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史 CONTENTS

- 1 The George Ernest Morrison Lectures in Ethnology
—An Introduction
The Editors
- 3 The Revolutionary Tradition in China
C. P. Fitzgerald
- 17 The Chinese Civil Service
Otto P. N. Berkelbach van der Sprenkel
- 33 The Narrow Lane. Some Observations on the Recluse in
Traditional Chinese Society
A. R. Davis
- 45 Buddha's Word in China
J. W. de Jong
- 59 Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia
Igor de Rachewiltz
- 75 On the Art of Ruling a Big Country—Views of
Three Chinese Emperors
Liu Ts'un-yan
- 91 The Tradition and Prototypes of the China-Watcher
Lo Hui-min
- 111 The Garden of Perfect Brightness, a Life in Ruins
Geremie R. Barmé
- 159 Appendix: The George Ernest Morrison Lectures in Ethnology

Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover picture G. E. Morrison with his two 'adopted' children, sons of his head servant, photographed in 1905 in the front courtyard of his house at 98 Wang-fu-ching Ta-chieh, Peking

THE TRADITION AND PROTOTYPES OF THE CHINA-WATCHER *

史 Lo Hui-min 駱惠敏

Vice-Chancellor, your Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

You will no doubt agree that the interest in China shown by the rest of the world since 1949 is quite unprecedented. What better proof of this than your presence here tonight, when you would willingly sacrifice your time for no apparent reason other than that I have somehow contrived to insert the word 'China' into the topic of my talk. Talks on China have always had a certain fascination. Even before 1949, large fees could be demanded from institutions not wanting to be thought behind the times. Such talks have even been staged, like concerts or jumble sales, in aid of charities. It is this kind of interest, often indiscriminate, that has been responsible for the flooding of the book-market by works on China. Speaking in this hall a few years ago, Professor Jean Chesneaux of the Sorbonne mentioned how, when he first embarked on China studies some thirty years ago, he could almost count serious works on the subject on a single hand; some ten years later he could only get through the reviews and abstracts, and ten years later again, could barely manage even to glance through the book-lists and catalogues, so much had been published in that time. Indeed, if the claim is true that at the close of the eighteenth century more books had been published in China than in the rest of the world put together, it is not unlikely, should the present trend continue, that there will be more works published *on* China than on the rest of the world put together before the present century is out.

But bewildering though this rapid growth of writings on China since 1949 may be, no-one should be misled into thinking that, by contrast, China was little heard of or written about before that date. Anyone who cares to skim through bibliographies, or to wade through the incomparable but by no means exhaustive library, now housed in Tokyo, of the man whose memory we honour here tonight, will surely be staggered by the sheer mass of material

* The 37th George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology, delivered by Dr Lo, Senior Fellow in the Department of Far Eastern History, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University, on 27 October 1976 and first published by the ANU in 1978. It is reprinted here with the author's corrections. [—Ed.]

¹ Morrison, who began collecting books on China in Western languages soon after his arrival in Peking in 1897—out of necessity, as he put it—had, long before he became political adviser to the President of the Republic of China in 1912, built it into a unique collection of its kind (with books, pamphlets, maps, catalogues, etc., in all major languages except Chinese and Japanese). Housed in a specially-constructed fireproof building within the compound of his residence at 98 Wang-fu-ching Ta-chieh, widely known in his time (and still to foreigners since) as ‘Morrison Street’, the library became a place of pilgrimage for scholars from all over the world working on China and her neighbouring regions, as well as for curious celebrities. The increasing difficulties of keeping up such a collection, however, finally obliged him, in 1917, to sell it to Baron Iwasaki Hisaya 岩崎久彌 of Japan, after he had failed to find a buyer who would keep it, as he wished, in China. First housed in a building in Hongo, Tokyo, erected for it in 1924, in which same year a catalogue prepared by Morrison himself was republished in two volumes under the title *Catalogue of the Asiatic Library of Dr G. E. Morrison: now a part of the Oriental Library, Tokyo, Japan*, the collection, known as the Morrison Library in accordance with the conditions of sale, later formed the core of the expanded Tōyō Bunko, or Oriental Library. The library, now part of the National Diet Library, also acquired, in 1989, the South-east Asian collection of Morrison’s second son Alastair.

published on China before 1949.¹ It would be infinitely easier, and certainly less presumptuous, for someone returning from a three-week package tour of China to give a synthesis of Chinese civilization and divine its future, as is not infrequently done, than for me to give anything approaching a meaningful sketch of this daunting bulk of material. For to do so requires a knowledge not just of China, but of the historical and social background and personal predicaments of all the individual writers, each differing so greatly in temperament, intellect and approach.

I do not know when or why the term ‘China-watcher’ acquired an unsavoury connotation. Any critical observer of the contemporary scene indulging in drawing comparisons with the past and foretelling the future—to my mind,



Figure 1

Morrison's last day with his collection in his library in Peking—photograph taken with the purchaser's representatives (Odagiri Masunosuke and Ishida Mikinosuke and staff) who came to take delivery of the library and arrange for its transportation to Tokyo

what China-watching is all about—is bound to be controversial at times, and even suffer for it. The derogatory overtones that came to be associated with the term ‘China-watcher’ may, however, also be due to a certain resentment felt by some at what they consider to be the undeserved influence exercised by these observers, an influence often quite disproportionate to their knowledge and understanding of their subject. Be that as it may, it is unquestionably true that, just as popular music or the popular press (whose currency rarely denotes quality) nevertheless exert an influence often deep and widespread, the same can be said of the pronouncements of China-watchers. Such a perception may have prompted the reported remark made by an American soon after the outbreak of the Pacific War, that the two greatest disasters suffered in recent times by the United States in Asia were Pearl Harbour and Pearl Buck!²

But Pearl Buck is merely one of the more popular writers who, among countless others, has helped to mould the image of China. While physical and cultural distance confer on them an objectivity and detachment rarely achieved by the Chinese themselves, including those living under foreign jurisdiction, by the same token they suffer, perhaps inevitably, from the habit of judging China by their own standards.³ “The Chinese mode of shaking hands is peculiar and, I cannot help thinking, characteristic,” an English writer observed as late as 1868. “Instead of grasping heartily each man his brother’s hand, after our Anglo-Saxon fashion, the Celestial shakes his own.”⁴ Such an observation, though trivial, was typical. Nowhere was this attitude of foreign observers more clearly manifest than when they came to evaluate Chinese culture, which was alien to them. The more extreme simply dismissed it as puerile, and to justify their preconception set out to interpret and reconstruct Chinese civilization, supporting their prejudices and intolerance with half-truths, and making up for their ignorance and lack of understanding with rationalization or simple fabrication.

This task, this cultural ‘white man’s burden’, inextricably bound up with its political counterpart, fell in the early stages on the shoulders of Protestant missionaries. That the missionaries should have taken upon themselves the task of interpreting China stemmed as much from their evangelical zeal as from their being on the whole better educated and more articulate than most Westerners in China. This partly explains why Western pronouncements on China and Chinese culture were so often made by missionaries, and why, when Chinese studies were introduced into universities in England, America and elsewhere, more often than not it was missionaries or men with missionary backgrounds who came to occupy the chairs of learning—thus obtaining for China-watching an academic respectability.

Then there were those with lesser pretensions, who felt urged to say something about the China they had visited, not unlike those of the present day who go to the People’s Republic on organized tours. The more enterprising of these, quite rightly realizing that the story that “Chinese dogs also bite” would not go down well, dwelt on the seemingly strange phenomena

² Pearl Buck (1892–1973), the daughter of an American missionary, grew up in Hangchow and remained in China after marrying an American agronomist in the Chinese government service, during which time she produced, among other works, a great many novels on Chinese themes which met with a mixed reception by Chinese in the heatedly divided political atmosphere of her time. An idol of the ruling Chinese upper class in which she moved, she was criticized (as Henry James was by Somerset Maugham for not truly understanding the British whom he portrayed—see Maugham, *A writer’s notebook*) for her sentimental and somewhat superficial view of China and the Chinese though she lived there for the greater part of her life. Chinese reservations about her and her work did not, however, jeopardize the award to her of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938.

³ This is more commonly practised than is generally supposed, and its value remains dubious notwithstanding the fact that it has been misused by many countries in Asia and elsewhere to excuse their human-rights abuses and other malpractices.

⁴ G. B. Bacon, “Our Chinese neighbours,” *Hours at Home* 8 (Nov. 1868): 1.

Figure 2

Pearl Buck, photographed soon after receiving her Nobel Prize



Figure 3

Illustration from the Bodleian Library MS of the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* depicting the imagined reception of Marco Polo's father and uncle by the Yuan Emperor Kubilai Khan (source: Dawson, Chinese chameleon, facing p.10—see note 31)



⁵ These words of Bayard Taylor (1825–78), author, *inter alia*, of *A visit to India, China and Japan, in the year 1853* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1855), were cited by John Tyler Cutting, a Representative from California, as “an evidence of their immoral nature” in support of the Chinese Exclusion Act during the debate in the House of Representatives on 4 April 1893. See *Congressional Record*, 52nd Congress, 1st Session, vol.23, pt 3, p.2915.

⁶ Quoted by Nathan A. Pelcovits in *Old China hands and the Foreign Office* (New York: King's Crown Press, under the auspices of the American Institute of Pacific Relations, 1948), p.11. Sir Louis Mallet (1823–90), for many years with the British Board of Trade, was an authority on Britain's foreign trade policy.

which, in their attempt to convey them as such, became stranger still. This, what may be described as ‘tourist lore’, has a long tradition going back to before the time of Marco Polo. It received a sudden impetus with the so-called ‘opening of China’, and reached its zenith some time after China's defeat by Japan in 1895 when the affluent bourgeoisie took to emulating the educational grand tour of the aristocratic youth of an earlier age, and included China in their itinerary. They went in the then somewhat revolutionary pedagogical belief that educational excellence could best be obtained by experiencing the

bad as well as the good, and that their own spiritual purity could be more rigorously tested by having some acquaintance with those whom the American traveller and author, Bayard Taylor, had described as “morally the most debased people on earth, whose very touch is pollution.”⁵ No country or people seemed capable of exciting the same curiosity or fantasy as China, and the tourist lore only added to, rather than diminished, the mystery. It was precisely to exploit this budding thirst for curiosity and fantasy that such works as the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, more than five centuries earlier, were invented.

As distinct from the tourist lore of occasional observers, the professionalization of China-watching is of quite a recent date. It may be difficult for people living in the present China-watching-industrial era to imagine that in earlier

times such watching was done by amateurs—people, that is, with other jobs to do, such as missionaries, traders and consular officials, who took to part-time watching only as the need arose from their work. The professionalization of this activity came about from the belief that China needed to be watched with more vigilance than amateurs hitherto had the time or inclination for.

That this belief should suddenly have gained currency half a century after the formal opening of China and after nearly a full century of Protestant missionary residence can partly be explained by the fact that foreigners went to China to do certain work, but not to live among the Chinese. In fact, the importance of keeping these two—Chinese and foreigner—apart was recognized very early on, long before the words “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” were uttered. The fear that the two might meet was best expressed in 1863 by Louis Mallet, who said: “The paramount difficulty and danger to be avoided in our dealings with China is all unnecessary contact between British traders and the natives.”⁶ This difficulty was overcome and the danger averted by the setting up of foreign settlements, or concessions, in the so-called Treaty Ports, within which foreigners lived in racial and cultural purity and immune from Chinese influence, in a strictly defined *imperium in imperio*, buttressed by extraterritoriality which put them beyond the arm of Chinese law. But although it was generally agreed

**Figure 4**

"The Yellow Peril"—a drawing said to be based on a design by the Kaiser showing himself (?) in the guise of the archangel Michael leading the hesitant European nations to counter the threat from the East (source: Dawson, Chinese chameleon, facing p.143)

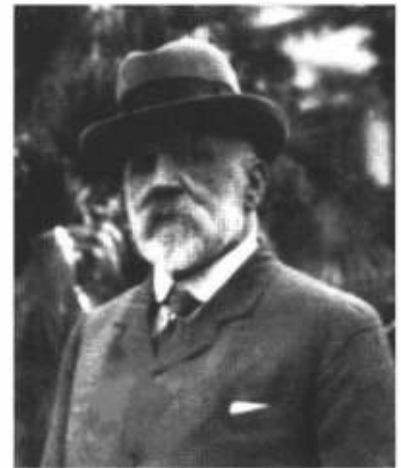
that the Chinese, like their civilization, had never changed and would never do so, change was nevertheless thrust upon them, and to foreigners peeping out from behind their barbed-wire barricades, the immutable inscrutability with which the Chinese met these thrusts aroused suspicion and alarm.

It was paradoxical, therefore, that the professionalization of China-watching should have occurred when China, plummeting to the rock-bottom of her national fortunes following her defeat by Japan in 1895, became the "sick man of Asia," as Lord Salisbury described her, reeling from what many at the time diagnosed as an incurable disease. This diagnosis coincided with the time when the term 'Yellow Peril' came into great vogue, a term coined by an Australian⁷ to describe an episode in the middle—or should I say, medieval—period of Australian history, which my audience here knows only too well and which, in any event, I have neither the time nor the required delicacy to deal with. What with the image of the "sick man" and clamours of "Yellow Peril," there arose at that time a popular fear that every Chinese was a carrier of infectious jaundice. Many cartoons survive to testify to the general panic during this rather unhappy phase of medico-political history. But the military threat from an enfeebled China implicit in the term Yellow Peril, which the German Emperor William II had helped to make famous, was a contradiction which historians have up to now neither comprehended nor explained, though Valentine Chirol, Foreign Editor of *The Times* and the chief moulder of British public opinion on China, attempted an explanation at the time. Translating the medical and political technicality into words more easily understood by men of an industrial age, he wrote in a letter to Baron von Holstein of the German Foreign Office that although he was "strongly impressed with the utter worthlessness of China as a positive factor in the political equation of the Far East, as a negative factor she may have her own uses, like

⁷ Charles Henry Pearson (1830–94), in his book *National life and character: a forecast* (London: Macmillan, 1894). A graduate of Oxford, where he was later a Fellow of Oriel College for nearly twenty years, Pearson had also taught at Cambridge and London before migrating to Australia in 1871. After a spell of farming in South Australia he became a lecturer in history at the University of Melbourne and then headmaster of the Presbyterian Ladies College in the same city. He entered Australian politics in 1878 and was a member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly until 1891. In that year he returned to England and served as secretary to the Agent-General of Victoria in London until his death. *National life and character* was the last of his many books and aroused a great deal of controversy, which persisted after his death. George Nathaniel Curzon, in his book, *Problems of the Far East* (London, 1894), was one of many who took issue with Pearson's assumptions regarding China and the Chinese.

Figure 5

Valentine Chirol (1852–1929)



⁸ Chirol's letter to Holstein, 21 June 1895, in *The Holstein papers*, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961): 3, *Correspondence 1861–1896*, p.522. Sir Valentine Chirol (1852–1929), who had been *The Times* correspondent in Berlin, became in 1896, upon the retirement of Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, Foreign Editor of the paper. Friedrich von Holstein (1837–1909), whom Chirol came to know in Berlin, was regarded as the moving spirit—and as the evil genius by his detractors and some historians—behind German foreign policy from 1890 to 1906.

⁹ Quoted by Bertrand Russell in his *History of western philosophy* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1946), p.715. The words “*On n’a jamais tant employé d’esprit à vouloir nous rendre bêtes*” are from a letter dated 30 August 1755 from Voltaire, acknowledging Rousseau's gift of a copy of his latest book, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (Amsterdam, 1755), which Voltaire described as a work “against the human race.” See Theodore Besterman, ed., *Voltaire's correspondence* (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1953–65), vol.27, letter 5792, pp.230–4.

¹⁰ “George Bernard Shaw,” in Bertrand Russell's *Portraits from memory, and other essays* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1956), p.74.

¹¹ The reference is to the so-called “Ching-shan Diary,” which formed chapter 17 of *China under the Empress Dowager* (London: W. Heinemann, 1910). See Lo Hui-min, “The Ching-shan Diary: a clue to its forgery,” *East Asian History* 1 (1991): 98–124.

¹² Ernest Bramah (?1869–1942), who had never been to China, was the author, *inter alia*, of *The wallet of Kai Lung* (1900), *Kai Lung's golden hours* (1922), *Kai Lung unrolls his mat* (1928), *The return of Kai Lung* (1932), and *Kai Lung beneath the mulberry tree* (1940). He was for many years on the staff of the *Manchester Guardian*.

¹³ Published simultaneously in that year in London (by Heinemann) and New York (by Doubleday), *China, the pity of it* became, in the event, Bland's last indictment of China.

¹⁴ Derk Bodde, *Tolstoy and China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), p.3.

any stone which may drive an express train off the line if placed in the proper position.”⁸ To extend his metaphor further, Morrison, who was appointed soon afterwards as the *Times* correspondent to Peking, was intended as some kind of railway guard to keep a watch on China to make sure that she did not get into such a position as to derail the express train of imperialism which was then heading for the heartland of China with gathering speed.

It is not to Morrison, however, but to his one-time friend and later enemy, J. O. P. Bland, that the latter-day professional China-watchers must trace their ancestry. I obviously cannot hope to cover in a few words the fifty-year metamorphosis of a career sustaining and sustained by a consistent anti-Chinese ideology, but as Voltaire said of Rousseau, “never was such a cleverness used in the design of making us all stupid,”⁹ or, as Bertrand Russell said of Bernard Shaw, “He could defend any idea, however silly, so cleverly as to make those who did not accept it look like fools.”¹⁰ Having achieved prominence through making a forgery, jointly with Sir Edmund Backhouse, into one of the most frequently quoted sources on modern Chinese history,¹¹ Bland went on for the next thirty-five years turning out plausible half-truths, building up his reputation as a relentless campaigner against China. Unlike Ernest Bramah's Kai Lung books¹² or Danny Kaye's mimicking of the Chinese language, which aim simply to amuse and sound so delightfully familiar and convincing without using a ‘real’ fact or syllable, Bland endeavoured to generate contempt and hatred, and succeeded. Intensifying his campaign against China as his enmity increased towards Morrison (who, incidentally, was the first person to expose the notorious “Ching-shan Diary” forgery), he went on to the furthest lengths to spite the Chinese by espousing the cause of China's then enemy, Japan. As an uncompromising critic, first of the Manchu regime, then of Yuan Shih-k'ai's Peking Government, then of the Kuomintang that followed it, and finally of the Chinese Communists, he alone could boast the remarkable claim of having been applauded and quoted in succession by the very people who had been ousted by the regime he was attacking, as well as by the next aspirant to the seat of power. Bland represents the peak of China-watching, which he crowned in 1932 with his most violent testament, *China, the Pity of It*.¹³

But China and the Chinese, the object of his solicitations, overtook him and left him behind, and his impassioned outburst, as it turned out, signalled the dead-end of China-watching. His followers and less gifted imitators since have merely traced and retraced the same old steps in an intellectual vicious circle, endeavouring to get a glimpse of the China from which they draw further and further away, lost in the mists of the very myth they help to perpetuate. To understand the process that brought to this unhappy end what was at its inception a praiseworthy enough effort—that of understanding China—let us try to see, if briefly, how it all started.

No oriental country with which the West has come into contact, it has been observed, has aroused the same degree of ardent admiration and violent antipathy as China.¹⁴ Extreme sentiments, indeed, have marked all stages of

the West's efforts to understand the country. In the centuries of often confusing fluctuations and twists, three periods stand out as being of particular significance, namely the thirteenth century—made famous by the account of Marco Polo; then the period known in European history as the Enlightenment, distinguished by the influence of the Jesuit missionaries; and finally the century or so dating from the time of the Industrial Revolution that coincided with the Protestant missionary movement, when the attempt to get to know China was coloured by evangelical fervour coupled with the search for markets and, towards the end of the period, with imperialistic expansion. Much has been written about the two earlier periods so I will not repeat it here, but merely point out those features which have since become part of the common heritage of China-watching.

Marco Polo's account of China was a kind of thirteenth-century *Red Star Over China*¹⁵ in its revelation in vivid detail of a world which had up till then been shrouded in hearsay and mystery. Unlike those sent to the East both before and after him, Marco Polo was not politically motivated. As the merchant son of a merchant, with obvious intellectual limitations, then as a servant of the invading Mongols who employed him on occasional errands, his vision of China was necessarily distorted and blurred by obsequious underlings and the spoils of war, and his attention was drawn mainly to material manifestations, which were all he could appreciate and understand. It is true that languishing in the mediaeval gaol of Genoa where he dictated his experiences, and looking back on China with nostalgia, he may have exaggerated what he had seen, like many Old China Hands after him have done, though many of the embellishments and extravagances were more likely the contribution of his ghost-writer, Rustichello, the writer of romances from Pisa. These, as well as interpolations by later editors, caused this important source on the China of his time to be suspect and generally disbelieved. Although the Jesuit missionaries were able to verify much of what he had related, it was not until towards the end of the last century that he was fully vindicated through the verification of his observations by scholarly researchers.¹⁶ In fact, Marco Polo, with his exaggerated figures and dimensions, by which he may have hoped to convey the image of a civilization too grand for the narrow mediaeval mind to encompass, was merely anticipating the more recent reliance on statistics by many social scientists, including China-watchers. The difference was that Marco Polo's description may simply have been a clumsy attempt to tell the story in a way his audience could understand, whereas modern writers, and many China-watchers in particular, have deluded themselves and their readers into believing that statistics add up to the sum total of human endeavour, oblivious to the vast complexity that lies behind them. While Marco Polo's story certainly raises the question of the difficulty of describing an alien culture, a difficulty many latter-day China-watchers have glossed over rather than recognized, the disbelief and suspicion with which his account was received by his contemporaries reflected an arrogance which was to be

¹⁵ *Red star over China* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), by the American journalist Edgar Snow, was the first account by an outside observer of the Chinese Communists' Long March and of their base of operations in north-west China.

¹⁶ Scholarly affirmation of the exploits of this thirteenth-century traveller was recently sensationally called into question by Frances Wood of the British Library in her book entitled *Did Marco Polo Go to China?* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1995), which concluded by suggesting that in all probability he did not go beyond Crimea, or present-day Turkey. This claim has been comprehensively answered by Igor de Rachewiltz, an authority on Yuan China at the Australian National University, in an article to appear in a forthcoming issue of *Zentralasiatische Studien* (27 [1997]: 1–59), entitled "Marco Polo went to China."



Figure 6

Portrait of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), one of the earliest and best-known Jesuit missionaries, who went to China in 1582. Having succeeded after seventeen years in reaching Peking, his tact and hard work soon won him the trust of the court and the friendship of many officials in high places, so that he was not only allowed to remain in the capital but was given a plot of land inside the Hsuan-wu Gate 宣武門 on which to build a church. His Chinese name, Li Ma-tou 利瑪竇, was widely known and soon became synonymous, even to the very young and the illiterate, with ‘respected, good foreigner’. On his death ten years later the mission was granted another piece of land as a burial-plot outside the P’ing-tse Gate 平則門 where he and other Jesuit missionaries after him were interred. Known as Ch’a-la’r (written 岔道), otherwise Ma-wei-kou 馬尾溝, this site remained a much-visited attraction over the centuries until it was occupied by the Peking Municipal Cadre School under the Communist government

magnified in the writings of nineteenth-century observers, who refused to grant the possibility of the existence of another culture equal, let alone possibly superior, to their own. It is indeed a powerful comment on the gullibility of the general reading public, as well as on the skill of the image falsifiers (as many China-watchers might be pleased to know), that while Marco Polo’s account was discredited, the fourteenth-century fantasy, the so-called *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, continued to enjoy wide popularity until the nineteenth century, and the images it created, which have survived in many forms and adaptations into our own times, were allowed to haunt the dreams of children when tales about China were told.

But though Marco Polo’s account was to fire the European imagination (the discovery of America being, to some, by no means the worst consequence), it was not until the seventeenth century that through the Jesuit missionaries Europe received a clearer picture of China. The reports of these missionaries opened up a completely different vista, not merely supplementing or enlarging upon the view which the medieval travellers with their obvious limitations had been unable to bring into proper focus. Because of the debate provoked by these reports, a debate which involved practically every intellectual of note in Europe and particularly in France, and because such men as Voltaire employed the reports on Chinese philosophy and institutions as weapons in the struggle against the intolerance of the established order, both Church and State, the Jesuits were accused, especially by rival orders within the Catholic Church, of having falsified their accounts of China. But in fact these reports, starting with those of Matteo Ricci, were far from being all favourable. Ricci has actually been accused by some modern writers, I think quite illogically, of inconsistency for praising in some reports Chinese political and social ideas and ideals, while in others relating with disapproval various malpractices and social injustices. There is no doubt that their residential restrictions and their scholarly training and inclinations tended to make the Jesuit missionaries dwell more on the ideals embodied in the Confucian canons than on their application. Certainly, coming from a society which was then fast disintegrating, the Jesuits were genuinely impressed by what they learnt, not only of the old traditional ideals but of the institutions which had grown out of them and which appeared to be reasonably stable and smoothly functioning. Their descriptions in turn impressed and were eagerly seized upon by men in search of remedies for their own troubled society. The distortion, therefore, did not occur in the reports themselves but in the use made of them. There was no question of insincerity in the admiration of such men as Voltaire, Robert Turgot or François Quesnay for those aspects of Chinese civilization described to them, but Voltaire for one did make Chinese ideals serve his political ends, and in so doing provoked counter-attacks from his ideological opponents, men like Rousseau who, along with others, had no other interest in China than to use her as a proxy to fight what was in essence a local European, and more particularly a French, battle. The same may be said of the views of Montesquieu, Daniel Defoe and Samuel Johnson, which were not so much based on any intimate knowledge of China as they were a

reaction against the excesses of reformers dressed up as China advocates. These excesses were carried further by the affectation, amongst the aristocratic hangers-on of the French Court, of *chinoiserie*, a vogue which was carried to a ridiculous extreme under Madame de Pompadour during the reign of Louis XV and caricatured in such works as Oliver Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*—though in this particular case the author was actually a Sinophile. The Jesuit missionaries themselves, or at least the editor of their reports on China, may be said to have precipitated the controversy by suggesting that China could even serve as a model for Europe in the very title of the best-known collection of these reports, *Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses*.¹⁷ But in the subsequent search for the 'edifying' and the 'curious' and the battle over both, the image of China became blurred and distorted and, in the heat of the

¹⁷ *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères, par quelques missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*, 28 vols in 26 (Paris: Nicolas le Clerc, 1717–58). Prior to the French Revolution, these reports were to exercise a great influence on some of the leading thinkers of the eighteenth century.



Figure 7

Together with Schönbrunn in Vienna, this room in Schloss Ludwigsburg, Württemberg (1714–22), is among the best-preserved examples of Rococo chinoiserie in Europe (source: Hugh Honour, Chinoiserie. The vision of Cathay [London: John Murray, 1961], pl.22)

¹⁸ The book by Louis Lecomte, entitled *Nouveaux memoires sur l'état présent de la Chine* (Paris: Nicolas le Clerc, 1696), was one of the works by the Jesuits referred to the Faculty of the Sorbonne on 1 July 1700, condemned by it on 18 October that same year, and ordered to be burnt. (See Virgile Pinot, *La chine et la formation de l'esprit philosophique en France 1640-1740* [Paris: P. Geuthner, 1932], pp.90–108.) Though the book was mainly an apologia for the Jesuits' methods in China, its condemnation signalled a decline in the high regard for China which the Jesuits had helped to foster in France. See also Lewis A. Maverick, *China: a model for Europe* (San Antonio, Tex.: P. Anderson, 1946), pp.17–19.

argument which was really about France and not about China, forgotten.

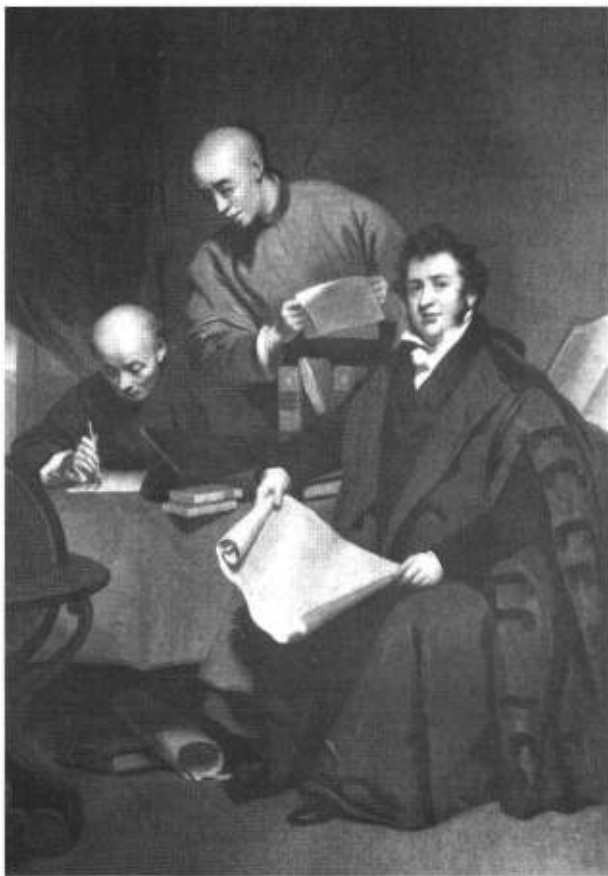
That China's reputation during the period of the *ancien régime* was not all that its Protestant detractors made it out to be can be seen not only from the ranks of her critics, but also from the fact that barely eleven months after Louis XIV had celebrated the first New Year's Day of the eighteenth century with so-called Chinese festivities, a book on China by the Jesuit missionary Louis Lecomte, in which he praised as well as criticized China, was ruled subversive by the Theological Faculty of the University of Paris, which had been asked to examine it, and was ordered to be burnt.¹⁸ Then Christian Wolff, philosopher, mathematician and friend of Leibnitz, whose proposal for cultural contact between Europe and China had led to the establishment of the Academies of Berlin and St Petersburg, was dismissed from his Chair in the University of Halle for praising, in a lecture he gave in 1731, the moral precepts of Confucius, pointing to them as evidence of the power of human

reason to attain moral truth by its own efforts, a view which was considered by his enemies to be verging on the negation of Christianity.¹⁹ Considering the time in which he lived and the fact that some two centuries later, in 1924, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, the Cambridge don, and Bertrand Russell were similarly removed by the British Conservative Government from the Boxer Education Fund Committee because of their Chinese sympathies, Wolff's dismissal may not seem extreme.²⁰ But it is an indication that not everyone during the Enlightenment was wholly on the Chinese side. Already within a decade of the first British diplomatic mission to China under Lord Macartney in 1793, China had gained for herself an unenviable name. This is shown by an article published in the *Edinburgh Review* as early as 1805, two years before the arrival in China of the first Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison (with whom, incidentally, our Morrison was frequently confused even by historians).²¹ For its perceptiveness and tolerance that contrast strongly with what was to come, and its relevance to our own time, it is worth quoting at some length:

When it is considered what partial and contradictory

Figure 8

Robert Morrison with two of his helpers, possibly from among the ten Chinese he managed to convert to Christianity in his twenty-five years of missionary endeavour in China



¹⁹ G. F. Hudson, *Europe and China: a survey of their relations from the earliest times to 1800* (London: Edward Arnold, 1931), p.320. See also Adolph Reichwein, *China and Europe: intellectual and artistic contacts in the eighteenth century* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1925), pp.84–7.

²⁰ E. M. Forster, *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* (1934; reprint edition, London: Edward Arnold, 1947), pp.127–8. See also *The autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, one-volume edition (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1975), pp.365–6, 381–3.

representations are daily made by travellers, of the national character and general condition even of those countries which lie in their immediate neighbourhood, and with how many deductions and allowances we must receive the accounts which are given by intelligent individuals, of societies that are accessible to all the world, it will be unnecessary to assign any peculiar reason for the distrust and suspicion with which we are inclined to view any report of the moral and intellectual condition of the Chinese. We seldom see foreign nations either fully or fairly, and scarcely ever consider what we do see without prejudice or partiality: novelty is sure either to magnify or diminish the objects with which it is associated, and the spectator of strange manners is almost irresistibly tempted either to despise them for differing from his own, or to admire them as something incomparably superior.²²

He then went on to give an example of what was clearly already a prevailing attitude:

What else indeed do we know with certainty of the Chinese but of natural philosophy, but of their total incapacity for the fine arts, and the great imperfection of their knowledge in those that are most necessary, but the stupid formalities which encumber their social intercourse, but the singular imperfection of their language, their cowardice, uncleanness and inhumanity.²³

This note of caution against intolerance resulting from ignorance and bigotry was raised now and then throughout the nineteenth century and into our own time. So great had the prejudice become that Abel Rémusat, the pioneer of modern Sinology, thought it necessary to use the occasion of his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1815, in his own words, to “run the risk of being reproached for partiality towards a people to whose literature” he had given many years in order to bring the Western critics of China “to a less unfavourable opinion.”²⁴ Father Huc, one of the earliest travellers in modern times to have traversed large tracts of relatively unknown China and by no means an uncritical admirer, was provoked by the habit, already adopted in his time, of foreign residents in China of ridiculing Chinese customs and their way of life and pointed out that Chinese would find much in European behaviour equally comical and illogical.²⁵ But the attitude of the West was still unchanged some twenty years later, as was pointed out in the *Cornhill Magazine*, where it was observed:

China will remain stereotyped to our popular imagination only so long as we preserve our profound ignorance of the vast amount of internal activity which has been at work within her borders for ages.²⁶

It is significant that voices such as these, coming invariably from those far from the Chinese scene, were drowned out and ignored, to the extent that a quarter of a century later, during negotiations over the Boxer Settlement in 1901, the well-known politician and journalist E. J. Dillon could still write:

Few Englishmen take the trouble to study the Chinese character, and all are therefore happy to hear that it is incomprehensible. Hardly one in a hundred

²¹ Robert Morrison (1782–1834), who went to China with the East India Company in 1807, became the first Protestant missionary there, a fact marked by the naming in his honour of the Morrison Education Society, founded in Macao in 1836 “to improve and promote education in China by Schools and other means.” The school set up there was moved to Hong Kong upon the island’s cession to Britain. Morrison is best known as the author of a Chinese-English dictionary and a grammar of Chinese, which were much depended upon by foreigners in those early years. His missionary endeavours were less successful. Although Robert Morrison died almost three decades before the birth of the famous *Times* correspondent G. E. Morrison and nearly sixty years before the latter first went to China, the two were often confused, not only by contemporary writers but later by historians. Martin Kieffer, in *The awakening of China 1793–1949* (American ed., New York: Putnam, 1967), an expanded translation of Roger Pellissier’s *La Chine entre en scène* (Paris: R. Julliard, 1963), provides a comparatively recent example of this confusion (p.172). His description of G. E. Morrison as a Protestant missionary in his introduction to an extract from *An Australian in China* suggests he may not have even read the book.

²² *Edinburgh Review*, vol.5, 1804–05, p.260.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.262.

²⁴ Joseph Needham, *Science and civilisation in China*, vol.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), pp.38–9. Jean Pierre Abel Rémusat (1788–1832), a self-taught scholar who held a Chair at the Collège de France from 1814 until his death, made many pronouncements on China in his works, by no means all favourable.

²⁵ Abbé Evariste Régis Huc (1813–60), *L’empire Chinois, faisant suite à l’ouvrage intitulé Souvenirs d’un voyage dans la Tartarie et le Thibet*, 2 vols (Paris: Gaume Frères, 1857): 2, ch.3, p.12. In spite of many observations of his with which some historians might disagree, Huc was probably one of the most open-minded travellers ever to have visited China.

²⁶ “Feudal China,” by F. S. T., *Cornhill Magazine*, vol.30, Nov. 1874, p.550.

²⁷ Emile Joseph Dillon (d.1933), "The Chinese wolf and the European Lamb," *Contemporary Review*, vol.79, 1901, p.1.

²⁸ Lionel Curtis, *The capital question of China* (London: Macmillan, 1932), p.vi.

²⁹ Wolfgang Franke, *China and the west* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1967), p.140.

³⁰ *British Quarterly Review* 56 (July 1872): 98.

thousand is aware of any established fact of China's history, polity or religion which would warrant or excuse the attitude of the Powers towards the Celestial Empire, yet that attitude, although frequently modified, has been uniformly unfriendly.²⁷

And as late as 1931, Lionel Curtis, who had started the China Study Group at Chatham House, had to confess that his own ignorance of China was shared by "an overwhelming majority" of his fellow countrymen, "an ignorance which constituted," as he forcefully put it, "a dangerous condition."²⁸ Yet this "dangerous condition" was caused, paradoxically, not by a lack of information but by the flood of literature alluded to earlier. If this veritable mountain of written words had not helped towards a better understanding of China and instead had led one distinguished scholar to claim that Europe knew less about China in the nineteenth than in the two previous centuries,²⁹ it was because the newcomers—the traders and Protestant missionaries, all took to explaining China according to their own preconceptions and to suit their own interests, and in so doing misled themselves and their readers—so much so that a contributor to the *Quarterly Review*, speaking of China, complained:

In this age we perhaps read more but certainly know less about general topics than in the happy days of readers of the *Penny* and *Saturday* magazines, who in a short half column used to get the information which is now spread through a whole article in a popular journal."³⁰

Some would no doubt express the same idea in this year of 1976 in much stronger terms.

The Protestant missionaries' attitude is shown in their distortion of the Jesuit reports on China dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Figures 9 & 10

Protestant missionaries Walter Henry Medhurst (1796–1857, left), a Scot, and the American Samuel Wells Williams (1812–84)



In an attempt to ridicule and discredit their Catholic predecessors they stressed the 'degraded' state of the country as they now found it to explain their own presence there—to save Chinese souls from further contamination from their own godless culture which they condemned as earnestly as the Jesuits had exalted it. While the Jesuits had sought to understand the culture of the people they were there to convert, the Protestant missionaries denigrated it to justify their evangelical mission. This attitude was clearly reflected in the pronouncements of such prominent leading figures in their movement in China as W. H. Medhurst, James Legge and Samuel Wells Williams, whose works are still prescribed reading for students of Chinese civilization in institutions of higher learning, including this university. Williams, one of the earliest

American missionaries in China, expressed himself shocked to find the Chinese without the Christian faith in “a kind and degree of moral degradation of which an excessive statement can hardly be made or an adequate conception hardly be formed,” while James Legge, later the first Professor of Chinese at Oxford, confessed that his mind “recoils shuddering from the thought that generation after generation has descended to the grave, without one individual ever having had the thought of God in his mind, or the name of God on his lips”; and after producing (with the unacknowledged collaboration of diverse Chinese ghost-workers) his translation of the Confucian classics, for which undertaking he is best known, he concluded that China had “a body politic the size of a giant, while it still retains the mind of a child.”

Medhurst, who founded the first foreign school and a publishing house in Shanghai for the enlightenment of the Chinese, gave expression to a commonly-held belief that “the uniformity and unvariableness of the Chinese mind is to be traced to their possessing one set of opinions on philosophy and religion,” and he spoke for the whole Protestant movement when he declared that the Chinese “had no prospect of amelioration but in the liberalizing and happy influence of Christianity.”³¹ This was after spending more than twenty years in the country “to labour,” as he put it, “for the benefit of China.”³² The urgency of this need for the Christian faith was best expressed by yet another missionary:

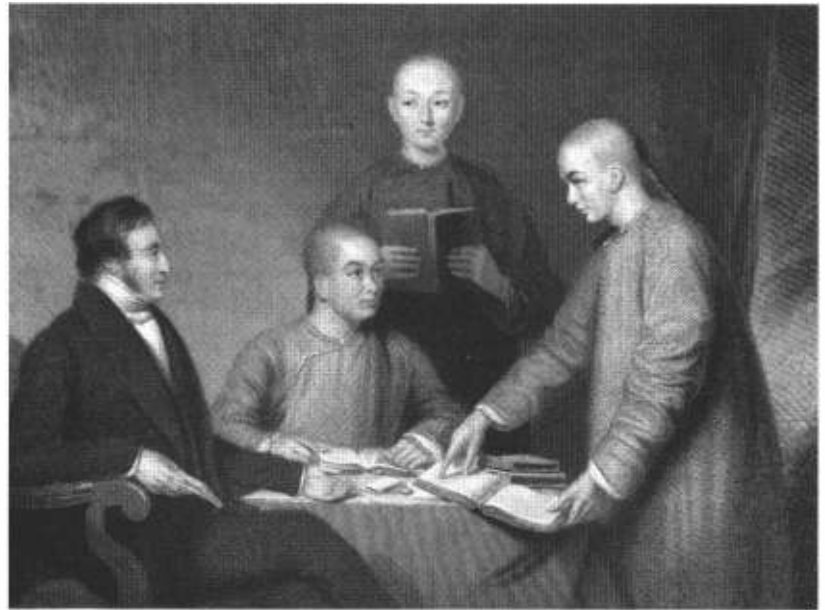
The most appalling item in the creed of a Chinaman is that he has brought himself to believe a lie. He really does not seem to have any conception of truth. It is a sad sentence to write, for amongst its letters lies hidden the death warrant of an empire. We confess this colour-blindness, rendering it impossible for the Chinese to see the truth, fills us with the saddest forebodings. The work awaiting Christian missions is indeed gigantic. They have to create a conscience in three hundred million of the human race!³³

But formidable though the task was, the self-sacrificing missionaries were determined to give it a try. One of them suggested:

The true way to reach a people so little imaginative in religion must be through education. Here the difficulties are the language and the old customs. It would be hard to break down what has worked tolerably well for

Figure 11

James Legge with his teacher-assistants, who included, at various times, Ho Fuk-tong, Wong Shing (Huang Sheng) 黃勝, and the well-known scholar Wang T'ao 王韜



³¹ Quoted by Raymond Dawson in *The Chinese chameleon* (London, New York, etc.: Oxford University Press, 1967). For the views of Williams see p.134, for those of Legge, pp.68 and 138, and for those of Medhurst pp.70 and 136. (I am greatly indebted to the author of this work, from which a number of illustrations for this article have also been drawn.)

³² Walter Henry Medhurst (1796–1857), *China: its state and prospects, with especial reference to the spread of the Gospel: containing allusions to the antiquity, extent, population, civilization, literature and religion of China* (London: J. Snow, 1838), p.1.

³³ Morrison Pamphlet no.149, Morrison Library, Tokyo: a review in an unidentified journal of a book by the Rev. Alexander Williamson, Agent of the National Bible Society of Scotland, entitled *Journeys in North China, Manchuria, and Eastern Mongolia; with some account of Corea* (London, 1870).

³⁴ "China," by G. W. P., *American Review*, March 1848.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Dawson, *Chinese chameleon*, p.158.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Samuel Robbins Brown (1810–80), an American Protestant missionary and one of the longest-serving principals of the Morrison Academy. It should be mentioned that upon his retirement in 1847 Brown took back with him to America three pupils from this school, Yung Wing (Jung Hung) 容閔, Wong Shing (Huang Sheng) and Wong Foon (Huang K'uan)

Figure 12

"Wong-y-Tong" by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–92), depicting a Chinese boy adopted into a wealthy English family at the height of the vogue for cultivating things Chinese (source: Dawson, *Chinese Chameleon*, facing p.110, reproduced by permission of Lord Sackville; photograph by permission of the Curator of the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery)



so many hundreds and thousands of years. But the struggle must come; it is the inevitable result of the contact of the weak and false with the strong and true. The only hope for the poor Chinese is their unrivalled docility and quickness of imitation. They wish to know and pursue the right, and their religion and philosophy have kept them at least pure-minded in comparison with other pagan races.³⁴

To see the truth was to see the value of Western Christian civilization towards which the Chinese must strive. The same writer continued somewhat sceptically:

The result of the English Opium War ... cannot but have the effect to extend foreign influence in the Empire. It would be as remarkable a fact as any connected in their singular history should the Chinese now gradually and quietly come to the standard of Western civilisation. When the influences are considered that are bearing more and more upon them, their destiny appears one of the greatest mysteries of providence that time should solve.³⁵

In spite of such great missionary effort, however, 'colour-blindness' continued to prevent the Chinese from seeing the truth. For this many missionaries blamed the Chinese language. It was not just any ordinary language difficulty, such as Medhurst suggested, but that "in the science of grammar the Chinese have made no progress. They have not learned to distinguish the parts of speech."³⁶ Rather, as the future Professor of Chinese language and literature at Yale University, Wells Williams, pointed out, the Chinese language was so primitive that it was "an unwieldy vehicle for imparting new truths."³⁷

This point was elaborated on by the Rev. Samuel Brown,³⁸ Principal of the Morrison School in Hong Kong, founded for the benefit of the Chinese. In a learned address read to the American Oriental Society and published in the Society's journal Brown declared:

[An] important clue to the right appreciation of a nation's character, is its language The Chinese language ... is unsocial in its very genius. The tones of the human voice that elsewhere perform the high office of expression, conveying from mind to mind the most intelligible signs of the emotions of the speaker, are in China strangely forbidden to subserve this purpose, and limited to the mere multiplication of words. It follows, then, that there are slender means of indicating by the voice, either the tender or the severe, the joyous or the sad, ... that there is little room, in short, for pathos in the language. Hence oratory is unknown in China.³⁹

and went on to give the following example of the working of the Chinese mind:

Every one who is at all familiar with the Chinese mind, is aware that one of its most prominent characteristics is, not indolence, but a sort of stoicism or insensibility. Tell a Chinese a joke, and he will smile; tell him a tale of

suffering, and there are ten chances to one that he will do the same.⁴⁰

Such inscrutability was, to say the least, disconcerting, sometimes exasperating even, and undoubtedly brought about the notion held by many foreigners in China, including diplomatic representatives, that the only way to make the Chinese take note of what one had to say was to accompany shouts with threatening gestures.

In a letter to Abbé Breuil soon after his arrival in China in 1923, the Jesuit scholar Pierre Teilhard de Chardin lumped missionaries and traders together when he said that “the European in the Far East is normally engrossed in the business of commerce or religion. The pursuit distracts him or arrests him at the lowest intellectual level.”⁴¹ To be fair, however, the preoccupation of those engaged in commerce was somewhat different. An early trader, writing in the *Calcutta Review*, expressed a typical sentiment when he said “It must be confessed that China is not a pleasant place for a mere traveller. The only thing we can go there to do is trade, and to do this successfully we must deal in opium.”⁴² For this reason, the traders did not have the same language worries as the missionaries. All they needed, in the words of an Old China Hand who ought to have known, was “the modest minimum which will suffice to enable them to check the work of their native clerks and writers without loss of face.”⁴³ Soon, however, traders and their supporters came to feel that if they were to operate successfully they would have to get rid of many irksome Chinese institutions, and in order to do this were led to attack the rationale behind them. This new approach was advanced by Alfred Percy Sinnett, Editor of the *Hong Kong Daily News*, in a booklet in which, after describing one of China’s earliest and most basic classics, the *Book of Poetry*, as “a barely intelligible jumble of nursery morality,”⁴⁴ and comparing the Confucian canons to the works of the Victorian pseudo-moral philosopher Martin Tupper (1810–89), he went on:

In what is it that Chinese civilisation consists? Of course, say its admirers, it is a different kind of civilisation from ours, but we have no more right to condemn it than the Chinese have to condemn the manners and customs of Europe. It would be as reasonable to say that mud has a different kind of cleanness from that of spring water. The difference may be granted readily enough, but the cleanness most people would demur. Chinese civilisation is different enough from ours, but wherein it is civilised is difficult to make out.⁴⁵

For this reason, he said, “every measure of our own which grafts upon it the principle of better things is a step in the right direction, and the opposition which the native government may offer us is an obstacle not worth considering.”⁴⁶

He was, in this, one of the earliest China lobbyists advocating the assumption by the Western Powers of the control of China for the benefit both of ‘civilisation’ and of the Chinese themselves—a movement which, as we have seen, culminated in the appearance of Bland’s *China, the Pity of It*, in 1932. Sinnett argued how this could be effortlessly achieved:

Figure 12

The Jesuit scholar Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1954)



黃寬, who went on to become the three earliest Chinese graduates of American universities.

³⁹ The paper, entitled “Chinese culture: or remarks on the causes of the peculiarities of the Chinese,” and read to the Society on 17 October 1850, was published in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 7 (1851). For the quotation see pp.172, 176.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.176.

⁴¹ Letter to Abbé Breuil of 25 May 1923, *Letters from a traveller* (1912; reprint ed., London: Collins, 1962), p.74.

⁴² In a review of the books *China*, by George Wingrove Cooke, *The Chinese and their rebellion*, by T. T. Meadows, and *A general description of China*, by John F. Davis, *Calcutta Review*, March 1859.

⁴³ Chapter 1 of the unpublished memoirs of J. O. P. Bland, Item 27, Bland Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

⁴⁴ Alfred Percy Sinnett, *Our policy in China* (London, 1869), p.8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.17.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.19.

⁴⁹ "The Future of China," *Fortnightly Review* 361, n.s. (Aug. 1896): 60.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.160.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp.161–2.

⁵² Jan Jakob Maria de Groot (1854–1921), *The religious system of China, its ancient forms, evolution, history and present aspect, manners, customs and social institutions connected therewith*, 6 vols. in 3 (Leyden, 1892–1910), vol.1, bk 1, Introduction, p.1. This work, despite its heavy title and gloomy subject matter, is highly amusing and entertaining for its vituperation, this being the most prominent feature of the book.

⁵³ Ibid., General Preface, p.xi.

It is not even necessary for the civilising power to grasp political authority. All that is wanted is the co-operation of the native government, that easy co-operation which consists simply in not throwing artificial obstacles in the way Our moral right to demand this from the reigning dynasty, considering its obligations to us, is beyond dispute.⁴⁷

"The national pride of the people," he added, "is not of a kind which would be in the least degree wounded by our assumption of a somewhat authoritative tone in our dealings with the government at Peking."⁴⁸ China's defeat at the hands of Japan in 1895 seemed to many to offer a good opportunity for taking over. It was wrong, it was asserted, to expect China to reform herself. In an article in the influential *Fortnightly Review*, the author, after arguing that "the broad provinces of China need but the magic touch of Western science to produce all our principal objects of consumption, in a quantity and at a price which will revolutionize the market of the world,"⁴⁹ said: "it is unfortunate . . . that many Englishmen still believe in the possibility of China taking advantage of the friendly advice of foreigners and proceeding to reform herself." This, he believed, was "an initial error, which will vitiate any line of policy based upon it."⁵⁰ He continued:

The Chinese are the least observant of mortals; most of them regard the triumphs of Western science with indifference or stupid wonder While we may be well assured that the few liberal-minded men who affected to be immensely impressed with the undoubted advantages of foreign laws, foreign wine, Harvey's sauce, and French tinned mushrooms, are very silent about these when they find themselves under the shadow of their ancestral hall . . . it is not to be supposed that the bulk of the so-called educated classes has thought out the matter for themselves and come to the conclusion that the East is better than the West. They are incapable of any such mental process . . . the Chinese mind is a 'non-conductor'; they only believe in our power so far as they see it, and they are so constituted that they do not see far or much.⁵¹

Such opinions were not merely expressed by missionaries and traders in their frustration, but equally by people whose scholarly interest in aspects of Chinese civilization might have led one to expect from them some sympathy for, or at least a better understanding of, their subject. For this reason I find the views of such well-known Sinologists as J. J. M. de Groot and E. T. C. Werner particularly puzzling. De Groot, Professor of Chinese studies first at the University of Leiden and later Berlin, was the nominal author of a six-volume work entitled *The Religious System of China*. After more than twenty years spent in seeking out, with the help of Chinese research assistants, many aspects of Chinese civilization which could only be found, to use his words, amongst "the most barbarous and semi-civilized peoples,"⁵² or "savages in a low stage of culture."⁵³ "As with semi-civilized peoples in general," he went on, "so in China religious ideas and usages pervade social life to its inmost recesses, that these are, so to say, the back-bone of the manners and customs, of the domestic and political institutions of the nation, and to a large extent

of its legislation.”⁵⁴ He then concluded, in reference to the philosophy that had helped to mould Chinese institutions, that:

In the mountains of reasonings not a single grain of common sense is to be found; and though these sages have obtained places of worship for themselves in the Government temples dedicated to Confucius and are the great disciples of his school of learning, thus gaining the highest laurels ever conferred in their country on the human intellect, not one of them has ever enriched the Empire with the simplest rudiment of real, useful knowledge.⁵⁵

His contempt for the culture which he had spent more than two decades of his life studying became a virtual labour of hate when he came to discuss *feng-shui* 風水, or geomancy, an early appreciation of the concept of ecology to which that most eminent historian of Chinese science, Dr Joseph Needham, has attributed the origin of the invention of the magnetic compass.⁵⁶ Though de Groot made no serious attempt to understand *feng-shui*, finding it, as he said, a subject “hardly worthy of serious study,” he nevertheless declared that “it fully shows the dense cloud of ignorance which hovers over the whole Chinese people; it exhibits in all its nakedness the low condition of their mental culture, the fact that natural philosophy in that part of the globe is a huge mount of learning without a single trace of true knowledge in it.”⁵⁷ He then concluded:

Even though it were granted that the Chinese race is not stamped for ever with total incapacity to rise to a higher level of mental culture, a complete overthrow and reorganisation of its religion, philosophy, literature, customs and social forms would be required to uproot *Feng-shui*. In other words, *Feng-shui* would bear the supreme sway in China as long as China is China and the Chinese are Chinese.⁵⁸

With scholarly findings such as these, the logic that led to E. T. C. Werner's appeal to the Western powers to take immediate control of China becomes clear. This author of the learned *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*, in the completion of which Morrison did much to assist,⁵⁹ urged:

In behalf of their own interests, and in behalf of civilisation, it behoves the Western nations concerned to once and for all take this step, and take it before it is too late. China cannot, of herself, catch us up for many hundreds of years, and Europe and the World cannot stop and wait for her, especially when a stoppage means injury to itself now, and perhaps ultimate destruction. And if we believe, as we must, that a more enlightened, and, at the same time, firm rule would be beneficial to the people by bringing about in the shortest possible way a lasting change in their character, there is a further spur to prompt action, namely, the voice of humanity ...⁶⁰

“China,” he averred, “having buried her talent in the ground for so long must now be called upon to give account thereof to her masters.”⁶¹ As fate would have it, this was the man enlisted as a collaborator by Herbert Spencer,⁶² whose phrase “survival of the fittest” is sometimes mistakenly attributed to Darwin, and one of whose works, when translated into Chinese, was to become a fomenting influence in the so-called cultural renaissance of modern China.⁶³

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.x.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol.3, bk 1, pt 3, ch.13, p.1051.

⁵⁶ Needham, *Science and civilisation in China*, vol.3, pp.359–63, vol.4, pt 1, pp.231–45.

⁵⁷ de Groot, *The religious system of China*, vol.3, bk 1, pt 3, ch.12, p.938.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, ch.13, p.1056. It is interesting to note that, commenting on the burning of the library of a Chinese Christian convert, a follower of Matteo Ricci, a library which contained works on geomancy, Needham wrote, “How tragic it was, and how paradoxical in view of the exceptionally learned nature of the Jesuit mission, that one of the most shameful aberrations, the ideal of ‘holy ignorance’, should thus have closed, perhaps for ever, some of the doors of knowledge on the origins of one of the greatest of all Chinese contributions to science.” Needham, *Science and civilisation in China*, vol.4, pt 1, p.244.

⁵⁹ The bulk of the research for this work, which was not published until 1932, was carried out in the library of G. E. Morrison, and with much help from him, even though Morrison took a dislike to Werner personally.

⁶⁰ E. T. C. Werner, “The China problem and its solution,” *Fortnightly Review* 57, n.s. (Jan.–June 1895): 585.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.584.

⁶² Werner contributed the section on China (pt 9) in the series, *Descriptive sociology; or groups of sociological facts, classified and arranged by Herbert Spencer* (London, 1873–1934).

⁶³ *The study of sociology* (London: K. Paul, Trench, 1873) was translated by Yen Fu 嚴復 (1854–1921) into Chinese and published in 1903 under the title *Cb'un-bsueb i-yen*. See also Benjamin Schwarz, *In search of wealth and power. Yen Fu and the west* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), and Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth movement: intellectual revolution in modern China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

⁶⁴ David Hawkes (b.1923), a Research Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, since 1973, and best known for his translations of classical Chinese literature, including *Cb'u Tz'u, the Song of the South. An ancient Chinese anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) and *The story of the stone* by Cao Xueqin, 2 vols (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1973, 1977), was elected Professor of Chinese at Oxford in 1959, from which post he resigned in 1971.

⁶⁵ James Legge (1815–97), the first holder of the Chair of Chinese at Oxford (1876–97), had served with the London Missionary Society in Malaya and Hong Kong from 1839 until 1873. He was succeeded by Thomas Lowndes Bullock (1845–1915), who, though a consular official himself, was the son of a clergyman. After Bullock's death the Chair remained vacant until the appointment of William Edward Soothill (1861–1935), a former missionary in China. The distinguished Chinese historian Ch'en Yin-ch'ueh 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) was invited to accept the Chair in 1940 after Soothill's death at the age of seventy-four, but he was obliged to relinquish the post almost immediately because of an eye ailment and returned to China. It then once more remained vacant until the appointment in 1947 of Homer Hasenpflug Dubbs (1892–1969) who, like his father before him, had been a missionary of the China Mission of the Evangelical Church in Hunan. Only with Dubbs' retirement in 1959 was the missionary connection with Chinese studies at Oxford severed. It may be mentioned that Ernest Richard Hughes (1883–1956), who became a Reader in Chinese Religion and Philosophy in 1934, had also been a missionary in China for over twenty years.

Figure 13

Legge in his latter years



The fact that scholars should have held views little different from those of missionaries, traders and consular officials is hardly surprising, for their roles were interchangeable and were indeed often interchanged during the period under review. It was precisely these who, as I mentioned earlier, occupied university chairs of Chinese studies almost everywhere. I have no time to name them all but will simply cite the case of two universities of which I have been a member. It was not until 1959, with the appointment of David Hawkes,⁶⁴ that Oxford succeeded in breaking its tradition of having a missionary for its Professor of Chinese, a tradition which began with James Legge in 1876.⁶⁵ As for Cambridge, it was dominated until 1932 by diplomatic and consular officials starting with Sir Thomas Wade, who was appointed at the age of seventy-one after spending over four decades in China pursuing his study of the language and culture of the country while serving first as Consul then as Minister, working tirelessly—contrary to the generally held view—against Britain's gun-boat policy for equitable relations between the two countries, despite his association, as Minister, with the Chefoo Convention that, among other things, legalized the opium trade.⁶⁶ This diplomat-scholar tradition was continued by the appointment, upon Wade's death, of Herbert Allen Giles,⁶⁷ whose reputed refusal, during his long occupancy of the Chair, to allow any student or other interested person to make use of the collection of books on China his predecessor had left to the University, may thus be said to have unwittingly prevented the wider circulation of such ill-conceived views as those of which I have already given some examples.⁶⁸ (The physical barriers that had to be passed to reach the Oriental collection at Cambridge before it was moved to its present premises as late as 1924 were reputed to be a Giles legacy.) His uncompromising longevity reputedly made it necessary for the University to offer him a 'golden handshake' before he could be persuaded to go just two years before his ninetieth birthday, and it was not until 1938, with the appointment of the Czech scholar Gustav Haloun,⁶⁹ that Chinese studies in Cambridge entered the arena of twentieth-century scholarship.

However unsatisfactory these appointments may have been, it would be wrong to judge these early pioneers too severely, for it was upon their hard-built foundations that so much of present-day Chinese studies outside China rests. But this is not to gainsay that the monopoly of the academic scene by men of just such backgrounds made the discipline known as Sinology what it long remained in some countries (such as Leiden and Berlin under de Groot)—namely, the study of the Chinese and their civilization not only as a dead object but as a hostile one whose elimination was dearly to be desired if it would facilitate research. It was the views of such men, both missionaries and others, that added weight to those expressed by the ignorant and the jingoistic and shut the Western mind off from a better understanding of China and the Chinese, as much as did their self-imposed seclusion in foreign concessions and the immunity afforded by extraterritoriality. It explains why foreigners were often caught unawares by events that were taking place immediately outside their intellectually and physically fortified walls. No other event caused a greater shock than what is known as the Boxer Uprising,

described by Morrison in his well-known account as “Chinese mid-summer madness,”⁷⁰ when the peasants of North China rose to attack the very people who had come to save their souls and help them manage their country. Then, out of the prolonged disbelief there suddenly appeared the so-called “Ching-shan Diary,”⁷¹ hailed by *The Times* as “the most important document that ever came out of China,”⁷² and by such leading lights in Sinology as Henri Cordier and Paul Pelliot as an important source on modern China.⁷³ Even after doubts about the Diary’s authenticity were raised publicly, it was still given a place of honour by reputable Chinese historians in practically every important collection of documents on modern Chinese history.⁷⁴ This so-called “Diary of the Court Chamberlain” came as a relief to those eager to hear that the uprising had nothing to do with the action of the Western powers. It confirmed what they had always suspected and said: it was all simply due to Chinese xenophobia and barbarism.

This period of European excesses had two effects: one was the conversion to a critical viewpoint of many Chinese, most of them foreign-educated, who began to despise their own culture and at the same time appealed to foreigners not to forsake them but rather to take them on as collaborators. Typical were men like Wang Ching-ch’un 王景春 (1882–1956), the well-known American-educated railway engineer and administrator and son of a Methodist pastor, who in 1913 declared: “China is slow, stupid, conservative, and everything else, but nevertheless with her prodigious and her instinctive sense of gratitude, she can be a coadjutor in Asia of no mean value.”⁷⁵ It was undoubtedly with such men in mind that Reginald Johnston, later Professor of Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, commented in an article in the *XIX Century and After*, in the same year:

It is a bewildering phenomenon that just as China was ceasing to appear grotesque to Western eyes she began to appear grotesque to the eyes of many of her own sons: that just as we Europeans were realising with amazement the high value of China’s social and political philosophy, her ethics, her art and her literature, the Chinese themselves were learning to treat these great products of their own civilisation with impatient contempt. We long tried our best to persuade them that their philosophy was absurd, their art puerile, their religion sardonic, their poetry uninspired, their ethics barbarous, their conventions upside-down, and now when we are more than half conscious of our own errors of judgement, they are putting us to confusion by insisting that we were almost wholly right. Fortunately for China this attitude is not likely to be permanent⁷⁶

I only hope his assertion was correct.

Another reaction was a sense of revulsion and outrage which excesses of Western aggression and insult aroused in men as different as Victor Hugo, Eugène Simon, Leo Tolstoy, Lowes Dickinson, Mark Twain, Bertrand Russell, and George Ernest Morrison. Time does not allow me to discuss the diverse pictures of hope each of these painted and entertained for China, resulting from their sympathy for the country and its oppressed people, but I ask to be allowed a short word about the man whose memory this lecture seeks to

⁶⁶ Thomas Francis Wade (1818–95), Consul then Minister in China from 1871 to 1883, was appointed the first Professor of Chinese at Cambridge in 1888. He instituted the system of romanisation now known as ‘Wade-Giles’.

⁶⁷ Herbert Allen Giles (1845–1935) had served as a consular official in China for twenty-six years, from 1867 to 1893.

⁶⁸ It may be mentioned that de Groot, in his acknowledgement concluding Part 3, “The grave,” of Book 1, “Disposal of the dead,” of his above-cited work, went out of his way to record that the loan of “some important Chinese books, indispensable for the completion of the present volume” and “not obtainable anywhere else” was “flatly refused by the then Director of the Chinese library of Cambridge University.” This did not, however, prevent de Groot from writing the sort of book he did.

⁶⁹ Herbert Franke, “Gustav Haloun (1898–1951): in memoriam,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 1952, 102,1.

⁷⁰ “The siege of the Peking legations” was published in two instalments in *The Times* on 13 and 15 October 1900, and again in the Weekly Edition on 26 October 1900.

⁷¹ See n.11.

⁷² “The mystery of the Forbidden City,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 Oct. 1910, a review attributed to Valentine Chirol but in fact written by J. O. P. Bland.

⁷³ *T’oung Pao* 23 (1924): 282.

⁷⁴ Just to cite a few of the better known and more authoritative collections: Tso Shun-sheng, ed., *Chung-kuo chin pai-nien shih tzu-liaobsu-pien* [Sources on Chinese history of the last hundred years, pt 2] (Shanghai, 1933), pp.464–90; Yang Sung and Teng Li-ch’un, eds, *Chung-kuo chin-tai shih ts’an-ke’ao tzu-liao* [Reference sources on modern Chinese history] (Shanghai, 1947), pp.420–50, (also in Jung Meng-yuan’s revised edition, 1949, pp.364–91 and in a new edition); *Chung-kuo chin-tai shih tzu-liao bsüan-chi* [Selected sources on modern Chinese history] (Peking, 1953), pp.477–505; China Historical Society, ed., *I-ho-t’uan* [Sources on the Boxer movement] (Shanghai, 1951), vol.1, pp.57–84.

⁷⁵ From an article in *Journal of Race Development* (Jan. 1913): 81–202.

⁷⁶ “A league of the sacred hills,” *XIX Century and After* 73 (Feb. 1913): 306

⁷⁷ See *The Times*, 17 July 1900.

⁷⁸ Letter from G. E. Morrison to V. Chirol, 1 Nov. 1906, in Lo Hui-min, ed., *The correspondence of G. E. Morrison, Vol 1 (1895–1912)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.389.

⁷⁹ E. Backhouse and J. O. P. Bland, *Annals & memoirs of the court of Peking* (London: W. Heinemann, 1914), p.492.

Figure 14

Sir Reginald Fleming Johnston (as he was later styled) (1874–1938), in the courtyard of his residence in Chang Wang Hutung (near the Old Drum Tower), where he was installed soon after his arrival in Peking towards the end of February 1919 to take up the English tutorship to P'u-yi 溥儀, the dethroned emperor of China. Upon being given the additional duty of controlling of the capital's imperial parks and gardens he built for himself a retreat at Ying-t'ao-kou 櫻桃溝 in the Western Hills, among rock-pools and bubbling streams, where he spent a great deal of his time, particularly during the summer, and entertained his Chinese friends and foreign visitors. Chang Wang Hutung, however, remained his principal residence until he left China in 1925 following the ejection of his young charge from the Forbidden City by the 'Christian general' Feng Yu-hsiang 馮玉祥 in a coup d'état in November the previous year.

The sable coat and hat he wears proudly in this photograph were a gift from his imperial pupil. Johnston later left these in his will to a close lady friend, a frequent companion during his last year at idyllic Eilean Rìgh on the west coast of Scotland—to which he failed to return after a regular day-trip to Edinburgh on 6 March 1938, collapsing and dying from a stroke at the city's railway station



honour. Morrison went to China as the first professional China-watcher, and an 'imperialist'. To the end of his life, he based his hope for China's salvation on her ability to reform along Western lines. Yet as the creator of the library which remains to this day the best of its kind on China, and which stands as a monument to his serious effort to gain a better understanding of the country, and as an observer of China, who, in spite of his bias, was able to record "from day to day the momentous vicissitudes with the prescience of a statesman and the accuracy of a historian," to use the words of his premature obituary in *The*

Times,⁷⁷ he could not help being outraged by the injustices and slander levelled against the people among whom he lived and worked. Unlike Teilhard de Chardin, who despite his humanity and tolerance could only see China's civilization in the image of a glorious sunset, Morrison, whose defence of China against the attacks of her enemies had identified him with a government of which he disapproved, was able, though surrounded by prophets of doom, to see a future for the Chinese. "Make no mistake," he wrote as early as 1906, "a reformation is proceeding, however crudely it may be conceived, and we can pin our faith in the future of the Chinese people, however we may have to condemn and threaten and bully this antiquated government."⁷⁸ Whether we agree or disagree with his other prognostications, surely, looking back over the last seventy years, we must agree that his faith was not misplaced.

The picture I had hoped to draw for you I am afraid must remain sketchy, but in parting, may I offer one last quotation:

History, as Froude has said, presents no subject matter for science: had he examined some of the material from which Chinese history is usually compiled, he might have expressed the same idea in more forcible terms.⁷⁹

These are the words of Sir Edmund Backhouse and J. O. P. Bland in another of their joint works written after their "Ching-shan Diary" forgery had brought them recognition as authorities on China, words intended both as a cover for their fabrication and as a smear on Chinese historiography. But actually they are not bad lines to keep in mind when reading works by China-watchers, present or past. I myself, in the best of that tradition, have been trying hard in the last hour or so to make a few simple ideas as complicated as possible. If you are not confused by now, it is not for want of trying on my part.

With this, may I wish you all good watching over the China-watchers.

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