

Book Reviews



HEURTEBISE, Jean-Yves. 2020. *Orientalisme, occidentalisme et universalisme : histoire et méthode des représentations croisées entre mondes européens et chinois* (Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Universalism: History and Method of Cross-representations between European and Chinese Worlds). Paris: Editions Eska.

FLORENT VILLARD

Jean-Yves Heurtebise's essay explores various aspects of the crossed history of intellectual and cultural relations between European and Chinese worlds since the Renaissance. It is a decisive contribution not only to the epistemological questions debated within the field of Sinology – the delimitation of its object, its role in the construction of an essentialised China, its Eurocentrism – but above all, to a critical history of representations of China in Europe.

This stimulating work is the fruit of a compilation of articles published by the author in English, French, and Mandarin since 2014. Although a real effort has been made to strengthen the coherence of the whole, it does not escape the pitfalls of such an exercise in that it creates several redundancies, and thematic developments that sometimes distance the reader from the subject. It also suffers from a disorganised structure, and language that lapses into jargon on occasion. This demanding and ambitious essay, whose plentiful citations are always in their original language, nonetheless proves highly fertile in terms of ideas and methodological perspectives.

The subject is tackled from three distinct angles: a critical approach to the conceptual and philosophical dimensions of these representations and their histories; a theoretical reflection that aims at reconsidering the debate between universalism and relativism in terms that go beyond a sterile duality, and finally, a discussion of the interlinked issues of Orientalism and Occidentalism applied to the Chinese sociohistorical context.

A substantial introduction allows the author to draw up a particularly welcome critical state of the art concerning these ideas and the way they are used. He reflects on the two poles, negative and positive, of these discursive depictions, questioning both their symmetry and their singularity and, in particular, the absence of a historical colonial infrastructure in the case of Occidentalism. He is therefore convincing when he demonstrates that what he terms "Sinological Orientalism" has its philosophical presuppositions in a definition of "culture" inherited from

European intellectual history and seen as indissociable from homogeneous language and people (p. 45).

After this theoretical introduction, the author offers a long section on the history of intellectual representations of China. From Matteo Ricci to Gilles Deleuze, and taking in Kant and Hegel, this historical overview is undertaken using a selection of authors from different periods, philosophical traditions, and ideological orientation. For the author, the Jesuit interpretation of China and the Chinese rites controversy constitutes the origin of the epistemological foundations of a European discourse on China (p. 70). Heurtebise sees the ontological gap between the "European subject" and the "Chinese object," the inability to imagine the processes of hybridisation and the recurrence of philosophical clichés applied to China (the missing of transcendence, absence of idealism, lack of rationality, inability to think in abstract terms) as the distinctive traits of an Orientalising European representation of China. The culturalist anthropology of the nineteenth century and the romantic illusion of autonomous knowledge outside its subject of study has reinforced this representation (p. 89). Countering this, the author tries to show that European Sinological knowledge was the product of a co-construction with texts, debates, and issues from within China (p. 91).

Heurtebise puts forward an edifying reinterpretation of the references to China to be found in the writings of German idealist philosophy. He traces Sinophobia back to a period before the nineteenth century, revealing in a convincing manner the gap – in particular where Kant and Hegel are concerned – between the progressive universalism of their philosophical systems and the culturalist and racist foundations of their anthropological discourse, in particular when applied to Asia/the East/China (p. 91-113).

Citing the writings of Gilles Deleuze and François Jullien, Heurtebise extends his discussion on the philosophical representations of China and "Chinese thought." He reveals the limits of Deleuze's representation of China, seen as purely imaginary, metaphorical, and with an intellectual production that had come to a halt in a "pre-philosophical" state (p. 119, 124). He nonetheless draws on Deleuze for a method by which to go beyond an "external difference" between China and the West, and see the possibility of thinking of the internal differences and multiplicities of these spaces (p. 138). The author's constant methodological ambition lies in thinking of what is common and universalisable in these texts and geocultural spaces without falling into an essentialising dualism.

The second main section of the work seems more dispersed as far as the subject is concerned. Enlightening pages on the pictorial perspective and the ideal of "Western medicine" allow the author to develop a stimulating and critical reflection on the methodological difficulties of comparative studies, and to deconstruct biases that are culturalist, essentialising, and lack historical context, which continue to beset the dominant discourse on Chinese/Western medicine in China and in Europe (p. 144-85).

In the three other "case studies," Heurtebise tackles some texts and discourse enshrined within the Chinese-speaking space. A too-

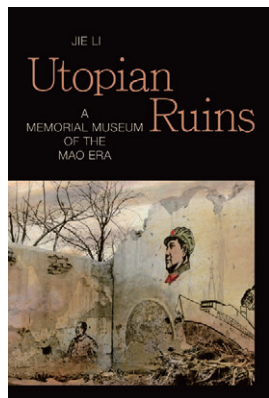
brief analysis of the amnesic nationalist imagination in science-fiction literature (p. 185-201) precedes a historical and philological development on the polysemy and the political uses of the concept of *tianxia* (天下), literally "under the sky" or "empire-world" in the politico-cultural imagination of the pre-modern period (p. 201-36). His ambition and the richness of his textual and theoretical references would seem to call for greater development to tackle in context such a complex concept in all its historical variations. It does, however, provide the author with the opportunity to apply his transcultural approach whilst taking care not to isolate the texts and to juxtapose their different interpretations of this polysemic idea.

The last chapter gives us a critique, sometimes stimulating but often rather confused, of what the author calls a "quadruple ideological projection" of China (developmental, liberal, pacifist, and ecological), its putative identity, its historical trajectory, and its future (p. 236-59).

The conclusion represents an attempt at a synthesis and formalisation of the author's methodological suggestions for cultural studies. In a language that is sometimes a little abstruse, he suggests that henceforth we think of the relationship between "European and Chinese worlds" in terms of circulation, hybridisation, and heterogeneity within these geocultural spaces. Despite the formal and structural weaknesses inherent in its constitution, this study, supported by an impressive quantity of secondary literature, would seem to be indispensable reading for researchers working with or on China, as well as those interested in intellectual history (Chinese, European, global) and in subjects relating to postcolonial criticism, transcultural studies, and comparative literature.

■ Translated by Elizabeth Guill.

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LI, Jie. 2020.
Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era.
Durham: Duke University Press.

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Li Jie's new book is an intriguing study of a series of objects that can be understood as cultural texts in a broad sense, spanning literary writings, photographs, documentary films, and architectural

constructions. Produced during the Mao era, they have recently been "re-mediated," as Li writes, or reintroduced into China's media sphere, whether through journalism, independent film production, or museum-making. The study presents itself as a "memorial museum," a "curated collection" of exhibits assembled by the author around the theme of "utopian ruins." Rather than excavating new primary sources, "this imagined memorial-museum-in-book-form curates from existing textual, photographic, and cinematic records about the subaltern" (p. 6). The common theme of these texts is determined by the author's choice to include both utopia and ruins, the socialist ideals of Maoism as well as the violence and mass mortality it entailed.

The first two chapters deal with textual documents produced by two famous writers, Lin Zhao 林昭 and Nie Gannu 聶紺弩, who were persecuted and imprisoned during the Anti-rightist Movement and the Cultural Revolution, respectively. Focusing on Lin Zhao's prison essays and notebooks, many of them written in blood, Li Jie argues that Lin drew on a tradition of premodern and revolutionary martyrology, in which blood stands for both the "promises and dangers of revolution" (p. 66). In the case of Nie Gannu, several of his poems found their way into his secret "dossier" (*dang'an* 檔案) together with "interpretations" penned by people reporting on him and, ironically, survived thanks to the dossier.

The second section of the book draws on photography and documentary films produced during the Mao era. Propaganda photography, theorised by the journal *Mass Photography* (1958-1960), is discussed as "eyewitness testimonies to revolutionary miracles that not only failed to witness and record but also contributed to man-made catastrophes" (p. 105). Nonetheless, photography deserves a place in the memorial museum: "Rather than dismissing propaganda photos or treating them as objective windows onto a historical past, we should recognize both the aspirations they express and their complicity in the catastrophe" (p. 147).

The moving images produced by Michelangelo Antonioni in his film *Chung Kuo: Cina* (1972) and Joris Ivens and Marceline Lorian in their epic *How Yukong Moved the Mountains* (1976) evince similar ambiguities. Li Jie argues that the directors "went to China in search of an authentic world where social relations were not mediated by mass-produced images, only to find another kind of 'society of spectacle' where the Maoist visual regime penetrated the most remote villages" (p. 167). Despite their shortcomings, the films stand as documents to the age, Li Jie argues, that were avidly discovered by nostalgic Chinese audiences in the early 2000s.

The final section of the book deals with architectural and monumental productions or legacies of the Mao era. Here the book covers some well-known ground, with the depiction of factories in three films: Wang Bing's *王兵 West of the Tracks* (*Tie xiqu* 鐵西區), Jia Zhangke's *賈樟柯 Twenty-four City* (*Ershisi cheng ji* 二十四城記), and Zhang Meng's *張猛 Piano in a Factory* (*Gang de qin* 鋼的琴). The factory serves as an ambiguous metaphor of the Mao era, which elicits both the nostalgia of some of the retired workers interviewed by Jia Zhangke, but also the enduring effects of industrial pollution and perennial disenfranchisement in Wang Bing's film.

The last chapter examines existing museums and memorials of the Mao era, beginning with a careful discussion of Ba Jin's 巴金 1986 essay calling for a museum of the Cultural Revolution, and surveying some of the sites that can make a claim to fulfilling such a mission. Ultimately, Jianchuan's Museum Cluster, with its cluttered, uncommented, yet immediately accessible and even tangible mass-produced content, may allow "more pluralistic interpretations of the past than any historical master narrative" (p. 247). By contrast, former "trauma sites" like the prison camp at Jiabiangou, a