900. Loti describes his activities from his arrival in September 1900 to the last night he spent in the Forbidden City (May 1901). As aide-de-camp to Vice-Admiral Pottier,

[72] Mesch, *Having It All in the Belle Époque*, p. 137.

Loti carried dispatches to the French Legation in Beijing, met Li Hongzhang in a delegation, and represented Pottier at the funeral of a German officer. In Beijing, Loti displays a host of emotions ranging from amusement, and bewilderment to disturbance, melancholy, horror, and guilt. In a sinophilic mood, Loti describes the human aspect of the Chinese as victims of both the Boxers and the foreign invaders, contemplating his own out-of-place-ness with irony and humour in the splendid palace whose art and architecture inspire admiration. As he turns Sinophobic, he sees buildings that used to represent ancient grandeur as grotesque and monstrous.[73]

In *La Fille du Ciel*, signs of monstrosity pervade the descriptions of Beijing, reflecting the Sinophobic input from *Les derniers jours de Pékin*, whereas Nanjing appears to be a product of Sinophilic idealisation. The Manchu army's triumph over Nanjing obliterates the citadel of Sinophilic dreams. Both the throne rooms, in Nanjing and Beijing, contain dragons as the imperial sigil, but monsters only appear in the Manchu throne room (technically left by the Ming dynasty in reality).[74] There, the feet of a carillon are moulded into monstrous, gilt figures, and the carpets are lined with porcelain monsters as well. For a seasoned naval officer like Loti, it is easy to transfer

[73] Loti, *Les derniers jours de Pékin* in *Voyages*, p. 1042.

[74] Compare the second tableau for Act I on page 40 in *La Fille du Ciel* and the second tableau for Act IV on p. 184. For descriptions of the throne room at the Forbidden City, see Loti's *Les derniers jours de Pékin* in *Voyages*, p. 1116.

scenes of fighting and brutality to theatrical description. Reporting to the empress about the Manchu invasion at the west of the citadel, a messenger says 'Quelques milliers de femmes ont réussi à se jeter dans le fleuve…Les autres, on les viole, en même temps qu'on les étrangle…Le sang coule sur les pavés, autant que l'eau du ciel après l'orage…'.[75] This echoes vividly a passage in 'Vers Pékin': as Loti sails upstream to reach Beijing, he traverses 'l'eau vaseuse et infecte où flottent des immondices de toute sorte, des carcasses le ventre gonflé, des cadavres humains et des cadavres de bêtes'.[76] Aside from being one of the two major colours (along with gold) of the throne room in Beijing, red is regularly identified with blood in *Les derniers jours de Pékin*: the ramparts encircling the Imperial City are 'couleur de sang' and the Forbidden City is painted 'couleur de sang qui a séché'.[77] The Manchu takeover alters the semantic sense of 'blood', shifting it from a pacifist romantic union to slaughter.

Before Nanjing falls, references to blood involve the potential union of Han and Manchu. Afterwards, blood is associated with atrocity, death, and torture. Just as Nanjing suffers from carnage, the tableau of Beijing presents an abattoir of rebels. Act IV opens in an execution site where executioners, passers-by, and fruit merchants rub

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[75] Gautier and Loti, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

[76] Loti, *Les derniers jours de Pékin* in *Voyages*, p. 1037.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 1068, 1114.

shoulders in front of heads on spikes and decapitated bodies. In the tableau, some executioners are wiping down the blood on their blades at the front of the stage, and the first scene begins with one executioner's complaint of sore arms to onlookers.[78] This is reminiscent of the encounter with an executioner in Octave Mirbeau's 1899 novel *Le Jardin des supplices*. As the narrator and Clara meet the executioner during his break, the man is cleaning 'de fins instruments d'acier avec des chiffons de soie; sa robe était couverte d'éclaboussures de sang; ses mains semblaient gantées de rouge'.[79] Although the executioners in the play are not figures carefully crafted to criticise bourgeois mediocrity in nineteenth-century France,[80] they share with Mirbeau a debonair matter-of-factness, giving the impression that torture is as everyday and artisanal as brewing in China.

Nevertheless, Loti's contribution to *La Fille du Ciel* should not be reduced to an uncritical outlet of Orientalist sadism and personal feelings. Aware of the gravity of the play's political allusions, Loti feels indebted to the extraordinary experience he had in

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[78] Gautier and Loti, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

[79] Octave Mirbeau, *Le Jardin des supplices* (Paris: Gallimard, 2021 [1889]), p. 202.

[80] The executioner in *Le Jardin des supplices* is an artisan of what he calls the art of 'savoir tuer', a ritualised profession whose science, complexity, elegance, and beauty are threatened by uniform administration as a triumph of 'l'esprit bourgeois'. See Mirbeau, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

the Forbidden City, which propels him towards writing. In an interview with François Tessan, Loti admits:

> J'ai vécu le roman le plus romanesque qui se puisse imaginer. Concevez-vous un officier en tenue de campagne, tout botté et en armes, oubliant, parmi les soies dorées, les étoffes rares, les bouddhas grimaçants, les chimères et les dragons, qu'il est un simple mortel occidental! Comment ces heures uniques n'auraient-elles pas éveillé en moi la pensée de symboliser en un drame typique les crises qui déchirèrent l'Empire Céleste?[81]

Like Gautier, Loti invests personal emotion into *La Fille du Ciel* to address his place in the internal crisis and foreign invasion of late-Qing China. Like Gautier, Loti understands the Taiping Rebellion as a recent episode of the 'formidable querelle des Chinois et des Tartares'.[82] It should, however, be underlined that the Taiping regime follows a form of Christianity established by its founder Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864), so it does not represent the 'Chinese' identified with Confucianist cultural tradition.

The hypertrophied picturesque had its last episode in America. Foregrounding exotic sights and sounds, the production received devastating criticism, and the audience 'ne s'intéressèrent qu'au côté purement pittoresque de l'ouvrage, aux défilés éclatants, aux robes et aux bijoux des protagonistes du drame'.[83] In Tessan's evaluation, the picturesque becomes purely pejorative and loses the sense of playful

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[81] François Tessan, 'Loti en Amérique', *Demain* (June 1924), pp. 185-186.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

[83] *Ibid.*

mimicry linked to the identity politics in theatre and mass culture in Belle Époque Paris. For Loti, the picturesque is mostly identified with his literary reputation as 'Loti l'enchanteur', a producer of atmospheric landscapes which transfer the reader from reality to a 'décor de féerie'.[84] In New York, Loti lost his composure because of linguistic and cultural alienation, documented in his 'New York entrevu par un Oriental très vieux jeu' (1917). To describe his alienation from the play's English version, Loti compares translation to the reverse side of an embroidery. In switching to 'l'envers d'une broderie', one still perceives a recognisable relationship to the recto, but the surface is blurred and rough, with stitches that form a puzzling intertwinement. Loti qualifies the statement by adding that what he and Gautier wrote is not intrinsically brilliant, but it is noticeable that 'l'envers en a été recoloré avec une habileté consommée; mais, quand même, c'est toujours un envers'.[85] What was previously compromising the manifestation of political subtexts in *La Fille du Ciel* was compromised by translation and cultural displacement.

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[84] Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*. Paris: Flammarion, 1990 [1887]), p. 80.

[85] Pierre Loti, 'New York entrevu par un Oriental très vieux jeu', *Quelques aspects du vertige mondial* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1917), p. 230. Caroline Ferraris-Besso explores the issue of translation as a form of dispossession for Loti in 'Trans-lations: Loti de la Chine à l'Amérique', conference paper presented at *Transatlantics/Transatlantiques*, 47th Annual Nineteenth-Century French Studies Colloquium, New York, 3-5 November 2022.

To come to terms with his dispossession in the American adaptation of *La Fille du Ciel*, Loti reasserts his performative identity as an Oriental ill at ease in New York, whose skyscrapers stand for the Anglosphere that estranges him from the ownership to which he is entitled as author. He went to New York to appear as the French play's author, yet he proclaims to be an anguished Oriental who finds the city devilish.[86] Praised as a 'magician au charme oriental',[87] Loti finds himself in an unfamiliar place attempting to work his familiar magic. In his account, frequent use of the word 'dérouter' shows that complicity with French literary and popular culture underlying the play is profoundly interrupted. In fact, Loti is more pragmatic than nonplused by this situation. Once the performance is over, Loti declares that 'ce théâtre ne m'intéresse plus. Une pièce qui a été jouée, un livre qui a été publié, deviennent soudain, en moins d'une seconde, des choses mortes […] et je m'en détache'.[88] Letting the play go and leaving it behind indicate his gesture of disowning and the will to move on. For him, what matters is the 'matérialisation d'un rêve chinois', the process of recollection and representation.[89]

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[86] Loti, 'New York entrevu par un Oriental très vieux jeu', pp. 212-223.

[87] Tessan, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

[88] Loti, 'New York entrevu par un Oriental très vieux jeu', p. 246.

[89] *Ibid.*

The political subtext of *La Fille du Ciel* offers cues not obvious to the Belle Époque French public. It taps into Chinese political thought and engages with debates about China's national identity. The text of the play was meant to open a window onto the creative possibilities of exoticism, drawing on political allusions with a touch of seriousness that is not often associated with melodrama. Its emotional intensity earned the sympathy of the novelist Claude Farrère, who met Loti in Constantinople and was given a draft of the play in 1904. Although he disliked the ending, the second and the fourth acts 'sont d'une inexprimable émotion' for him.[90] By invoking a new and egalitarian China set out in amorous terms, the play acts as a go-between negotiating melodrama, political thinking, and cultural perception. It is a work that deals with indigenous politics in a synthetic and sympathetic way. It blends Chinese reformist thinking and French melodrama, incorporating allusions to Kang's ideas for reform to balance the love story with a nation-building blueprint. However, the subtext gets buried under a gauchely orchestrated live embodiment of the Chinese picturesque, not to mention the melodramatic turn that romanticises the meaning of ethnic unity. It is stranded among other nuances as part of the jetsam of its journey across the Atlantic, from French into English. Removed from its intended cultural milieu, the original

[90] Evrard, *op. cit.*

thematic recipe was downplayed by the stage production. Despite this, the internal conflict between the political and the picturesque is not an easy one to reconcile, as it tinges historicist pursuits with romanesque temptations imbued with local colour and sentimentality. As an instance of China in turn-of-the-century French theatre,[91] *La Fille du Ciel* could have joined the array of female character-types driving the model for novel femininity if its original design had panned out. In the end, what remains is a script where the play of intertextuality calls for a decipherment that would reconcile Eastern politics with Orientalist exoticism. Responsible for the play's thematic setup, Judith Gautier seems less of an armchair traveller than a writer who walks the tightrope between fiction and History.

II-5 Beyond the Chinese-Christian Paradigm: Multiconfessionalism in Paul Claudel's *Le Repos du septième jour* and Sexual Satire in Victor Segalen's *Le Combat pour le Sol*

Enfermé parmi les choses mortelles
(Et, le ciel étoilé passera lui aussi)
Pourquoi ai-je désir de Dieu?
Giuseppe Ungaretti[92]

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[91] For a global vision of China in nineteenth-century French theatre, see Lo Shih-lung, *La Chine sur la scène française au XIXe siècle* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015).

[92] Giuseppe Ungaretti, 'Damnation', *Vie d'un homme*, trans. by Philippe Jaccottet (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 48.

This section revolves around the aesthetic potentials of China's spiritual world discovered through playwriting. This becomes an object of contention for French practitioners of exoticism. They dramatise forms of religious beliefs in China by mapping the language of spiritual devotion onto expressions of their own faith or turning it into forms of satire. *Le Repos du septième jour* is a play in three acts first published in 1901, then in Paul Claudel's collected *Théâtre* (*Mercure de France*) in 1912. The play was composed from 1895 to 1896 shortly after Claudel arrived in Shanghai.[93] He stayed at the consulate of Fuzhou from 1896 to 1897 and from 1898 to 1904. More than a geographic location, Fuzhou brings a significant amount of local colour into the religious landscape of *Le Repos*, which too easily passes just as an evangelistic narrative about China's conversion to monotheism driven by Claudel's Catholic faith. Although scholars have already identified elements drawn from Buddhism and regional folk beliefs in the play,[94] they follow the Chinese/Christian binarism established by Victor Segalen who used this framework to lambast the play. This view sidelines the play's multiconfessional complexity and fails to appreciate its stylistic choices and the fact that the very concepts of 'Sky' and 'Fils du Ciel' evolve

[93] General accounts on Claudel and China include Gilbert Gadoffre, 'Claudel et l'univers chinois', *Cahiers Paul Claudel 8* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), and Bernard Hue, *Littératures et arts de l'Orient dans l'œuvre de Claudel* (Paris: Klinksieck, 1978).

[94] See Yvan Daniel, *Paul Claudel et l'Empire du Milieu* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2003), pp. 277-304.

from dynasty to dynasty in China. Acknowledging this avoids reductive categorisation and shifts the focus from the triumph of Christianity to how belief systems are mobilised to construct the world of the play.

In a letter to Claudel on 25 January 1915, Segalen admits the great influence exerted by Claudel's works over him, specifying that 'j'ai tellement retourné le *Repos* que le voyant, seul de vos drames, privé d'une seconde version, j'ai eu l'audace passionnée de lui en écrire une en renversant tous les rôles, et que ceci, m'échappant des mains, est devenu un drame sans lien ni foi commun avec le vôtre'.[95] However, Segalen is no steadfast fan of Claudel; his allusion to the absent second version and his own rewriting covers up objections expressed in a letter to Ythurbide on 1 April 1913. First, Segalen deems Claudel's experience of China superficial, because Segalen regards coastal regions and cities including Shanghai, Fuzhou, and Tianjin as 'le zeste littoral de la grosse orange',[96] places of easy access far from the gist of real China. For Segalen, the great pulp of the hinterland has remained unknown to Claudel, and Segalen would claim an advantage from having been on several expeditions into it. Second, for Segalen, knowing China through port cities produces the conceptual equivalent of

[95] Victor Segalen, *Correspondance*, ed. by Henry Bouillier, 2 vols (Paris: Fayard, 2004), II, pp. 545-547.

[96] Victor Segalen, *Œuvres*, ed. by Henry Bouillier, 2 vols (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), II, p. 708.

Orientalist trinkets for European consumption. This approach to China pursues an exoticism narrowly defined in its geographical sense of the non-European, which is more restricted than what Segalen envisages as the 'esthétique du Divers',[97] a radical project that seeks to widen the semantic possibilities of the term 'exotic' in dialectic with its colonial overtones. Claudel not only falls 'aux prises avec le carton coloré sud' but ruins 'le grand mythe dur et pur du Fils du Ciel' by compromising a subject that is 'précisément et admirablement dramatique' by 'deux forts longs sermons ennuyeux.'[98] Third, Segalen identifies the dramatic crux of *Le Repos* as 'l'un des plus grands conflits qu'on puisse imaginer sous le Ciel puisque le Ciel de Chine rencontrait le Ciel Latin'. In *Le Repos*, this is unduly bogged down by liturgy and dulled by 'la pauvreté du décor impérial, les maladresses dans un protocole dogmatique qu'il vaux mieux ne pas aborder si l'on n'en est pas maître'.[99] Spurred by 'l'ennui douloureux de voir un aussi grand sujet enterré sous des pelletées de mots', Segalen throws down the gauntlet by writing *Le Combat pour le sol* (1913), which Henry Bouillier construes as 'un pamphlet presque antireligieux' in the introduction to the 1995 edition.

[97] Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme* in *Œuvres*, ed. by Christian Doumet, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2020), II, pp. 764-765.

[98] *Ibid*., p. 709.

[99] *Ibid.*

Strangely enough, it seems that no attempt has been made to ask whether Segalen did justice to Claudel's play by squeezing it into the oppositional framework of the 'Ciel de Chine' and the 'Ciel Latin' (which Bouillier narrows down to 'Ciel catholique' in his biography).[100] Even if Segalen regrets that Claudel's vision of China is compromised by the mercantile portal cities and colourful trivia, many critics conclude that the local colour of *Le Repos* is discrete, obscured by evangelism, or erased by Symbolism.[101] If the local colour is too insignificant to be perceived, how could Segalen justify his evaluation? Convinced that the long dialogues serve as mouthpiece for Claudel's credo in *Le Repos*, Bouillier writes that 'il est évident qu'il n'a guère cherché la couleur locale mais voulu affirmer la suprématie d'une religion de concorde er d'amour'.[102] In contradiction to his liberal understanding that non-Christian elements often underly Christianity as a crowning superstructure instead of a rupture of local belief systems,[103] Jacques Houriez associates *Le Repos* with Symbolist theatre because of its erasure of reality, observing that 'la couleur locale y est si discrète qu'elle

[100] Henry Bouillier, *Victor Segalen* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986 [1961]), p. 348.

[101] On the Symbolism of *Le Repos*, see also Gabriel Hourcade, 'L'écriture de l'échec: Segalen, l'Empereur de Chine et la tentation du mythe' (Doctoral thesis, University of California, Davis, 2011) in ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (accessed 12 January 2023), p. 46.

[102] Bouillier, *Victor Segalen*, p. 348.

[103] Jacques Houriez, *Le Repos du septième jour de Paul Claudel* (Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1987), p.56.

ne peut qu'inviter le spectateur à envisager l'Idée sous son aspect d'éternité'.[104] Yvan Daniel's recent study presents an exception to this insensitivity to local colours in Claudel's play. Daniel includes accounts of Fujian folk beliefs and Buddhism in the analysis of *Le Repos*, but he did not go as far as to revise the dualistic structure of the Chinese/Christian sky based on these findings, which are grouped under the title of 'Engagé sous deux ciels' in the book.[105]

I argue that the opposition between the 'Ciel de Chine' and the 'Ciel Latin' is inaccurate to account for the spiritual struggle in *Le Repos*, because the play's dynamic juxtaposition of belief systems defies such reading. It is problematic to group regional folk beliefs, localised versions of Buddhism, evolving state institutions for political and religious order to construct legitimacy and regulate calendric practice under the umbrella term of 'Ciel de Chine'. This is not to say Claudel is less of a proselytiser and more sinologically engaged than Segalen, but to point out that although monotheism prevails in *Le Repos*, the play's spiritual landscape proves to be more complex than the uncontested binary established by Segalen. Building on Daniel's analyses, I show that chthonic elements associated with Ghost Month worship, funeral rites, witchcraft, and popularised versions of Buddhism should at least be acknowledged as a subversive

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[104] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

[105] See 'La Chine fossilisée' in Daniel, *Paul Claudel et l'Empire du Milieu*, pp. 265-322.

cluster and source of internal conflict for the state embodied by the Son of Heaven. Instead of ascent, the emperor descends to the netherworld to seek the remedy.

Set in an imaginary China, *Le Repos* begins with an imperial audience. The unnamed emperor demands the ministers to report on the country's situation honestly instead of making a litany of accolade. On this prompt, a prince announces that conventional rituals to appease the dead involving wine, grains, clothes, joss papers, and music no longer work. The ghosts attack and possess the living while wandering through the country. The prince implores the emperor to close Earth's gate to stop the dead from tormenting the living. A necromancer is presented to the court, but the emperor denounces necromancy as 'des arts infâmes et défendus', 'l'art noir', and 'pratiques hideuses'.[106] This indicates a certain tension between witchcraft and the state-instituted sacrifice and rites.[107] Despite this unwelcoming aspect, the emperor is persuaded to use necromancy as a potentially effective solution. The necromancer invokes Huangdi, a mythological sovereign, to advise the emperor of the remedy. Having bid the emperor to honour the underworld, Huangdi disappears. So, the emperor

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[106] Paul Claudel, *Théâtre*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1948), I, pp. 805-806.

[107] See Kan Huaichen (甘懷真), *Imperial Power, Rituals and Confucian Hermeneutics (Extended edition)*《皇權、禮儀與經典詮釋：中國古代政治研究（增訂版）》(Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2022 [2004]), pp. 33-78. Kan indicates that political statements are often inherent in the state institution of sacrifice and rites, whose form and content at times draw on folk beliefs, a body of practices that is policed by the state but can in turn infiltrate the state's protocols.

decides to go to the underworld to find out more about the remedy. He first encounters his mother who has become blind and points him to a demon for further directions. Through a long conversation, the demon teaches the emperor about the principle of Evil and the existence of the 'Seigneur du Ciel'. Then, he meets 'l'Ange de l'Empire' who also calls itself 'l'Ange du Riz'. Naming the angel like this suggests the proximity between the calendric order based on astrology and agriculture, for the emperor compares the angel to 'un astre qui tourne autour du pôle'.[108] The angel speaks of Satan and introduces a concept similar to the *contrapasso* in Dante's Inferno to explain how the underworld works:[109] a crime is punished in a form that either resembles or contrasts with the deed. On this note, the emperor concludes that if man obtains food from working the earth, the earth comes for man to demand something in return to explain why his country is plagued with restless ghosts. To elucidate the remedy, the angel postulates the hebdomadal model consisting of six work days and a rest day on the seventh to achieve 'la paix entre le Ciel et la Terre'. Bearing this wisdom, the emperor returns to the living world and finds himself in the middle of a revolt. Initially, it was indicated that his sceptre was made of jade, a symbol of nobility in China. Now

[108] *Ibid.*, p. 836.

[109] 'Voici le lieu où l'injustice est réparée, où la peine avec le crime subsiste dans un invariable équilibre' in Claudel, *Théâtre*, p. 839.

as he raises it, it has become a wooden cross, a sign of conversion.[110] Also, the revelation leaves jarring marks on the emperor's appearance. Swollen and leprous, his face is short of a nose with eye sockets emptied and bleeding. To proclaim the gospel, he specifies that 'ce n'est point Bouddha qui dort, ni le Tao pareil au Dragon dans la nue, ni le tourbillon du Yang avec le Yin, ni l'inextricable enchevêtrement des hiérogrgammes. Mais comme l'éclair fulgure, / C'est ainsi, quand elle paraîtra dans le ciel, que le sage et l'ignorant, s'ils tiennent les yeux ouverts, verront d'un même regard la face de la vérité'.[111] In a way reminiscent of Œdipus after his blinding, he wishes to abdicate, recuperate the traveller's walking stick, meander in the mountains and the 'West',[112] and meditate the truth he has obtained from the abyss. The play ends on remarks on general fecundity marked by good food supply and reproduction and the emperor's prayer 'Paix à l'enfant de Dieu dans la communion de la flamme!'

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[110] Christopher Bush identifies this as the play's 'ideographic' and 'ideological' moment in his study of Claudel's 'allegorical reading of ideographs as secretly Christian symbols' in contrast to the modernist—especially the Imagist—invention of Chinese in his 'Reading and Difference: Image, Allegory, and the Invention of Chinese', *Writing China: Sinographies*, ed. by Eric Hayot et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. 34-63.

[111] Claudel, *Théâtre*, p. 848.

[112] The emperor says: 'la gloire de la Vision viendra de la Montagne et de l'Ouest' (*Théâtre*, p. 850). The 'West' echoes with one of the Chinese conceptions of heaven, which derives from the Buddhist term of *Sukhavati*, known as the 'Land of Bliss' or 'Western Pure Land'.

It is important to note that the world of *Le Repos* does not correspond to any specific dynasty of Chinese history, whose state conceptions of heaven and religion vary.[113] The play functions like a Petri dish in which regional folk beliefs, local Buddhism, Claudel's idea of Chinese culture mediated by Jesuit missionaries,[114] and his Catholic faith mingled with literary concerns cohabit. Drawing on Claudel's 'Fête des Morts, le septième mois' (1896) in *Connaissance de l'Est* and 'Les Superstitions

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[113] For recent surveys, see John H. Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-christian Dialogue* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994) and Lin Fushi (林富士), ed., *New Essays on Chinese History: History of Religion* 《中國史新論：宗教史》(Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2010). Specialising in the imperial power of pre-modern China, Kan Huaichen (甘懷真) offers a useful monograph and online courses such as the above-cited *Imperial Power, Rituals and Confucian Hermeneutics* and 'Nation and Imperial Power in Pre-Modern China' (傳統中國的國家與皇權), National Taiwan University Open Course Ware (2011), URL: http://ocw.aca.ntu.edu.tw/ntu-ocw/index.php/ocw/cou/100S102 (accessed 27 December 2022), especially course 4 and 5. Useful ideas that can be gleaned from this include: (1) there is a tension between unauthorised witchcraft and imperial power in pre-modern China, and (2) imperial power consists of the postulation of calendars as the guiding principle for agricultural production. Questions such as what 'Heaven' is and how funerals and sacrifices should be held are open to philosophical debate and political claims. Cf. Liang Youdien (梁右典), *Pre-Qin Confucianism Religious Studies: Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi for Funeral, Sacrifice, Heaven's Viewpoint* (doctoral thesis), National Chengchi University Institutional Repository (2015), full text URL: https://nccur.lib.nccu.edu.tw/bitstream/140.119/78743/1/150201.pdf (accessed 27 December 2022). Further studies of this area help to interpret the emperor's scruples concerning the necromancer in *Le Repos* and the prominence of sacrifice and astrology in *Le Combat.* For the conception of 'religion' in modern China, see Chen Hsiyuan (陳熙遠), '"Zongjiao/Religion": A Keyword in the Cultural History of Modern China' (「宗教」：一個中國近代文化史上的關鍵詞), *New History*《新史學》, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2002), pp. 37-66.

[114] In his *Vestiges choisis*, Father Joseph de Prémare's interpretation of the Chinese canon instigates the idea that the Christian vocation is prefigured in the pagan Chinese world. See Houriez*, Le Repos du septième jour*, pp. 52-63. For Claudel's reception of Jesuit mediation, see Daniel, *Paul Claudel et l'Empire du Milieu*, p. 365.

chinoises' (1910), a talk collected in *Sous le signe du dragon*,[115] Daniel points out that Claudel's observation of ceremonies of the Ghost Month in Fuzhou feeds into *Le Repos.*[116] These documents show Claudel's awareness of how textual traces of non-Christian beliefs would amount to the play's spiritual plurality. Celebrated in southern China, Taiwan, and Chinese diaspora communities, the Ghost Month is the seventh month in the lunar calendar. It is believed that on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, ghosts are released from the underworld and the living should worship and feast them in exchange for peace. Claudel has written a note on the Ghost Month in his *Connaissance de l'Est.* His 'Fête des Morts' begins with a description of joss papers, which he calls 'ces lingots de carton' and 'la monnaie des Morts'.[117] Claudel also notices that through combustion, paper simulacra of terrestrial properties accompany the dead, and flutes and gongs are played to animate the rite. The text's main body deals with what looks like a ceremony of boat-burning, which involves the burning of a seaworthy vessel to purge evil spirits and disease. As Claudel observes the ceremony in the dark, fire sparkles and acoustic effects are sharpened in his description. Following the description of boat-burning, he concludes that 'ce sont les fêtes du septième mois,

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[115] Claudel, *Œuvres en prose*, ed. by Jacques Petit and Charles Galpérine (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp. 1075-1088.

[116] Daniel, *Paul Claudel et l'Empire du Milieu*, pp. 288-290.

[117] Claudel, *Connaissance de l'Est* (Paris: Gallimard, 1929 [1900]), p. 43.

où la Terre entre dans son repos.'[118] But he does not seem to be satisfied with this and adds a short description. On his way back, he sees people insert incense and red candles in the earth. Plunging into this darkness dotted with red twinkles, he notes: 'Tout s'est tu, et tel qu'un mort sans yeux au fond de l'infini des mondes, encore, j'entends le ton du sistre sépulcral, la clameur du tambour de fer dans l'ombre compacte heurté d'un coup terrible.'[119] Just like the emperor's mother and the emperor himself, Claudel inhabits the blindness resonating with ceremonial music to experience the worship of the dead. He associates the ceremonial percussion in Fuzhou with an Egyptian instrument, associating the ceremony's mystique with another form of Oriental worship.

Obviously, the number seven refers to *Genesis* (2:1-3) in which God rested on the seventh day from the previous work of creation. Hence, submitting to this work/rest cycle marks China's conversion in the play. However, some of Father Joseph de Prémare's interpretations over-read the Chinese canon as a foreshadowing of Christian faith. In *Vestiges des principaux dogmes chrétiens tirés des anciens livres chinois* (1878), a book Claudel borrowed from Father Colombet in 1895,[120] he writes:

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[118] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[119] *Ibid.*

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 365.

> Traditions sur la Semaine et sur le nombre Sept chez les Chinois […] Outre le texte de l'Y-King on y voit encore: 2e celui de Sse-ma-tsien disant 'que les anciens rois sacrifient à la Suprême Unité tous les sept jours'.[121]

The book by 'Sse-ma-tsien' refers to *Shiji* ('Records of the Grand Historian') and the relevant passage can be translated as follows:

> In ancient times, the Son of Heaven sacrificed and worshiped the Supreme One at the south-eastern suburbs in spring and autumn. Constituted by ox, sheep, and swine, the sacrifice lasted for seven days, and the altar opened up to eight directions for the ghosts to pass through.[122]

The original text only indicates 'seven days' without specifying whether 'seven' means duration or frequency, whereas the latter would usually take other adverbial markers (such as *mei* [每], 'every') to distinguish itself from frequency. To go to the bottom of this, it requires serious linguistic analysis to determine the stylistic tendency of the author Sima Qian and his contemporaries to determine the meaning of 'seven'.

Though it is well established that Claudel is influenced by the Jesuits' Figurist reading of Chinese canon, that is, a way of interpretation that identifies Christian vocation in non-Christian sources.[123] Figurism is not the only source Claudel employs in this play. The Jesuits' reading underlies the play's religious rationale, but the play is

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[121] Joseph de Prémare, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[122]「古者天子以春秋祭泰一東南郊，用太牢具，七日，為壇開八通之鬼道。」in Sima Qian (司馬遷), Shiji ('Records of the Grand Historian') 《史記》 Online text: https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=5773

[123] See Daniel, *Paul Claudel et l'Empire du Milieu*, pp. 361-389.

situated in a world populated by non-Christian beliefs and practices, and the final conversion does not seem to alter these elements. Claudel might not have had enough Chinese to question Father de Prémare's reading, but he could have been aware of aspects of the polyvalence of 7 given his expositions on beliefs in China in 'Les Superstitions chinoises'. He is certainly influenced by Figurism, but it is important to note that (1) seven is the Ghost Month's ordinal number, (2) seven is the square root of forty-nine, the total number of days that it takes for a soul to re-incarnate after its death in the previous life according to Buddhist beliefs. In Chinese, the idiomatic expression for this period is 'seven-seven-forty-nine' (7×7=49) to break the number down. (3) Lastly, based on this rule of re-incarnation, Chinese folk practice involves funeral rites every seven days after a person's death to complete the 49-day period. The first round, called the 'head seven', is deemed to be the most important because the ghost of the dead returns home on the seventh day following his or her decease. Although these suggestions do not challenge the primacy of Claudel's faith, they are essential to an understanding of how rich and enigmatic the game with the number 7 really is in the play, not to mention that they all stem from the play's chthonicism.

In *Le Repos*, the crisis is characterised by the failure of rites associated with funeral and Ghost Month celebration. The prince reports:

> Ni le vin, ni les offrandes de riz et de fèves

> Ne satisfont les morts, ni les vêtements qu'on leur offre,
> Ni les taëls de papier ne les trompent, ni la flamme ne les éblouit, ni le bruit des gongs et des tambours ne les repaît.
> Mais ils errent la nuit dans les champs, ou sur les fleuves dans le brouillard, et comme des rats ils fourmillent dans les maisons.[124]

Claudel transposes folk belief and funeral rites to the state practice to regulate the relationship between the living and the dead. When this mechanism is out of order, it makes sense for the emperor to descend to the underworld in search of the remedy. Daniel stresses the performative aspect of these rites as a theatrical springboard for Claudel to write the play without dwelling sufficiently on the subversive and invasive dimensions of chthonic elements. Though these elements are undeniably instrumental in ushering in Claudel's credo, their peripheral and popular otherness lies in opposition to the centralised state power, and it is by their instrumentality that they become objects of the emperor's quest in the play. If the gate to Hell does not seal well, the restless dead will spring from the earth to wreak havoc regardless of the Fils du Ciel's supremacy.

Moreover, the emperor's journey leading to the revelation of an angel entails a series of chthonic engagements. If listed according to the order of their appearance, the necromancer, Huangdi, the emperor's mother, a demon, and an angel form a chthonic itinerary without suggesting anything evocative of the Dantesque penetration that

[124] Claudel, *Théâtre*, p. 800.

eventually carries the traveller through the earth's abyss to arrive at the antipodal surface and reach Paradise. The *Inferno* acts as a relevant model here because Claudel is an acute reader of Dante and has extolled him as the epitome of poetry. For Claudel, Dante's poetry reveals the inexhaustible beneath the finite. Claudel also agrees with Dante that man should desire God but this desire is characterised by a troubling yet productive ambiguity straddling love for God and love for sensual beauty.[125] Without pursuing the ascension to Heaven that the *Divine Comedy* exemplifies, *Le Repos* expands horizontally in terms of the variety of cultural traditions, making the underworld a crossroads of belief systems. In giving license to the necromancer to invoke Huangdi (or the Yellow Emperor) by means of shamanic possession, the emperor encounters the symbolic 'father' for all ruling sovereigns of China and the Chinese nation. In fact, this identity of Huangdi was a nationalistic construction contemporary to Claudel's stay in China, as late-Qing intellectuals started reinterpreting the legend of Huangdi to forge 'a privileged symbol for modern Chinese national identity'.[126]

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[125] See 'Introduction à un poème sur Dante '(1921) in Clauedel, *Œuvres en prose*, pp. 427-429.

[126] See Shen, 'The Myth of Huang-ti (Yellow Emperor) and the Construction of Chinese Nationhood in Late Qing'. Yvonne Hsieh suspected that Claudel may have confused Huangdi with Qin Shihuang, the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty who united China in 221 BC. See Hsieh, *Victor Segalen's Literary Encounter with China* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 226.

Using a medium to channel a divinity or spirit is known as one of the ritual techniques for divine revelation in China.[127] In the section on Fuzhou in *À travers la Chine*, Léon Rousset's account of a soldier's possession serves as an example to complement Claudel's 'Fête des Morts' and testify to the practice of revelation from a French perspective. As the soldier returns to himself, he reports he has been engaged in a long communication with spirits furiously fazed by the construction of the Fuzhou Arsenal, a Sino-French project for shipbuilding and training. The Arsenal encroaches on the neighbouring hills and has thus disturbed the spirits' rest. If the authorities wish to protect the project from the spirits' revenge, they should satisfy them. So, the officials order 'la célébration du Pou-tou' i.e. general offerings designated for the Ghost Month to close the case.[128]

Meeting the emperor's mother in the underworld is a rather straightforward reference to *Mulian Rescues His Mother*, a Chinese elaboration of the tale of Maudgalyayana, a disciple of Buddha, recorded in *Yulanpen Sutra* (also known as the

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[127] The invocation of Huangdi in *Le Repos* and the emperor's position as a sacerdotal chief in *Le Combat* should ideally be considered against the backdrop of what Vincent Goosaert terms as the 'revelatory ecology' of China, encompassing both state institution and folk practice. See Goosaert, *Making the Gods Speak: The Ritual Production of Revelation in Chinese Religious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

[128] Léon Rousset, 'Coutumes et superstitions populaires', *À travers la Chine* (Paris: Hachette, 1886), p. 139.

Ullambana Sutra). In the tale, Mulian attempts to give his late mother some rice upon discovering she has been reborn into the realm of preta i.e. hungry ghosts driven by uncontrolled desires. To his chagrin, she cannot have any meal as a preta, because every mouthful of rice turns into burning coal in her mouth. To guide Mulian, Buddha tells him to offer food to monastic communities on the fifteenth day of the seventh month such that the monastic community will transfer the merits to the ghosts. Accentuating filial piety, Chinese elaborations of this tale include theatrical pieces which are performed in temple fairs to honour gods or ghosts. For Daniel, 'cette théâtralisation du mythe s'inscrit parfaitement dans le syncrétisme religieux chinois'.[129] To push the idea of syncretism further, it makes sense to say that the cross-cultural syncretism introduced by Claudel into *Le Repos* is not accounted for by the binary framework of 'le Ciel chinois vs. le Ciel latin', because these crucial encounters are chthonic-identified and the difference between folk practice, state prescription, and the Chinese elaboration of Hindu texts all escape this oppositional framework.

Even if conversations with the demon and the angel finalise the emperor's search for a remedy, this does not mean the boundaries of the play's multicultural landscape are closed. Two significant intersections are open to interpretations and further

[129] Daniel, *Paul Claudel et l'Empire du Milieu*, p. 291.

investigation: one is the separation of Heaven and Earth, and the other is the idea of retribution announced in Hell. Towards the end of the play, a reciter says that 'une surface de lumière sépare le Ciel de la Terre' to mark the closure of Earth and the new order being brought to the world. This echoes an edict recorded in *Shangshu* ('The Book of Documents'), one of the *Five Classics* of ancient Chinese literature. The edict is called *Jueditiantong* (絕地天通, 'to break the communication between the earth and the heaven').[130] In *The Age of Mythology in the History of Ancient China*, Xu Xhusheng construes that the edict effectuated a religious reform to turn witchcraft into a state-sanctioned specialisation which stopped everyone's access to the celestial realm.[131] Here, heaven is infiltrated with the sacred and the secular will to power in order to exclude witchcraft from popular access. Kan has also indicated that various players (including the emperor and intellectuals) defined rites differently based on their interpretation of canons in order to formulate their own political discourse. Therefore, it is impossible to presuppose that any given period in Chinese history had a fixed

[130] *Shangshu* (尚書, 'The Book of Documents'), online text: https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=43254

[131] Xu Xusheng (徐旭生), *The Age of Mythology in the History of Ancient China* 《中國古史的傳說時代》(Taipei: Liren [里仁], 1999), pp. 97-98. The universal access to witchcraft was recorded in *Chuyu* from *Guoyu* ('Discourses of the States, 771-476 BC): https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=24890

consensus on what the 'right' rites are.[132] Then, how can 'le Ciel chinois', as Segalen would have it, be singular, rather than 'les Cieux chinois'?

The theme of katabasis links the play with a variety of underworlds in the Western tradition, including the Greco-Roman one and the Christian hell. This raises a question on what Claudel might possibly mean by saying that the underworld is where 'le crime subsiste dans un invariable équilibre',[133] a suggestive reference to the notion of *contrapasso*. For Claudel, the equilibrium of crime and punishment has a lot in common with the principle of vengeance in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. Before he left for Shanghai, he translated *Agamemnon* from 1892 to 1894. In 'L'Orestie d'Eschyle', a preface for the 1961 reedition of his translation of the trilogy, Claudel notes that the pre-Christian idea of crime and punishment is governed by the *lex talionis* i.e. the principle of retribution. After this, Claudel adds that 'les Chinois exagèrent encore le côté matériel de cette conception primitive en disant que le châtiment suit le crime comme le son suit le coup sur une lame de bronze. Le mal revient sur son auteur par une conséquence presque physique'.[134] Claudel might have taken karma as an indigenously Chinese

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[132] Kan, *Imperial Power, Rituals and Confucian Hermeneutics*, pp. 33-78.

[133] Claudel, *Théâtre*, p. 839.

[134] Claudel, *Œuvres en prose*, ed. by Jacques Petit and Charles Galpérine (Paris: Gallimard, 1965 [1910]), p. 418. For an illustrated account of China's buddhist hell, see Léon Rousset, *À travers la Chine*, pp. 142-143.

notion; in any case, he thinks the tragic idea of vengeance resembles the principle of retribution governing *Le Repos*'s underworld.

Skipping these suggestive associations that constitute the vision of spirituality and governance in *Le Repos*, Segalen condemns 'la pauvreté du décor impérial' of the play. It is true that *Le Repos* gives scanty scenic descriptions, unlike *Le Combat* which offers detailed depictions of the imperial observatory and the imperial concubine's palace which is decorated with what reads like an icon painted on panel or made with mosaic in act II.[135] 'Peint sur un panneau qu'on ne peut rouler comme les soies', the picture is described from a putative 'Chinese' point of view which, in Segalen's rendering, finds a gilded altarpiece foreign. It leads one to wonder: why would a play concerned with spiritual struggle provide descriptions on what the palace is like and how the empire functions? If we do not mind the forest in which Dante gets lost before journeying to Paradise through Inferno and Purgatory being poorly adorned, why is being laconic about décor in *Le Repos* an intrinsic minus? If Satan's speech happens to be one of the most exuberant passages of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, why cannot Claudel's didactic conversation conjoining the emperor, a demon, and an angel also contain poetic aspirations? Vindicating *Le Repos* in terms of its multiconfessional engagements does

[135] Segalen, *Œuvres complètes*, II, p. 682.

not offset Claudel's implication in the French monopoly of Catholic edification of China and his Euro-supremacist statements,[136] but the play's religious tenets should not desensitise us to the complex construction of the play's spiritual landscape. *Le Repos* presents China's conversion to Christianity through a crossroads of religious and power systems dominated by chthonic engagements. In light of this, Claudel should at least be credited for his vision of an unconventional spiritual agon that melds his Catholic faith with forms of Chinese folk belief and Buddhism.

The way in which *Le Repos* engages with otherness is not as reductive as Segalen presents it, since it displays a rich combination of cross-cultural associations involving the chthonic, the Catholic, and Chinese imperial rites. Segalen's hostility towards *Le Repos* reminds us of his position in *Essai sur l'exotisme*, an incomplete set of notes presenting Segalen's revisionist project to engage with cultural and aesthetic otherness while steering clear of the clichés of colonial discourse closely tied up with the term 'exotisme'. Charles Forsdick observes that the *Essai* is 'founded on a reiterated act of negation and expiation, as if the only viable approach to exoticism is through cultural and semantic exorcism'.[137] By critiquing interpretations and practices that reduce

[136] On the French protection of Catholicism in China, see Muriel Détrie's *France-Chine: Quand deux mondes se rencontrent* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), p. 45. On Claudel's Euro-supremacism, see Hourcade, 'L'écriture de l'échec', pp. 42-45.

[137] Charles Forsdick, *Victor Segalen and the Aesthetics of Diversity: Journeys between Cultures* (Oxford:

exoticism to superficial difference and the non-European, Segalen attempts to free exoticism from its moribund and worn-out associations and recast it as an energised encounter with what he sees as radical difference. Following a trajectory analogous to the theories of *Essai sur l'exotisme*, *Le Combat* seeks to present a replacement deemed to be more compelling than its rival.

Objecting to Segalen's interpretation of *Le Repos* should not, however, altogether discredit *Le Combat*, whose sexual satire is characterised by confrontational energy and crudeness. Just as Claudel's play is concerned with a crisis, *Le Combat* begins with the acknowledgement of 'l'Influx' that causes drought and famine all over the country. However, Segalen relocates the setting of this acknowledgement from imperial counsel to the emperor's farewell to his concubines and the empress, specifying that the emperor is about to practice abstinence in isolation for three days as a sacrifice to deal with the Influx. Among the concubines, there is a newcomer, 'l'Étrangère', who stands out because of the bright colour of her eyes and hair and a graceful but slightly gauche manner. The emperor nominates her 'Élue-du-Ciel' for her taciturn and outlandish bearing that 'semble venir d'un autre ciel'. Meanwhile, a group of guards appears with a foreign prisoner. A crown of thorns on the head, the prisoner is covered with spittle

Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 27.

and blood. The emperor notices them because all penalties are supposed to be deferred. The officer in charge reports that the prisoner is capable of 'une insolente magie' for agitation and showing up in numerous forbidden places, claiming the existence of 'another sky' and a being called 'god'.[138] The emperor recognises him as a troublemaker and grants him an honourable and quick death. The following plot unfolds Segalen's play with the polyvalence of 'élue' among other puns based on Chinese-Christian systems, as 'élue' meaning either chosen by Providence or chosen by the Fils du Ciel. During his abstinence, the emperor encounters the executed prisoner's phantom, takes it to be a vampire, and fails to accept its evangelical prompts delivered in Chinese. Then, the phantom conjures up Élue-du-Ciel, endows her with the ability to speak Chinese by crossing her lips, and bids her to deliver the 'Prince d'Ici-Bas' before vanishing. Even if Élue-du-Ciel continues the effort to convert the emperor, they are not on the same page in terms of the meaning they attribute to words such as 'lord', 'sky', and who reigns in the highest heaven. Élue-du-Ciel tells the emperor that the phantom is a saint sent by 'celui qui aime ses créatures et l'amour de sa gloire' in addition to various evangelistic suggestions that bemuse the emperor.[139] As the phantom appears again, the emperor declines its last attempt at conversion based on his

[138] Segalen, *Œuvres complètes*, II, p. 657.

[139] *Ibid*., p. 671.

'impurity', best understood as the interruption of his abstinence. Before vanishing together with the phantom, Élue-du-Ciel also makes the sign of the cross. When the abstinence is over, the emperor remains unconvinced of his purity despite the invigilating minister's confirmation of his chamber's intactness. As the Influx continues its havoc, Élue-du-Ciel is found to have been in a trance during the emperor's absence. Having demanded her nocturnal company, the emperor reproduces the speech activation he has learnt from the phantom by a kiss and hand sign. Then, they engage in a conversation on love confounding two different objects of desire i.e. Élue-du-Ciel and the love for Christ. Though the emperor promises he will add her faith to the 'Protocole des Bons Génies reconnus',[140] she constantly refrains from his touch, unmoved by the proposal of promotion to the rank of Noble Consort. This act ends with Élue-du-Ciel's sudden death, an aggravation of the Influx, and popular insurgency. In the last act, the emperor sees the apparition of Élue-du-Ciel and the phantom stands in a pyre in a sacrificial ceremony preceding the first day of spring. Unmoved by the emperor's reference to their newborn son, Élue-du-Ciel points with her finger to the sky above. At daybreak, the two apparitions are seen to be transfigured in the flames. The emperor gets engulfed by the smoke of the Influx rising from the ground. A spring

[140] *Ibid.*, p. 695.

shower relieves the suspense and quenches the land, which returns to being 'la Bonne Terre de l'Empire'. Among signs of recovery, the emperor is left with a sense of loss, pining for 'quelque chose d'insaisissable et d'inconnu'.[141]

Against Claudel's evangelisation, Segalen's intention, as Henry Bouillier observes, is to 'présenter un conflit ou plutôt une rivalité entre deux puissances célestes, le Ciel de Chine et le Ciel catholique'. But in *Le Combat*, none of the opponents win the match of elimination, since the restoration of order comes almost spontaneously and the Influx seems to wear itself out in a paroxysmal fit.[142] Segalen has conceived the Influx as a third-party unknown to the Chinese-Christian tug-of-war, in which the emperor and the Christian God are belittled as 'les petites religions' unable to grasp the Influx's might.[143] The conversations involving the emperor, the foreign martyr, and Élue-du-Ciel are structured around unproductive communication which leads to incomprehension and the emperor's false anticipations generated by Élue-du-Ciel's consent, misunderstood as her acceptance of consummation rather than her devotion to God.[144] Thus, Segalen's sexual satire involves the characters' conflation of the sacred

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[141] *Ibid.*, p. 707.

[142] Bouillier, *Victor Segalen*, pp. 348-349.

[143] See Bouillier's introduction to the text in *Œuvres complètes*, II, p. 644.

[144] Yvonne Hsieh has made a complete analysis of the main conversations that confronts Christian proposition and the imperial authority of China in *Victor Segalen's Literary Encounter with China: Chinese Moulds, Western Thoughts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 229-235.

and the sexual, epitomised by the ambiguity of the fact that Heaven commands the feelings and actions of Élue-du-Ciel. During their second conversation, Élue-du-Ciel tells the emperor she is going to teach him 'un autre amour. Apre et souverain'.[145] The emperor takes the allusion to Redemption to be a promise of unprecedented voluptuous pleasure. After exclaiming 'Élue-de-Ciel! Élue du cœur! Élue de joie!', the emperor anticipates that 'tu m'apportes dans les plis secrets de ta robe un amour bien inattendu!'[146]

One of the moments that are symptomatic of the futile confrontation between the Son of Heaven and Christianity is the emperor's pleading for Élue-du-Ciel's love. It contains one of the rare references to the word 'combattre' in the play:

> Reviens à moi combattre dans la nuit. Viens m'aider et me secourir…Lutte de deux corps effrayés. Étrange l'effroi dans mon cœur…Viens te débattre…viens t'échapper…Avec toi j'escaladerai la muraille Terre et les créneaux déchirés…Tu feras éclater mon âme de rire et de sanglots égalisés…Je serai homme![147]

For the emperor, fighting for carnal pleasure supersedes fighting for the welfare of the empire. Proclaiming himself as as 'astrologue du Ciel Intérieur',[148] the emperor shifts the function of astrology from establishing cosmic, moral, and political order to his

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[145] Segalen, *Œuvres completes*, II, p. 694.

[146] *Ibid*., p. 695.

[147] *Ibid.*, p. 696.

[148] *Ibid.*, p. 681.

introspection to contemplate his unrequited love for Élue-du-Ciel. On this note, the emperor in *Le Combat* ends up suffering in a way that is comparable to the emperor in *La Fille du Ciel*, since both of them pine for unattainable beloveds who desert them for pursuits deemed worthier, one Providence, the other Han purity.

Intended as a satirical makeover of *Le Repos*, *Le Repos* conflates the sacred and the sexual by populating the semantic field of 'Heaven' with Christianity and imperial power. We can also consider whether the emperor in *Le Combat* satirises Segalen's own fascination with the Son of Heaven. In a letter to Yvonne Segalen on 31 July 1909, Segalen envisages the emperor as follows:

> Exotisme Impérial, hautain, aristocratique, légendaire, ancestral et raffiné. Car tout, en Chine, redevient sa chose. Il est partout, il sait tout et peut tout. […] Les pays éloignés vassaux lointains; et les peuples d'occident? Ses tributaires respectueux. Je tiens mon Personnage.[149]

In *Le Combat*, the emperor is cooped up in a room for unsuccessful abstinence, humbled by the Influx, and overcome by the desire for Élue-du-Ciel. Instead of being omniscient, he knows little about what to do to deal with the Influx and control foreign members in the palace capable of supernatural conjecture and transfiguration.[150] Contradicting his supposed qualities including 'aristocratique', 'hautain', and 'raffiné', the emperor

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[149] Segalen, *Correspondance*, I, p. 942.

[150] Yvonne Hsieh has surveyed Segalen's theatrical works in relation to the fantastic in 'Victor Segalen et le théâtre', *La Tentation théâtrale des romanciers*, ed. by Philippe Chardin (Paris: SEDES, 2002), pp. 112-120.

commits his ardour to the forehead and bosom of Élue-du-Ciel, and his omnipotence is shadowed by the horror of solitary waiting all night long.[151] The 'astrologue of Ciel Intérieur' proves to be no lord of everything, but a master of earthy cajolement spurred by a foreign crush.

Despite their disparate motivation, *Le Repos* and *Le Combat* draw heavily on rites and the ritualisation of statecraft and social organisation in China.[152] Their literary rivalry contends for what China has to offer in terms of the potential for dramatisation based on its system of governance as inseparable from the emperor's domestic, spiritual, and sexual life. As a result, these plays reinvent practices of divine revelation, folk belief, and the use of sacrificial rites essential to the exercise of power in the Chinese empire. Reinvented as such, these practices become the materials to formulate multiconfessionalism and sexual satire, respectively, in the plays of Claudel and Segalen. Their exoticism involves reinventing the spirituality of the Chinese empire through languages of faith and sex. These plays are also products of their authors' reductive visions. Being too dismissive of Claudel's faith, Segalen downplays the cultural diversity of *Le Repos*. Drawing on chthonic elements that go beyond Figurist

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[151] Segalen, *Œuvres complètes*, II, p. 695.

[152] For a recent study on this, see Anne Cheng and Stéphane Feuillas, ed., *Autour du Traité des rites: De la canonisation du rituel à la ritualisation de la société* (Paris: Hémisphères, 2022).

readings, *Le Repos* presents an enigmatic knot that ties evangelism with a variegated spiritual landscape. Claudel's limited access to Chinese makes it difficult to determine whether the play's complexity is a calculated result or a mixture of trial and coincidence producing resonance aplenty. The diverse fabric of these plays requires an open dialogue between literature and studies of religion, anthropology, ritual systems, and Chinese history. Their (anti-)religious exploration can be better understood through careful contextualisation.

In the plays discussed above, China provides scenarios of crisis, mystery, and dramatic tension. These plays straddle the Sino-French borders of cultural tradition, myth, and political struggle. In *La Fille du Ciel*, melodrama infiltrates political thinking by reworking the meaning of pacifist union proposed by Kang Youwei and portraying women's patriotic passion through assimilations of Joan of Arc. Claudel presents a very different kind of twist for the Chinese sovereign. If the superhuman mission to which Gautier and Loti commit their empress and emperor is to achieve a romantic and political unity to sew up the wounds of division, Claudel sends his emperor on a journey to the underworld, where Odysseus, Orpheus, Aeneas, and Dante are among his fellow travellers, to look for the remedy for the country's plight. Are Gautier, Loti, and Claudel, in a way, like Antonin Artaud three decades later, who uses the Oriental as an outlet for his writerly concerns? In *Le Théâtre et son double*, the 'théâtre oriental' does

not really mean a particular counterpart to European theatre. Instead, it acts as a watchword, an Other in possession of what the Self deems lacking, for the avant-garde search for non-verbal elements to vitalise theatrical representation in Europe. In their plays, fantasy fulfils a non-naturalistic theatre in which characters act as symbols rather than ingredients of a *tranche de vie* with a transparent fourth wall. Stylisation gives leeway to the remix of space, time, and belief systems, bypassing the constrictions of reality and religious doctrine.

Chapter III

In Search of the 'Real' China: Spaces of Ethnography

'*L'ethnographie* — il est bien ennuyeux d'avoir à le répéter — s'intéresse au *beau* et au *laid*, au sens européen de ces mots absurdes.

Elle a cependant tendance à se méfier du beau, qui est bien souvent une manifestation rare, c'est-à-dire monstrueuse d'une civilisation'.

Marcel Griaule[1]

In this chapter, I examine claims about the 'real' China intent on dissipating information considered to be false. These claims assume forms of ethnography basing its credibility on different conditions and relations between the author and the object of description, depending on the authors' national background, political position, and access to Chinese culture. This practice involves the construction of 'ethnographic authority', a concept borrowed from James Clifford to designate strategies to establish the narrating onlooker's credibility as a purveyor of truth while translating experiences into textual forms.[2] Ethnography is understood as a descriptive method to produce

[1] Marcel Griaule, 'Un coup de fusil', *Documents* II (1), (1930), p. 46.

[2] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 21-54.

knowledge about peoples and their cultures. I focus on *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* (1884), *Le Théâtre des Chinois* (1886), and *Les Plaisirs en Chine* (1890) by Chen Jitong; *Journal des îles* (1902), *Briques et tuiles* (1909), and *Équipée* (1914) by Victor Segalen; and *Essai sur la littérature chinoise* (1912) and *Théâtre et musique modernes en Chine* (1926) by George Soulié de Morant. My analysis of these work further develops themes including crossdressing, racialised sexuality, and homoeroticism already evoked in Chapter I. This choice of texts follows the sense that rituals of truth about China present as much what the author intends to be taken as the reality as the author's commitment to the specific rationale underlying the ethnographic knowledge presented as such. Ethnography vehicles the desire to find the real and relay it to those who cannot witness the Other's activities on the spot.

Nevertheless, it is worth stressing that subjecting these texts to 'ethnographic' reading is not unproblematic: as a modern discipline whose evolution entails some recognised criteria to validate the production of knowledge, ethnography would seem poles apart from the projects and pretensions of Chen, Segalen, and Soulié de Morant, for they wrote in an age when ethnography just began to take shape as a discipline of learning. In some ways, their accounts are closer to man-of-the-world anecdotes. Instead of being university-trained scholars who operate on the model of participatory

observation or other methodologies instituted by modern academia, they were amateur observers, employed in military, medical, or administrative roles by either France or China at the turn of the nineteenth century. To qualify my use of 'ethnography', I begin with a discussion of the terms in which I invoke ethnography as a source of critical concepts for texts produced when the practice of cross-cultural representation was not partitioned into distinct disciplines. Then, I explore the ways in which Chen, Segalen, and Soulié de Morant construct ethnographic authority and how this is framed by their intentions and conceptual limitations instead of a stable set of methodologies. It is precisely by reading them in this way that we can delineate the intersection of literature and ethnography. I argue that how Chen, Segalen, and Soulié de Morant position themselves vis-à-vis ethnographic authority takes us to the 'prehistory' of ethnography, a phase marked by their activities as imperial agents from China and France. To relate my reading to ethnography as a literary practice and its historical development, the prefix 'pre-' is based on the fact that my main texts were created not long before two 'symbolic dates' for the birth of ethnology as an academic subject: 1925 and 1938. The year 1925 saw the foundation of the Institut d'ethnologie de Paris by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Marcel Mauss and Paul Rivet, key figures in the institutionalisation of ethnology,

and 1938 is the year when the Musée de l'Homme was launched as the result of repurposing the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro.[3]

III-1 The 'Prehistory' of Ethnography

Today, the ethnographer evokes a fieldworker who meets a variety of methodological standards to conduct research and produce a synthetic cultural description adhering to the norm of participant observation.[4] This figure differs from 'amateurs' such as colonial administrators, officers, missionaries, and travelogue writers mainly because the Ethnographer possesses analytic techniques supported by scientific sophistication and linguistic proficiencies as well a good sense of cultural relativism.[5] These are elements that justify 'experiences' registered as a reliable source of information about the Other's cultural reality. Vincent Debaene indicates that justifying experiences as knowledge involves a 'cercle vertueux' which validates knowledge gleaned from fieldwork by a certain framework and methodology.[6] This is

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[3] Vincent Debaene offers a comprehensive account of the development of French ethnology from the nineteenth century to the 1970s in *L'Adieu au voyage: L'ethnologie française entre science et littérature* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), p. 45.

[4] See Robert Thornton, 'Narrative Ethnography in Africa, 1850-1920', *Man* (18), pp. 502-520.

[5] Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[6] Debaene, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

not to say turn-of-the-century writers do not employ strategies to construct authority to validate the truth about a cultural other they enunciate, but to say that they are rather spontaneous in presenting their engagement and rapport with the object of description. My investigation begins with the premise that the intersections of gender and empire shape the kinds of ethnographic authority practiced by Chen, Segalen, and Soulié de Morant. They may not have been conscious that their writings on China constitute an inventive language event calling for methodological scrutiny, but they made use of the nature of writing as literary artifice to fulfil their intentions. Hence, their choice of style embodies the paradigmatic possibilities of ethnography, whose perspectives shift between local observation, global imposition, and political engagement. These possibilities present more nuances than the dualistic conception of imperial subjugation and resistance respectively carried out by ethnography and auto-ethnography, for the process of transcultural infiltration and translation cannot avoid betrayal that compromises the story of conquest or undermines resistance. Their writing shows (rather than tells) that the writing of self-other relations involves 'matters of power and rhetoric rather than of essence'.[7]

Chen, Segalen, and Soulié de Morant share with the ethnographer the

[7] Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

representational impulse to describe China for the French reader while helping themselves with a variety of literary techniques without necessarily subscribing to modern ethnographic measures to hedge what they say. They contribute to the 'prehistory' of ethnography in a time when French and East Asian cultures were grappling with the cultural, linguistic, and political differences that had been brought into new proximity through increased contacts. Although inescapably lodged in the ideological context in which they are complicit, they possess increasing technical and conceptual tools to revise or even rectify the literary legacy passed on to them from the preceding generations, characterised by the Parnassian poets' allusions to China and Loti's pro-imperial romance validated by personal travels. Signs of nascent revisionism are shared among them for varying causes, one of which can be represented by Gilbert de Voisins, a writer and Segalen's travel companion in the expeditions in 1909 and 1913. To the detriment of a sensibility capable of taking in the China that he experiences *en route*, ornamental, minuscule, and delicate chinoiserie blinds his vision unpleasantly. For him, just as knowing France through 'ses chansons de café-concert' is inadequate, it is a shame to 'gâter les yeux et l'esprit en regardant à la loupe de délicats, de délicieux, d'inégalables petits riens' propagated by people including Gautier, Bouilhet, and

Mallarmé, as he specifies.[8] Though confluent with the desire to seek a more accurate and nuanced vision of non-Western realities, these concerns are not simply antithetical to his predecessors' Oriental fantasy and colonial literature. Instead, they entertain a complicated relationship with cultural reductionism. In what follows, I show how forms of ethnographic authority are constructed to claim authenticity.

III-2 Chen Jitong: Reversing the Perceptual Framework on the Cultural Frontline of the Sino-French War

In recent decades, Chen Jitong (1852-1907), or alternatively spelled as Tcheng Ki-Tong, has been rediscovered as a pioneer of Chinese Francophonie and an important figure in the history of Sino-French cultural exchange.[9] A native of Fuzhou, Chen

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[8] Quoted in Paul de Cassagnac, 'Pour la plus Grande France', *L'Autorité* (19 October 1913).

[9] Recent scholarship has focused on Chen's cross-cultural mobility. I am particularly thankful to Qi Yue, whose 'Un échange interculturel sino-européen à la fin du XIXe siècle. Idéaux, pratiques et enjeux intellectuels dans l'œuvre du doplomate-écrivain Chen Jitong' (Doctoral thesis, Universié Paris Sciences et Lettres, 2023) has initiated my research on Chen. Other useful works include Catherine Vance Yeh, 'The Life-Style of Four *Wenren* in Late Qing Shanghai', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 57:3 (December 1997), pp. 419-470; Li Huachuan, *Wan-Qing yipe waijiaoguan de wenhua licheng* [The Cultural Journey of a Late-Qing Diplomat] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004); Jing Tsu, 'Chen Jitong's "World Literature"', *Sound and Script in the Chinese Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 112-43; Yinde Zhang, 'Pour une archéologie de la francophonie chinoise: Le cas de Tcheng Ki-tong', *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 339 (July-September 2011), pp. 289-300; Ren Ke, 'Fin-De-Siècle Diplomat: Chen Jitong (1852-1907) and Cosmopolitan Possibilities in the Late

studied at the Fuzhou Naval Yard, known as l'Arsenal de Fou-Tchéou, an institution of the late-Qing Self-Strengthening Movement that was launched in the 1860s and jointly run by Chinese and French personnel.[10] Unlike his peers destined for careers in navigation, shipbuilding, and engineering in one of the first student delegations sent to Europe in the 1870s, Chen was singled out by Viceroy Li Hongzhang to study international law and negotiation at the École libre des sciences politiques in Paris for his linguistic aptitude and social acumen.[11] Subsequently, Chen worked as a military attaché and interpreter at the Qing embassies in Berlin and Paris, where he lived for

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Qing World' (Doctoral thesis, The Johns Hopkins University, 2014) in ProQuest <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/fin-de-siècle-diplomat-chen-jitong-1852-1907/docview/1859066326/se-2> [accessed 19 September 2022]; Wen-Hui Chang, 'Les images françaises dans la littérature franco-chinoise: en commençant par Ki-Tong Tcheng', *Romance Notes*, Vol. 55, No. 3, *At War: Spaces of Conflict (1870-2015)* (2015), pp. 475-485; and Ren Ke, 'Cheng Jitong, *Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois*, and the Literary Self-Fashioning of a Chinese Boulevardier in Fin-de-siècle Paris', *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Fall 2016), pp. 90-103. A number of records created by Chen's contemporaries include Henri Cordier (1849-1925), *Histoire des relations de la Chine avec les puissance occidentales, Deuxième partie 1888-1902* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1902), p. 68, 70; Robert Harborough Sherard (1861-1943), *Twenty Years in Paris: Being Some Recollections of a Literary Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1905); and Anatole France, 'Chinese Tales', *On Life and Letters*, trans. A. W. Evans (London: J. Lane, 1922), pp. 75-85.

[10] Léon Rousset wrote *À travers la Chine* (1886) to share his experiences in China to stimulate interest at home to support the French expansion overseas.

[11] See Li, *op. cit.*, p. 38 and Ren, 'Cheng Jitong, *Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois*, and the Literary Self-Fashioning of a Chinese Boulevardier in Fin-de-siècle Paris', p. 91.

fifteen years and married a French wife. It would be wrong to picture Chen as a mandarin cocooned in the bureaucratic outpost of European capitals. *Au contraire*, he lived up to Viceroy Li's expectation for him to specialise in these fields by becoming a man about town. His command of French was instrumental in building his cultural celebrity in the Parisian social scene. Ren Ke's contextual study indicates that Chen rode with the right tide: the mass-circulated newspapers and periodicals catering to an increasingly literate readership in fin-de-siècle Paris were a promising stage for a flamboyant diplomat from the Far East.[12] Among the multiple hats worn by Chen for the Qing court, he was also a popular writer, an object of newspaper sightings,[13] giver of public lectures for *sociétés savantes*,[14] salon-goer, and boulevardier used to chitchatting with Third-Republic luminaries. Chen's first book, *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, was first serialised in the *Revue des deux mondes* and published in book form in 1883. The book was so popular that by 1884 it was in its third printing and by

[12] See Ren, 'Cheng Jitong, *Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois*, and the Literary Self-Fashioning of a Chinese Boulevardier in Fin-de-siècle Paris', p. 95.

[13] Some of Chen's public appearances were recorded by *Le Gaulois* (22 March 1886), *Le Matin* (18 June 1886), *Journal des Débats* (5 June 1887) and *La Presse* (8 June 1890).

[14] Romain Rolland took note of a lecture of Chen delivered at the Sorbonne in *Le Cloître de la rue d'Ulm: Journal de Romain Rolland à l'École normale (1886-1889)* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1952), pp. 276-277.

1886 in its tenth.[15] In the same vein, *Le Théâtre des Chinois* and *Les Plaisirs en Chine* are collections of essays that introduce Chinese theatre and forms of entertainment to the French reader.

Ren has rightly construed that Chen's transcultural positioning fuses the personas of auto-ethnographer, flâneur, boulevardier, and Chinese scholar-official, and that Chen 'cultivated a creative and cosmopolitan identity of a writer at home in both the mass press of fin-de-siècle Paris and in the literati values and sensibilities of late imperial China'.[16] Nevertheless, much of Chen's 'creativity' and 'cosmopolitan identity' are likely to have been prompted by right-wing French members of parliament in semi-private meetings authorised by Viceroy Li. This means that his transcultural self-fashioning is rooted in the inter-imperial cultural politics that engages the Third Republic and late-Qing China. Chen's conduct in the cultural scene of Paris thus involves a performative sprezzatura, a representational ploy derived from processes of cultural hybridisation applied to his capacity as an official delegate and a French-speaking author. This entails a continuous cultivation of studied comfort to show that

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[15] See Yeh, *op. cit.*, p. 437.

[16] Ren, 'Cheng Jitong, *Les Parisiens peints par un Chinois*, and the Literary Self-Fashioning of a Chinese Boulevardier in Fin-de-siècle Paris', p. 91.

Chen is ‘at home’ in a setting ostensibly alien to his background. Carrying out sprezzatura through hybridised cultural and linguistic manœuvres, Chen’s curated ease evokes the trope of the swimming duck in Chinese idiom: it appears to be leisurely on the surface, while paddling rather forcefully beneath the water. To accurately assess Chen’s creativity, we should note that his allegedly (near-)native knowledge of France and China as the French reader enjoyed it falls largely into the realm of rhetoric. Authenticity and artifice are intricately weaved into an ambiguous relationship, crucial to understanding how various personas and cultural repertoires are engaged to orchestrate Chen’s cross-cultural performance. In what follows, I relocate Chen’s writing from an idealised transcultural flânerie to the worldly arena of parley, backdoor messaging, and geopolitical scramble, which conditioned Chen’s auto-ethnography and his Sino-French double identity. In his writing on gender and Chinese theatre, he emphasises artistic sophistication and spirituality to eclipse the sector’s close association with prostitution, drawing on analogies to French culture to frame subjects he deemed risqué. To explain these tendencies, I show how his literary style and classist statements propelled by the pride of a Chinese *lettré* makes the flâneur in his role-play more of a tactical gloss than an essential identity.

The ‘Secret Journal of Two Weeks in Paris’ records Chen’s meetings with French

statesmen, merchants, and military officers such as the incumbent prime minister Jules Ferry, minister for foreign affairs Paul-Armand Challemel-Lacour, and two Bonapartist MPs including Paul de Cassagnac and his younger brother Georges in June 1884, in the run-up to the Sino-French War (1884-1885) two months later.[17] This document reveals the multiple functions Chen served for the Qing court which exceeded his official position as a military attaché. Dining with a naval officer enabled Chen to obtain an inventory of French warships and manpower deployed in Indochina,[18] but his meetings with Jules Ferry and Challemel-Lacourdid did not contribute to any game-changing turn in the course of the war. It shows that Chen managed to iron out some rancour accumulated over previous diplomatic dialogues; notwithstanding, China's dominion over Indochina as one of its tribute states and the French ambition to take over Indochina formed a Gordian knot that no delicate parley could cut.

The war looming large, it was talking with anti-war partisans and the Cassagnac brothers that delivered some interesting results. They acknowledged the legitimacy of vengeance for Henri Rivière, the naval officier who was killed by the Black Flag Army

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[17] Chen Jitong, 'Bali Banyue miji' ('Secret Journal of Half a Month in Paris'), in Zhang Zhenkun et al., ed., *Zhongguo jindaishi ziliao congkan xubian: Zhongfa znahzheng* (*Sequel Edition of Modern Chinese Historical Documents Series: The Sino-French War*), 5 vols (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1995), I, pp. 541-561.

[18] Chen, 'Secret Journal', p. 549.

led by a Chinese patriot named Liu Yungfu. But the hindrance constituted by tropical disease, heat, difficult terrain, and anti-French hostility among the Vietnamese and Chinese convinced them that engaging the technologically advanced navy in ground combat did not look promising at all; in reality, it would only fulfil the private interests of some Republican politicians, who were believed to have stakes in the mining industry in Indochina. Chen forwarded their advice to establish a Chinese embassy in Indochina to replace the ancient tribute system. He also warned that the French navy might just ravage parts of the Chinese coast and require skirmish indemnity.[19]

Most importantly, the advice offered by Paul and Georges de Cassagnac seemed to provide a spur to Chen's literary expositions on China. Known for his rejection of the Tonkin campaign, Paul de Cassagnac deprecated Jules Ferry as 'le dernier des misérables et le dernier des lâches'.[20] The French press, as Georges de Cassagnac pointed out, is best at swaying public opinion, for writers could turn their own whims into public opinion through journalism. What the press extolled could one day become the reference for policy-making. Therefore, Georges suggested that if the Chinese

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[19] *Ibid.*, p. 553.

[20] Assemblée nationale, *Base de données des députés français depuis 1789*, URL: https://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/(num_dept)/1488 (Accessed 4 September 2022).

embassy had befriended the major newspapers through underhand endowments, the press would have backed the idea that it was wrong for France to encroach on China's entitlement to rule Indochina.[21] In response to this, Chen appeared reluctant to sacrifice China's integrity to win sympathy from the French press. Chen declined this suggestion based on moral scruples. However, Chen's subsequent actions showed that he did not dismiss the idea of resorting to the pen entirely: his publications on China proved that the pen could be mightier than the sword in some cases, given that the pen was wielded by himself. This episode of espionage and solo performance provoked quibbling from Chen's ambassadorial superiors, who urged the Qing court to notify them in advance so that they would not remain ignorant until they read the news and thought the employee had become a wild card.[22]

The preambles of Chen's expositions on China often address the falsity of representations of China in French literature and identify this as the text's target of correction. It is clear that Chen has dropped the ostensible guardedness about influencing the public through writing and taken up the role of an auto-ethnographic

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[21] Chen, 'Secret Journal', p. 555.

[22] See 'Marquis Zeng Jize's letter to Office for the General Management of Affairs Concerning the Various Countries concerning Chen Jitong's meeting with the French prime minister' in *Sequel Edition of Modern Chinese Historical Documents Series: The Sino-French War*, I, pp. 613-614.

influencer in fin-de-siècle Paris, a fertile ground for him to carve out a 'cultural frontline' to fight against clichés about China. Chen's outspoken dissatisfaction with France's reductive reception of Chinese culture has already been sufficiently commented.[23] The central tenet of his dismissal of run-of-the-mill travelogues laments the lack of truth and solid evidence, as is announced in 'A Chinese Colonel on China', an article published in *All the Year Round*, a weekly journal edited by Charles Dickens, and the avant-propos of *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*. 'You [Europeans] err', he accuses, 'moreover, through hasty induction. You hear of a case of child-murder, therefore you set down infanticide as an everyday occurence; you find a lady who cannot walk, therefore you assume that all Chinese ladies are incapable of moving'.[24] 'Tout ce qui vient de la Chine a un attrait particulier;' Chen mocks, 'un rien, une petite tasse de porcelaine transparente, même un éventail, sont regardés comme des objets précieux.—Cela vient de la Chine!'[25] To counter Orientalist misinformation, Chen proposes to 'rétablir la vérité'.[26]

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[23] See Tsu, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123 and Yeh, *op. cit.*, p. 437.

[24] Chen, 'A Chinese Colonel on China', *All the Year Around: A Weekly Journal*, 34 (3 May–4 October 1884), p. 297.

[25] Chen, *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1884), p. i.

[26] *Ibid*., p. iii.

To establish his legitimacy for such an undertaking, Chen underlines his native identity and acquired experiences, claiming that he can deliver truth about China in ways that are congenial to the European taste:

> Je me suis proposé, dans ce livre, de représenter la Chine telle qu'elle est, de décrire les mœurs chinoises, avec la connaissance que j'en ai, mais avec l'esprit et le goût européens.
>
> J'ai voulu mettre mon expérience native au service de mon expérience acquise; en un mot, je pense comme un Européen qui aurait appris tout ce que je sais de la Chine, et qui se plairait à établir entre les civilisations de l'Occident et de l'extrême-Orient les comparaisons et les rapprochements auxquels cette étude peut donner lieu.[27]

'Autoethnography', as defines James Buzzard, is 'the study, representation, or knowledge of a culture by one or more of its members'.[28] According to Mary Louise Pratt, auto-ethnography also involves 'instances in which colonised subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the coloniser's terms'. The 'engagement' consists of appropriating 'the idioms of travel and exploration writing, merging or infiltration them to varying degrees with indigenous modes'.[29] To visualise

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[27] *Ibid*., p. vii.

[28] James Buzard, 'On Auto-Ethnographic Authority', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2003), pp. 69-91.

[29] Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2008 [1992]), p. 9.

his auto-ethnographic authority, *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* opens with an engraving of Chen's portrait, the only illustration of the book. In the portrait, Chen is dressed in Manchu military costume, and a title 'Attaché militaire de Chine à Paris' accompanies his name on the front page (Figure 3). Alongside this, we should also note that Chen 'was ardently attached to the pleasures of the capital. It was said of him, after his disgrace, that tucking up his pig-tail under his hat, and in European costume, he used to attend the public halls and dance as wildly the cancan as any Valentine-le-Désossé of them all.'[30] The description was written by Robert H. Sherard, an English journalist and friend of Oscar Wilde. Sartorial code-switching seems to help cross various social habitats.

[30] Sherard, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

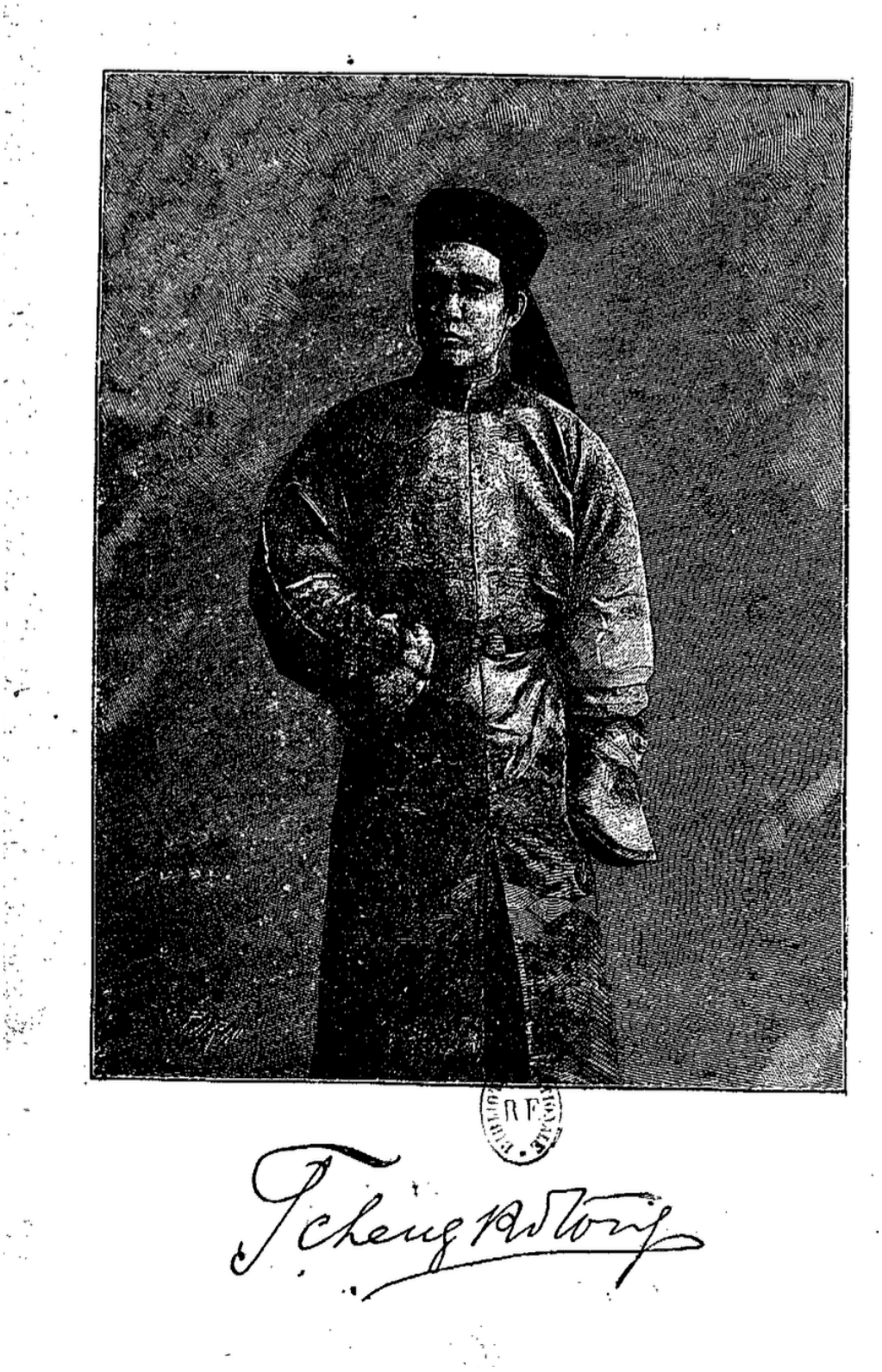


Figure 3. Portrait of Chen Jitong in *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1884).

To deliver the promised 'goût européen', Chen maps *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* onto *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840-1842) which was popular earlier in the century in terms of form and content. Representative of a genre known as panoramic literature in nineteenth-century France, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* is a multivolume collaborative work created by authors and illustrators contributing to a catalogue of urban types such as the notary, young lady, the Bohemian, or the pharmacist. Chen proclaims that he was to describe the 'mœurs sociales et politiques' of China, to which a number of titles are dedicated to present an overview of Chinese society.[31] However, one should be cautious of how his socialite alter ego finds its way into the auto-ethnographic performance, especially when he claims his sensitivities are as European as Chinese.[32] His alleged compatibility is in fact a product of multiple cultural and linguistic crossings take place. Hence, it makes sense to ask: How 'panoramic' is *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*? To what extent does the book offer a socio-cultural panorama whose scale and scope is comparable to that of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*? For, after all, *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* is a monograph authored by one diplomat who sought to re-engineer China's image through writing for

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[31] Chen, *Les Plaisirs en Chine* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1890), p. ii.

[32] Tsu reminds us that 'even as he often lamented the false representations of the Chinese in Europe, Chen was fully aware of the value of manipulating that space' in *Sound and Script*, p. 121.

the French reader, rather than by a group of contributors interested in celebrating social mixing and the commodification of vision brought about by modernity with cross-generational compatriots.

First, *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* does not seem to share the fascination with an all-embracing spectacle which is often at work in panoramic literature. In the 'Avant-propos' of the first volume of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, the objective of the book is to preserve society's image for its own posterity:

> …songeons-y, un jour viendra où nos petits-fils voudront savoir qui nous étions et ce que nous faisions *en ce temps-là*; comment nous étions vêtus; quelles robes portaient nos femmes; quelles étaient nos maisons, nos habitudes, nos plaisirs; ce que nous entendions par ce mot fragile, soumis à des changements éternels, la beauté?[33]

For Balzac and other contributors, 'l'humanité arrange toutes les vingt-quatre heures ses ridicules et ses vices, tout comme une grande coquette arrange et dispose ses volâtes, ses bijoux et ses dentelles'.[34] Engrossed in rapidly changing reality, panoramic literature seeks to capture society's self-image which is constantly metamorphosing and evanescent. Yet, this concern for cross-generational transition is absent in Chen's rather

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[33] Honoré de Balzac et al. *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes: Types et portraits humoristiques à la plume et au crayon. Mœurs contemporaines* (Paris: J. Philippart, 1876), I, p. vi.

[34] *Ibid*., p. v.

selective undertaking. Chen mediates the contact between disparate cultures as a displaced subject. Characterising himself as a 'revenant' lingering in a liminal space, he is entertaining an audience who will otherwise fall back on Orientalism if he fails to secure their attention and trust. Therefore, borrowing the accoutrements of panoramic literature benefits the cultural frontline Chen sought to maintain by filling some of the gaps of cultural difference.

According to Walter Benjamin, panoramic literature operates analogously with hitherto invented optical devices such as panorama and diorama, offering verbal experiences on a par with display machinery:

> Works like *La Grande Ville*, *Le Diable à Paris*, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. In a certain sense, they are moral dioramas – not only related to the others in their unscrupulous multiplicity, but technically constructed like them. To the plastically worked, more or less detailed foreground of the diorama corresponds the sharply profiled feuilletonistic vesturing of the social study, which latter supplies an extended background analogous to the diorama.[35]

If Chen had intuited the visual appeal of panoramic literature and how it resonated with the showcasing of merchandise and illusory spectacles, he cleverly aligned his literary

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[35] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 531.

expositions with what was in vogue without fully signing up to the 'unscrupulous multiplicity' constitutive of the urban experience. Otherwise, he would have at least wanted to include more pictures in his publications to altogether 'compete' with the illustrations often in use in travel writing. For instance, *Péking: Histoire et description* (1897) written by Alphonse Favier, General Vicar of Beijing, combines Chinese woodcuts and photography to illustrate the city's cultural history and urban layout.

From *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* to *Le Théâtre des Chinois*, Chen's corrective and defensive stance takes on a rhetorical flair by appropriating aspects of French culture in a rather baroque way. Here, I argue that Chen's vindication of Chinese culture draws on notions and tropes of French identity and civilisational superiority, displaying a subtle elitism to present his panorama of Chinese culture in contrast to the 'unscrupulous multiplicity 'in Benjamin's appraisal of panoramic literature. This works together with his use of French culture to hedge, translate or dignify what he has to say regarding Chinese theatre and gender relations in China, resulting in a tactfully 'sanitised' vision of sexuality in China. Although deprived of the double portrayal 'à la plume et au crayon' as one of the formal features of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, *Le Théâtre des Chinois* employs comic hyperboles that echo with the tone of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. In the opening of *Le Théâtre des Chinois*, Chen

invokes Molière as the master of daring to associate his expositions on Chinese theatre with the dramaturges of the French canon. Then, he starts the monologue of a 'revenant' to characterise his comparative approach to Chinese theatre informed by both European and Chinese sensitivities:[36]

> N'avais-je pas raison de dire de Molière qu'il était le patron des audacieux? La transition est violente: c'est un Chinois qui rend cet hommage à Molière, et qui voudrait se dire de ses disciples pour faire excuser la hardiesse de ses pensées. N'ai-je pas entrepris de défendre nos antiques institutions et nos mœurs contre le mépris par trop despotique de l'Européen. […] N'ai-je pas imaginé de détruire un préjugé? Tel a été, en effet, le but que je cherchais à atteindre; mais mon sujet m'a entraîné plus loin, et je me surprends moi-même prenant goût à écrire. […]
>
> J'ai vue les choses d'Occident comme pourrait les voir un revenant d'un autre âge, qui se serait trompé de date, et, se croyant à la fin du monde, se serait ressuscité. On dit quelquefois sous forme de plaisanterie: 'Si nos ancêtres sortaient de leurs tombes, que d'étonnements ils éprouveraient!' Sans doute! — Je suis un peu semblable à ce revenant; mes ancêtres n'ont pas été aux croisades et, si je devais remonter le cours des siècles, je crois que, même chez les Celtes, il me serait difficile de découvrir un cousin.[37]

After assuming this figure of cross-cultural revenant, Chen introduces a rêverie in

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[36] The subtitle of *Le Théâtre des Chinois* is 'Étude de mœurs comparées'.

[37] Chen, *Le Théâtre des Chinois* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1886), pp. iii-iv.

which ‘j’imaginais rencontrer et Montaigne et Pascal, et Molière et Corneille’.[38] In the rêverie, he becomes ‘un lettré français qui viendrait à apprendre qu’il n’a qu’à s’embarquer pour aller applaudir Démosthène à la tribune, ou assister à la *première* de *Philoctète*, de *monsieur* Sophocle, de l’Académie hellénique.’[39] Along with the mystique of a Francophone mandarin, Chen brings the smashing sensation of cultural shock and the thrill of learning to the French reader. Playing a mediatory role capable of bilingual invocations, Chen’s revenant manipulates the transmission of ideas through a cunning shuttling between the cultural traditions of France and China.

Just as *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* makes a tongue-in-cheek reference to *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, *Le Théâtre des Chinois* draws on the humoristic tone of the collection to present auto-ethnography as a pleasurable performance rather than an infuriated defence of one’s native culture. To dignify the Chinese actor, Chen foregrounds the actor’s indispensability in animating the playwright’s work, claiming that ‘le comédien est le ministre plénipotentiaire du poète auprès de Sa Majesté le public’.[40] This rhetorical elevation shares the general tenor of Balzac’s eulogy of the

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[38] Chen, *Le Théâtre des Chinois*, p. v.

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

grocer, who, boasting a massive supply of goods from around the world, deserves the stature of 'le ministre de l'Afrique, le chargé d'affaires des Indes et de l'Amérique' humbled by his banal appearance.[41] Just as the grocer provides the bread and butter of modern life with his bountiful stock, which is also the source of his scrappiness, the actor delivers the script regardless of the stigmatisation imposed by the society. For Chen, the actor is the linchpin of theatrical art: 'sans eux, le drame reste à l'état de lettre morte: nulle action, nul intérêt, nulle immortalité de l'œuvre…sans eux l'art dramatique n'existerait pas'.[42] For Balzac, the grocer is the 'pivot social' and 'l'alpha et l'oméga de notre état social. Vous ne pouvez faire un pas ou une lieue, un crime ou une bonne action, une œuvre d'art ou de débauche, une maîtresse ou un ami, sans recourir à la toute-puissance de l'épicier. Cet homme est la civilisation en boutique, la société en cornet, la nécessité armée de pied en cap, l'encyclopédie en action'.[43] Hyperbolic elevation is one of the strategies Chen borrows from panoramic literature to present his vision of China.

In the previous section, I have commented on Chen's pre-emptive identification

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[41] Balzac et al., 'L'Épicier', *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (Paris: J. Philippart, 1876), I, p. 41.

[42] Chen, *Le Théâtre des Chinois*, p. 21.

[43] Balzac et al., 'L'Épicier', *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, I, pp. 42-43.

with the French reader regarding the prohibition of women on stage. Here, I will explain how this fits with Chen's presentation of gender roles in China's cultural tradition. Instead of touching on the homoerotic practice of Chinese theatre, Chen suggests prohibiting women in the theatre protects them from being assailed publicly:

> Ce fait démontre que la femme dont la honte est publique ne résiste pas aussi aisément que l'homme au mépris qui la frappe. Un homme peut promener ses vices dans la rue et réunir tous les genres de débauche, le public du théâtre s'en soucie peu. Il applaudira le comédien dans tous ses rôles et entendra de sa bouche l'éloge de la vertu même. Mais la femme n'a pas ces faveurs. La générosité des actions qu'elle accomplit sur la scène et la noblesse des sentiments qu'elle y exprime sont opposées aux bassesses de sa conduite et l'on ne peut s'empêcher de regretter que la fiction ne soit pas la réalité. La vertu sied à la femme comme la beauté à la fleur: c'est sa parure naturelle.[44]

This rationale is consonant with Chen's presentation of *yin* and *yang*, the passive feminine principle and the active masculine principle fundamental to the traditional Chinese worldview.[45] As *yin* represents the moon and *yang* the sun, 'L'un éclaire,

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[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

[45] In 'Vers le Houang-Ho' (14 September 1909) in *Briques et tuiles*, Segalen alludes to the copulation of a married couple based on the relationship of the sowing ploughman and the earth. This is not only one of the ways Segalen reworks the principle of *yin* and *yang* but also an echo with Claudel's 'Ardeur' (1897) in *Connaissance de l'Est* and Rimbaud's 'Soleil et Chair' (1870). See Hsieh's analysis in *From Occupation to Revolution: China through the Eyes of Loti, Claudel, Segalen, and Malraux (1895-1933)* (Birmingham, AL: Summa, 1996), pp. 81-85 and Segalen, *Œuvres*, I, p. 524.

l'autre est éclairé; l'un est éblouissant de clarté, l'autre lui doit ses pâles reflets. Mais le soleil est l'astre bienfaisant et généreux, et la lumière qu'il cède à la lune a le don d'éclairer aussi: elle a une douceur tempérée qui calme les esprits chagrins et apaise les passions du cœur'.[46] In this sense, the interior and the household become women's proper sphere enshrining their fragile beauty:

> Que la femme ne connaisse ni les antichambres des ministères ni les réceptions mondaines où l'Européenne se pare de toutes les séductions de son sexe pour charmer la société des hommes, elle n'a pas à le regretter. […] Mais passez le seuil de la maison, vous entrez dans son royaume et elle y gouverne avec une autorité que n'ont certes pas les femmes européennes![47]

According to Chen, Chinese women are at best proud Junos ruling in each household. Intellectual pursuit is by no means viable for an ordinary woman not because she is unfit for study, but because this will become a deviation from 'sa véritable voie', the way of grace and tenderness, 'deux souveraines du foyer domestique qui s'inspirent de la nature'.[48]

To account for women performers visible in other venues, Chen prioritises the

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[46] Chen, *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, p. 58.

[47] *Ibid*., pp. 60-61.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

spiritual over the sexual, dignifying what has been conventionally denigrated in the Chinese society. What is noteworthy is that in Chen's writing, women performers in China resemble the women of the French salons and everyday life with whom they share key qualities, especially spirituality. Calling the unmarried singing performers invited to pleasure boat parties 'femmes musiciennes', Chen explains that their presence on the boat is to entertain the gourmets during their gastronomic tasting with 'la voix harmonieuse de la femme et le son mélodieux des instruments', and that any mention of 'débauches nocturnes' is utterly misleading.[49] Elsewhere in *Les Plaisirs en Chine*, they reappear as 'demi-mondaines' who are 'très instruites, bonnes musiciennes; quelques-unes même connaissent très bien la littérature, la peinture, etc.'[50] In sum, 'le charme de leur conversation devient aussi apprécié que celui de leur art'.[51]

This portrayal conforms to the wit Chen ascribes to the French salon in a chapter titled 'Société européenne'. A self-proclaimed 'admirateur passionné de l'esprit',[52] Chen remarked that he has seen 'des femmes charmantes très attachées aux choses de

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[49] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

[50] Chen, *Les Plaisirs en Chine*, p. 157.

[51] Chen, *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, p. 214.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

l'esprit, les adoptant quelquefois par goût, quelques fois par méthode pour se venger de la politique qui absorbe leurs maris'.[53] For him, 'l'esprit de la femme' is an ineffable feminine quality incorporated with physical appeal, visible in 'deux jolis yeux [qui] scintillent au milieu des éclats de rire de ce lutin'.[54] Chen also identifies wit as an aristocratic trait opposed to the 'esprit pédant, multicolore, emprunté, étiqueté, qui ressemble à un ballon acheté ou à une décoration trop étrangère'.[55] In borrowing the art of conversation and sociability of the French salon to depict itinerant women performers excluded from theatrical institutions, Chen presents a highly selective vision of their merits and practices. Cultural refinement and elitism are central to Chen's (re-)construction of Chinese femininity for the French reader, as it draws on what is socially acceptable in France to ennoble singing entertainers whose distinction from prostitutes can be at times ambiguous.

As the 'ressource de la conversation' of Chinese women musicians inevitably verges on coquetterie, Chen resorts to French-derived metonyms to support his argument. 'Elles ont la ressource de la conversation, ressource si précieuse chez les

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[53] *Ibid*., p. 223.

[54] *Ibid*., p. 221.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

femmes, et il est inutile de demander s'il se trouve chez nous des Célimène et des Arsinoé. Il y a toujours un prochain très…apprécié dans la conversation du beau sexe'.[56] Only when compared to counterparts in *Le Misanthrope* can women entertainers be rightfully coquettish and can the sexually ambiguous 'prochain' surfaces to hint at male transvestites.[57] This is not the only instance in which Chen curates information and cultivates his writing style to render the content palatable to the French reader.[58] If we place Chen's cross-cultural representation on the spectrum of modes of translation theorised by Friedrich Schleiermacher—the translator either moves the reader to the author or the author to the reader—it would not be exaggerating to say Chen tends to 'domesticate' China for the French reader to negotiate and market otherness through the process of auto-ethnography,[59] especially as the subject involves gender and

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[56] Chen, *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, pp. 217-218.

[57] Another brief reference to crossdressing in Chen's writing appears in *Les Plaisirs en Chine*, in which Chen writes 'un comédien, déguisé en femme' presents the programme written on a panel to organisers of the show, p. 288.

[58] Tsu has already analysed Anatole France's response to Chen's translation of Chinese tales. See Tsu, *Sound and Script*, p. 121.

[59] Schleiermacher presents this theory in a lecture titled 'On the Different Methods of Translation' and this is quoted in Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 19-20.

sexuality in cultural practices.[60] Transferring this aspect of translation theory to the appraisal of Chen's transcultural strategies highlights how symbols of the target language's matrix are identified and reprocessed to make a foreign culture familiar. Tsu Jing pithily observes that 'what French readers most liked was the mirroring of their own literary prestige. They had no way of assessing Chen's native expertise, nor would it have occurred to his foreign audience to question the Chinese colonel's mastery over his own culture.'[61] One sign of this limited degree of scrutiny is that Chen's oratory style convinced Romain Rolland who comments that 'c'est, sans aucun doute, le Chinois, que Voltaire eût trouvé le plus Français'.[62] If Chen's expositions on China were not couched in terms confirming the prestige of French culture, could his native experience alone gain the intended currency on a cultural frontline of the Sino-French confrontation and enhance his cultural celebrity?

Turning the norm of participatory observation in ethnography from 'man on the

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[60] Building on Schleiermacher's paradigm, LaurenceVenuti pushes the dual possibilities of translation to the opposition between domestication and foreignisation. Here, Schleiermacher's idea functions as a metaphor for transcultural movement rather than part of Venuti's critical prescriptions. See Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[61] Tsu, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

[62] Rolland, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

spot' to 'man from the spot' then to 'man straddling two spots', Chen's cross-cultural mediation involves a kind of hybridisation as it engages both the vindication of Chinese culture and the mono-centrism of European culture. He translates his Sino-French double identity into a mobile perceptual framework while making use of panoramic literature to propose a flânerie through Chinese society falsified by reductive imagery. Further on, Chen invokes an idealised universalism transcending cultural difference. Chen concludes the chapter 'Le Théâtre' with a generalisation on the theatre as a representational device to enact and re-enact human passion regardless of whether the form involves human actors or puppets:

> L'humanité se donne sans cesse le spectacle à elle-même: nous pouvons négliger la taille, le costume ou la substance des acteurs, tout cela n'est que surface et trompe-l'œil: la vérité, la grande et immortelle vérité, c'est que nos désirs, nos passions, nos joies, nos souffrances ne changent pas: toujours les mêmes, nous les voyons répéter sans cesse, dans tous les siècles et sous toutes les latitudes, l'éternelle comédie humaine![63]

Clearly a knowing wink at Balzac's *Comédie humaine*, 'l'éternelle comédie humaine' appeals to the idea that there are universal principles underlying varying forms of cultural practices. To pierce through the heterogeneous surface, as Chen claims,

[63] Chen, *Les Plaisirs en Chine*, p. 292.

language acquisition is key to unifying the discordance of humanity through mutual understanding. In a speech addressing the Congrès des sciences ethnographiques in 1889, Chen first congratulates the success of the same year's *Exposition universelle* and posits that the numerous *congrès scientifiques* occasioned by the event should one day unify mankind, and the word 'l'Étranger' will consequently disappear from the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, because humanity will have achieved unification through mutual understanding based on science and language acquisition.[64] For him, learning foreign languages lays the cornerstone for universal peace if the leading class cultivates multi-linguistic interests to exit the babel of mutual in-/mis-comprehension: 'c'est en favorisant parmi les classes dirigeantes le goût des langues que la paix deviendra plus universelle'.[65] Chen portrays himself as the poster child of this universalist project: 'en faisant tout mon possible pour comprendre les langues de l'Europe et je serais heureux de voir beaucoup d'Européens user à cet égard de réciprocité. C'est grâce à cette étude passionnée de votre langue que j'ai aujourd'hui l'insigne honneur de vous parler de mon pays'.[66] This confession reveals how Chen

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[64] Chen, 'La nationalité chinoise: Aperçu ethnographique', *Mémoires du Congrès International des Sciences Ethnographiques* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892), pp. 5-13.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

self-consciously engages his bilingual cultural baggage to manipulate the perceptual framework of cross-cultural representation, whose doubly sourced authority hybridises identities conceived along lines of national language and culture.

III-3 Victor Segalen and George Soulié de Morant: Intermittent Reflexivity and Erotic Exoticisms

Segalen belonged to a turn-of-the-century European minority that Chen may not have known about, for Segalen's distaste for the French fascination with *chinoiserie* was as vehement as Chen's. In the letter to Ythurbide previously discussed with regard to *Le Repos du septième jour*, Segalen flays the reductive vision of China as the home-town of Orientalist bibelots:

> C'est du pittoresque confit, rôti, salé, sucré, dont les tranches toutes prêtes s'emportent et, indifféremment, dessalées, font la gélatine Loti, resalées, l'emporte-gueule Mirbeau, marinées, la saumure Ajalbert. Claudel, lui (et je lui rends justice de tout l'écart entre le spectacle et lui), en a fait une superbe nourriture ; mais l'achalandage initial est le même : c'est la ville 'aux millions d'habitants', rues en boyaux, tripes aux étalages, odeurs et cris de friture …Article d'exportation. Songez que seuls ou presque s'exportent les Cantonnais, les Foukiennois, les gens de Ning po.
>
> Mais, ceci, est-ce toute la Chine ? Est-ce autre chose que la pacotille

que ramenaient autrefois nos grands oncles?[67]

Segalen's denunciation of cultural ignorance and moments of reflexivity in his writing resonate with 'a growing sensitivity to the epistemological problems of writing across cultural boundaries' in a variety of fields of cultural studies.[68] Often considered as a writer with anticipatory vision who wanted to unlearn the conceptual frameworks that organised the experience of encountering the other in a time when the distinction between 'civilised' and the 'savage', 'self' and 'other', the 'West' and the 'Orient' were sharper, Segalen is in fact visionary but entrenched in some of the exoticist conceptions of his time. While Segalen's writing betrays weariness with narratives of escapism, romantic encounter, and conquest, the lucid reflexivity and critical spirit demonstrated in his *Essai sur l'exotisme* become intermittent in his writing on theatre, women, and pleasures in China. It is precisely the refreshing questions he raised and the commonplaces he sometimes fell into that constitute his arresting ambiguity. Among the 'commonplaces' is the feminisation of conquered countries that are often compared to the native women's body to be possessed.

Marc Gontard and Yvonne Hsieh are among the scholars who have noted the

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[67] Segalen, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henry Bouillier, 2 vols (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), II, p. 709.

[68] Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, p. 153.

sexual energy permeating Segalen's works, ranging from his Tahitian period to the close engagement with Chinese high culture. Gontard indicates that the narrator of *René Leys* harbours an insatiable desire for knowledge, which fuels his determination to 'penetrate' the 'Dedans' and certainly highlights the overtone of defloration.[69] Hsieh contextualises Segalen's erotic tendency with respect to the tradition of European travel writing since the age of Enlightenment to the present based on Dennis Porter's analysis, which identifies religious beliefs, political institutions, and sexual practices as three salient themes of travel writing.[70] 'An essentiel element in the eroticism of travel', as Porter points out, 'resides in the potential for exotic sexual experiences with bodies of different shades and shapes or arrestingly different in their adornments'.[71]

As I have used Soulié de Morant's *Bijoux de ceinture* as an example of erotic exoticism in turn-of-the-century French literature on China, I explore references to theatre, women, and pleasures in China in the non-fictional writing by Segalen and Soulié de Morant respectively to see how they position themselves in relation to

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[69] Marc Gontard, *Victor Segalen: Une esthétique de la différence* (Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 1990), pp. 111-112.

[70] Yvonne Hsieh, *From Occupation to Revolution*, p. 87.

[71] Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 81.

ethnographic authority in this section. Soulié de Morant is an interesting foil to Segalen's shifting attitude, because the former remains consistent in endorsing his fitness to introduce things Chinese throughout his literary career. Soulié de Morant is clearly aware of how the contiguity of the erotic and the exotic can be manipulated, whereas Segalen is characterised by what I call intermittent reflexivity as he progresses as an *écrivain-voyageur*. I set Segalen in contrast with the consistency of Soulié de Morant, who adopts a rather assertive position in transmitting ideas.

As Soulié de Morant tends to cast himself as an ambassador of Chinese culture drawing on his ex-consular credentials in his works on China, Segalen admits his ignorance of Chinese theatre frankly in one of his earliest experiences of Chinese theatre, which took place probably in the Chinatown of San Francisco in 1902: 'et j'ai la sensation — malgré ma bonne volonté — d'avoir encore un peu moins compris l'art dramatique chinois que M. Loti n'a pénétré son Japon'.[72] This riff on Loti is a gesture acknowledging Segalen's incomprehension, removing ethnographic authority from his own writing. However, there are times when Segalen's self-critical rigour softens. In the travel notes about Japan sandwiched in the notes about China in *Briques et tuiles*,

[72] Segalen, 'Journal des îles', *Œuvres*, ed. by Christian Doumet, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2020), I, p. 25.

we learn that Segalen has been to playhouses and red-light districts when he was visiting Kyoto and Tokyo. There, he treats his incomprehension more casually: 'Je ne sais pas quelle en est l'aventure. Mais la logique des gestes, leur parfaite appropriation, l'excellent commentaire rythmique de l'orchestre suffisent à m'en faire voir tout le réalisme humain. J'ai l'illusion de comprendre, et cela me suffit.'[73]

If Segalen's intermittent reflexivity registers a variety of attitudes towards the exotic subject, Soulié de Morant is concerned with how his writing can contribute to a totalising science of China. References to theatre and entertainment in China are dispersed among Segalen's works, whereas Soulié de Morant's *Essai sur la littérature chinoise* and *Théâtre et musique modernes en Chine* survey the history of Chinese literature, accompanied by an anthology of Chinese theatre accompanied by photographic illustrations and musical notes. Correctly ascribing the rise of theatre to the cultural influence of the conquering Mongolians,[74] Soulié de Morant also pays attention to the social transformation undergone by Chinese theatre as China enters the Republican period with emphasis on social equality and the evolving perception of

[73] Segalen, 'Briques et tuiles', *Œuvres*, I, p. 620.

[74] Soulié de Morant, 'Le théâtre et le roman du XIII au XVIIe siècles', *Essai sur la littérature chinoise* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1912), p. 233.

actors in Chinese society. But focusing on the complexity of social transformation also highlights his own importance to suggest he is among the selected few who can decipher the evolving cultural reality undergoing massive upheavals. 'Il n'est peut-être pas', he claims, 'dans tout l'Occident, dix personnes pour lesquelles les mots 'théâtre chinois' évoquent autre chose qu'un tourbillonnement de costumes étranges dans un tapage étourdissant de gongs et de cymbales'.[75] Nevertheless, this privilege cracks rather easily. In the section on costume and face-painting, Soulié de Morant uses his imagination to interpret the kinds of face-painting that unspecified interlocutors fail to explain to him, associating this practice with the face-painting of indigenous people in North America. To sweep objects of incomprehension under the carpet, the knowledgable vice-consul falls back to a confabulated past where blurry lines of distinction seem passable, resorting to 'le dernier vestige d'un temps où les Chinois se peignaient comme les Peaux-Rouges, à qui l'ethnographie les apparente'.[76]

Despite this, my intention is not to place Chen, Segalen, and Soulié de Morant on a scale of reliability or reformist evolution, because they are entrenched in different sets

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[75] Soulié de Morant, *Théâtre et musique modernes en Chine* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1926), p. XIII.

[76] Soulié de Morant, *Essai sur la littérature chinoise*, p. 239.

of ideological concerns. The presentation of Chinese culture is instrumental in the pursuit of their goals, so they can arrive at opposing conclusions on the same subject. Take passion, one of the central expressions of Chinese theatre, for example, Soulié de Morant construes amorous passion as the major drive of theatrical representation in China.[77] Convinced that French theatre excels in this regard, Chen denies that love occupies an important place in Chinese theatre and adds that 'l'amour tourmenté, tyrannisé, paraîtrait à nos yeux une exagération' and that a Chinese person 'ne comprendrait pas ce genre de supplice qui consiste à s'aimer ardemment et à ne pas se marier'.[78] In lieu of celebrating romantic love, Chen characterises industriousness as the true Chinese passion: 'nous concevons l'ardeur au travail et l'application comme des passions.'[79] Additionally, Chen identifies filial piety as the dominant theme in Chinese theatre and links this to the social mores of China.[80] These conflicting accounts reveal that when bodies of data concerning a cultural reality are being represented, their meaning are arbitrarily processed by the mediator who is making the

[77] Soulié de Morant, *Théâtre et musique modernes en Chine*, p. 32.

[78] Chen, *Le Théâtre des Chinois*, pp. 77-78.

[79] Chen, *Le Théâtre des Chinois*, p. 81.

[80] *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

enunciation for a specific purpose.

I have argued that Chen intends to provide a 'sanitised' vision of women performers. Chen's ethereal portrayal of 'femmes musiciennes' does not seem to hold ground if we consider Segalen's description. In 'Délices temporelles', Segalen reveals that theatres, restaurants, and brothels form a cluster that are not always easily distinguished: 'Du théâtre, dis-je, me voici au restaurant qui se confond d'ailleurs avec la Maison publique. (Il en est de trois classes.)'[81] The refined musicians in Chen's account become 'Mesdames les prostituées' in Segalen's reference to singing entertainers at dinner parties.[82] Probably one of the party's guests, Segalen evokes an image in stark contrast to Chen's ethereal artists. In the lively, smelly chaos of the restaurant, the accompanying prostitutes bulge with layers of elaborate clothes that seem to put a wet blanket on philandering titillations:

> Celles-ci, car la Maison est de premier ordre, viennent de Sou-tchéou, d'où viennent, il faut le croire, les plus jolies femmes de Chine. Elles sont toutes rondes et dans leur vêtements tout boudinées de manches, de pantalons. Le mieux qui puisse arriver est qu'elles revêtent un assez long vêtement flottant, noir ou bleu clair ou blanc—Peau jolie à l'œil, ingrate au toucher, reste malgré tout, terreuse—sous la tunique, nues en

[81] Segalen, *Œuvres*, I, pp. 639-641.

[82] The same way of addressing prostitutes appears in the passage on Japanese theatre. See Segalen, *Œuvres*, I, p. 624, 640.

été, ainsi que prononça Bourget. Mais vêtues ainsi que d'un engin défensif, d'une terrible et bien déplaisante ceinture d'étoffe roulée qui protège et ravale tout désir. […]

On mange. Elles ne mangent pas mais vous servent si elles daignent et boivent. Elles ne prennent point place à table, mais au besoin sur vos genoux. Elles sont lourdes, charnues, denses et dures. Remuantes, et craignent les mouvement vifs. — Entre elles, elles parlent le saccadé langage de Chang-hai. Et elles chantent, accompagnées d'une guitare mâle, ou bien aussi d'un tambourin et d'une claquette qu'elles manient elles-mêmes…[83]

The spirituality lauded by Chen is substituted by the prostitutes' very physical presence pressing on the guest's knees. Munching and drinking, the guest experiences the very material sensations of their bodyweight, the texture of their clothes and flesh, and their song and speech.

In *René Leys* and *Thibet*, the language of defloration remains allegorical and implicit, but it becomes explicit in *Briques et tuiles*. Segalen remarks that many of the accompanying prostitutes are not 'cueillies'.[84] Further on, his comments on the difficulty of deflowering them in the given time and place leads to the finding that these prostitutes are actually sexually ambiguous:

Toutes ces vierges-là ne demandent qu'à le rester sans doute; et ce n'est,

[83] Segalen, *Œuvres*, I, p. 641.

[84] *Ibid.*

> ni l'heure ni le moment ni le lieu de déflorer quoi que ce soit. On y parle de tout, si ce n'est femmes. Ces mauvais lieux, ou lieux de plaisir, ces impures maisons, ces abris de l'orgie, ces repaires de tous les débords licencieux, sont, très au fond, des cavernes d'ennuis et l'école même de la plus indifférente chasteté.[85]

Here, sexual ambiguity seems to be the real curb to the possibility of defloration instead of bundles of clothes. Segalen seems to offer ironic disillusionment at the revelation that the lascivious playground is actually just a make-believe harem: encountering the prostitutes does not necessarily promise carnal pleasure in a heterosexual framework; instead, it can be imposing and implicitly homoerotic.

For Segalen, cross-dressing entertainers are fundamentally 'chaste' and 'indifferent' because they are excluded from the economy of heterosexual eroticism activated by their resemblance to women prostitutes. In *Équipée*, the conclusion drawn from an uncharitable depiction of Chinese women agrees with this indifferent chastity, given that ordinary Chinese woman is 'plus honteuse qu'une femelle de phoque putréfiée' and what remains the best of Chinese femininity can only be found in theatre:[86]

> Là, dans les pièces antiques, se revoyaient les longues jaquettes

[85] *Ibid.*

[86] Segalen, *Œuvres*, II, p. 58.

> onduleuses, les robes à franges sous les pieds, et toutes l'arabesque dessinée par un corps de femme dans les airs, comme l'idée et l'élastique imaginaire dans l'esprit…Seulement, au théâtre, dans les meilleurs théâtres, ces rôles étaient justement tenus par des hommes: de jeunes garçons…[87]

The femininity performed by cross-dressers outshines real women with the adornment of outfit and social rituals. On the one hand, these passages support the criticism of Segalen that his poetic and epistemological quest is marked by sexual drives commonly seen in colonial literature, which either feminises or objectifies the exotic land, men, and women. After all, among other symbolic significations China contains for Segalen, the country is 'comme un beau fruit mûr dont on palpe amoureusement la forme, notre marche lente mais certaine, contourne d'un sillage distant la globuleuse Chine dont je vais si goulûment presser le jus!' in the opening of *Briques et tuiles*.[88] On the other hand, it also makes one wonder how Segalen's intermittent self-awareness eventually reached a self-critical pole that other 'adventurers' rarely attained in turn-of-the-century French literature.

The French school of ethnography inherits a relativist thinking that Lévi-Strauss characterises as 'pensée ethnographique' from Diderot, Rousseau, and Montaigne,

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[87] Segalen, *Œuvres*, II, p. 59.

[88] Segalen, *Œuvres*, I, p. 477.

which is then picked up by Comte and Durkheim.[89] Here, ethnography is more than a methodology; it is a way of thinking, a *fait de pensée* addressing the relativity of mores.[90] In line with this, Tzvetan Todorov traces this tradition of cultural relativism in *Nous et les autres*, highlighting Montaigne's liberal vision of the formative advantage of travelling, since the traveller 'se tire une merveilleuse clarté, pour le jugement humain, de la fréquentation du monde'.[91] Montaigne also stresses the pleasure produced by variety and the various rationales behind cultural differences: 'La diversité des façons d'une nation à autre ne me touche que par le plaisir de la variété. Chaque usage a sa raison.'[92] In their depiction of gender relations, sexuality, and fun in the Chinese theatre and the neighbouring entertaining sector, what kinds of pleasure do Chen, Segalen, and Soulié de Morant find in variety? What kinds of portal into the Chinese world do they offer as they portray themselves either as an insider/outsider? If they can be fruitfully read as part of ethnography's prehistory, they also seem to decline,

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[89] Lévi-Strauss, 'La sociologie française' [1945] in Georges Gurvitch, ed., *La Sociologie au XXe siècle*, Vol. 2, *Les Études sociologiques dans les différentes pays* (Paris: PUF, 1947), p. 515. For the specificity of French ethnology as a 'French exception', see Debaene, *L'Adieu au voyage*, pp 86-94.

[90] Debaene, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

[91] Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres: La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1989), pp. 59-129.

[92] Montaigne, 'De l'institution des enfants' and 'De la vanité', cited in Todorov, p. 66.

in the sense of linguistics, the principles formulated by Montaigne with a slight modification: ‘chaque raison façonne son usage’. Shaped by distinct discursive situations, their writing on Chinese theatre creates a verbal conduit for scopic pleasure and a gateway to the decentring space of un-learning and transcultural self-fashioning. Their writing constitutes mini-theatres of cultural and political mediation by showing the manoeuvrable scale of translatability of the other's cultural reality. Teeming with inventive possibilities, spaces of (auto-)ethnography in their writing are politically charged and self-conscious at varying degrees.

In addition to ethnographic authority, another compelling perspective is the bilingualism inherent to writings of people such as Chen Jitong and Kikou Yamata (1897-1975). Their international background combines experiences of French, Chinese, and Japanese cultures. Born in Lyon, Yamata is the daughter of a Japanese consul and a French lady. As a Japanese-French *femme de lettres*, Yamata pursued a career analogous to that of Chen not only because of their entry into the Parisian literary circle but also because they realise modalities of linguistic power beyond the horizon of a given national language. Although Yamata falls outside the central concerns of this thesis, the very involvement of Chen and Yamata in French literature shows that the East Asian dimension of turn-of-the-century Francophonie is an exciting territory

relatively understudied in comparison to their Indochinese, West Indian, African, and Canadian counterparts, because it does not fall into the directly 'colonial' domain. How they move between French, Chinese, and Japanese accentuates issues of transculturality and translation, destabilising the binary concepts of native/foreign, central/periphery, and dominant/subaltern. In their works, these concepts are no longer mutually exclusive; rather, they function as valved passages or communicating vessels in which literary production runs like flows of ideas driven by pressures arising from their condition and circumstances whose impact covers the entire system of their bilingual subject-hood. Territoriality becomes flexible with them, and their self-fashioning involves a constant interplay of estrangement and belonging. Thus, as has been analysed above, Chen's assimilative practice that negotiates foreignness in an 'insider-oriented native medium' in *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes* puts self-translation and transcultural representation and ethics into proximity.[93] What happens when the domestication of a cultural other is carried out by a native of the source culture? In the bilingual or near-native command of a dominant language, how to productively conceive self and other to interpret the meaning of texts? Exploring spaces of ethnography, this chapter

[93] 'Insider-oriented native medium' is a term used by Tsu Jing to describe Lin Shu's practice in his translation/transliteration of *La Dame aux Camélias* into mandarin in the 1890s. See 'Bilingual Loyalty', in Tsu, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

signposts an opening for further investigation.

Chapter IV

Chinese Cruelty and the Fabrication of the Far-Eastern *Femme Fatale*

This chapter is concerned with tales written by French men about the voluptuous and fatal suffering of delicate and vulnerable men at the hands of a dominant woman in China. It works with the assumption that turn-of-the-century French fictions on the erotic life of Empress Dowager Cixi (1861-1908), a Manchu noblewoman who governed the late-Qing dynasty for almost five decades,[1] are informed by masochism, understood as a contemporary discursive formation which is apparent in the sexual dynamics of their plot. This understanding of masochism revolves around Chinese cruelty, a cliché more often referred to as *supplice chinois* in French. Both terms are based on the idea that China is a place where torture is universal, and the country secures the lead in terms of cruelty and sophistication in punishments.[2] *Supplice chinois* also retains a religious dimension that appeals to Catholic devotion, as torture,

[1] Following the end of the Exposition universelle (1900) on 12 November, the illustrated supplement of *Le Petit Journal* contains an illustration of the Chinese pavilion with a portrait of Empress Dowager Cixi on the upper right corner that stands for the leader of China, in lieu of Emperor Guangxu. This bespeaks the French perception that Cixi was the effective ruler of China. See 'Exposition de 1900: Pavillon de la Chine' in *Le Petit Journal. Supplément illustré*, No. 53 (25 November 1900), p. 373.

[2] See George Ryley Scott, *A History of Torture* (London: Bracken Books, 1994 [1940]), p. 102.

and execution as a public spectacle, bear resemblance to the Passion of Christ or the ecstasy of Saint Theresa.[3] It is also noteworthy that in the lead-up to the Boxer uprising in 1900, late-nineteenth-century China was rife with xenophobic violence against European missionaries and Chinese Christians. Incidents of martyrdom and Chinese massacre were commonly seen in the French press.[4] In light of this, the exhibition of *supplice chinois* not only inspires terror and indignation but also compassion and a peculiar sense of sensuality. A grisly spectacle that appears to justify imperialism in order to champion Western civilisation against the Orientals can also be a source of erotic satisfaction, as was explored later by Georges Bataille in his *L'Expérience intérieure* and *Les Larmes d'Éros*. Focusing on *T'seu-Hsi: Impératrice des Boxers* (1911) by George Soulié de Morant and *Les Amours d'une impératrice et d'un délicieux jeune homme* (1922) by Charles Pettit,[5] my reading draws on the significance of masochism in fin-de-siècle culture and aspects of twentieth-century theorisations of

[3] Antonio Dominiguez Leiva and Muriel Détri, ed., *Le Supplice oriental dans la littérature et les arts* (Paris: Les éditions du Murmure, 2005), p. iv.

[4] See, for example, 'Les Massacres en Chine (supplices)' in *Le Petit journal. Supplément illustré*, No. 56 (19 December 1891); 'Massacre d'un missionnaire, le Père Bertholet, et de deux de ses catéchumènes, par des Chinois fanatiques, à Tung-Kiang-Tcheou' in *L'Illustré Soleil du dimanche*, No. 26 (26 June 1898); 'Le Martyre du P. Victorin' in *Le Pèlerin*, No. 1163 (16 April 1899), and 'Massacre dans l'église de Moukden en Mandchourie' in *Le Petit journal. Supplément illustré*, No. 507 (5 August 1900).

[5] Evidently, Soulié de Morant and Pettit are far from the only Western authors who have written novels based on Cixi's life. For a survey on a host of predominantly Anglophone fictions on Cixi in the twentieth century, see Owen Aldridge, 'The Empress Dowager Cixi in Western Fiction: A Stereotype for the Far East?' in *Revue de littérature compaée*, 2001/1 (297), pp. 113-122.

masochism as a double-sided mechanism that affirms and subverts power structure.

IV-1 From Masochism to Chinese Cruelty: Discourses, Clichés, and Questions

The term *masochism* was coined by Richard von Krafft-Ebing, a Viennese doctor who published *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) to catalogue a host of pathologised sexual behaviours followed by copious case studies. He invents the term from the name of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, a poet and novelist whose life practice, and novella *Venus in Furs* (1870), provided examples for Krafft-Ebing to name this sexual behaviour. Notions of degeneracy and heredity play an important role in Krafft-Ebing's conception of masochism and perversion in general, showing that the theoretical construction of masochism is closely tied up with the medical and cultural discourses of nineteenth-century Europe. For instance, theories of degeneration such as the *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine* (1857) by Auguste Morel 'gained dominant status as a cultural theory of national decline in the following decades' especially in psychiatry and criminology with Cesare Lombroso.[6] Lying at the intersection of biology and social criticism, degeneration applies concepts

[6] Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 131. For the history of sexual perversion in France, see Vernon A. Rosario, *The Erotic Imagination: French Histories of Perversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

of biological devolution to social problems perceived as the society's decline. The publication of Charles Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1871) provoked thinking on the place of sexuality in human evolution, the development of social Darwinism, and the instigation of social regulation in Europe.[7] The ascension of medicine as a new voice of authority went hand in hand with this paradigm to advise public debates on sexuality, class, and race. With the emergence of sexology, medical discourse took the discussion of sexuality from the domain of morality and religion to that of social order and public hygiene. Establishing knowledge about sexual perversions through postulations in medicine and psychiatry was one of the corollaries of theorising degeneration.

The popularity of *Psychopathia Sexualis* testifies to what Rudi C. Bleys observes as 'a distinct debate on sexual matters' which 'became part of a wider project of social hygiene and the regulation of class, race and gender alike'.[8] Today, *Psychopathia Sexualis* retains its importance as a pioneering analytical enterprise to explore non-

[7] See Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-Male Sexual Behaviour outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination, 1750-1918* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 152-156. Noteworthy literature on Darwinian theory includes Michael Banton, *Racial Theories*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Patrick Tort, *La Pensée hiérarchique et l'évolution: les complexes discursifs* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1983). It is important to note that Darwin's mechanism of natural selection 'precipitated the conversion of the scientific community to evolutionism, but did not necessarily dictate the structure of the theory to be accepted' and remained an object of debate in Peter J. Bowler, *Theories of Human Evolution: A Century of Debate, 1844-1844* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 42. Residual respect for a purposeful and linear progress in evolution lent cachet to the once-discredited mechanism of the inheritance of acquired characters proposed by J. B. Lamarck in his *Philosophie zoologique* (1809) by Lamarck's followers and the neo-Lamarckians.

[8] Bleys, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

reproductive sexualities. Having found 'a firm place in scientific and popular vocabulary',[9] masochism also figures in several works by Sigmund Freud, such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), and 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924). Freud's point of departure has some overlap with Krafft-Ebing, particularly the assumption that sadism and masochism are the active and passive forms of the same tendency to derive pleasure from pain. However, Freud differs from Krafft-Ebing by basing his theory of sadism and masochism on the linguistic model of active, passive, and reflexive, while also probing into the individual's psychic condition to resolve the apparent contradiction in seeking pleasure through pain, the opposite to self-preservation. As Freud comes to develop the idea of a destructive instinct, it allows him to account for the ways in which sadism and masochism are two sides of one coin. In 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', Freud identifies sadism with the outward expression of 'the destructive instinct, the instinct for mastery, or the will to power'.[10] When the instinct stays inside the organism and

[9] John K. Noyes, *The Mastery of Submission: Invention of Masochism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 141.

[10] Sigmund Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey et al., 24 vols (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-74), XIX, p. 163.

finds no sadistic outlet, it becomes the 'libidinally bound' 'erotogenic masochism'.[11]

In his 1967 preface to the French translation of *Venus in Furs*, Gilles Deleuze works from the Freudian model to analyse actors in masochism in terms of family romance. But Deleuze shifts to a different model in his collaboration with Félix Guattari for *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'anti-Œdipe* (1972) and the subsequent volume *Mille plateaux* (1980). Their understanding of desire and sexuality is bolstered by a Marxian thesis that 'Tout fait machine' underlying their project of materialist psychiatry, more emblematically schizoanalysis.[12] This means that biomechanism and human psyche are not the sole variables in masochism, they are machines intersecting with other machines in the world that territorialises the expression of desires. So, the articulation of desire is structured and fashioned by culture and society as well as individuals. This is made possible by the concept of 'territorialisation' central to the anti-Œdipal project of Deleuze and Guattari, a 'hinge-term to connect Marx and Freud, to articulate the concept of libido and labour-power'.[13] Far from a wholesale rejection of Freud, Deleuze and Guattari seek to conjoin models of psychoanalysis and Marxism

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

[12] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'anti-Œdipe* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972), p. 10.

[13] Eugene W. Holland, 'Deterritorialising "Deterritorialisation": From the "Anti-Œdipus" to "A Thousand Plateaus"', *SubStance*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (66), Special Issue: Deleuze and Guattari (1991), p. 57.

in what they put forward as the programme of schizoanalysis. For Deleuze and Guattari, individual psychology (the so-called *machine désirante*) is inseparable from the larger framework of social (re-)production.[14] Forms of social organisation and production individuate desire and organise sexuality through the process of territorialisation,[15] whereas transgressive sexualities such as masochism 'deterritorialise desire by subverting the very social structures that negatively determined the sexual expression's form in the first place'.[16]

Carol Siegel highlights the usefulness of Deleuze and Guattari's framework since their vision of masochism as both socially determined and antisocial foregrounds male masochism's relationship with culture.[17] As one of the sites of cultural inscription, literature's representation of men's 'voluptuously endured suffering' at the hands of women plays out the affirmation and subversion of structures of control and oppression

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[14] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: l'anti-Œdipe*, p. 39.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[16] Carol Siegel, *Male Masochism: Modern Revisions of the Story of Love* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 18. Suzanne R. Stewart indicates that Deleuze's grounding of masochism in *Venus in Furs* rather than psychoanalytic discourse in *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch* already makes masochism 'an aesthetic or cultural event' in *Sublime Surrender: Male Masochism at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 3.

[17] Siegel, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

codified in the society.[18] In light of this, the masochist is not just a man plagued with disorder in his libidinal system, or a degenerate *tout court*; rather, he 'draws on stereotypes of violence and technologies of control in order to convert them into technologies of pleasure'.[19] Unlike Freud who claims that 'the suffering itself is what matters' for the masochist,[20] Deleuze sees the masochist as 'une victime qui cherche un bourreau, et qui a besoin de le former, de le persuader, et de faire alliance avec lui'.[21] Educating, persuading, and concluding an alliance seem more like properties of mastery that is being masked thanks to the pain acquired through masochism. What matters, indeed, is getting the 'right kind of person in the right kind of setting' to receive the desired blow, as pure submission fails to explain the power relations at work in masochistic acts. Masochist dynamics involve the transaction, translation, and transformation of positions of social and sexual hierarchy.

Although Deleuze, in *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, owes a considerable debt to Freud and links the masochist's alliance with the harsh mistress (Mother) with the violation of the son's resemblance to the Father,[22] the educational and transactional

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[18] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[19] Noyes, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[20] Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

[21] Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch: Le froid et le cruel* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), p. 20.

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

aspect of masochism resurfaces in the story of *equus eroticus* in *Mille plateaux*, which renews Deleuze's theorization of masochism in collaboration with Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari substitute the psychic struggle within family dynamics with 'un devenir-animal' in 'une question de forces' and 'une inversion des signes'.[23] *Equuus eroticus* consists of three roles, the horse, the master-tamer, and the mistress. Essentially, the masochist positions himself as the horse to undergo the process of taming, which Deleuze and Guattari unfold as the domination of man over the horse's instinct through transmission of forces. Occupying the horse's position, the masochist thus possesses the force transmitted by the horse and his own instinct. The mistress is there to carry out the conversion of forces and the inversion of signs in the masochistic layout in order to fulfill the immanence of desire, a mechanical vision of how desires and tensions arise to replace the Œdipal unconscious. Time and again, Deleuze and Guattari identify the masochist's body as the body without organs,[24] a radical conception of a virtual body 'exempt from any organisational or hierarchical formation and the instrumentality and alienation that follows' to counter the fully formed actual body susceptible to

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[23] Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. Mille plateaux* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1980), p. 193.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 188, 189, 191, and 204.

manipulation.[25] Conceived as such, the masoschistic man-horse metamorphosis becomes one of the instances in which myriad investments of human energy—cognitive and productive, physical and perceptual, desire and work—are unleashed from social, cultural, and political structures that might re-territorialise.[26]

Though Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of masochism is concerned with masochism less as a late-nineteenth century cultural product than as an example of body without organs to reformulate psychic life, their formulation of *equuus eroticus* is germane to the dynamics of the historical moment of the discursive formation of masochism, notably the age of high imperialism. The politicisation of sexual economy of their critique provides an efficacious tool of analysis.[27] Eric Hobsbawm describes the world at this time as being characterised by 'growing division of the globe into the strong and the weak, the "advanced" and the "backward"'.[28] The ownership of world territories fell into a number of empires including Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, and the US, whose political rule and economic exploitation induced regionally defined

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[25] Chloe Kolyri, 'The Body Wuthout Organs in Schizoanalysis', *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2020), p. 491.

[26] See Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 57 and Kolyri, *op. cit.*, p. 492.

[27] Chantelle Gray van Heerden, 'To Be Done with the Possible, To No Longer Possibilate: Considering the Masochist as the Figure of Exhaustion', *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2019), pp. 187.

[28] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1987), p. 59.

discourses that formed a kind of topography of ethnic or national character across the empires.[29] These discourses attributed effeminacy, a penchant for sodomy, or aggressiveness to various ethnic groups, so that the development of sexology intersects with imperial ethnography. Towards the late nineteenth century, geopolitical realities that support the metaphor of penetration into virgin land in discourses of exploration and conquest was on the wane, giving way to the empires' alarming awareness of their own limitations and looming threats, including the so-called 'tropicalisation' of Europeans, social degeneracy, and fears of reverse colonisation exemplified by the Yellow Peril. The sexual trope for exploration and conquest became 'entwined with a whole series of metaphors concerning the loss of control and of self in the erotics of exploration', giving rise to several (proto-)masochistic situations identified by John K. Noyes in literary texts of this period that vent social dissent and 'displace European fantasies of sexuality and violence onto exotic settings'.[30] This means that places faraway are suitable for the enactment of extreme things: exotic lands provide a safely remote stage for the projection of fantasies of domination, submission, violence, and

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[29] To counter the 'tropicalisation' of Europeans, what Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper term as the 'embourgeoisement of imperialism' in *Tensions of Empire* functioned as a response to codify the conduct of colonial agents. Evoked in Chapter I, this concept is also discussed in Bleys in *op. cit.*, p. 146.

[30] Noyes, *op. cit.*, p. 117. See Amber Jamilla Musser's analysis in *Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), pp. 42-57.

pleasure onto stereotypes of sexuality. Noyes's study of German literature and colonial history foregrounds the 'imperialist man', whose failed affirmation of power is sexualised as a form of subversion, while also pointing out the ambivalence of female chastisement in the colonial context, which is both masochistic and civilising.[31] This provides several methodological takeaways for the reading I intend to undertake in this chapter.

Certainly, this line of enquiry resorts to the psychopathology within racism and colonialism explored by Frantz Fanon in his *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Fanon describes white men's masochism as a derivative of white America's 'agressivité sadique vis-à-vis du Noir', the desire to punish the black man unnecessarily.[32] Masochism arises from the white unconscious in response to the guilt complex provoked by the contradiction between racism and liberal and democratic ideals. Thus, the white man justifies and valorises black aggression by having it turned on himself, reproducing the classic schema of masochism.[33] Fanon's psychic formulation of white male masochism hinges on two levels of sexual codification: first the sadistic abuse of the black, and secondly the oversexualisation of the black body. The black body

[31] Noyes, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

[32] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris : Seuil, 1952), p. 172.

[33] *Ibid*., p. 171.

incarnates genital power overwhelming moral restrictions and taboos and comes to be associated with regression to the primitive stage and Bacchic folly.[34] The question of how transferable this is presents us with a complex task for work on racialised representations in the Chinese context: if there is a persistent quest for the Negro 'made palatable in a certain way',[35] is there an analogous paradigm to account for the French fascination with Chinese cruelty? How is the mutilation of the yellow man sexualised by the yellow dominatrix? How does the discursive framework of masochism suggest ways of justifying the sexual cannibalism of the *femme fatale*?

In her analysis of the conflation of masochism and white masculinity, Amber Jamilla Musser shows that white masculine domination is couched in terms of masochism in discourses surrounding colonialism and patriarchy, in which the invention of a threat of domination (the butch or black man) or the focus on the white man's own woundedness within an economy of injury, serve to veil the power of the white masculine subject.[36] Highlighting Cixi's domination and sexual voracity very much invents a threatening economy of injury. The *supplice chinois* as the supreme

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[34] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

[35] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 176.

[36] See Musser, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-57.

technology of torture dovetails with this Chinese identity invented by the French mass culture. In the first section, I aim to call into question the ways in which *supplice chinois* has been read and, through the process of interpretation, reproduction, and adaptation, created in France as an essentialising cliché about China. Questions central to this include: How does the masochistic framework of representation recuperate *supplice chinois* as technologies of torture imbued with local colour? How does *supplice chinois* act as a symbol of violence and paradoxical pleasure that pivots on the masochistic ambivalence of the affirmation and subversion of power? In the second section, I am interested in how the fabrication of Chinese *femmes fatales* posits a male masochistic gaze, and how we can understand how Orientalism shapes the submission of a sexually ambivalent man to a sexually voracious dominatrix. It would miss the point to assume that every author encountered in this chapter is necessarily likely to be what Krafft-Ebing classifies as an 'ideal masochist', for whom 'the psychical perversion remains entirely within the spheres of imagination and fancy, and no attempt at realisation is made'.[37] The point is to assess the extent to which masochistic thinking, itself an object of fascination, underlies fictions about the Empress Dowager Cixi while making use of *supplice chinois* as an element of local colour to engage the reader in a masochistic

[37] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. by Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011 [1965]), p. 231.

appreciation of *femme fatale.*

IV-2 Beyond Octave Mirbeau: *supplice chinois* Made in France

'…tout est effrayant ici…l'amour, la maladie…la mort…et les fleurs!'

Octave Mirbeau, *Le Jardin des supplices*[38]

Created in 2003, *Chinese Torture/Supplice chinois: Turandot* is an online project that offers a fertile ground for academic research on *supplice chinois* as a trope in French culture. Along with some established wisdom about *Le Jardin des supplices* (1899) by Octave Mirbeau, the scholarship compiled in this website provides some basic assumptions that cannot be overlooked. First, we learn that nineteenth-century travel writing on China harbours an encyclopaedic ambition to encompass geographical, social, political, and cultural features of China while often marked by inaccuracy and bias.[39] Among several topics, legal penalties in China are often described in light of the travelling author's subjective interpretations, insofar as Claire Margat argues that *supplice chinois* does not originate in China; instead, it is a composite of fictional and

[38] Octave Mirbeau, *Le Jardin des supplices* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988 [1899]), p. 144.

[39] See Muriel Détrie, 'Le thème des "supplice chinois" dans les récits de voyage: document ou fiction?', (28 November 2006), *Dossiers spécialisés* in *Supplices chinois*. URL:http://turandot.chineselegalculture.org/Essay.php?ID=48 (accessed 19 March 2024).

real-world elements of horror invented in France.[40] By fiction, Margat does not solely mean prose narratives that have no base in reality but includes photographs whose commentary draws largely on literary clichés that predetermine scientific, ethnographic, and aesthetic interpretations with pretensions to objectivity. Identifying France as the country of origin of *supplice chinois* as a fin-de-siècle cliché that exerts a considerable influence until the twentieth century foregrounds the process of cultural construction and how popular interpretations of such constructions snowballed into something else. *Le Jardin des supplices* stands as a case in point.

Le Jardin des supplices begins with a conversation in lieu of carnage it is notorious for. In the 'Frontispiece', the conversation happens in a salon and revolves around the idea that manifestations of man's innate cruelty and murderous impulse are ubiquitous in modern society, a theme Mirbeau has already explored in 'L'École de l'assassinat' in *Contes cruels*. Both 'Frontispiece' and the short story use shooting games involving life-size figures in village fairs as an example to reveal that 'des simulacres de mort' and 'des parodies de massacres' are like wars that are legitimate outlets for man's

[40] Claire Margat, 'Le "supplice chinois" dans la littérature française: Du *Jardin des supplices* d'Octave Mirbeau aux *Larmes d'Eros* de Georges Bataille', *Supplice chinois* (September 2005). URL: http://turandot.chineselegalculture.org/Essay.php?ID=38 (accessed 19 March 2024).

murderous instincts.[41] Participants of the conversation contain a doctor, a philosopher, a naturalist, and a disfigured man, and the latter links the discussion on atrocities to a misogynistic opprobrium against women, hauling the audience's attention for his journey to the Far East. The narrator is outspoken in his fraud and debauchery since the official purpose for his voyage to Ceylon—conducting embryological research—is a fake pitch for government funds. Then, his infatuation with a young English lady brought up in Canton named Clara leads him to a pandemonium of torture and sexual horrors in the Torture Garden. To his anguish as an onlooking novice, the narrator watches Clara wallow in a series of sadistic excess in the Garden, where the suffering of male victims produces a spectacle for her to enjoy in his company. The intertwining subjects of killing, death, and love materialise in the narrator's journey and the Garden itself, as the dispatch of victims and the disposal of their bodies are woven into the maintenance and fertilisation of the garden's flora, whose lushness indicates a clockwork harmony of life and death. The story ends with Clara's paroxysmal convulsion, and after her recovery from a hysteric and at times deathly trance, she is ready to revisit the Garden again, with previous memories all effaced.

What does Mirbeau want to say through China? Does he really mean to depict the

[41] Octave Mirbeau, *Contes cruels*, eds. by Pierre Michel and Jean-François Nivet, 2 vols (Paris : Librairie Séguier, 1990), I, pp. 35. See also 'Divagations sur le meurtre' in *Contes cruels*, I, pp. 45-46.

Torture Garden as a metonymy of China, or is he using China as a vehicle for something else? What makes *Le Jardin des supplices* different from other novels written in the nineteenth century that involve *supplice chinois*?[42] Scholars seem to agree that the novel presents a China that is essentially allegorical in which the Garden, though located in Canton, is a hub of universal vice and horror regardless of nationality.[43] In particular, Pierre Glaudes holds that the dedication and 'Frontispiece' of the novel exempt its exoticism from the denigration of its apparent referent, China, as the prison of Canton is nothing but a displaced accusation of anti-Dreyfusard France.[44] Glaudes

[42] Notable examples include *Les Tribulations d'un Chinois en Chine* (1879) by Jules Verne, *Le Dragon impérial* (1869) by Judith Gautier, and 'L'Aventure de Tsë-i-la' (1884), a short story by Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, which are studied by Marco Modenesi in 'Rêves et cauchemars d'imagerie orientale: La Chine des romanciers à la fin du XIXe siècle', *Crise fin-de-siècle et tentation de l'exotisme*, ed. by Guy Ducrey and Jean-Marc Moura (Lille: Université Charles-de-Gaule-Lille 3, 2002), pp. 71-84. The representaiton of *supplice chinois* in these works does not figure in my discussion as they explore less the erotic dimension of torture while accentuating terror and violence.

[43] See Éleonore Reverzy, 'Du bon usage de l'allégorie: du *Jardin des supplices* à *Dingo*' in *Octave Mirbeau: Passions et anathèmes*, ed. by Laure Himy-Piéry and Gérard Poulouin (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 2007), pp. 249-257, and Pierre Glaudes, 'Entre diatribe et allégorisme satirique: l'affaire Dreyfus dans "Le Jardin des supplices" et "Le Journal d'une femme de chambre", *Studi francesi*, No. 185 (2018), pp. 206-215. DOI: https://journals.openedition.org/studifrancesi/12553 (accessed 24 January 2024). In the same vein, Richard Hibbitt reads Mirbeau's China alongside Thomas More's *Utopia* in terms of cultural hybridity in 'Anticolonial Exoticism in Octave Mirbeau's *Le Jardin des supplices*' in *French Decadence in a Global Context: Colonialism and Exoticism*, ed. by Julia Hartley, Wanrug Suwanwattana, and Jennifer Yee (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022), pp. 97-120.

[44] Glaudes, *op. cit.*, p. 207. Having signed the two petitions that requested the revision of the case of Alfred Dreyfus, Mirbeau actively participated in the collective actions that followed the publication of Zola's 'J'accuse'. See Alain Pagès, 'L'entrée en dreyfusisme d'Octave Mirbeau' , *Les Paradoxes d'Octave Mirbeau*, ed. by Marie-Bernard Bat, Pierre Glaudes, and Émilie Sermadiras (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), pp. 163-175.

shows one of Mirbeau's strategies is to make hate speech hateful. Just like Célestine, the protagonist in *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1900), who declares to be 'pour l'armée, pour la patrie, pour la religion et contre les juifs' to deliver Mirbeau's satire on the French conservatives,[45] 'ces pages de Meurtre et de Sang' are ironically dedicated to priests, soldiers, judges, and men who educate, guide, and govern men in *Le Jardin des supplices.* Mirbeau simulates the style and hostility of hate speech in some of the characters in *Le Jardin des supplices*, such as the banter of the cannibalistic explorer from Normandy rife with discrimination. This can be read as a departure from Mirbeau's previous antisemitic position exhibited in works including *Les Grimaces*.[46] From anti-antisemitic attack to universal cynicism, Mirbeau's China amounts to a 'laboratoire mental' in which the carving of human flesh is meant to uncover the macabre truth of humanity through literal means.[47]

Moreover, Gaultier Roux reminds us that even if Mirbeau's novel came to be associated with illustrated accounts of the *péril jaune* in public perception, Mirbeau

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[45] Mirbeau, *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (Paris : Gallimard, 1984 [1900]), p. 157.

[46] For more discussion on Mirbeau and antisemitic discourse, see Michaël Prazan, *L'Écriture génocidaire: l'Antisémitisme en style et en discours, de l'affaire Dreyfus au 11 septembre 2001* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2005), p. 124.

[47] Gaultier Roux, 'Au pays des supplices: caricature et paroxysme dans la Chine fantasmée d'Octave Mirbeau', *Quête littéraires* (10), p. 126. DOI: https://doi.org/10.31743/ql.11537 (accessed 5 March 2024).

remains against this kind of representation not because he sympathises with the Chinese, but because he despises the moral high ground on which any civilisation would lay claim.[48] For instance, in an article titled 'Sur un vase de Chine', Mirbeau's contemplation of an antiquitarian shop leads to his denigration of civilised Europeans. Mirbeau is amazed that what contemporary European craftsmen work hard to accomplish what has already been done by a 'Barbare' four centuries before. Ironically called the Barbaric, the Chinese are capable of 'admirables et déconcertantes transmutations de la matière' and their land was violated by 'les civilisés d'Europe à peau blanche'.[49] In sum, *supplice chinois* envisaged by Mirbeau presents a complex metaphor intent on the caricature of antisemitic France and modern society. The novel's success and renown played a significant role in spreading the theme, which was nevertheless subject to reductive reception and adaptations.

Among notable spin-offs that use *supplice chinois* as a sensational highlight are the theatre production at the Grand-Guignol (1922) and *Les Mohicans de Babel* (1926)

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[48] Roux, *op. cit.*, p. 124. On Mirbeau's critique of hypocrisy of civilization and society, see also Emmanuel Godo, 'Un roman coupable : *La Jardin des supplices* de Mirbeau' in *Le Mal dans l'imaginaire littéraire français (1850-1950)* ed. by Myriam Watthee-Delmotte and Metka Zupancic (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), pp. 221-232.

[49] Mirbeau, 'Sur un vase de Chine' (4 March 1901), *Le Journal*, p. 1.

by Gaston Leroux.[50] None of these works follow the inverted track of Mirbeau's social critique in the form of *supplice chinois*; instead, they emphasise violence and tropes conforming to exoticist conventions.[51] The Grand-Guignol, regarded as the theatre of horror *par excellence*, foregrounded explicit violence and terror that a resident doctor was engaged to treat spectators who fainted during the show. In its adaptation of Mirbeau's novel, *supplice chinois* turns from a source of sadistic pleasure into a retribution that destroys Clara through the Grand-Guignol's signature vocabulary that combines naturalism and melodrama.[52] The adaptation at the Grand-Guignol evinced the popularity of *supplice chinois* in French mass culture.

It is from this split between the tenor (the atrocities of antisemitic France and universal cruelty) and the vehicle (the Torture Garden in China) that emerges *supplice*

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[50] Pierre Giffard, a French journalist and writer, also makes passing references to scenes of torture evoked in Mirbeau's *Le Jardin des supplices* in his *La Guerre infernale: Grand roman d'aventures inédit*, 2 vols (Paris: Albert Méricant, 1908), II, p. 871, 897. More discussion on this title can be found in Chapter V.

[51] See Margat, 'Le "supplice chinois" : un imaginaire occidental', in *Le Supplice oriental dans la littérature et les arts*, ed. by Antonio Dominguez Leiva and Muriel Détrie (Paris: Les éditions du Murmure, 2005), p. 91.

[52] For a case study dedicated to the adaptation with its historical contexts, see Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *Grand-Guignol: the French Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), pp. 195-230, and Claire Margat's commentary that links the women's body in the poster of the Grand-Guignol performance with the hysteric opisthotonos in 'Le "supplice chinois": un imaginaire occidental' in *Le Mal dans l'imaginaire littéraire français (1850-1950)*, pp. 82-85.

chinois as a cliché conjoining violence and pleasure. Invoking *supplice chinois* as a cliché inevitably touches on the term's complex relationship with repetition and reproduction in modern material culture. The choice of *cliché* instead of other words possessing similar meanings such as stereptype or *lieu commun* follows the advice of Ruth Amossy and Anne Herschbert Pierrot. Amossy and Pierrot hold that cliché tends to dominate the domain of rhetoric, stylistics, and literary representation as a powerful device of verisimilitude, whereas stereotype comes to be associated more often with preconceptions of social identities in sociological discourses.[53] Given the nuanced differentiations among these terms, *supplice chinois* is symptomatic of the workings of cliché since its trajectory is very much parallel with the word's etymological development.

According to *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, the first acceptation of cliché comes from its origin in printing: 'Plaque reproduisant en relief une composition ou une image et pouvant server à plusieurs tirage'. With the invention of photogrpahy in the 1820s, cliché came to be associated with 'image, positive ou négative, obtenue au moyen d'un appareil photographique après développement de la pellicule'. Finally, the

[53]Ruth Amossy and Anne Herschberg Pierrot, *Stéréotypes et clichés* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011), p. 55-85. See also Jennifer Yee's distinction between cliché and type in *Cliché de la femme exotique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), pp. 67-73, and Ruth Amossy and Elisheva Rosen, *Les Discours du cliché*, (Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1982), p. 49.

reproducibility and destination for mass circulation inherent in printing and photography give rise to the figurative sense of cliché: 'lieu commun, expression rebattue'.[54] From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, *supplice chinois* has been written about as much as photographed and captioned in first-hand and second-hand references. Its career as a cliché overlaps with the very domains of mechanical production that lead to its deflation as a pejorative word.[55]

In 'Le "supplice chinois" dans la littérature française', Margat has already identified the 1910s as the key period in which the mass diffusion of photographs that document *lingchi*, a capital execution also known as 'slow process'. Publications such as *Opinions chinoises sur les Barbares d'Occident* (1909) by Ferdinand-Joseph Harfeld, *Dix ans au pays du dragon* (1910) by Jean-Jacques Matignon, and *Pékin qui s'en va* (1913) by Louis Carpeaux all contain photographic illustrations of capital executions in China that feed into the public perception of *supplice chinois*. Margat indicates that travel writers who have witnessed executions in China (or professed to have done so) in the 1910s mostly knew *Le Jardin des supplices*, but they tend to distance from Mirbeau's novel to distinguish their documentation from the polemic novelist's

[54] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, URL: https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9C2584 (accessed 6 May 2024).

[55] To write the history of cliché, one cannot evade from the process of 'reproduction dévalorissante' in Amossy and Rosen, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

fantasies unwarranted by eye testimony and photographic exactitude. For instance, Matignon desuades his reader from trusting Mirbeau as a viable guide to things Chinese, because

> Avec une prodigieuse fécondité, l'artiste a su broder sur une maigre trame de réalités, les fantaisies les plus extraordinaires, à la fois horribles et attrayantes, en des pages mirifiques où le plus pur et le plus délicat lyrisme se mêle au plus affreux et au plus brutal réalisme.[56]

Matignon tactfully combines a number of credentials to make his account convincing. His monograph distils from 'Dix ans' of stay in the mystified 'pays du dragon' undertaken by 'Médecin Major de l'Armée coloniale hors cadres Ex-Attaché à la Légation de France à Pékin', the professional title printed next to Matignon's name. Meanwhile, he is savvy in balancing the ostensible seriousness of his professional stature with a relaxed tone, as the chapter on Chinese capital execution is grouped under the heading 'Impressions de globe trotteur', promising both cosmopolitan acumen and the rigour of a man of science. Matignon did not say whether he observed *lingchi* himself, but his commentary of a series of photographs taken by a colleague emphasises precision by presenting a step-by-step rundown of the process in anatomical terms. One might suppose Matignon is the perfect candidate to report the scene of *supplice chinois*,

[56] Jean-Jacques Matignon, 'La Sanction pénale en Chine', *Dix ans au pays du dragon* (Paris: Maloine, 1910), p. 248.

if Mirbeau proves to be too flamboyant a storyteller as Matignon dismisses. But a look at the whole chapter reveals that Matignon has other fish to fry. Just like many ethnographers and anthropologists of his time committed to the denial of coevalness—a retrograding gaze that tends to place the Other backwards in the timeline whose present is occupied by the onlooking, evaluating, and in this case, European subject—[57] Matignon characterises China as 'un specimen unique au monde de paléontologie sociale' in the chapter's opening.[58] His overview of Chinese penal punishments does not lead to a condemnation of cruelty, nor does he burden himself with the call for civilisation. Rather, he concludes that a modified version of severe punishment is the golden mean between Chinese cruelty and 'notre humanistarisme pleurnichard et ridicule à l'égard des criminels' to intimidate culprits.[59]

Characterised by Michel Foucault as the age of 'sobriété punitive' in *Surveiller et punir*,[60] the nineteenth century saw a transition from publicly inflicting physical pain to an economy of suspended or deprived rights in Europe and America with regard to

[57] See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014 [1983]).

[58] Matignon, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 271.

[60] Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* in *Œuvres*, ed. by Frédéric Gros, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2015 [1975]), II, p. 275.

the administration of penalties.[61] *Supplice chinois* mirrors aspects of medieval torture of which Europe was gradually steering clear throughout the process of modernisation dominated by the state institutionalisation of justice. Its horror resides in the reversal of this rite of passage. It refuses to be a dead specimen but a horrifying fossil that disturbs the 'naturalised spatilised Time which gives meaning […] to the distribution of humanity in space'.[62] The military doctor's opinion on the enforcement of criminal penalty in France takes shape by way of a putatively objective account of *supplice chinois* reminiscent of Europe's medieval practices. Serving as an example that corroborates such an opinion, the *supplice chinois* according to Matignon seems to rely on the credits of his profession and photography if it is to persuade the reader at the expense of *Le Jardin des supplices.*

The last point I want to make in this section has to do with a range of engagements with *supplice chinois* in response to Mirbeau's legacy. From horror theatre and photo-illustrated travelogue to novels about Cixi I am about to analyse in the next section, these engagements hold varying positions vis-à-vis Mirbeau's novel. What they seem to share in common is a peculiar penchant for graphic storytelling. Particularly in travelogue and fiction, the construction of ethnographic authority involves references

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 271.

[62] Fabian, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

to photography and experiences of expatriation, a source of privilege that empowers the performance of knowledge. In *T'seu-Hsi*, George Soulié de Morant claims in a footnote that he has witnessed *lingchi* in China beneath the description of one of Cixi's favourite eunuchs who suffers the same penalty in the novel but was decapitated historically.[63] Soulié de Morant also acknowledges the photographs of *lingchi* taken by European expatriates to connect the passage to a wider network of witness and representation. Unlike Matignon who dismisses the credibility of Mirbeau's novel, Soulié de Morant makes use of both Mirbeau's legacy and the photographic diffusion of *supplice chinois* to increase the resonance of his novel.

Thus, it can be argued that *supplice chinois* imposed as something plausibly real by dint of photography. Photography, as Roland Barthes observes in *La Chambre claire*, has a 'co-natural' existence with its referent, namely the creature or thing that has stood before the camera lens. Unlike language or other signs of representation that can be freely mobilised by an author without the necessary and physical presence of the referent, photography has to have the referent being in front of the lens as a prerequisite of its production. Therefore, photography offers an indexical reflection of the real

[63] George Soulié de Morant, *T'seu-Hsi: Impératrice des Boxers* (Paris: Éditions You-feng, 1997 [1911]), p. 91.

through the compelling token of *ça-a-été*,[64] a proof of an existential connection between the paper image and its referent in the world before the age of Photoshop and smartphones. Apart from this phenomenological linkage, the changing status of photography as a form of archival evidence and work of art since its invention in the 1820s bears on its appeal to the real. In the second half of the nineteenth century, photography partook in what John Tagg calls a host of emerging 'techniques of surveillance' that foregrounds the discipline of the body through domains of expertise and institutions such as criminology, sanitation, psychiatry, the police, prisons, hospitals, and schools.[65] This means that institutional practices, social relations, and legislations play a part in charging photography with appeals to the real. In this sense, what makes *supplice chinois* frightening is not just the atrocity recorded by the photographs, but also bound up with the function and meaning of photography itself as a visual testimony validated by wide-ranging aspects of modern life.

The network of representation and circulation of *supplice chinois*, despite its internal contradiction with regard to fictional fantasy, constitutes the 'texte culturel

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[64] Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: Notes sur la photographie* (Paris : Gallimard, 1980), p. 120.

[65] John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Palgrave, 1988), pp. 4-6.

extérieur au récit' that guarantee the ostensible veracity.[66] What needs to be further explored is why the collage of fact and fiction so essential to the making of *supplice chinois* becomes a compelling local colour to evoke a feature reckoned to be distinctively Chinese. In Chapter II, I have discussed the use of local colour as a means of conveying distinct features of the object of representation to underline its identity as being culturally, geographically, and historically other than the community in which the work of art is created. Having shown that local colour is the open-sesame for exotic enchantment in theatre in Chapter II, I will demonstrate how *supplice chinois* provides novels on Cixi with local colour and technologies of torture to combine pain and pleasure.

IV-3 Towards a Sisterhood of *femmes fatales*: Clara, Cleopatra, and Cixi

The overarching argument of this section is that *T'seu-Hsi* and *Les Amours d'une impératrice et d'un délicieux jeune homme* assert a form of mastery through the performance of male weakness. This mastery involves the deployment of the *femme fatale* and *supplice chinois* to retell the story of Empress Dowager Cixi who epitomises Chinese cruelty. In these novels, though her victims and devotees are not European male, they fulfil the exotic displacement of fantasies of sex and violence acting as a

[66] Laurent Jenny, 'Structure et fonction du cliché', *Poétique* 12 (Paris: Le Seuil, 1972), p. 435.

buffer for immediate identitification. This is not to say reading these novels becomes purely a matter of regarding the pain of others, as crucial conditions for European male masochistic identification are salient despite the absence of European characters. As Mireille Dottin-Orsini points out, the *femme fatale* is 'femme *fatale-à-l'homme*' in fin-de-siècle misogyny.[67] From 1870 to 1914, figures of the *femme fatale* are legion in French literature 'sous une forme spécifiquement ou accessoirement orientale'.[68] It should also be noted that female sexuality is central to what Foucault calls the *scientia sexualis*, the epistemological quest for the truth about sex, which peaked in the second half of the nineteenth century and involved intimate exchange between literary and medical discourses. This intersection of literature and medicine, as Rachel Mesch indicates, was promoted 'through the voice of male authority', and it exerted significant influence on naturalism and decadence, two movements 'destined for a primarily male audience'.[69] Viewing the fictional Cixi as part of the sisterhood of the *femme fatale* very much reads *T'seu-Hsi* and *Les Amours d'une impératrice et d'un délicieux jeune*

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[67] Mireille Dottin-Orsini, *Cette femme qu'ils disent fatale: Textes et images de la misogynie fin-de-siècle* (Paris: Grasset, 1993), p. 17.

[68] Jennifer Yee, *Clichés de la femme exotique*, p. 180. See also Jennifer Yee, 'Colonial Virility and the Femme fatale: Scenes from the Battle of the Sexes in French Indochina', *French Studies, A Quarterly Review*, 54: 4, Oct. (2000), pp. 469-478.

[69] Rachel Mesch, *The Hysteric's Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle* (Nashville, TE: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), p. 6.

homme in terms of decadence that accentuates perversion and hysteria among other themes. The sexuality of women, 'un être ontologiquement malade',[70] inspires fantastical associations with pathology and vices to which Orientalism provides a mine of vocabulary. In light of these circumstances, the masochistic disposition to the manipulation and enjoyment of injury and pain can be read through fictions on Cixi portrayed as a *femme fatale*.

T'seu-Hsi tells the story of how the Manchu noblewoman navigates her way from the bottom of the hierarchy for concubines to its very top and takes control of state power. Set in a China plagued by decades of regional revolts and foreign encroachment on the empire's territory, the novel foregrounds both Ts'eu-Hi's will to power and lust. Soulié de Morant mixes court intrigue and the country's agonised responses to European invasion with lurid details about Ts'eu-Hsi's sexual life steeped in rumours and sensationalism. Two eunuchs known to be her favourites are central in serving her sexual interests. Newspaper passage, translated poems, and footnotes of eyewitness are incorporated into these novels to make the story verisimilar. To distinguish the fictional character from the historical figure, I use 'Ts'eu-hsi', Soulié de Mornat's spelling for the protagonist in the novel but not for the title *T'seu-Hsi*, and 'Tseu Hi' (Pettit's

[70] Dottin-Orsini, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

spelling) to distinguish these fictional characters from 'Cixi', the Pinyin spelling which I use to designate the historical Manchu noblewoman.

In the novel, it is speculated that the eunuch Ngan to-hai has an affair with his patron. The affair is presented as an unattainable love at first sight for Ngan. Ngan first encounters Ts'eu-hsi as a newly elected concubine to be examined for her physical wellness and virginity. Cast as a destitute married man, he undergoes castration to earn a living for his family. Carnal pleasure and affections are thus not unknown to him, paving way for 'les indiscrétions commises par Ngan to-hai et par Ts'eu-hsi' during the examination.[71] The minute description of how the young concubine takes off her clothes focuses on the exchange of looks between them. Ts'eu-hsi is content with her allure as Ngan is given to erotic ogles, 'lourds de désirs irréalisables'.[72] Being a eunuch sets no limit to Ngan's growing ambition. He grows from a facilitator of Ts'eu-hsi's promotion to her sex partner. To illustrate this progress, Soulié de Morant devises an episode of coercion drawing on the custom for the emperor to select the consort to spend the night with. Before bedtime, the emperor is presented with a host of tablets which indicate the name of consorts by a eunuch. The emperor flips the tablet of the

[71] Soulié de Morant, *T'seu-Hsi*, p. 80.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

consort if he desires her company. This task is carried out by the Head Eunuch in the novel. Soulié de Morant also points out that each eunuch keeps his resected genitals in preservatives as a kind of work visa.[73] So, to have the emperor flip Ts'eu-hsi's tablet, Ngan steals the head eunuch's visa and blackmails him into influencing the emperor's choice, promising that the visa will be returned the night when Ts'eu-hsi's tablet is flipped. Ts'eu-hsi gives birth to Emperor Xianfeng's only male heir, for which she is promoted to Imperial Consort, a rank second only to that of the empress.

During Ts'eu-hsi's first regency, sex becomes a means of fulfilling Ngan's own political ambition. To cavort with Ts'eu-hsi, he makes use of a self-devised strap-on dildo. The object is described as 'un appareil singulier où deux éperons, placés l'un au-dessus de l'autre, dressaient leurs formes plus que viriles, recouvertes d'une soie fine irritante comme de la chair'.[74] As Ts'eu-hsi reaches orgasm, the self-interested eunuch 'profitait de ces instants où il se croyait encore utile, pour renouveler la demande d'un emploi dans les provinces'.[75] Giving in, Ts'eu-hsi dispatches him to inspect coastal defence in Guangdong. The order is confirmed by the emperor grudgingly. The

[73] According to Matthew H. Sommer, Chinese eunuchs preserve their amputated genitals in order to be buried with them, hoping to be reincarnated as an intact male. See Sommer's *The Fox Spirit, the Stone Maiden, and Other Transgender Histories form Late Imperial China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024), p. 16.

[74] Soulié de Morant, *T'seu-Hsi*, p. 88.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

overjoyed eunuch embarked on an imperial barge to travel down the Great Canal that connects Beijing and southern provinces such as Suzhou, unaware of a messenger who has been secretly sent to a prefecture that Ngan will stop by to receive the prefect's salute. In all the pomp and pride of a court delegate, Ngan finds himself on the duck, greeted by an imperial decree that sentences him to death for violating the customs that forbid eunuchs to exit the palace. He is condemned to *lingchi*, a form of torture that involves slowly slicing the convicts's flesh over a period of time resulting in the convict's death.

In fact, these episodes makes several detours from Cixi's promotion and the real assignment Cixi gave to An that caused his death sentence. In *Artful Subversion*, Peng Ying-chen credits Cixi's ascension from a sixth-ranked consort to empress dowager within just nine years to 'clever tactics', which involved other sorts of conceits. Viewing that Xianfeng Emperor was an amateur painter and lover of theatrical performances, Cixi started practicing these arts soon after her entry to the court to attract the emperor's attention.[76] To dramatise the death of An de-hai, the historical figure on which Ngan to-hai is based, Soulié de Morant gives him a virilising prospect as an inspector of naval defence and cuts it short with the sentence of *lingchi*. The summer

[76] Peng Ying-chen, *Artful Subversion: Empress Dowager Cixi's Image Making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), p. 7.

of 1869 saw the preparation for the wedding of Tongzhi Emperor, Cixi's son. The commission for the fabrication of wedding gowns was given to imperial dressmakers in Suzhou, the renowned silk centre in southern China. Far from involving anything that has to do with ships and sea forts, the objective of An's errand was to supervise the dragon dress for the upcoming wedding in autumn.[77] Apparently, the historic mission seems 'less masculine' than inspecting coastal defence.

An travelled in grand style and attracted public attention. His trip infuriated high officials because it was deemed as a serious breach of the tradition that forbade eunuchs to leave the palace. An and the his company was arrested by the governor of Shandong. Cixi was cornered by an overwhelming number of grandees calling for An's decapitation, not *lingchi*, including Prince Gong, a younger brother of Emperor Xianfeng and other usually open-minded colleagues who had backed Cixi's measures for Westernisation. The governor of Shandong was bid to behead An on the spot and seek no further confirmation from the court. In a recent biography of Cixi, Chang Jung suggests that 'the grandees suspected he [An] had been having an affair with Cixi and wanted to cover up a scandal'.[78] If this is true, Cixi provoked disapproval for granting

[77] For an account of An's controversial errand that led to his death, see Chang Jung, *Empredss Dowager Cixi* (London: Vintage, 2014), pp. 103-107.

[78] Chang, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

her favourite eunuch too much privilege that was likely to spread assumptions about their love scandal.

Termed as the 'mort lente' in the novel,[79] *lingchi* involves a detailed description of the process that follows the incision of one part of Ngan's body to another, with a particular attention to the response of Ngan. We learn that opium is ministered to him prior to the torture, but pain sets in before the drug takes full effect. The scene culminates in the 'violence extreme qui se confond avec la volupté intense' in which the executed eunuch becomes 'transfiguré', 'une buée de beauté flottait autour de sa tête aux cheveux hérissés […] sa bouche s'entrouvrait dans un sourire ravi'.[80] The chapter ends with Ts'eu-hsi's reading of the report. She shakes her head silently and marks it with vermillion ink as a sign of imperial approval. Along with the footnote that mention the author's experience of eyewitness, the conclusion of the episode in an administrative act demonstrates that *supplice chinois* functions as a niche econmy of injury conflating violence and voluptuousness as the direct consequence of Ngan's intimate (yet ambitious) subjugation to Ts'eu-hsi. Such a uniquely Chinese way to die blurs the boundary between pain and ecstasy, channeling masochism through *supplice*

[79] Soulié de Morant, *T'seu-Hsi*, p. 90.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

chinois as a local colour in the same hue as the blood stain on the executioner's apron and the Empress Dowager's vermillion ink, used to approve the report of Ngan's execution in the novel.

In Chapter XI, Soulié de Morant describes that aging does not affect Ts'eu-hsi's beauty but has thwarted her sensitivity for novelty. Blasé about everything, she is snowed under boredom. One day, an idea dawns on Li Lien-ying, the successor to Ngan, to please Ts'eu-hsi in a grand new way. A young man is brought to Ts'eu-hsi's opium divan and he is offered some opium by the Empress Dowager herself. As the effect of opium sets in, Ts'eu-hsi lets her guest undress her while keeping an eye for the coordination of Li, who is standing by the drapery covering the couple engaged in sex. Suddenly, Li stabs the young man in the back, mingling the painful jerk with orgastic convulsion. The act sweeps Ts'eu-hsi away and is followed by a description of her swoon:

> Ts'eu-hsi, tordue de jouissance, enlace toujours le cadavre dont le sang chaude l'inonde; des ondes de volupté la secouent et la prient. Il lui semble que c'est son propre sang qui coule, que c'est elle-même qui meurt; l'horreur du trépas se mêle en elle à la merveilleuse certitude de vivre, mais de vivre une existence irréelle où la joie viendrait par larges effluves étourdissants qui feraient vibrer, jusque'à la douleur, tous les sens.[81]

[81] Soulié de Morant, *T'seu-Hsi*, pp. 159-160.

The chapter concludes with Ts'eu-hsi's newly acquired habit as her sexual life reaches a plateau after Li's introduction of sex-murder. The phrase 'il lui fallut recommencer' emphasises the cyclic nature of the sadism of Ts'eu-hsi, echoing with the Chinese servant's prediction of Clara's recovery from paroxysm and revisit to the Torture Garden in *Le Jardin des supplices*: 'Ce sera toujours à recommencer!'[82] Then, the impersonal pronoun 'on' is employed to describe the recurring passage of a golden-tasseled black carriage in the Capital. This is the vehicle whereby Li procures male paupers to supply Ts'eu-hsi's boudoir.

The sexual cannibalism of Ts'eu-hsi makes her akin to the Cleopatra in 'Une Nuit de Cléopâtre' (1838) by Théophile Gautier.[83] In the short story, Cleopatra is consumed by boredom and she grants a night of orgy to a young man named Meïamoun, a hunter who is desperately in love with her. He has swam through the vaulted channel whereby the water of Nile supplies Cleopatra's bath to access the palace secretly. Having had a night's worth of kingly luxury and possession of Cleopatra, Meïamoun drinks poison obediently and dies upon the return of Mark Anthony. The lover of the *femme fatale*, according to Mario Praz, 'is usually a youth, and maintains a passive attitude; he is

[82] Mirbeau, *Le Jardin des supplices*, p. 268.

[83] *Laus Veneris* (1866) by Swinburne also features sexual cannibalism.

obscure, and inferior either in condition or in physical exuberance to the woman'.[84] Meïamoun and male characters involved in sexual relationship with Ts'eu-hsi are not only subaltern but also ambivalent in terms of their gender characteristics. Meïamoun is cast as an decidedly androgynous figure, as he 'cachait sous cette molle apparence des nerfs d'acier et une force herculéenne; singulier privilège de certaines natures antiques de réunir la beauté de la femme à la force de l'homme'.[85] We only know that the first victim of Ts'eu-hsi is of 'forme robuste',[86] but the attribute is not so much a physiological information as an indicator of masculinity. A prey with a nice physique can hardly escape the position of passivity. Not to mention the eunuchs, whose sexual ambivalence results from castration rather than any symbolic suggestion. The rapprochement between Ts'eu-hsi and Cleopatra is also evident from the outset of the novel, wheren the palace is described as 'harem impérial',[87] a blatant contradiction with the cultural specificity of China of which Soulié de Morant tends to present himself as an expert, as has been shown in Chapters I and III.

In *T'seu-Hsi* and *Les Amours*, the performance of male weakness entails the

[84] Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. by Angus Davidson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951 [1930]), p. 205.

[85] Théophile Gautier, *Le Roman de la Momie suivi de Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* (Lausanne: Rencontre, 1968 [1838]), p. 244.

[86] Soulié de Morant, *T'seu-Hsi*, p. 157.

[87] *Ibid*., p. 15.

portrayal of vulnerable men as well as the manipulation of Cixi's physiological attributes to intensify masochistic dynamics. In the preface to his novel, Pettit writes that 'Tseu Hi est d'un tempérament ardent',[88] and legend has it that she sent for good-looking young men who end up disappearing mysteriously in the palace. Pettit starts his account of Tseu Hi's life at the height of her power, unlike Soulié de Morant who begins with her adolescence. Dreaming of the 'sanglant passé' that refers to both the Manchurian conquest of China and foreign invasions,[89] Tseu Hi is characterised as a 'surfemme' who constantly grapples with an untameable virile will.[90] This constitutes a lead-in for her affair with the 'delicious young man' named Cheng Sou, whom as Pettit claims, is a personification of her numerous ephemeral lovers. Cheng is a young scholar who composed a poem titled 'La chanson nocturne du phénix'. The poem depicts the solitude of a phoenix in search of its love.[91] Upon the recital of the Head Eunuch, Tseu Hi becomes infatuated with the poem and sends for the author. While

[88] Charles Pettit, *Les Amours d'une impératrice et d'un délicieux jeune homme* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1922), p. 10. For other references to Tseu Hi's ardour, see *Les Amours*, p. 30, 193, and 215.

[89] Pettit, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[90] Pettit, *op. cit.*, p. 29-30.

[91] In *René Leys*, the poetic letter titled 'Première Nuit' René claims to receive from Empress Dowager Long Yu also allegorises the desiring female subject as a phoenix. The difference of age and standing between the Empress Dowager and the European lad is thought of as the difference between a phoenix that has already lived a long life and is now having 'le fils de l'Aigle Étranger' in its loving maternal nest. See Segalen, *René Leys* in *Œuvres*, ed. by Christian Doumet, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2020), II, pp. 319-320.

waiting, Tseu Hi smokes opium and has a vision of her former life as a male warrior, acknowledging that 'l'âme d'un homme émigre dans un corps féminin'.[92] On the following dose, Tseu Hi has the Head Eunuch recite the poem again, whose last line 'Et la fleur Haï Tang, doux symbole d'amour, agite son calice palpitant, entrouvert par la brise parfumée du soir' enthrals her by the sexual allusion of the parting flower. Tempered with the poem's erotic suggestions, Tseu Hi's bellicosity spurs her on to romantic conquest.

Unlike Soulié de Morant who uses explicit violence to represent male subjugation, Pettit opts for a protracted path that allows the effeminate man some space to play the 'harsh mistress' to delay the sexual gratification and cannibalism of the *femme fatale*. To fetch Cheng, the Head Eunch disguises himself as an academician and convinces Cheng that the poem he submitted has been accused of plagiarism. Pretending to lend a hand to defend Cheng's honour, the impersonated academician brings Cheng to the palace to discuss his case with other colleagues. The Head Eunuch narcotises Cheng, puts him in a coffin, and transfers him to a pavilion surrounded by a lake. To attend her 'galant rendez-vous nocturne',[93] Tseu Hi disguises herself as a lady-in-waiting and

[92] Pettit, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[93] Pettit, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

finds Cheng half-awake in the pavilion. Their encounter is presented as a reversed Sleeping-Beauty moment: Tseu Hi, driven by impatience, presses her lips on Cheng's mouth, and the 'contact de feu' awakens him.[94] Believing that Tseu Hi saved his life, Cheng invites her to supper together instead of waiting on him. The gourmet meal was conceived as an impetus to stir up other sensual desires in the frugal scholar, but Tseu Hi's subterfuge stumbles on an austere type. Cheng vows to remain chaste before marrying a betrothed girl he has never seen, and he disagrees with her on how the poem about the solitary phenix should be read. Tseu Hi recites it in hopes of conveying her interest through its sexual innuendo, as she believes 'seul, un véritable amoureux peut composer de pareil vers'.[95] Yet, Cheng replies that he only imagines to be in love as part of the creative process. Cheng's refusal leads to a series of fruitless courting from Tseu Hi's part. Pettit does not reveal whether Cheng is aware of his captivity, as the novel focuses on Tseu Hi's desperate pursuit of the literary man vowing to remain chaste before an arranged marriage. Failing to draw Cheng closer to her, Tseu Hi finds herself in tears, refraining from the thought of shredding Cheng into pieces. Her outburst turns out to be a *tour de force* as Cheng finally offers her consolation as the first step toward their physical intimacy. As the emperor's death engenders struggles

[94] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

[95] Pettit, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

for power among nobles, Tseu Hi's situation is made precarious. Worrying that a carpet search backed by other lords within the palace would reveal her liaison with Cheng, she decides to kill him. She poisons Cheng's tea, regrets doing so, and fails to stop him from drinking it in time. Believing that his mistress has drunk the same tea and is about to die as well, Cheng declares his love for her and faints. He gets strangled by eunuchs and placed into the coffin which accommodated him previously. Before submerging the coffin into the lake, Tseu Hi prostrates herself to beg pardon for what she has done to him. Then, she plucks a flower from her diadem and throws it to the point from which the coffin sank. There is a sense in which Tseu Hi is positioned as a masochistic dominatrix, whose dressing down as a maid and unrequited pursuit seem to amount to detours that add flavour to her possession of Cheng Sou, whose destruction is delayed by means of a false superiority granted by Tseu Hi.

The conflation of sexual and murderous drives marks one of the central threads that binds turn-of-the-century French portrayals of Cixi with the *femme fatale*. Among the characteristics shared in common by Tseu Hi, Ts'eu-Hsi, and Clara is ardour, a kind of red-blooded vigour bordering on defeminisation and sexual excess. The ardour of Ts'eu-Hsi and Tseu Hi often leads to the demise of their lovers, whereas Clara's ardour is a transferrable vital energy for the narrator, who feels in his veins 'd'héroïques

ardeurs et des forces nouvelles' upon kissing Clara's hair as a reward for agreeing to watch the feeding of interns of the Torture Garden with her.[96] The spectacle of torture excites Clara, insofar as 'sa peau, si blanche, se colorait de rose ardent; ses yeux avaient un éclat noyé de joie sexuelle'.[97] In *T'seu-Hsi*, the protagonist's unchanging beauty is manifest through 'une même ardeur' that burns her body given to sensual pursuits.[98] Lastly, ardour appears as an adverb in the scene leading up to the stabbing of Ts'eu-Hsi's victim. Ts'eu-Hsi 'guette ardemment le coin du rideau où Li Lien-ring se tient dissimulé'.[99]

In Soulié de Morant's and Pettit's novels on the Empress Dowager, masochistic mastery resides in the manipulation of the *femme fatale*'s physioglogy and the performance of male weakness. The threats posed by the exotic female body affirm the structure of representation dominated by European male authors, whereas this enables a masochistic reading that controls and directs ways of subjugation. Male weakness is performed through forms of subjugation that symbolically reproduce the process of 'devenir-animal' essential in Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of masochism.[100]

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[96] Mirbeau, *Les Jardin des supplices*, p. 150.

[97] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[98] Soulié de Morant, *T'seu-Hsi*, p. 151.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[100] Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. Mille plateaux*, p. 193.

As is envisaged by Deleuze and Quattari, 'devenir-animal' anticipates liberation from the territorialisation of strucutres of power that does not impose a hierarchical order, but in these novels, 'devenir-animal' seems to reaffirm Praz's conclusion that 'a love of the exotic is usually an imaginative projection of a sexual desire'.[101] The apparent male subjugation bespeaks the control of symbolic association and distribution of pain and pleasure, making *supplice chinois* part of the masochistic armoury.

In these novels, male weakness entails castration and effeminacy, which facilitate the masochistic framework of a presumed female domination. However, it is worth noting that there are several cultural implications yet to be studied regarding the representation of eunuchs. The first involves how French writers respond to eunuchs' immersion in the state affairs of China and the practice of castration in its historical and technical contexts. It is not purely an invention of Soulié de Morant that eunuchs meddle in the political life of Chinese imperium. Periods such as the Tang dynasty (618-907) and the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) saw the prevalence of eunuchs exerting a massive control over the state. After the fall of the Ming, Manchu emperors throughout the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) imposed a greater curtailment on eunuchs' activities to prevent their interference.[102] *After Eunuchs* by Howard Chiang is one of

[101] Praz, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

[102] Howard Chiang, *After Eunuchs: Science, Medicine, and the Transformation of Sex in Modern China*

the most valuable studies in this field, and it will illuminate how these French novels are situated in relation to the historicity of eunuchism. The second implication questions the extent to which the repugnance inspired by eunuchs go hand in hand with a contemptuous Sinophobia, as Chiang indicates that 'the distaste for eunuchs and the antipathy for the Chinese imperium became isomorphic during the peak of Western overseas imperialism'.[103] How these novels contribute to the stereotype that views China as a 'castrated civilisation' and another 'Sick Man of Asia' next to the Ottoman empire through the reworked images of eunuchs as servants of the *femme fatale* calls for further investigation.

Steeped in the tradition of the *femme fatale* 'which united in itself all forms of seduction, all vices, and all delights', [104] these novels on Cixi bring into play the turn-of-the-century concerns with sexual perversion and erotic expression. This entails the pathologisation of female sexuality and deep-seated contradictions in the conception of femininity. She possesses both angelic beauty and demoniac evil; she is life-giving and murderous, irresistibly nubile and subversively virile. She enjoys vital energy while remaining subject to symptoms conceived by the medical and literary discourses that

(New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 1.

[103] Chiang, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[104] Praz, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

imagine the female body to be intrinsically infirm. In the paragraph preceding Li's stabbing, the description of Ts'eu-hsi's orgasm makes a direct reference to one of the emblematic hysteric manifestations, associating her sexuality with Clara's, a sexuality pathologised in terms of hysteric attacks in *Le Jardin des supplices.*[105] 'La tête de Ts'eu-hsi se renverse enfin dans une crispation qui la tend comme un *arc* [my italics]'.[106] The arch refers to opisthotonus, a form of spastic contraction in which the head, neck and spine are arched backwards and regarded as 'the hysteric's classic posture'.[107] This linkage makes a statement in the 'Frontispiece' of *Le Jardin des supplices* resounding, as it involves men's ambivalence towards femininity:

> Dégénérescence, névrose, neurasthénie…parbleu !...la femme n'est pas plus que l'homme, refractaire aux maladies psychiques…bien que, chez elle, ces maladies prennent une forme charmante et touchante, qui nous fait mieux comprendre la délicatesse de son exquise sensibilité.[108]

If one is to organise a congress for the sisterhood of *femmes fatales*, it is hard to determine the ideal venue, as the salon, the boudoir, exotic palace, and hospital ward all fit pretty well. Despite these points in common that make Cleopatra, Clara, and Cixi seem to be repeating the same thing, that is, the demonised female sexuality associated

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[105] See Margat, 'Le supplice chinois: un imaginaire occidental', pp. 84-85.

[106] Soulié de Morant, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

[107] Howard W. Telson, 'Une Leçon du Docteur Charcot à la Salpêtrière', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (January 1980), p. 58.

[108] Mirbeau, *Le Jardin des supplices*, pp. 59-60.

with varying degrees of exotic allure, fictions on Cixi display a number of noteworthy features. Their masochistic imagination explores the dangers and pleasures of unbridled female sexuality contrasted by forms of male weakness, marrying the demonic force of the *femme fatale* with horrors of *supplice chinois* for ultimate titillation. Orientalism plays an instrumental role in what is already prevalent in decadent literature, given that works such as *La Marquise de Sade* (1887) by Rachilde highlights the cruelty of Mary Barbe, the protagonist whose pleasure involves the haemorrhage of one of her male devotees, Paul Richard.[109] Indeed, Soulié de Morant and Pettit orientalise the 'complexe mythique de la femme-mort-mal' in the cultural tradition of the West,[110] whilst the masochistic framework of representation may turn the compound into 'la femme-mort-malade' and make it clear that threats of pathologised femininity are the source of pleasure for a male malady and means of mastery. Apart from the indirect mastery of male masochism, cultural authority also constitutes the mastery that mediates the other through the performance of ostensibly cultural-specific knowledge. Soulié de Morant and Pettit conflate the realm of the real and pseudo-real by liaising with photographic accounts of *supplice chinois*. They also embrace the fantasmatic

[109] Rachilde, *La Marquise de Sade* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996 [1887]), p. 268, 287.

[110] Anne-Laure Bucher, 'Malédiction de la féminité' in *Le Mal dans l'imaginaire littéraire français (1850-1950)*, ed. by Watthee-Delmotte and Zupancic, p. 177.

legacy of Mirbeau's novel which certain travel writers oppose with their claims of a higher degree of veracity. Last but not the least, their novels converge the late nineteenth-century cultural and scientific fascination with sexual perversion and *supplice chinois*, perpetuating myths revolving around the *femme fatale* and China. Foregrounding the injury of male bodies and pathologised female bodies full of menace, these novels practice an exoticism that seems to agree with Hélène Cixous's ironic observation on the other's body: 'il ne faut pas que le *corps* de l'étrange disparaisse, mais il faut que sa force soit domptée, qu'elle revienne au maître'.[111] The comeback of the *femme fatale* cannot be once for all.

[111] Hélène Cixous, *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* (Paris: Galilée, 2010), p. 85.

Chapter V

Writing the Yellow Peril: Confronting China in Gobineau's Works and Novels on Future War

'Vous ne percevez donc pas les grondements précurseurs de l'orage qui se forme là-bas en Extrême-Orient?'

Capitaine Danrit[1]

Readers of the twenty-first century can look at the Yellow Peril, as if it were a piece in a museum showcase, and learn from Jeffrey Crean's classification that the Yellow Peril has four forms: cultural, demographic, economic, and strategic.[2] Cultural fears see Chinese culture as outlandish and menacing, exemplified by clichés about Chinese cruelty. Demographic fear arises in encounters of diasporic immigrants from China, which partially stimulated the economic fear, as Chinese workers intensified competition with their white counterparts by wage-dumping and high productivity. Other aspects of economic fear also included trade imbalances caused by the influx of low-price goods from China into Europe's domestic market. The strategic fear was

[1] Capitaine Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune*. *La Mobilisation sino-japonaise* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979 [1905]), p. 59.

[2] Jeffrey Crean, *The Fear of Chinese Power: An International History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), p. 2. Crean's study straddles the period between the 1880s and 2022, offering an excellent overview with an emphasis on Anglo-American sources.

rooted in the projection of the military power of China, potentially joined by Japan which was, in the late nineteenth century, viewed as its potential ally.

However, in Belle Époque France, the distinction between varieties of the Yellow Peril was never so neat; it was a messy mishmash of collective memory, racial thinking, and anxiety. The Yellow Peril recalls the invasions of Attila the Hun and the Mongols in the fifth century and the thirteenth century respectively. As China and Japan came to be viewed as rising nations of the yellow race, they were feared as modern avatars of what Edward Gibbon had called the 'shepherds of the North', invading barbarians that constituted one of the causes of the fall of the Roman empire.[3] The boundaries between these fears were blurry, and they often interact and intertwine with each other, drawing on both literary and non-literary sources such as journalism and pamphlets written by strategists.

Such is the case of Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) and less well-known authors of novels on future warfare published from the 1880s to the First World War, including Pierre Giffard (1853-1922), Émile-Cyprien Driant (1855-1916) who wrote under the pseudonym of Capitaine Danrit, Maurice Spronck (1861-1921), and Henri de

[3] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols (New York: Everyman's Library, 1993), III, p. 29.

Noussanne (1865-1936) among many others. A French aristocrat and diplomat with extensive literary aspirations, Gobineau based his theory of racial determination on an overview of the history of human civilisations in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, a four-volume essay published from 1853 to 1855. As we will see in this chapter, the representation of the Yellow Peril is largely influenced by these authors' other professions, ranging from journalism (Giffard, Spronck, and de Noussanne), right-wing statesmen (Spronck and Danrit), and the military (Danrit). In their work, various *dimensions* of yellow peril fear serve as ingredients that can be mixed and matched together to inflate fears of imminent destruction. Like other tales of future wars produced in the Belle Époque, the representation of the Yellow Peril is characterised by a 'mixité discursive'.[4]

For Gobineau, China figures as one of the living examples of the immutability of racial characteristics and a hotbed of menace to Western civilisation, and such expositions often lead to a pessimistic conclusion that nothing can be done to prevent the Yellow Peril. Later yellow perilist fictions espouse the same belief that China and Japan pose an imminent threat to the West, but the conclusions they draw from such a

[4] Matthieu Letourneux, '"Quand arrivera la guerre de demain—Bientôt, je veux l'espérer": Récits de guerre future, généricité et discours social', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3-4 (Spring-Summer 2015), p. 231.

belief take the opposite direction. They support imperialism. They often start with a portrayal of horrible hordes that throw Europe into an existential crisis and conclude with a reaffirmation of imperialist activities. The underpinnings for such reaffirmation include the Eurocentric world order and belief in technological progress, but these are not entirely positive. Fears about populational decline and social 'devirilisation' are reflected in these fictions' self-admonition as a kind of inconvenient truth they want society to face. Less widely recognised is one form of representation of leaders of the Yellow Peril that reverses the Orientalist stereotype that renders East Asian men as effeminate, for which the crossdressing actors of Beijing opera was the example discussed in Chapter I. Leaders of the Yellow Peril are instead given a virile depiction, along with other attributes that assimilate them into the norms of white masculinity, so that they appear convincingly perilous. This is concomitant with the devirilisation of France as a decadent nation debilitated by pacifism and excessive consumerism. In analysing how these representations of the Yellow Peril participate in the prophecy of 'the next great war' as well as popular genres such as *littérature d'anticipation* and the *roman d'aventures*. My reading reconciles Gobineau's pessimism and the endorsement of imperialism found in yellow perilist fictions by suggesting that they share an underlying romantic attachment to the self-transcending glories of war in this chapter.

Exploring the contrast between Gobineau's pessimism and the imperialist sympathies of yellow perilist novels, I want to argue that manifestations of the Yellow Peril in Belle Époque French fictions forecasting the 'next great war' deploy rituals of truth about the Yellow Race to rally support for a war culture mobilised by racialised symbols. They deploy what I call a poetics of displacement that legitimises and delegitimises various visions of world order by relocating opponents of inter-European competition from within the club of white empires to the Far East. Contemporary upheavals in the Far East provide a propitious backdrop for the literary and visual rehearsals of an apocalyptic war. To support this claim and examine how racialised symbols are mobilised, I revisit moments of the Western history of racial thinking that gave rise to the notion of Yellow Peril, with special attention to the writing of Gobineau, dubbed by Lévi-Strauss as 'le père des théories racistes' in the first part of this section.[5] In the second part, I examine the representation of the Yellow Peril in Gobineau's literary work and novels prophesying future wars. Starting from what lies under their apparent contradiction regarding empire-building, I propose ways to reconcile it through the identification with the conventions of Belle Époque fiction on future wars. Finally, I look at how the redistribution of masculinity across racial lines differs from

[5] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race et histoire* (Paris : Folio essais, 1987 [1952]), p. 10.

clichés of yellow perilist fiction. The poetics of displacement reveals how Orientalist conceptions about China dislodge Germany or Britain from the crosshairs of classic French Revanchist conjecture by invoking an external foe that justifies a 'stronger together' reaffirmation of Euro-American imperialism. The forecast of wars-to-come follows aspects of Revanchism while also engaging racial thinking and the education of masculinity for an imperialist relaunch. Whereas Gobineau's relevance to our century is largely understood in terms of his seminal influence to the history of European racism,[6] the relationship between his representation of the Yellow Peril and war fictions that confront the Yellow Peril calls for critical attention. How these texts reflect or contribute to the ideological production of ideas about race and imperialism, and how they might, in varying degrees and in hindsight, enact a dialogue over mankind's ability to reshape it, deserves much attention.[7]

V-1 A Peril that is Yellow: Encoding Racial Thinking

For a topic as vast as the Yellow Peril, my study cannot certainly overshoot the mark by aiming at providing a comprehensive survey of its history and contemporary

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[6] Michael Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970), p. 4.

[7] John Rieder's study on how early English-language science fiction engages the history and discourses of colonialism provides valuable guidance for this avenue of thought. See his *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).

ramifications kindled by the Covid pandemic and China-US tensions. The adequate scope for this chapter is to delineate the historic moments characterised by nineteenth-century anthropology and Western fears of China and Japan on the rise in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century that proliferated fictions about the Yellow Peril as a menace to Western civilisation. Existing scholarship has done an excellent job in historicising Western racial thinking in which colour terms came to define the layout of human 'race' and managed to persist in modern approaches to human difference. One of the best works on yellowness in racial thinking is Michael Keevak's *Becoming Yellow*. Keevak begins his account by revealing that early modern Europeans often describe the Chinese as 'white', an evaluative term indicating their appreciation of Chinese wealth and cultural refinement.[8] Soon enough when the Europeans accumulated experiences with East Asians, this vision altered by starting to gain internal nuances based on region, gender, and class. Yellow was just among a plethora of possibilities of how East Asian skin colour could be called.[9] Keevak contends that instead of coming from eye-witness description in travel texts, the idea of Chinese as yellow comes from the construction of race and the desire of scientists in

[8] Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 23-43.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries to map the world on which a tableau of human taxonomy is painted.[10] Keevak argues that it is during this period that peoples across the globe started to get lumped together by taxonomists according to continents and geographic regions first and assigned with sets of characteristics including colour. The biological taxonomy of Carl Linnaeus (1797-1778) and the classification of man by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840) created building blocks for Western science to construct knowledge about life science. Meanwhile, racial categories of white, black, yellow, and red assigned to various continents on earth came to shape the Western conception of human varieties, which privileged the white as the measure for observation and evaluation. What makes the Yellow Peril 'yellow', in effect, testifies to the history of Western taxonomy, medicine, anthropology, and racial thinking, as it involves how the Europeans (and later the Americans) view and describe nations and cultures other to their own, and more particularly, how skin colours came to constitute the criteria for determining racial variety and hierarchising different kinds of people.

Keevak underlines that colour coding in racial thinking comes after the idea of dividing the world into races, and it becomes a myth that is hard to dislodge from the

[10] Keevak, *Becoming Yellow*, pp. 44-70.

conception of human differences.[11] This view agrees with Nicholas Hudson's surmise that eighteenth-century scientific literature exemplified by the work of Linnaeus, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788), and Blumenbach 'converted the scattered misconceptions and antagonisms of traders and travellers into coherent systems'.[12] The formation of racial science is crucial in investing 'racism' with a sense of objectivity and conviction in the inferiority of visibly different groups. The use of 'race' as a scientific term testified to the interest and willingness to subject mankind to the kind of study and categorisation previously used for animals and plants. In removing humanity from the isolated top of the *scala naturae*, Buffon 'first made systematic use of the term "race"' to denominate human varieties and elevated the term to a new biological nomenclature.[13]

As race denotes the family bloodline of animals, the term's 'bestial connotation' agrees with Buffon's presentation of Africans as being 'degenerated' as a result of harsh environments and with the notion of social upper crust that form the opposite of

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[11] Keevak, *When Did East Asians Become Yellow ?* (Yellow Peril Redux: From Coolies to Concentration Camps, Trade Wars and Coronavirus Project, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 14 April 2023) [online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXTKeVYhsYE, accessed 31 August 2024].

[12] Nicholas Hudson, 'From "Nation" to "Race": The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 247-264..

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 253.

hierarchy.[14] For instance, *Systema naturae* first published in 1735 by Linnaeus made a pioneering attempt to systematise the world and placed human at the top of the animal kingdom. In the genus *Homo*, man was subdivided into four varieties, 'each of which was assigned both a geographical designation as well as a colour in a progression from white to black: "Europaeus albesc. / Americanus rubesc. / Asiaticus fuscus. / Africanus nigr."'.[15] In 1795, Blumenbach put forward a schema that divided mankind into five races, namely the Caucasians, Mongolians, Ethiopians, Americans, and Malays in his *De generis humani varietate nativa*. For him, yellow seems to belong to one of the chromatic manifestations of human 'racial varieties', which is '*olive tinge*, a sort of colour half-way between grains of wheat and cooked oranges, or the dry and exsiccated rind of lemons: very usual in the Mongolian nations'.[16] This betokens 'a long descriptive and taxonomic tradition' that uses a host of colour terms to designate vague notions about peoples of Asia.[17]

In the nineteenth century, the new field of physical anthropology sought to determine racial varieties in terms of quantitative anatomy and physiological features

[14] Hudson, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-254.

[15] Keevak, *Becoming Yellow*, p. 49.

[16] Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *The Anthropological Treaties of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, trans. and ed. by Thomas Bendyshe (London: Anthropological Society of London, 1865), p. 209.

[17] Keevak, *Becoming Yellow*, p. 71.

including skin colour. Matching people's skin colour with colour chips derived from black, white, yellow, and red, the four putative elements constitutive of human races became an object of scientific fascination and field practice that went well into the twentieth century. Complaining that perceiving and evoking nuances of skin colours tends to fall prey to figurative speech, French physician Paul Broca (1824-1880) provided what he calls a 'tableau chromatique' in his *Instructions générales pour les recherches et observations anthropologiques* (1865) to establish a standardised measuring criteria believed to be precise and objective.[18] In the table, colour chips and eye samples are labelled and arranged in colour gradients progressing from light to dark, just like the shop presentation of make-up powders designed to be held up to the skin to find the closest match.[19] These instances show that articulating racial differences through colour terms is a product of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific, medical, and anthropological discourses that divide mankind into racial categories.

Occupying an intermediate space between the dichotomy of black and white,

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[18] Paul Broca, *Instructions générales pour les recherches et observations anthropologiques* (Paris: Victor Masson, 1865). p. 4, 137. A second revised edition appeared in 1879, and the 'Tableau chromatique de la couleur des yeux et de la peau et du système pileux' spread through three pages to fit with the pocket size of the book that facilitated onsite measurement as its newly added subtitle 'à faire sur le vivant' suggests. See Keevak, *Becoming Yellow*, p. 85 and Broca, *Instructions générales pour les recherches et observations anthropologiques*, 2nd ed. (Paris: G. Masson, 1879).

[19] Keevak explores how nineteenth-century anthropology used measurements of skin colours to identify yellowness in East Asians in *Becoming Yellow*, pp. 71-101.

'yellow' came to be seen as an accepted fact of East Asian physiognomy, even if colour terms used to describe the degree of darkness and specify the hue still varied. The 'yellow race' merged with the technical category 'Mongolian', from which was derived 'Mongolism', a term that used to denominate the mental deficiency and physical characteristics of children born with Down's Syndrome form the 1860s to mid-twentieth century.[20] In Western perception, the yellow body denotes at times sallow colour, sickness, and aptitude for physical labour and practical calculation. Although non-white characteristics detected on white-born children caused internal debate amongst practitioners on the validity of racial differences,[21] this did not upset the notion of racial hierarchy and signs of deficiency and degeneracy identified with non-white races.

Racial hierarchy is one of the fundamental concepts of Gobineau's *Essai.*

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[20] The term 'Mongolism', which used to be synonymous to Down's Syndrome, was identified by Dr John Langdon Down (1828-1896) in his 'Observations on an Ethnic Classification of Idiots' (1866). This association of delayed development with racial characteristics consolidated in the twentieth century, insofar as behaviours of English-born 'Mongolian imbeciles' were mapped onto that of the chimpanzee, the posture of Buddha, and 'the symbolic act of humiliation practiced by the Chinese race in F. G. Crookshank, *The Mongol in Our Midst: A Study of Man and His Three Faces* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1923), p. 28, 43-44. Mongolism was shown to be caused by genetic disorder in 1959, and the World Health Organisation substituted the term with 'Down's Syndrome' on the request of the Mongolian People's Republic a few years later. See P. M. Dunn, 'Dr Langdon Down (1828-1896) and "mongolism"', *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, No. 66 (1991), p. 828.

[21] Footnote 2 in Dunn, *op. cit*., p. 828.

Gobineau stipulates that human races are different from one another, and they are placed in a hierarchy of value and talents, on the top of which sits the Aryan race. Only the Aryans can author civilisation, so their migration and miscegenation with other races are responsible for the development of various civilisations. The rise and fall of nations are understood in terms of the concoction of bloods, whose purity determines the persistence of the race/culture in question. Thus, the interplay of unequal races is essential to explaining social and political changes. For instance, Gobineau believes that China was civilised by an Aryan tribe immigrated from India and the giant in Chinese mythology is one of the chiefs or the personification 'd'un peuple blanc venant opérer en Chine, dans le Ho-nan, les mêmes merveilles qu'un rameau également hindou avait, antérieurement, préparées dans la vallée supérieure du Nil'.[22] The white race, as Gobineau affirms, were 'auteur premier de la civilisation chinoise'.[23]

For Gobineau, the point of establishing a racial hierarchy is not just to use it as a scale to classify civilisations, but to make sense of the modern world whose socio-political dynamics are viewed in terms of decadence. Gobineau assigns a central role to racial mixture to the explanation of why the world is going downhill as he sees it, for

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[22] Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 4 vols (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot Frères, 1853-1855), II, p. 260.

[23] *Ibid.*, II, p. 298.

what the inferior race gains through miscegenation does not compensate what the superior race loses throughout the same process instigated by interracial contact. Miscegenation modifies a race's given value, and the alloy is never welcomed as a salubrious sign, 'parce qu'il n'a plus dans ses veines le même sang, dont des alliages successifs ont graduellement modifié la valeur'.[24] To put it more bluntly, it is lethal to introduce heterogeneous elements to a race: 'les nations meurent lorsqu'elles sont composées d'éléments *dégénérés*'.[25] As the Aryan blood mixed with that of the Chinese mass, the 'noble élément' was eclipsed by the native dispositions, so what was enumerated by Gobineau as the Aryans' merits such as 'souplesse', 'énergie généreuse', and 'goût de la liberté' are lost in the Aryans' sinonisation.[26]

In Gobineau's *Essai*, China figures as one of the civilisations whose portrait, drawn from both indigenous sources and conventional Western learning, supports his theory of racial determinations. Léon Poliakov has rightly remarked that 'with a pretence of science, he [Gobineau] gave vent to bitterness and disappointment of every kind. He himself admitted that science was for him "only a means to assuage a hatred of democracy and of the Revolution"'.[27] Gobineau's expositions on China end with

[24] Gobineau, *Essai*, I, p. 39.

[25] Gobineau, *Essai*, I, p. 38.

[26] Gobineau, *Essai*, I, p. 274.

[27] Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, trans. by

two hypotheses concerning the consequence of foreign invasion. The first hypothesis posits that the conquest of China by a yellow race will not change the status quo of the country and will produce unwelcome repercussions for the conquering nation in terms of racial constitution. The second expects a modification of the Chinese civilisation by means of blood mixing between the Chinese and the white conquerors, but this will encounter, in practice, considerable difficulties as the population of China is immense. Therefore, Gobineau posits that the white conquest of China will be characterised by an 'immutabilité gouvernementale', as the Chinese are thought to be easy to vanquish and dominate but hard to transform according to his racial theories. Gobineau recognises China and India as two living proof of the 'truth' that a race never swerve from its destined course and intrinsic character no matter how far and wide it has travelled and spread.[28]

Gobineau's negative perception of the Chinese combines extant Western stereotype and his appraisal of world history and international politics. Having written extensively on the Middle East and Asia as a diplomat, Gobineau was highly aware of the situation of China in his lifetime. In *Trois ans en Asie* (1859), he claims that Europe will suffer from commercial activities with Asian trade hubs such as Bombay, Calcutta,

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Edmund Howard (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 1974), p. 233.

[28] Gobineau, *Essai*, II, pp. 312-314.

and Canton, because Europe does not benefit as much as Asia benefits from the transactions and 'la vie des pays chauds' yields no outcome other than making Europeans effeminate, brutal, and dumb.[29] Complaining that Chinese silk and tea are sapping European capitals, Gobineau warns that sooner or later China will manage to obtain opium from cheaper sources including autonomous supply, so Europe should not count on the revenue of opium.[30] This is all based on the conviction that 'le mal fait par l'Asie aux Grecs et aux Romains menace tout autant l'Europe moderne'.[31] Modern Europe will repeat the fall of the Roman Empire if it clings relentlessly to foreign trades that widen the scale of interracial contact. Gobineau underlines his disapproval of territorial and commercial expansions by concluding that 'l'Asie est un mets très séduisant, mais qui empoisonne ceux qui le mangent.'[32]

Gobineau's isolationist worries gradually grew into a vision of final catastrophe resulting from Russia's territorial expansion in East Asia,[33] inaugurating what he fears as a 'new fifth century' through the contiguity of territories. In 1879, he wrote to dom Pedro that 'une avalanche chinoise et slave bigarrée de Tartares et d'Allemands de la

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[29] Gobineau, *Œuvres*, ed. by Jean Gaulmier, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), II, p. 366.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 367.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 369.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Gobineau, *Œuvres*, III, xi.

Baltique' will put an end to European civilisation.[34] In 1880, he affirms to W. S. Blunt that 'Nous sommes au Ve siècle, mon cher ami, un nouveau Ve siècle, et quand on se demande si ce seront les socialistes, les Baguades qui mangeront tout, on se trompe, ce seront les Chinois formant sous des noms de régiments russes une belle armée hunnique'.[35] Gobineau's vision of a resuscitated Yellow Peril had some moorings in contemporary affairs. He was first warned of the Yellow Peril by Count Julien de Rochechouart (1831-1879), who spent ten years in the French Legation in Beijing after serving as Gobineau's attaché in Teheran in the 1860s. Rochechouart's stay was impacted by xenophobic attacks such as the Tianjin massacre which jeopardised Sino-Western relations.[36] Bursts of violence and diplomatic tension led Rochechouart to believe that China was a looming threat to the West in his *Pékin et l'intérieur de la Chine* (1878). Rochechouart's account teems with denigration of the Chinese commonly seen in Sinophobic Western authors. Stagnancy, unfitness for spirituality

[34] *Ibid.*, III, xlvii.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] The incident was complicated by mutual misunderstanding. The presence of foreign troops and the locals' negative perception of Catholic-run orphanage brewed hostility among the Chinese, who believed the baptism ministered to sick and dying children was bewitchment and the children's hearts and eyes got extracted to make medicine. Keen to do justice to the sisters and disperse the angry crowd, the French consul confront the crowd with a pistol. The consul fired a shot which killed the Chinese magistrate's assistant. Infuriated, the crowd killed the French officials and numerous sisters and priests, burning the church and the orphanage. See Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 300-301.

(therefore proper Christianisation),[37] and absence of any virtue convince Rochechouart that 'le cœur, le courage, l'enthousiasme, l'honneur, tous ces sentiments qui portent l'homme à faire des prodiges sont inconnus aux Chinois', 'une population vicieuse' in short.[38] Rochechouart fears that 'la corruption effroyable des races jaunes' will damage Western civilisation through increased contact,[39] and this view comes in harmony with Gobineau's own.

In his final years, Gobineau's obsession with the Yellow Peril found unambiguous expressions in his writing including an 1881 contribution, in German, to the *Bayeuther Blätter*, a periodical founded by Wagner.[40] The article was republished under the title of 'Ce qui se passe en Asie' in the *Revue du monde latin* in 1885, then as a brochure in 1928. It revolves around Gobineau's view of Russia's influence in Asia and his anxiety over latinisation within Europe itself, and contacts with Asia—China specifically—which catalyse the modern world's decadence and racial adulteration characterised by 'la decomposition morale' and 'la ruine politique'.[41] In 'Ce qui se passe en Asie',

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[37] Gobineau decides that 'l'esprit de la race jaune n'est ni assez profonde, ni assez sagace pour saisir cette qualité réservée à l'espèce blanche' in *Essai*, II, 289.

[38] Julien de Rochechouart, *Pékin et l'intérieur de la Chine* (Paris: Plon, 1878), pp. 141-142.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

[40] For more detail on Gobineau's friendship with Richard Wagner, see Gregory Blue, 'Gobineau on China: Race Theory, the "Yellow Peril," and the Critique of Modernity', *Journal of World History*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 93-139.

[41] Gobineau, *Ce qui se passe en Asie* (Paris: Éditions des cahiers libres, 1928), p. 31. The essay's English

Gobineau bases his vision of an 'invasion chinoise' on grounds of economic competition and social degeneration. This agrees with contemporary anti-Chinese movements across North America and Australia. The trope of 'heathen coolie' provoked calls for exclusion and expulsion,[42] leading to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 in the US.[43] It also fits with his argument that China will push Europe further and faster down the spiral of degeneration. Gobineau posits that Russia's expansion and the opening of China to trade with the West pave the way for Western-bound migratory masses, whose precedents include the influx of Chinese immigrants into the British dominions and the US during the rush for gold in the 1850s.[44] Owing to their cheap labour and productivity, the Chinese worker becomes 'un objet d'horreur et de crainte, parce qu'on ne sait comment résister à l'abondance, à la persistence, à l'obstination et, en dernier terme, au bon marché incomparable de son travail'.[45]

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translation is available in Michael D. Biddiss, *Gobineau: Selected Political Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 235-247.

[42] Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2018), p. 31.

[43] Modern studies on Chinese exclusion in the US include Stuart Creighton Miller's *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), Frank H. Wu's *Yellow: Race in America beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), John Soennischsen's *The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2011), and Lon Kurashige's *Two Faces of Exclusion: The Untold History of Anti-Asian Racism in the United States* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

[44] Beth Lew-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[45] Gobineau, *Ce qui se passe en Asie*, p. 47.

For Gobineau, the forthcoming yellow horde would sound the death knell for a Europe more racially degenerate and more decadent than the Roman empire.[46] What remained of the Aryan element in Europe would be subjugated to the materialistic, dangerously industrious, cunning, and insensitive Chinese.[47] Moreover, if there is such a thing as 'Chinese materialism', it has some affinities with socialist doctrines seen by Gobineau as 'materialistic in inspiration and bureaucratically despotic in outcome' which Gobineau abhors.[48] Bearing such connections in mind, Gobineau has expressed his worries about the consequences of opening up China to Tocqueville: 'Observing such a great desire to open up China and to become involved with all that part of the ancient continent, so voracious in its old age, I might be surprised that we do not examine more carefully the consequences of such camaraderie'.[49]

The Yellow Peril was certainly not invented by Gobineau alone; it is a body of related ideas and images arising from fears of a return of East Asia to prominence in world power struggles. The term 'Yellow Peril' is generally attributed to Kaiser

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[46] See Blue, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[47] For Gobineau, the apex of Chinese civilisation consists of the state apparatus for material organisations and administrative formalities. He regards the Chinese as a people without imagination but endowed with acumen and finesse, which give rise to excellent novels yet poor poetry. See Gobineau, *Essai*, II, 284, 287.

[48] Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology*, p. 142.

[49] See Gobineau's correspondence with Tocqueville (15 January 1856) quoted in Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology*, p. 142.

Wilhelm II of Germany in 1895,[50] who was wary of the modernisation and military reorganisation of Japan and China. Richard Austin Thompson's 1957 doctoral thesis offers a lucid account of the Yellow Peril myth's formation across various fields, showing that the Yellow Peril represents fears that encompass economic competition, social degeneration, and military threat.[51] Twentieth-century instances of the latter obviously exceed Gobineau's horizon. The outcome of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) stirred worries about Japan's imperialist aspirations. The Boxers' uprising, as we have already seen in Chapters I and II, embodies anti-Western animosity in the form of direct violence. And finally, the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) demonstrated Japan's naval power and overthrows the idea that the world order is a matter of Western monopoly. The acceptance of Japan as a respectable imperialist power provoked not only anxiety but also interest in strategic collaboration among European nations. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902-1923) was conceived to curb Russia, for instance.

Were China, intrinsically inferior in terms of racial hierarchy, to become as militarily and economically powerful as Europe, what could happen to the white

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[50] G. G. Rupert, *The Yellow Peril* (Britton, OK: Union Publishing, 1911), p. 9.

[51] See Thompson, Richard Austin, 'The Yellow Peril, 1890-1924' (Doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1957) in ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (accessed 10 September 2024). Another valuable reference is Jacques Decornoy's *Péril jaune, peur blanche* (Paris: Grasset, 1970).

empires? Such is the question that preoccupies the yellow perilists. The Yellow Peril reflects the West's various attitudes towards China and Japan in discourses of economics, politics, visual culture, and literature. In France, the Yellow Peril was not only a literary subject but also an economic issue. The military might, populational mass, and economic revitalisation of East Asia left businessmen, parliament representatives, and diplomats with much to agonise about, given France's industrial backwardness (in comparison to Britain) and its future strategies for the domestic and colonial markets. John Laffey has demonstrated that although the Yellow Peril aroused calls for protectionism to end the 'colonial megalomania' and prevent the inundation of East Asian goods and cheap labour at home, it ends up strengthening the French commitment to securing the benefits of expansion while staying aware of possible dangers and areas of interests, instead of undermining imperialist activities.[52]

Laffey's study is useful in highlighting how upheavals in East Asia lent themselves to disparate interpretations in various discursive fields. For Parisian financiers, China remains an investment El Dorado with the construction of railways, banks, and mining sites, so they would respond to yellow perilist warnings with optimistic riposte.[53] For

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[52] John Laffey, *Imperialism and Ideology* (New York: Black Rose, 2000), p. 72, 87.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

Lyonnais silk merchants, industrialisation would transform China into a tough rival which gives them many reasons to embrace the prospect of an economic Yellow Peril. My aim in what follows is to show that yellow perilist fictions anathematise China as a Goliath that imposes an existential threat to the West, yet they diverge from Gobineau's pessimism by eventually espousing, as discourses on the economic Yellow Peril tend to do, the promotion of Western unity to support imperialism.

It was in this context that Kaiser Wilhelm II commissioned an iconic engraving based on his original drawing, which carried the title *The Yellow Peril* when it was published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1898 (Figure 4). On the left of the picture, a group of maidens clad in medieval armoury represents the nations of Europe led by the archangel Michael, who wields a flaming sword. They overlook the vast stretch of land (Europe) whose horizon is darkened by a mass of cloud and smoke, above which sits a Buddha atop a dragon, symbolising the looming threat from the Far East. What makes the allegory flagrant is a Christian cross floating in the sky above the maidens of Europe, in contrast with the Eastern idol. According to Thompson, the German monarch ordered the picture copied in oils and he sent reproductions of it as gifts to some of his royal colleagues.[54] In his letter to the Tsar, Wilhelm II explains the rationale behind the

[54] Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

drawing which is typical of yellow perilist thinking:

> It shows the powers of Europe […] to *unite* in resisting the inroad of Buddhism, heathenism and barbarism for the Defence of the Cross. Stress is especially laid on the *united* resistance of *all* European Powers, which is just as necessary also against our common internal foes, anarchism, republicanism, nihilism.[55]

More than a buzzword that inspired the Kaiser's artistic practice, the Yellow Peril materialised as one of the royal boardroom's concerns. In 1902, Wilhelm II evokes the possibility of reorganising twenty to thirty million Chinese troops led by Japanese delegates as 'a future to be contemplated not without anxiety'.[56] Wilhelm II has also admitted that he was a keen reader of Gobineau's work which exerted important influences on his worldview. Gobineau had been a close friend of Prince Philipp of Eulenburg, who provided a personal connection between Gobineau and the monarch.[57] This kind of unease gave rise to what Thompson calls 'the hypothetical war', whose possible courses of events became subjects that occupied the imagination of writers sharing yellow perilist fantasies, if not complete fraternity.[58]

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[55] N. F. Grant, ed., *The Kaiser's Letters to the Tsar* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920), p. 19.

[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

[57] See Blue, *op. cit*., pp. 127-129, and Crean, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[58] Thompson's study covers a host of English-language stories headed by H. G. Wells's *War in the Air* (1907) but it does not cover the French *roman d'anticipation*. Useful work on the Yellow Peril in American literature include William Franking Wu, 'The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940' (Doctoral thesis, University of Michigan, 1979) in ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (accessed 10 September 2024), and Christopher Frayling, *The Yellow Peril: Dr Fu Manchu and the Rise of Chinaphobia* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014).



Figure 4. Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, 'The Yellow Peril', *Harper's Daily* (1895).

What distinguishes Gobineau's vision of the Yellow Peril from others is his conviction that there is no remedy for the dangers from within and without Europe is fated to face. From within, industrialisation renders society materialistic and mediocre. Easy communication and contact encourage miscegenation. Gobineau's deep-seated malaise with modernity also finds fault with democratic movements, whose call for freedom is utterly incompatible with his concept of freedom as an aristocratic privilege. From without, the Chinese are the agent that speeds up Europe's ongoing decline. Seeing the worst in what is vaunted as progress and expansion, Gobineau's pessimism,

as Michael Biddiss rightly construes, 'is far from being imperialist in the sense of advocating that this dominance should be pursued any longer by purposeful expansion',[59] notwithstanding Gobineau and imperialism would agree upon white supremacy.

It is not my task here to survey the interpretation of Gobineau's thought in the development of racism in twentieth-century Europe and its liaison with Nazi ideology. Yet it makes sense to say that the reception of Gobineau's thought across the Rhine was vital to racist politics that instrumentalised his ideas.[60] Though Gobineau did not invent Aryanism singlehandedly,[61] his theories made racial hierarchy one of the most salient components in racist formulations. His friendship with Richard Wagner and prominence in the Bayreuth circle bridged his racial theory with aspects of pan-Germanism and Antisemitism advocated by Ludwig Schemann (1852-1938) and Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927), two figures crucial to the translation,[62]

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[59] Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology*, p. 253.

[60] Arnold H. Rowbothan provides a summary of the reception of Gobineau's *Essai* in France and Germany in his 'Gobineau and the Aryan Terror', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (April-June 1939), pp. 155-156.

[61] Léon Poliakov indicates that Gobineau 'merely systematized in a very personal way ideas which were already deeply rooted in his time' in *The Aryan Myth*, p. 233.

[62] Schemann was responsible for the German edition of Gobineau's *Essai* and its subsequent reprints in 1902 and 1903. A fourth edition of the German printing of Gobineau's *Essai* appeared under the Third Reich and a fifth came in the 1939-40. It is also known that excerpts of the *Essai* circulated in popular anthologies about racial questions and were even used in prescribed school-readers. See Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology*, p. 258.

propagation, and modification of Gobinist thinking in the German-speaking world.[63] Finally, there is a certain similarity between the treatment of Gobineau's thought by racist ideologues and the imperialist sympathy of yellow perilist fictions. For instance, the entry of Gobinism into the Germanosphere is marked by a substitution of his pessimism with a revitalising enterprise that gave rise to reformatory programmes aiming to restore Aryan glory. A Germanophile Englishman and son-in-law of Wagner, Chamberlain built on Gobineau's racial hierarchy by introducing the polarisation between Teutonic-German virtues and the ostensible Jewish vice plus an active agenda for racial creation in his *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), proclaiming that 'though it were proved that there never was an Aryan race in the past, yet we desire that in the future there may be one'.[64] Gobinist ideologues' promotion of reformist doctrines and eugenicist measures to retain racial purity alienates Gobineau's ideas, just as yellow perilist fictions seek to reinvigorate imperialism through a ritual of purification and terror associated with catharsis as Pierre-Jean Dufief has surmised.[65]

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[63] For a detailed account of the Germanisation and transformation of Gobineau's racial theory, see Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology*, pp. 257-260, and Michel Lémonon, 'La Diffusion en Allemagne des idées de Gobineau sur les races', in Michel Crouzet, ed., *Arthur de Gobineau cent ans après 1882-1982* (Paris: Minard, 1990), pp. 11-21.

[64] Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Less, 2 vols (New York, Howard Fertig, 1968 [1899]), I, p. 266.

[65] Pierre-Jean Dufief, 'Le Péril jaune, de Danrit à Alain Peyrefitte', *Travaux de littérature*, Vol. 17 (2004), p. 382.

V-2 Empires Redux: Forecasting the 'Next Great War' through the Yellow Peril

'…l'aventurier produit de l'aventure comme le charcutier de la charcuterie.'

Jean-Yves Tadié[66]

After the Franco-Prussian War, the power relationship in Europe changed. The balance of power on the Continent shifted as Germany, unified, sought to isolate a France plunged in political and social instability. According to I. F. Clarke, there was an outpouring of tales about future wars that climaxed in the forecast of French victory in the series of *La Guerre de demain* (1889) by Capitaine Danrit, adjutant of General Boulanger and his son-in-law.[67] About one hundred novels of this kind appeared from the 1880s to 1914.[68] This kind of fiction presented alarming visions of the future, and their lifecycle mirrored the development of the international situation. They fed on one crisis for plot and readers' interest, died down after a year or two as the crisis became obsolete,[69] until the next crisis arose and renewed the cycle. In the context of *littérature d'anticipation*, Matthieu Letourneux and Claire Barel-Moisan have observed that the

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[66] Jean-Yves Tadié, *Le Roman d'aventures* (Paris: PUF, 1982), II, p. 7.

[67] I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars, 1763-3749* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 40.

[68] Letourneux, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

[69] Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

genre's temporality is 'indissociable du rythme médiatique' and its orientation towards the future emerges in parallel with the sense of acceleration given by innovations in the means of transportation and communication.[70]

Novels on future wars often began as serial publications and, if successful, underwent republication as full-length books.[71] Danrit's *L'Invasion jaune* and Giffard's *La Guerre infernale* stand as examples of this pattern,[72] whereas some shorter stories such as 'La Revanche de la Chine' (1900) by de Noussanne appeared as an item among other rubrics in one issue of a newspaper. The appearance of this kind of novel overlaps with what Anne-Marie Thiesse identifies as the golden age of the French press[73]—a media environment that gave rise to the larger family of fiction to which future war stories belong: the *roman populaire*. The term serves as an umbrella for various forms of serialised fiction, beginning with the *roman feuilleton* that appeared in daily newspapers in the 1830s. Its wide readership was enabled by the growing accessibility of literature and the expansion of a reading public fostered by

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[70] Matthieu Letourneux and Claire Barel-Moisan, 'Introduction. Genre de l'anticipation et rapports au temps', *Belphegor*, No. 21 (2023), p. 3.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[72] See Jean-Claude Viche, 'Robida et la Guerre du futur, une approche bibliographique', *Robida, visionnaire de la guerre du futur*, *Le Téléphonoscope*. *Bulletin des Amis d'Albert Robida*, No. 10 (September 2003), p. 6.

[73] Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien: Lecteurs et lectures populaires à la Belle Époque* (Paris: Le Chemin vert, 1984), p. 17.

rising literacy rates.[74] By 1871, 82 percent of French population was literate, an increase of 16 percent from the 1850s.[75] The *roman populaire* emerged within a cultural and economic milieu shaped by the explosion of newspapers and literary journals—conditions made possible by technological advances such as the invention of the linotype in 1885, the growth of lending libraries, and the development of advertising strategies. These material conditions contributed to making the genre 'popular', not least through the affordability of newspapers compared to bound books.[76]

Several features of popular literature help contextualise novels about the Yellow Peril. First, such literature was a financial boon. As early as the 1840s, bestselling authors like Eugène Sue could attract thousands of new subscribers with hits like *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842).[77] The professionalisation of publishing, alongside a constellation of social and technological changes, turned literary production into an industrial enterprise.[78] Second, the commercial nature of popular literature meant that

[74] The first *roman feuilleton,* Balzac's *La Vieille Fille*, appeared in *la Presse* directed by Émile de Girardin in 1836. See Marc Angenot, *Le Roman Populaire: recherche en paralittérature* (Montréal: Presse de l'Université du Québec, 1975), p. 45 and Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien*, p. 83.

[75] Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien*, p. 15.

[76] Letourneux has noted that the serial form of *fascicule*—adopted by *La Guerre infernale*—was so cheap that a schoolboy could afford a copy with small changes that escaped the adult's frowning eyebrows in *op. cit.*, p. 232.

[77] Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien*, p. 84.

[78] Angenot, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

it catered to a mass readership, operating according to the laws of the market and blurring the lines between commodity and artwork. Unlike the more rarefied works discussed elsewhere in this thesis—for instance, Segalen's *Le Combat pour le sol*, which circulated privately among friends, or *La Fille du Ciel*, which, although intended for the Parisian stage, was rejected and ultimately premiered in New York in a translated adaptation—popular literature reached readers across a broad social spectrum. Its internally stratified sub-genres were shaped by class and gender conventions: crime story and adventure novels were typically aimed at male readers, while historical and sentimental novels were designed for women.[79]

This differentiation in readership is not only a matter of scale, but also of reception, class, and critical value. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the literary field, particularly his distinction between 'la production pure, destinée à un marché restraint aux producteurs' (such as some of Segalen's works) and 'la grande production, orientée vers la satisfaction des attentes du grand public' (such as the *roman populaire*) is instrumental in analysing the symbolic hierarchies of literary production.[80] Revolving around the ostensible antinomy between mass-produced popular literature and a 'purer' kind of

[79] Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien*, p. 200.

[80] Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992), p. 204.

artistic pursuit, Bourdieu's framework reveals how distinctions of value are socially and institutionally constructed. Literature qualified as 'popular' connotes a perceived lack of intellectual prestige and absence of aesthetic value,[81] relegating it to what critics have termed *paralittérature*, a domain seen as peripheral to literature proper and excluded from the canon.[82] Associated with the lowbrow, popular literature has not gained critical attention until recent decades, when interest has increasingly been accorded to 'works that were widely read but that would not go on to form part of the literary canon at the end of the [nineteenth] century'.[83] This revaluation has also led to growing interest in marginalised voices, including women writers who used masculine or gender-neutral pseudonyms to gain access to the literary marketplace.

The Yellow Peril novel emerges within this complex media environment, shaped by both market pressures and ideological currents. Rather than contesting the notion that such narratives reflect the 'poor taste' associated with popular literature, my aim is to foreground the social, economic, and cultural forces from which they arise. These novels, which dramatise imperial exploits and foreign threats, partake in the

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[81] Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien*, p. 174.

[82] Angenot, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[83] Anne O'Neil-Henry, *Mastering in the Marketplace: Popular Literature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), p. 9.

conventions of adventure novels, focusing on military action, technological development, and aperçus of global politics that anathematise the Chinese and Japanese. While their racial rhetoric aligns with what we now recognise as overt racism, these texts also illuminate the function of the 'œuvre-marchandise' as an ideological apparatus through which political ideas are disseminated in a mass-cultural form.[84]

The Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War are stimuli vital to the appearance of novels on the Yellow Peril.[85] *L'An 330 de la République* (1894) by Spronck, *La Bataille de Strasbourg* (1895) by Jules Lermina (1839-1915), 'La Revanche de la Chine' (1900), *L'Invasion jaune* (1905), and *La Guerre infernale* (1908) by Giffard are published shortly after these events. The trope of 'empire redux' designates both fear of rising East Asian powers and hope for a reinvigoration of Western empires. Also important are bilateral or multilateral alliances that define the strategical landscape in the works of de Nousanne, Danrit, and Giffard, such as the Franco-Russian Alliance (1891-1894), Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902-1923), and the Entente Cordiale (1904) that evolved into the Triple Entente (1907). The mutual strategic interests of France and Russia was a response to the rise of Germany. In the

[84] Angenot, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[85] Claude Farrère's novel *La Bataille* (1909) is also set during the Russo-Japanese War and its characters include Japanese officers.

yellow perilist context, the fall of Russia would make France seem vulnerable to the yellow invasion. In turn, Germany's resistance to the Yellow Peril sometimes exposes France's weakness. These alliances play a significant role in *L'Invasion jaune* and *La Guerre infernale*. They define the structure of international collaboration,[86] while also indicting Britian for violating 'la loi de solidarité blanche que nul peuple de civilisation chrétienne ne saurait oublier' by siding with Japan.[87]

Unlike these novels that hinge on specific news cycles and abide by the conventions of adventure novels, Gobineau's *Amadis* (1887) is a forerunner of their forecast of upcoming wars. It is a five-hundred-page poem on the eponymous Aryan knight and his last battle against the yellow horde. It has three parts: the first was published in 1876; the second in 1878; the third, where the finale takes place, was composed during 1879 and published posthumously in 1887, annotated by Mathilde Sallier de La Tour (1838-1911), Gobineau's longtime lover. Modelled on *Amadis of Gaul*, a chivalric romance originally in Portuguese and Spanish in circulation across Europe since the early fourteenth century, *Amadis* unfolds adventures and idealised human relationships between the romance's main characters. It centres on the life of

[86] Pierre Giffard, *La Guerre infernale: Grand roman d'aventures inédit*, 2 vols (Paris: Albert Méricant, 1908), I, 28.

[87] *Ibid.*, II, 487. See also Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune*. *Haine de Jaunes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1905), II, p. 752.

Aryan heroes in the circle of Amadis in a setting that deliberately confuses ancient, medieval, and modern references.[88] Opening with the pristine stage of humanity, book one describes the adventures of Amadis with his page Gandalin. Book two is characterised by racial mixture and decadence, reflecting the social sequence presented in Gobineau's *Essai.* Vivianne, the mixed-blood enchantress on Merlin's side, proposes to provide her magic in exchange for the share of power held by the Aryans, but her proposal is refused. She launches a series of struggles for power and prevails over Amadis. Amadis' entourage retreats to Parnassus and becomes invisible to other humans. Book three starts with the decay of Vivianne's reign replete with mass revolts and the invasion of yellow hordes. To defend Europe, Amadis rallies an army to confront the yellow horde. In the final battle, Gobineau uses an oblique way to announce the result: 'Les chevaliers ne sont pas vaincus, mais ils tombent étouffés, écrasés par le nombre de leurs victimes'.[89] Instead of being defeated by the Yellow Peril, the Aryans die of exhaustion and suffocation from the sheer mass of enemies to whom they remain superior in the actual fighting. The poem concludes with a desolate scene in which a she-wolf rejoices in the battlefield strewn with mud-smeared corpses, unaware of the haloed souls of Aryans rising above the wasteland outshined by their

[88] See Sallier de La Tour's note in Gobineau, *Amadis: poëme* (Paris: Plon, 1887), p. 539.

[89] Gobineau, *Amadis*, p. 552.

immortality.

In *Amadis*, Gobineau harbours an idealised vision of the Middle Ages that mediates his representation of the Yellow Peril.[90] It ends up with a 'chanson de geste au goût de 1830' as it features the confrontation between the privileged knight and hordes whose resemblance with the revolutionary crowd aggravates Gobineau's aversion.[91] At first glance, the doom and gloom of *Amadis*'s end and its origin in romance seem very distinct from yellow perilist novels that project towards the future foregrounding technology and progress. Yet in many respects, *Amadis* and these novels are connected, first because of their identification of the Yellow Peril, and secondly because they participate in the *littérature d'anticiation* characterised by a dialectic 'entre projection vers le futur et satire du présent'.[92] Yellow Peril functions as a vehicle for both Gobineau and these novelists to convey misgivings about the present in an imminent future. Set in the age of industrial civilisation, yellow perilist novels' search for heroic myths that tackle an invincible threat runs in the same vein as Gobineau's Aryan hero, realising what Clarke calls the 'chanson de geste for an age of

[90] His proclamation to Dom Pedro that 'I am a man of the Middle Ages—and remain so' and unfinished work *L'Histoire des Mérovingiens* (1882) prove the case. See quotations in Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology*, pp. 245-246.

[91] See Jean Gaulmier's introduction to Gobineau's *Œuvres*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), III, liii.

[92] Claire Barel-Moisan, 'Introduction', *Romans d'anticipation: une évasion du présent, Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3-4 (spring-summer 2015), pp. 174-177.

imperialism'.[93]

In his article on future war novels, Matthieu Letourneux has identified three temporal dimensions for their narrative structure: 1870, the period in which the fiction is written, and the 'avenir romanesque' to which the novel projects.[94] This trio of temporality enables Letourneux to show that these novels recycle aspects of Revanchist novels and the *romans alsaciens*. They transfer the structures and relations of the 1870 war to an imaginary future with a crisis looming on the horizon. Borrowing materials from news items increases the verisimilitude of such transfers. The Yellow Peril benefits from the displaced structure of animosity transferred from Revanchist sentiments. In *La Bataille de Strasbourg*, Jules Lermina closes the gap between the hateful Prussians and the Chinese by positing that 'on retrouvait chez ces barbares, sortis des profondeurs de l'Asie, les théories cruelles que jadis les Prussiens avaient mises en action pendant la guerre de France en 1870'.[95] In Chapter IV, I have demonstrated that Chinese cruelty partook in Belle Époque mass culture as a cliché in its own right, while it seems to be an interchangeable trope with Prussian atrocities in Lermina's conjecture. Hatred of the Germans is easily directed against the Chinese by

[93] Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

[94] Letourneux, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

[95] Jules Lermina, *La Bataille de Strasbourg*, 2 vols (Paris: L. Boulanger, 1895), p. 170.

equating one nation's cruelty with another.

Moreover, yellow perilist writing shares a certain kind of death-defying language with Revanchist literature. This makes grist for the mill of what was known as the *esprit militaire* in the nineteenth century: 'La mort volontaire d'une personnalité dans laquelle ne survit que l'obéissance'.[96] It promulgates what Gil Michaely terms as the 'modèle militaro-viril', a system of value that encourages the performance of a form of masculinity hegemonic in the nineteenth century, while connecting it with the army's institutional requirements to subject men to military service and sacrifice. This model works as an instrument for masculine domination. In *La Revanche fantastique* (1873), one of the earliest Revanchist stories, 'la mort seule peut nous épargner la honte et assurer le salut de la patrie !' works as one of the stock phrases of patriotism.[97] In *La Bataille de Strasbourg*, a French woman exclaims that 'sachez bien que j'aime ma patrie de tout mon cœur, je suis prête à mourir pour qui j'aime'.[98] Even in *Amadis*, the same language appears as Amadis's army vows to fight the invading horde without any winning margin:

C'est la patrie

[96] Gil Michaely quoting Étienne Lamy in 'L'armée rend-elle viril? Réflexion sur le "modèle militaro-viril" à la fin du XIXe siècle', *Le Genre des émotions*, No. 47 (2018), p. 231.

[97] Louis Denay and Eugène Tassin, *La Revanche fantastique* (Paris: Alcan-Lévy, 1873), p. 77.

[98] Lermina*, op. cit*., p. 84.

Pour nous pétrie,
Pour nous fleurie,
Par nous chérie;
Tous nos berceaux,
Tous nos tombeaux,
C'est la patrie
Qui va tomber si nous tombons![99]

Patriotism intensifies the tragic determination of *Amadis* as do the poeticisation of Gobineau's pessimism and his vision of Aryan vigour. In yellow perilist novels, reproducing the 'militaro-viril' model to envisage triumph buttressed by white solidarity is one of their common traits. In 'La Revanche de la Chine', white solidarity is evoked as the 'Nouvelle Sainte Alliance' as European forces gather in the Rhine valley in the wake of Russia's fall.[100] Titled *La Muraille blanche*, fascicle 21 of *La Guerre infernale* highlights the turning point at which Western countries decide to stop their internal struggle and unite against the Yellow Peril.[101]

Patriotic language is one of the crucial features of what Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker call 'la culture de guerre' in the lead-up to the First World War.[102]

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[99] Gobineau, *Amadis*, pp. 544-545.

[100] Henri de Noussanne, 'La Revanche de la Chine', *Le Monde illustré* (27 August 1900), p. 132.

[101] Giffard, *La Guerre infernale*, II, p. 269.

[102] Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18, retrouver la Guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), p. 201.

This designates the social, cultural, and political mobilisation of people across Europe to commit themselves to the belief that their nation is superior to others and threatened by barbaric encroachments. 'Les élites de tous les pays ont mis en forme le consentement de leur pays à la guerre, à travers le portrait d'un idéal de sacrifice et d'abnégation et dans la certitude d'une appartenance organique à la nation menacée'.[103] Waging a total war against the adversary race/nation becomes a necessary step to take because what lies at stake is the struggle between civilisation and barbarism, the human and the dehumanised, Manichaean opposites legitimised by racial thinking.

Not every yellow perilist novel is a story of success against the enemy; some are as bleak as *Amadis*, as *L'An 330 de la République* ends with the demise of civilisation aggravated by epidemics revived by the yellow hordes.[104] Exploring the failure of white solidarity and the 'devirilisation' of France, Capitaine Danrit's *L'Invasion jaune* pursues purposive and political ends through self-admonition. Published serially in April 1904, two months after the Russo-Japanese War broke out, *L'Invasion jaune* is divided into three parts: *La Mobilisation sino-japonaise*, *La Haine de Jaunes*, and *À*

[103] *Ibid*., p. 196.

[104] Maurice Spronck, *L'An 330 de la République (XXIIe siècle de l'ère chrétienne)* (Paris: Léon Chailley, 1894), p. 113. Spronck imagines an invasion of Europe waged by a Sultan joined by the yellow horde. This storyline is similar with Danrit's *La Guerre au vingtième siècle. L'Invasion noire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1894).

travers l'Europe.[105] In the beginning, an American tycoon named Jonathan Wishburn receives an order for an astronomical sum of weapons placed by Yukinaga, a trusted Japanese warlord. It is discovered that Yukinaga's purchase is part of preparations for a yellow invasion. Then, the scene shifts to Paris, where Wishburn's daughter Maggy attends a session at the French Parliament and befriends Robert Hardy, a French MP wary of France's pacifism and the Yellow Peril. They embark on a journey to China by way of Siberia and arrive in Xi'an. While observing the Sino-Japanese mobilisation, they see the Chinese emperor in person as the emperor inspects the troops on horseback. They are impressed by the emperor's majestic bearing that defies the notion that the Chinese emperor is just a languid effeminate puppet. It is revealed that Yukinaga acts as the generalissimo of the Yellow Army, for which China supplies manpower guided by Japan's technical and strategic expertise. Maggy, Robert, and a journalist named Luc Harn survive the massacre of Westerners in China to which they bear witness. The denouement of the Yellow Invasion pursues a geographical sequence in which major European nations fall like dominos one after another. The final two chapters represent the subjugation of France and the imperial marriage between the Chinese emperor and Nagaharou, daughter of Yukinaga. Meanwhile, the death of Yukinaga stirs up power

[105] My references, subject to the availability of copies, are to the 1979 edition for the first part and the 1905 editions for the second and the third parts.

struggles within the Yellow Army and undermines China's control over Europe soon after its conquest. With the financial aid of Wishburn, what remains of the French ruling class becomes 'colons de la peur' who flee to the island of Djerba, in Tunisia,[106] hoping to reinstitute their country in the Maghreb and strike back. In the Epilogue, Maggy ironically baptises Djerba as 'l'Île de France'.[107]

In *L'Invasion jaune*, Danrit ascribes the failure of white solidarity to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, with the 'faute originelle' resulting from the Franco-Prussian War.[108] Germany is left alone to bear the brunt of the Yellow Peril. In an interview conducted by Luc Harn with the Kaiser, the monarch indicates that he already forewarned Europe of the Yellow Peril ten years ago, and the illustration for the scene contains an oil painting identical to the real-world Kaiser's allegorical drawing (Figure 5). Pondering on the difficulty of creating a Franco-Russo-Germanic alliance, the monarch regrets the 'lourd héritage de haine' passed down from 1870.[109] Even so, having proclaimed that he has 'vécu trente-six ans sur l'espoir de la revanche',[110]

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[106] Capitaine Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. À travers l'Europe* (Paris: Flammarion, 1905), p. 798.

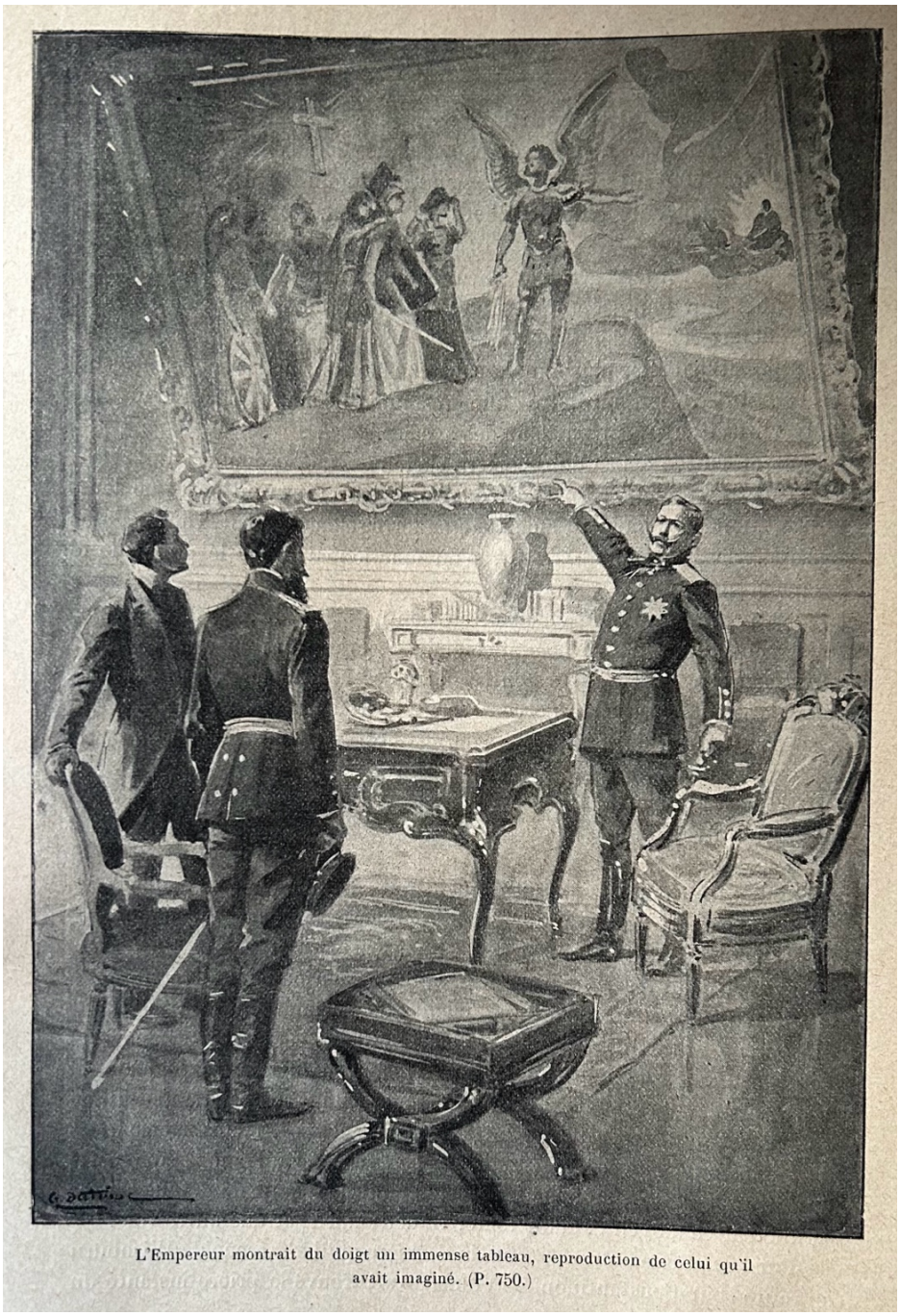
[107] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. À travers l'Europe*, p. 851.

[108] *Ibid.*, pp. 751-752.

[109] *Ibid.*, p. 751.

[110] Preface to *Mémoires d'un grenadier de la Grande Armée* (1907) by Honoré Beulay, quoted form Daniel David, *Le Colonel Driant: De l'armée à la littérature, le Jules Verne militaire* (Thionville: Gérard

Danrit displays spectacular sympathy for Germany by dedicating a chapter to its heroic resistance to the Yellow Peril, as if to contrast France's cowardice.



L'Empereur montrait du doigt un immense tableau, reproduction de celui qu'il avait imaginé. (P. 750.)

Figure 5. 'L'Empereur montrait du doigt un immense tableau, reproduction de

Klopp, 2006), p. 75.

celui qu'il avait imaginé' in Capitaine Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. À travers l'Europe* (Paris: Flammarion, 1905), p. 745.

During the parliament session, Robert Hardy lambasts France for having become weak and indulgent:

> Amollis dans le bien-être, habitués au luxe, plus aptes à discourir qu'à porter les armes, vous verrez alors avec effroi ces nouveaux barbares, irrésistibles par leur nombre autant que par leur organisation, détruire cette civilisation dont vous êtes si fiers! [111]

Then, the postrevolutionary France is characterised by national disarmament:

> La France n'avait plus d'armée; elle n'aurait bientôt plus de marine: tout ressort moral, toute énergie, tout esprit de lutte, de combativité semblait avoir disparu chez ce peuple qui avait rasé la Bastille, démoli les trônes et jeté en défi à l'Europe une tête de Roi.[112]

So far, this approach agrees with most of the yellow perilist novels by recognising a combination of internal predicaments—drop of birthrate, decline of civilisational vitality, negligence—as what makes Europe likely to succumb to the Yellow Peril summarised by Jean-Marc Moura.[113] In *L'Invasion jaune*, what Danrit sees as signs of France's social decline—disarmament, hedonism, and democratisation—become an explicitly gendered issue. 'Sans armée, sans virilité', France counts on Britain's alliance

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[111] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. La Mobilisation sino-japonaise*, p, 61.

[112] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

[113] Jean-Marc Moura, *L'Europe littéraire et l'ailleurs* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998), p. 127, 134. Moura also reads yellow perilist texts in relation to Gustave Le Bon's *La Psychologie des foules* (1895).

despite its previous quibbles for the Entente Cordiale.[114] In *À travers l'Europe*, this image of devirilisation is mapped onto the decline of France since the Napoleonic wars:

> Trop de prédilections antimilitaristes, trop d'appels à la lâcheté, trop de ruées vers les jouissances et vers l'or, Maître du monde blanc, avaient émasculé ce peuple français dont les héroïques sursauts avaient jadis ébranlé le Vieux-Continent.[115]

This criticism goes very much in the spirit of Thomas Couture's 1847 *Les Romains de la décadence.* In the painting, a group of people engaged in revel and sex are surrounded by statues of their ancestors who appear severe and strong in an arcade lined with majestic columns. Without evoking the comeback of the fifth century as Gobineau does, Danrit sounds the same siren for the moral, social, and political decline of France.

In the novel, the same observation is made by a Saint-Cyr-educated Japanese officer, who reckons France will become the most docile subject of the Yellow order because as Danrit emphatically reiterates in italics: '*elle n'a plus d'armée*'.[116] His analysis of France's quick subjugation supports Danrit's social admonition:

> Elle sera enfin la nation la plus docile à l'organisation féodale que nous lui imposerons, car les idées d'internationalisme, les enseignements donnés à la jeunesse par les intellectuels qui déforment à la fois l'histoire des ancêtres et les cerveaux des enfants, enfin le besoin de jouissance devenu général chez ce peuple l'ont si bien transformé qu'il

[114] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. Haine de Jaunes*, p. 187.

[115] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. À travers l'Europe*, p. 798.

[116] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. Haine de Jaunes*, p. 56.

ne craint plus qu'une chose: *la lutte* [Danrit's italics].[117]

Nostalgic for the France of the *Grande Armée*,[118] Danrit seems to be aiming at something other than the plain patriotism promised in the form of victory in his *La Guerre de demain*, through his reticence in suggesting remedies for the devirilisation of France.

To make the Yellow Army a tough nut to crack, Danrit goes as far as to redistribute masculinity among the characters in *L'Invasion jaune*. It is not enough to have a French-speaking and Francophile Japanese officer judge how un-virile France is.[119] Yukinaga himself is an engineering major fluent in English, French, and Russian.[120] The Chinese emperor shares many attributes with Jonathan Wishburn, the only white man whom Danrit describes extensively. We learn that Wishburn is 'grand, robuste, vigoureusement musclé. Au physique comme au moral c'était un lutteur et il en avait la carrure athlétique'.[121] The businessman is 'le type classique des amiraux anglais'.[122] Before the Chinese emperor appears, he is thought of as a 'jeune Empereur mou,

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[117] *Ibid.*

[118] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. À travers l'Europe*, p. 735.

[119] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. Haine de Jaunes*, p. 55.

[120] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. La Mobilisation sino-japonaise*, p. 30.

[121] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[122] *Ibid.*

efféminé et dont les faibles épaules étaient incapables de supporter le poids dont allait les charger l'inflexible volonté du Japonais'.[123] But as the white protagonists visit Xian, they see him in person and find that

> Il était jeune encore, bien découplé, de haute taille et de fière allure. C'était un Empereur-soldat, aux traits énergiques, au visage glabre d'un jeune très foncé, aux yeux très noirs, au regard assuré, au port de tête hautain et dominateur.[124]

The more threatening an East Asian character is, the more his description takes on the stock qualities of a white hero, dropping sexual ambivalence that can be seen as a sign of effeminacy.

Furthermore, the emphasis on an imposing physique and energy is not just concerned with the success of adventurous exploits or good soldiership, but also with the demonstration of sexual energy as a sign of desirable masculinity.[125] In attributing the performance of dominant sexuality to a foreign foe, Danrit prompts France to man up by emphasising menace. Danrit's vision of a devirilised France can be understood as an indirect form of militarism aimed at inspiring soldierly vocation among male readers. This intention was later praised by the *Anthologie des écrivains morts à la*

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[123] *Ibid*., p. 36.

[124] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. La Mobilisation sino-japonaise*, p. 239.

[125] Alain Corbin, 'La nécessaire manifestation de l'énergie sexuelle' in *Histoire de la virilité 2. Le triomphe de la virilité. Le XIXe siècle*, ed. by Alain Corbin (Paris: Seuil, 2011), pp. 127-157.

guerre (1914-1918), published in 1924, which credited Danrit with having saved generations of young Frenchmen from antimilitarism and instilled in them a 'saine notion du devoir militaire'.[126] If France stays as devirilised as is described by the novel, its destiny will be reverse colonisation by the Yellow Peril. To link the gendered dimension of the Yellow Peril with its political consequence, Danrit uses the Chinese emperor's marriage with Nagaharou, Yukinaga's daughter, to symbolise the fulfilment of Pan-Asianism, a movement that calls for Asian solidarity and challenges the Eurocentric order after the Russo-Japanese War.[127] As the Yellow Army marches towards Paris, the Chinese emperor craves to possess Nagaharou who has been betrothed to him. In the first part, Nagaharou is presented as a member of 'Fiancées de la Mort',[128] militarised widows of the Russo-Japanese War who have taken a vow of vengeance. To assist her father, Nagaharou is said to have forgotten the reserve and timidity of her sex and become one of the squad's 'amazones'.[129] Yet to return the emperor's 'regard brûlant et dominateur',[130] Nagaharou suppresses her contempt for

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[126] Cited in Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien*, p. 214.

[127] See Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 71-92.

[128] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. La Mobilisation sino-japonaise*, p. 34. Cf. 'les Vengeurs de la Défaite—les Citoyens de la Tombe—les Partageurs de la Mort' in Guy de Maupassant's *Boule de suif* (Paris: 1880 [2014]), pp. 17-18.

[129] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[130] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. À travers l'Europe*, p. 683.

the Chinese to fulfill the emperor's 'rêve d'ivresse et de volupté' and her own wish to become empress alongside the world's conqueror.[131] In *La Guerre de demain*, Danrit has explained the use of romance in his work: 'j'ai donc parlé d'amour…pour faire passer le reste!'[132] The relationship between the Chinese emperor and Nagaharou can be read as a bad romance that makes the fear of the Japanese mobilisation of China against Europe plausible to the yellow perilist imagination.[133] Just as *La Fille du Ciel* by Loti and Gautier transposes the nationalistic call for Manchu-Chinese equality to the realm of melodrama, *L'Invasion jaune* invests the Chinese emperor's sexuality with yellow perilist fear, mapping the union between a Chinese strongman and a Japanese woman warrior onto Pan-Asianist coalition.

In fiction as popular and purposive as *L'Invasion jaune*, we should not be surprised at values being presented in black-and-white opposites and characters with cookie-cutter attributes,[134] as Clarke has rightfully surmised.[135] It should not be overlooked

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[131] *Ibid.*

[132] Quoted from Letourneux, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

[133] Paul Doumer, a former governor of Indochina has expressed fears about this scenario. See Laffey, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

[134] Jean-Jacques Bridenne, one of the pioneers of the study of science fiction in France, has remarked that 'l'absence ou la banalité du vérisme psychologique' are, along with propagandistic outbursts, the drawbacks of Danrit's work. See his *La Littérature française d'imagination scientifique* (Paris: Gustave Arthur Dassonville, 1950), p. 174.

[135] Clarke, *op. cit*., p. 105.

that *L'Invasion jaune* and other Yellow Peril novels discussed in this section adhere to the conventions of popular literature, including the gendered division of thematic interests tailored to the respective audiences of its various sub-genres.[136] Whereas sentimental novels, often regarded as one of the basest kinds of popular literature, were typically written for women, adventure novels, including war stories and the *roman d'anticipation,* were the 'apanage' of men,[137] particularly adolescents. Appealing to boys and young men from the upper tiers of the mass readership, though not excluding a wider audience, these adventure novels gained social legitimacy from their alignment with patriotic values and a purported educational mission. Authors such as Capitaine Danrit and Théodore Cahu framed their works as contributions to patriotic and scientific pedagogy, echoing the values of the progressive bourgeoisie of the Third Republic.[138] Tales on future wars and adventure novels offer a virile pastime, imparting a 'morale virile' to male adolescents.[139] The danger encountered, trials surmounted, and journeys accomplished throughout adventures offer a myriad of initiations into

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[136] Anne-Marie Thiesse, 'Le roman populaire d'aventures: une affaire d'hommes' in *L'Aventure dans la littérature populaire au XIX^e siècle*, ed. by R. Bellet (Lyon : Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1985), p. 199.

[137] Thiesse, 'Le roman populaire d'aventures: une affaire d'hommes', p. 204.

[138] Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidie*, p. 205.

[139] See Ivan Jablonka, 'L'enfance ou le "voyage vers la virilité"' in *Histoire de la virilité 2*, pp. 33-62, and the 'morale virile' is a concept put forward by Sylvain Venayre, *La Gloire de l'aventure. Genèse d'une mystique moderne, 1850-1940* (Paris: Aubier, 2002), pp. 57-58.

masculinity. Having the objective of 'faire advenir l'homme dans l'enfant', the adventure novel diffuses codes of masculinity—courage, strength, resistance, energy, and sangfroid—qualities possessed by a hardened man, though how these codes are constructed and manifest through real-life behaviours vary from phase to phase in the nineteenth century.[140] The education of masculinity also draws on the *aventure coloniale*, a term that encapsulates France's expansions marked by the conquest of Algeria (1830) and the expeditions of Mexico (1862), Congo (1875), and Tonkin (1885) among other places.

More than just an entertainment, the adventure novel seeks to educate and edify, exemplified by the successful collaboration between Jules Verne (1828-1905) and his publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel (1814-1886) for the collection of *Voyages extraordinaires.*[141] The adventure novel mediates scientific and geographic knowledge through forms of popularisation (including stereotypes), achieving the goal of 'l'instruction qui amuse, l'amusement qui instruit'.[142] As a self-proclaimed fan and epigone of Verne,[143] Danrit aligns himself with the educational project of the *roman*

[140] For different regimes of nineteenth-century masculinity, see Anne-Marie Sohn, *'Sois un homme!': la construction de la masculinité au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), pp. 389-452.

[141] Letourneux, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

[142] Jules Verne, 'Avertissement de l'éditeur', *Les Aventures du capitaine Hatteras* (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1867), i.

[143] Tadié, *op. cit.*, p. 72. It is a familiar point in modern criticism to regard Capitaine Danrit as one of the

d'aventure. In 1894, he dedicated *La Guerre au vingtième siècle: L'Invasion noire* to Verne. The dedication can be read as the manifesto of Danrit's literary aspiration:

> Mon cher Maître,
>
> Lorsque j'étais enfant, vos merveilleux récits me transportaient; arrivé à l'âge d'homme, je les ai relus, admirant avec quel art vous vulgarisez tous les problèmes de sciences naturelles, avec quelles richesses de description vous racontez des voyages imaginaires, simplifiant les questions les plus ardues, rendant attrayante l'étude de la géographie, sachant faire jaillir les situations dramatiques et les émotions généreuses, amusant pour instruire, instruisant pour être utile.
>
> Si bien qu'un jour, piqué de la tarentule d'écrire, j'essayai d'appliquer, aux sciences qui dérivent de la guerre, votre merveilleux procédé.[144]

To what extent is the story about a devirilised France subordinated to a class of virile yellow elites 'amusant pour instruire, instruisant pour être utile'? What lesson do the remaining Frenchmen exiled in Africa have for the boy reader? *L'Invasion jaune* creates a reverie of reverse colonisation that engages ideas of gender, race, and empire. It is, in effect, impossible to extricate the devirilisation of France from the very oppositional relation it seems to overturn. The redistribution of masculinity presents itself as a violation of the routine language of stereotypes that substitutes the subject of desirable masculinity with what is usually its feeble foil. In displacing all sorts of

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followers of Verne. Other notable followers of Verne include Paul D'Ivoi (1856-1915) and Louis-Henri Boussenard (1847-1910). Danrit, D'Ivoi, and Boussenard wrote stories of colonial adventures and were all contributors of *Le Journal des voyage.* See Simon Bréan, *La Science-Fiction en France: Théorie et histoire d'une littérature* (Paris: PUPS, 2012), p. 50.

[144] Danrit, *La Guerre au vingtième siècle. L'Invasion noire*, p. 1.

recognition and emulation signals he would prefer France and Frenchmen to possess, Danrit evokes eschatological exploration and dystopian vision commonly found in the *roman d'anticipation* through explicit gendered terms identified as a national crisis.[145]

To make racial categories seem natural, *L'Invasion jaune* combines the significance of the colour yellow in Chinese culture with the yellowness derived from racial thinking. In the description of Xi'an, Danrit emphasises that the city is 'riche surtout par la fertilité de sa merveilleuse "Terre jaune"'.[146] Then, he points out the link between this geographic feature with Chinese culture:

> À ce sol d'une incroyable fertilité, l'Empereur de Chine devait un de ses titres principaux: *Le Seigneur jaune*, et sa couleur, reflétée par le visage de ses habitants, était devenue le symbole de l'Empire entier.[147]

This refers to yellow as the central colour in Chinese culture, as it is the colour of the Yellow River, the colour of the earth, and the official colour of the emperor.[148] Yet Danrit interpolates the skin colour of yellow amid these identifications, deliberately maximising the coincidence to racialise the Chinese. *L'Invasion jaune* recounts the

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[145] For Jean-Marc Gouanvic, eschatological exploration and dystopian vision are two of the major modes of writing histories of the future. See Gouanvic, *La science-fiction française au XXe siècle (1900-1968): Essai de socio-poétique d'un genre en émergence* (Amsterdam: Éditions Rodopi, 1994), pp. 32-35.

[146] Danrit, *L'Invasion jaune. La Mobilisation sino-japonaise*, p. 232.

[147] *Ibid.*, p. 233.

[148] For the centrality of the colour yellow, see Keevak, *Becoming Yellow*, p. 131, and Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 18, 35.

misadventure of Western empires in which their supremacy is lost to the Yellow Peril, whose leader usurps a form of masculinity desirable in French society. At least before the Sino-Japanese coalition crumbles, the emperor behaves like the hero of an adventure novel whose subject is the conquest of Europe.

In novels on the Yellow Peril, the poetics of displacement uses geographical, scientific, cultural, and military knowledge as leverage to inflate or deflate fears of the Chinese, making the fictional warmongering a business of worry-mongering while transmitting forms of masculinity. These novels carry important features of the popular mythology of war such as the cult of technology. Set in year 2002, 'La Revanche de la Chine' foretells a French *tour de force* to vanquish the Yellow Peril. The French defeat the Chinese by the 'obus-foudre',[149] a mass-destruction weapon that turns atmospheric electricity into artillery. Also classic in the exaltation of technology is *La Guerre infernale* by Pierre Giffard, illustrated by Albert Robida. Styled as 'Grand roman d'aventures inédit', *La Guerre infernale* has been thoroughly studied in terms of its evocation of future weapons and modes of combat vis-à-vis Robida's vast corpus, notably *La Guerre au vingtième siècle* (1887).[150] Weaponised dirigibles, underwater

[149] de Noussanne, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

[150] See Caroline Grubbs, 'Dépêches du front d'une guerre imaginaire: les récits de guerre au XXe siècle d'Albert Robida' in *Albert Robida: de la satire à l'anticipation*, ed. by Claire Barel-Moisan and Matthieu Letourneux (Brussels: Les Impressions nouvelles, 2022), pp. 288-299.

troops, air raids of cities and biological warfare, aspects already seen in Robida's work, resurface in *La Guerre infernale*.

The typology of Chinese tortures in 'Les Chinois à Moscou' and 'Dans l'avenue des supplices', fascicles 28 and 29 has been assessed in relation to Octave Mirbeau's *Le Jardin des supplices* and the literary context of future warfare.[151] I do not include Robida's representation of Chinese torture in my thesis partly because some useful work has been done for this, and also because Robida seems to position himself very differently from the authors discussed in Chapter IV and some of the yellow perilists. I am convinced by Clarke that Robida is 'not entirely serious in his forecast of war in the twentieth century' and that he contemplates his immediate reality and what might happen in the infernal war of 1937 with ironic amusement rather than with terror or any kind of partisan zeal.[152] When placing Robida among the continuers of Verne, Jean-Marc Gouanvic has also suggested that Robida parodies Verne's model.[153]

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[151] André Lange offers a clear overview in 'Le rire et l'effroi: massacres et supplices orientaux dans l'œuvre d'Albert Robida' in *Le Supplice oriental dans la littérature et les arts*, ed. by Antonio Dominguez Leiva and Muriel Détrie (Paris: Les éditions du Murmure, 2005), pp. 135-170. Recent studies include Giulia Ianuzzi's 'The Illustrator and the Global Wars to Come: Albert Robida, *La Guerre infernale*, and the Long History of Imagined Warfare', *Cromohs Cyber Review of Modern Historiography*, Vol. 22 (Florence: Firenze University Press, May 2020), pp. 95-136 and her chapter 'The Cruel Imagination: Oriental Tortures from a Future Past in Albert Robida's Illustrations for *La Guerre infernale* (1908)', *Law, Justice and Codification in Qing China. European and Chinese Perspectives. Essays in History and Comparative Law* (Trieste: University of Trieste, 2017), pp. 193-205.

[152] Clarke, *op. cit*., p. 82.

[153] Gouanvic, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

This requires further investigation, for most of Robida's work falls outside of the immediate purview of my thesis. But a quick look at one of Robida's illustration for *La Guerre infernale* substantiates my suspicion. Unlike most yellow perilists who endeavour to make their reader dread the Chinese populational mass,[154] Robida seems to be leaning towards making jokes of it. In 'Les Chinois à Moscou', the Chinese stack hundreds of soldiers into a pile that serves as an elevated terrain for observation.[155] Officers equipped with binoculars and telescopes walk up and down the human heap just like on a hill (Figure 6). It makes one wonder to what extent Robida's tongue-in-cheek representation of the Yellow Peril places himself at an ironic distance from the social and literary discourses that imagine the Yellow Peril in the mode of horror.

[154] For instance, de Noussanne provides a bulletin to report the crushing numbers of the Chinese army in 'La Revanche de la Chine', p. 126.

[155] Giffard, *op. cit.*, II, p. 881.



Figure 6. 'Quand ils n'ont pas de montagnes à proximité, ils en font avec des soldats couchés par centaines les uns sur les autres' in Pierre Giffare, *La Guerre infernale: Grand roman d'aventures inédit*, 2 vols (Paris: Albert Méricant, 1908), II, p. 881.

That irony is not just an episodic riff on clichés of Chinese cruelty in *La Guerre infernale* can also be proved by its narrative structure and the disproportionate incident that leads to the world war in the novel's beginning. It is told in the first person by a narrator who is a journalist of *L'An 2000*, a Parisian newspaper. He finds himself in the Hague to report on an international congress. Britain and Germany go to war because of a dispute between their plenipotentiaries over the serving of sorbet in the closing banquet. The war evolves into a world war, and the first half of the novel revolves around air raids and the armed harassment of the American inventor of a high-functioning dirigible in search of the highest bidder for his aircraft. Meanwhile, it is discovered that Japan, an ally of Britain, is plotting with China to invade the Western nations beginning with California, followed by the march across Siberia. The narrator gets captured by the Japanese and witnesses their attack on the Panama Canal that causes a blockade to the deployment of Western warships. After escaping the Japanese, the narrator returns to Europe and hurries to Russia to cover the Chinese invasion across Siberia. Though a Russian doctor manages to propagate an epidemic of cholera among the Chinese troops, the method backfires, affecting the Western army as well. As the Chinese army advances, the narrator gets imprisoned by the Chinese and watches his companions tortured to death one after another. The penultimate fascicle ends at the moment before his decapitation. The last fascicle begins with his trance-like self-

questioning of survival. In reality, all of his peripeteia is but a nightmare, as he has mistaken the year of 1907 on the calendar for 1937 because of a stain on the number 0 which makes the number look like 3 when seen from afar. He works for *Le Figaro*, not *L'An 2000*. Finding that none of his companions died, he sets out to write out his 'odyssée nocturne' set in a near future that justifies his warning about the Yellow Peril. The table of contents he sketches out after awakening bears the title of every instalment that has preceded the conclusion.[156]

Is it not ironic to talk about self-cancelling doom through 952 pages of blasts, escapes, menace, bloodshed, torture, and suffering (illuminated with 526 illustrations) that end up as *just* a nightmare? Can Giffard and Robida pay lip service to ideas and tropes they do not fully believe in, while also tapping into the *roman d'aventures* as an inherited system of categories, meanings, and expectations? Given that *La Guerre infernale* is not the first and only collaboration between Giffard and Robida,[157] who were also good friends, further work is needed to explore irony throughout the novels they co-created to see the matter in perspective. What can be said about my concern with gender is that the novel's narrator fulfils the kind of masculinity that excels at

[156] Giffard, *op. cit.*, II, p. 948.

[157] Their previous collaborations include *La Vie en chemin de fer* (1888) and *La Fin du cheval* (1899).

talking about adventures he survived. He is the savvy *aventurier* whose facility for fabricating swashbuckling tales is compared by Jean Yves Tadié to the profession of charcuterie. We can grant that it takes a turn-of-the-century Tom Cruise to return unscathed from a series of dangerous actions involving being captured by the Chinese. Or perhaps it is precisely because Giffard and Robida realise that it has become a mission impossible to pile up stock tropes of future wars to represent the yellow horde––or horror itself—so that the best way they could possibly contrive to end the series is to wrap it up in a dream?

Finally, my association of yellow perilist novels with the *roman d'aventure* has focused on the genre's purposive and political dimension. Vladimir Jankélévitch provides some insights on how to make sense of these stories steeped in xenophobia that mostly do not age well. Adventure, as construed by Jankélévitch, is one of the ways to consider time. 'La région de l'aventure, c'est l'avenir'.[158] For Jankélévitch, adventure is rooted in the drive to seize the certainty that there is a future in any case and grapple with the uncertainty about what this future entails. This is especially true of yellow perilist novels, as they centre on the certainty of the Yellow Peril and they are so engrossed in picturing its materialisation. They were so certain that what seemed

[158] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L'Aventure, l'ennui, le sérieux* (Paris: Flammarion 2023 [1963]), p. 11.

to confirm China's decline through Japan's victories got to be presented at their time as boosting the likelihood of a real Yellow Peril.[159] In displacing Revanchist animosity and concerns of social degeneration, yellow perilist novels explore what Clarke calls 'a mental geography of the future' populated with present fears monetised as prophecy and edifying materials for the cultivation of a form of masculinity.[160] China, in all its fascination and terror, creeps into this geography of the future and casts a long shadow, forming one of the *lieux communs* of turn-of-the-century fantasy.

[159] Crean, *op. cit*., p. 22.

[160] Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

Conclusion

Gender and empire are problematics recurrent in turn-of-the-century French literature on China, extending across differences of genre, style, and positions in relation to empire-building. In this period, Orientalist discourses chart out massive domains of academic endeavour and fantasies often bound up with currents of thought and literary movements haunting fin-de-siècle France, such as Decadence, gender crossing, racial thinking, and metaphors of pathology applied to the social consequences of these issues. The ideological matrix in which gender and empire are invoked exercises significant authority as well as creative power. Creation and contestation come with practices that codify difference, disseminate knowledge about other people, and claim the authority to represent geographical, human, and cultural otherness. Empire becomes the setting and the object of representation, as it gives rise to the codification of cultural difference through academic institutions, expositions, travel writing, photographs, and popular culture to inform and entertain metropolitan culture. Gender plays a significant role in the representation of China. The cultural meanings performed by gender-ambiguous people are prone to be read as forms of perversion by French writers who demonstrate a certain interest in experiencing them vicariously by incorporating them into exoticist literature. Turn-of-the-century French literature on China generates challenges and forms of counter-authority through

intellectual and aesthetic images.

By analysing gender and empire across a range of literary works, I have sought to answer the question posed in the beginning: what does China mean to turn-of-the-century French literature? Having examined this question in extensive detail throughout the previous chapters, I intend to sketch out a synthesising response as my conclusion. I have identified hybridity as one of the guiding critical concepts to make sense of questions of authority and counter-authority regarding the representation of the cultural Other, and its broad implications in forms of contact, particularly in the cultural interchange between France and China. The idea of shuttling between sameness and difference is key to my approach to figures and tropes encountered throughout my study. Among the passengers of these trajectories are a Chinese boy-actor who bears traces of decadent glamour as an androgynous artist, an imaginary empress of China thought of as a powerful embodiment of melodrama, Chinese women performers purged of their conventional association with prostitution in the auto-ethnographical account of a French-speaking Chinese author, novelistic adaptations of Empress Dowager Cixi as a *femme fatale* suggesting masochistic titillation, and a dreadful lord of the Yellow Peril whose masculinity subdues his French counterpart.

However diverse these possible ways of representing China, exercising intellectual credibility is crucial for representation to assume an authoritative position; in other

words, to perform knowledge. René Leys, the Belgian polyglot in Victor Segalen's eponymous novel, is an adept at this kind of performance. Written in 1911, *René Leys* recounts how the author's fictional double, 'Segalen',[1] navigates his way among different linguistic and cultural guides to penetrate China. 'Penetrating' China conflates the author's personal fascination with China with the sexualised trope of exploration and conquest. Meanwhile, penetration possesses another acceptation in this context, one concerned with incision and probing, almost evocative of anatomy as would befit the author's profession as a military doctor. He had hoped that the journey would benefit his project of writing *Le Fils du Ciel*, a novel that focuses on the life of Guangxu, the penultimate emperor of Qing dynasty. Segalen professes that 'je comptais pour cela [the project of *Fils du Ciel*] sur la pénétration professionnelle des médecins de nos races européennes'.[2] Cutting through the incomprehensible surface of China to illuminate the workings and hidden passions of an ancient empire becomes the crux of this epistemological quest.

However, the putative project of dissipating mystique by means of knowledge happens to superimpose myth with piecemeal accumulation of facts palatable to the mind of 'Segalen'. From the outset, Segalen the author makes us aware of this and

[1] From now on I will use the inverted commas to distinguish the character from the author.

[2] Segalen, *René Leys* in *Œuvres*, ed. by Christian Doumet, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2020), II, p. 214.

introduces an ironic pun: le 'Dedans', which designates the interior of the Forbidden City, also evokes the French idiom *être mis dedans*, to be duped. Managing to be put inside the Palace by an insider involves being duped voluntarily. So, 'Segalen' meets a bilingual prodigy named René Leys, a character based on a real person called Maurice Roy whom Segalen met in 1910. Maurice was the son of the director of the French post service in Beijing and had some connection with the Forbidden City. The real Segalen befriended Maurice and kept a journal called *Les Annales secrètes d'après Maurice Roy.* In his annals, Segalen records the stories Maurice tells him regarding the young man's involvement in the Chinese court including what Segalen calls 'des jeux grecs' involving the emperor, the eunuchs, and potentially Maurice himself. In a letter to a friend, Segalen wrote: 'J'ai mis la main sur un merveilleux collaborateur; un jeune Français de 19 ans, à Péking depuis 4 ans, qui parle chinois comme feu chinois lui-même et m'épargne des années de recherches.' In the early phases of their friendship, Segalen was rather positive about Maurice and congratulated himself on the relationship with Maurice as a propitious gain: 'c'est sans doute un ami qui se prépare pour Yvonne et pour moi.'[3] In real life, Segalen distanced himself from his protégé for some reason, consigning this episode of his life to the realm of fiction.

[3] Segalen, 'Lettre à Georges-Daniel de Monfreid' (21 June 1910), *Correspondance*, ed. by Henry Bouillier, 2 vols. (Paris: Fayard, 2004), I, p. 1126.

In the novel, René gives ‘Segalen’ Chinese lessons, and ‘Segalen’ is enthralled by René’s degree of cultural assimilation and the privilege allegedly conferred upon him as a high-ranking employee at the palace. Son of a grocer in the European legation, René happens to be a tutor at the school for Manchu nobles, head of the secret police of the court, and a secret lover of the Empress Dowager Longyu. These credentials represent social, cultural, and even sexual capitals indicative of a successful penetration of China. In the European community of late imperial Beijing depicted by the novel, René is neither an isolated case of cultural assimilation nor the only local guide to which ‘Segalen’ turns. M. Jarignoux is a neighbour of ‘Segalen’ who works for the Chinese government and has been rewarded with an official rank in the imperial bureaucratic system. Jarignoux has also become a Chinese subject through naturalisation, and he follows the local custom to marry a few concubines. Aside from René’s tutorials, ‘Segalen’ also takes lessons with maître Wang, whose presentation of Chinese geography and imperial bureaucracy seems useful, but it amounts to a litany of terminology that fails to appeal to ‘Segalen’’s imagination. ‘Segalen’ deliberately prioritises René’s friendship because of the very mystification that excites and perplexes him. When the choice is made, ‘Segalen’’s exclamation marks his commitment to the ritual of truth performed by René with his encyclopedic (but apocryphal) knowledge and suspicious network:

> Je vois clair. Voici la lumière et la porte et la pénétration! Voici mes entrées promises: le mur Rouge, le mur Jaune, le mur Violet infranchissable me deviennent tout d'un coup faits de réseaux délicats, transparents, que je perce et passe en jouant, sous des costumes…—Ma confiance n'a plus de bornes: je saurai tout: je verrai tout…[4]

The choice of René in lieu of Jarignoux and maître Wang as 'Segalen''s ultimate and most intimate guide is oriented towards the kinds of relations fostered between René and 'Segalen' rather than the veracity of what René claims to know.

Even if René's swashbuckling accounts are rife with inconsistencies, 'Segalen' consciously chooses to believe him and goes as far as giving prompts for the next episodes of René's adventures. Posing as an insider likely to introduce 'Segalen' into the palace, René merely takes him to a playhouse situated in a district packed with wine houses and brothels. Having been warned several times that René is a 'noceur',[5] 'Segalen' chooses to believe that the Chinese guests who greet René there are his colleagues from the secret police and that the Beijing opera singer on the stage is a young prince who is practicing for a performance in the palace. The explanation is far from plausible as nobles are forbidden to set foot in playhouses; if they ever wish to do so, the trip must go undercover. 'Segalen''s exotic, epistemological, and novelistic journey of penetration amounts to a game of complicity, a fraud licensed by his own

[4] Segalen, *René Leys*, pp. 274-275.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 235.

consent and fiction. In 'Segalen''s words, this license is his own choice: 'Mon parti est donc pris: celui de la grande confidence.'[6] To complicate the business of mystification, 'Segalen' suggests René should orchestrate an arson in the palace and solve the case to earn a promotion. He paints a rosy future in which René becomes 'grand chef de tous les Policiers des Dix-Huit Provinces et Pays Tributaires…Allez-y, mon cher Leys, et votre fortune est faite!'[7] Following this prompt, 'Segalen' ironises himself by admitting his complicity in the game of confabulation: 'Je ne sais trop moi-même si, parlant ainsi, je plaisante ou prophétise, —simplement: j'entre dans le jeu.'[8]

The friendship between 'Segalen' and René Leys is a salient example of male homosocial desire. Male homosocial desire designates bonds between men as a distinguishable strand in a broad spectrum connecting homosexuality and heterosexuality. It is a corollary of sexualised opposition, since it involves the internal mechanism of mutual attention, identification, emulation, collaboration, and competition between persons of the same sex. Male homosocial desire revises René Girard's conceptualisation of triangular desire in *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*. Triangular desire posits a subject, an object of desire, and a mediator. How

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[6] *Ibid.*, p. 355.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 276.

a subject identifies its object of desire is not necessarily linked to the object's intrinsic qualities but to the qualities identified by the mediator. For Kosofsky Sedgwick, Girard's basic paradigm for the structural relationship of identification and emulation fails to account for the power asymmetry inherent in both sexual and non-sexual male bonds. Hence, she underscores the 'mutual inscription' at work in homosocial and heterosocial desires to avoid an ahistorical approach to the maintenance and transmission of patriarchal power.[9]

'Segalen' identifies René Leys as the ultimate mediator of his desire for the mysterious nucleus of imperial China. Their homosocial relations abound with mutual inscriptions and forms of unevenness. René's claims to imperial favour, the command of the secret police, and a liaison with the Empress Dowager excites 'Segalen', placing the two men in a triangle of exotic desire. By identifying with René, 'Segalen''s time and space in Beijing become saturated by René's tales of social progress and sexual possession. Relying on René's network facilitates 'Segalen''s project to penetrate China, be it through real insider experience of the palace or just a delectable lie.

Conversely, the attention 'Segalen' lends to René is crucial for René's fiction and self-representation. Although 'Segalen' often calls René 'mon Professeur', his role

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[9] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016 [1983]), p. 22.

in the relationship with René is at times fatherly, friendly, and medical. ‘Segalen’ may seem ludicrously victimised by René, but he is actually the person who is pulling the strings: he is more resourceful, powerful, and authoritative; he selects the version of René that he likes. More than a confidant and a diligent student, ‘Segalen’ is aware of his multiple roles in the relationship. Throughout the story, he prefers to see René more as a successfully Sinonised European man than as a struggling teenager or a delirious patient. René’s death adds a casualty to the ritual performance of truth and reveals its toxicity. Learning China well lends cachet to one’s social profile, but there is a price to pay when the pretension to thorough assimilation reaches an impasse.

René Leys can be read as a tale of epistemological uncertainty in the pursuit of the Other. René epitomises false hybridity by staking his life on the performance of linguistic, cultural, and even sexual penetration of China through a series of tenebrous crossings, as he claims to have fathered a child with the Empress Dowager while occupying a favourable position in the Qing court. René’s alleged sexual relations with the Empress Dowager invert the conventional colonial power relation with the privileged white man and the indigenous woman. The human consequence and cultural diffusion of the liaison present forms of hybridisation, a source of prestige that enhances René’s position. ‘Segalen’ plays the role of the ‘willing accomplice’ to prod René to

inflate his achievements.[10] The act of listening to René's stories is itself a form of soft-soaping that encourages the performance of exoticist penetration, a series of fabulations on exoticist possession sustained by the homosocial bond between the French man and Belgian youth in the novel. The disillusion of 'Segalen' closes the novel with a note of irony. The one-time 'merveilleux collaborateur' ends up as the evidence of one's false consciousness about truth.

I conclude with *René Leys* because the novel offers a fantastic conflation of the recurrent themes of this thesis: gender, empire, and hybridity. It offers a miniature parable for one of my central concerns: What does China consist of for turn-of-the-century French writers? How can it be known? How can one validate what is purported to be of and related to China as true? Why does the epistemological journey matter at all? Our relationship to the world beyond the confines of domestic familiarity becomes equated with the capacity of knowing it from within, or pretending to do so to claim a position of authority. The subject formation of 'Segalen' the Sinophile entails the objectification of the cultural knowledge of China performed as a homosocial ritual of truth. Through the ordering and reordering of symbols to designate cultural difference, *René Leys* problematises the adjudication of difference and meaning among sets of

[10] Charles Forsdick, *Victor Segalen and the Aesthetics of Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 175.

cultural codes. In calling *René Leys* a parable, I do not suggest that all authors figuring in this thesis experience the same kinds of impasse of meaning 'Segalen' has reached. Nor do I want to cast all of them as members of a hermeneutic project for the search and restoration of the cultural essence or authenticity of China. Instead, what I have attempted to do is to demonstrate the complicated and diverse historical moments from which their writing emerges with variegated personal commitments and institutional practices. Negotiating the codification of cultural difference, their writings on China become a shibboleth at times identified as Orientalism, Sinology, and many things besides, bringing together cultural artefacts revolving around the exoticist desire for China.

Recognised as a buzzword in the 1980s and the 1990s worthy of newly edited textbook expositions,[11] hybridity retains its continuing relevance precisely because of one of its pitfalls, flagged up by Anne McClintock. Identifying hybridity as one of the contributors of 'fissures of formal ambivalence', McClintock warns that an excessively rigid vision of ambivalence cannot explain the workings of domination. She valorises an enquiry that 'involves investigating not only the tensions of conceptual form but also the torsions of social history' to fully grasp the workings of power.[12] The enquiries

[11] One of the most up-to-date examples include Joel Kuortti et al., *Engagements with Hybridity in Literature: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

[12] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* ((London:

conducted by this thesis follow this caution to avoid separating the concept of hybridity from processes of resignification and re-evaluation. Analyses dedicated to intertextuality and historicisation serve to examine the process of hybridisation propelled by some of the turn-of-the-century instances of increased geographical and cultural mobility. As a critical concept, hybridity also straddles the realms of language and sex, two models of cultural interaction germane to key issues of analysis of my thesis. It reveals that the process of Sino-French cultural hybridisation involves singular acrobatics pivoting in-between the cultures, challenging the insistence on borders and the monocultural constraints of the nation-state, national language, and national literature. In light of this, turn-of-the-century French literature on China takes the reader not on a voyage out, but an interstitial shuttling between worlds.

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