Francophonie and the Orient

Kang, Mathilde

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V France-Asia crossings: the case of the French corpus

A literature of the intimate nourished by the East

The history of the Francophone phenomenon in Asia, as presented in the previous chapters, naturally leads us to texts written by French authors. For an obvious reason: crossings go both ways. To circumscribe the corpus of crossings to the works of authors of Asian origin is to reduce and limit it. For one of the components of this corpus, especially literature on the East, exists in French works, particularly those from after the eighteenth century whose inspiration, conception, or genesis draw on the Eastern world. Undeniably, there is a long history of French writers representing and being enamored by the East. The tentative move towards a vague, fluid, and ephemeral image of the Orient began in the West in the Middle Ages. This propensity was originally from a Christian perspective, given the importance of the East to the religion. This medieval imaginary distorted and falsified, due to a lack of knowledge of the sciences, and was conceived behind a veil of distant mysticism where the earth merges with the Levant:

this idea, added to the confused connection with the Eastern origins of the religion, naturally pushed the men of the Middle Ages to place the earthly paradise in some country far to the east... India, Tibet appear successively in the legends as the place (Martino 5).

Thus public opinion was shaped on the one hand by the wonder of Marco Polo's travels, which illuminate the imagination of the time, and on the other hand, by the lack of real contact with the Eastern world before the thirteenth century.

Great expeditions that made significant progress towards Asia marked the sixteenth century. From then on the Orient penetrated into the Western imagination and the phenomenon was amplified thanks to the first missions carried out in Asia, which brought back unpublished data on the East.¹ Out of this appeared a profusion of texts claiming to be products of the

¹ The ambiguity between notions of the Orient, the Far East, and Asia was raised in the Introduction. From the perspective of Francophonie in the East, the word 'Orient' means the Levant.
East; yet they only feigned knowledge of the Eastern world. The epic of this unreachable land culminated in a frenzy during the seventeenth century, when a fiery European imagination turned towards the East: ‘From the middle of the seventeenth century, public attention was projected onto the “East”’ (Martino 85). Alas, this unfulfilled desire for the East clashed with a complete lack of knowledge. From the outset, the magisterial corpus accumulated since the sixteenth century through a variety of writings on the East, as imposing as it may be, leaves something to be desired as to its relative value in understanding France-Asia crossings. For the cruel and patent lack of first-hand material and genuine experience of the East relegates the writings of this period to the label of ‘made in Europe’. The list of ‘oriental novels’ established by Pierre Martino illustrates this well. The most prominent example is *Le fameux Chinois* by Du Bail in 1642 (Martino 28), which was written straight out of a Parisian salon, hence its lack of authenticity or genuine oriental flavor. This phenomenon of the Orient incubated in ‘the Parisian salon’ reflects the time when the Western world, at a distance of 3,000 impassable leagues, came up against its lack of imagination of an Orient that was based on languages and customs that were closed off to the West.

If we locate the arrival of the works of Confucius in France through Father Philippe Couplet in the 1680s (Cordier 1910, 113) as the first reference point for the penetration of Asian books, this gives a concise idea of the progression of Asia into the French imagination. The volumes handed over by Father Joachim Bouvet, returned from Beijing in 1697, to Louis XIV attenuated the lack of material. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries remained difficult for any French writer wishing to acquire concrete material on China, Japan, or the Indies; because of lack of means, few books were affordable. Writers were therefore condemned to a material deficit, even if they wrote fiction. Thus, those writings of ‘chivalric loves, great deeds, gallant conversations, abductions, disguises, duels, poisonings, court intrigues and revolutions’ (Martino 30), were conceived and written in a sort of literary greenhouse. Even the genius of Voltaire is found lacking: tinged with European flavor, it confuses ‘China and the various Eastern countries’ (Song 1989, 262). But Voltaire’s time saw a significant material improvement in that they had access to concrete objects from China such

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2 In the work of Pierre Martino (159) the bibliographic details of these volumes, dating from 1672, on Confucius and the Chinese sacred figures can be found.

3 Voltaire is not the only one to mix the two. The common phenomenon of the time to confuse China and Asia as a whole is underlined by Franck Michel (73).
as ‘tea services, porcelain figurines, parasols, wallpapers, screens, trinkets, and small furniture in lacquer, silk fabrics’ (Song 1989, 261). It follows that the literary production resulting from this pseudo-oriental period does not hold much interest for this book.

**The birth of a literature on the East**

Thanks to Emperor Qian Long’s decree to print 160,000 works in 1773 (Cordier 1910, 114), the Jesuits managed to send numerous volumes from Peking to France, thus marking the beginning of the systematic penetration of books from Asia. The osmosis between the Middle Kingdom and the West is further effectuated through one of the first dictionaries, written by the Jesuit Joseph Prémare (Daniel 366). The contribution of *Notitia Linguae Sinicae*, the first work of Chinese grammar (Daniel 366), allows for a real advance in the knowledge of Europeans vis-à-vis the Chinese civilization. There followed a vogue of chinoiserie that swept across Europe. A dozen plays (theater pieces, writings, pamphlets, philosophical texts) ‘signed by Voltaire’ and listed by Song Shun-Ching, paint a faithful portrait of the Western imagination of the time on the image of China. As proof, ‘one third of travel stories were devoted to China’ (Song 1989, 262).

On this long road to a better knowledge of the Orient, several works stand as markers. The famous *L’Orphelin de la Chine* by Voltaire, whose genesis had sparked exciting debates between Voltairians and Sinologists, without doubt owes its origins to *L’Orphelin des Zhou*, translated by Joseph Prémare (Halde & Ji). Edited by Jean-Baptiste du Halde in 1736, this translation is the first milestone of Chinese literature’s encounter with French readership. Consequently, from the perspective of France-Asia crossings, Voltaire’s play is considered ‘the first in France whose subject was borrowed from the Far East’ (Cordier 1910, 115). In the context of a Europe in love with an adored China, Chinese tragedy generated multiple translations into European languages. This play on the Yuan remains the cornerstone in the demystification of the Orient in the European imagination and is a landmark in literature on the East. Thus the eighteenth century saw

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4 Born in Cherbourg on 17 July 1666, and arriving in Canton on 7 November 1698, he died in poverty in Macau in September 1736. His Chinese biography is consistent with the French one.

5 Chinese tragedy occupies pages 417-460 of the third volume of a collection, triage, and correction of Jesuit letters edited by Father J.-B. Du Halde and Junxiang Ji.

6 The insertion of the *Petit orphelin de la maison de Tchao* by Du Halde is also confirmed by Henri Cordier (Cordier 1910, 115).
the beginning of an era of emancipation of the knowledge of the East the increasing number of expeditions to Asia.

In this time of enlightenment, the revelation of the Relations by the Jesuits shone a new light on the inaccurate representation of the East since the Middle Ages. In this vein, several Jesuit Fathers (Bouvet, Gaubil, Le Comte)\(^7\) had prepared or influenced the readership’s expectations through their scholarly work. Note in the same regard, Joseph Marie Amiot and Isidore Stanislas Helman,\(^8\) whose writings also form major landmarks in the advancement of European knowledge of the East. Thanks to the missionaries, travelers, and traders who brought back scraps of testimony from the East, the literary world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries held ingenuously certain stereotypes, thus ‘the tolerant Asian or the Chinese philosopher will become in the eighteenth century facile common tropes’ (Martino 62). The nineteenth century made a great leap forward through sustained and systematic expeditions that allowed the dissemination of a literature authored by the players of the French Eastern Empire, eyewitnesses of the previously disembodied oriental world. In this sense, the masterful translations by Julien Stanislas (1797-1873)\(^9\) give another great boost to the flowering of such a literature. This contribution of the East, which contributed in turn to the enrichment of the European spirit is underlined by Ferdinand Brunetière:

> the French nineteenth and eighteenth centuries would not be all they are if the things of the East and Far East, India and China in particular, had not become part of the composition of their minds (Brunetière 707).

**The French ‘self’ from the East**

If the second half of the nineteenth century remains one of the most dishonorable periods that the Empire of the Son of Heaven ever traversed, it is nevertheless an important landmark in European historiography. On

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7 In particular, the work by Louis Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires sur l’état présent de la Chine*, is cited by scholars as a base material for French writers of the time.

8 They are authors of a dozen major works of their time. See, for example, *Abrégé historique des principaux traits de la vie de Confucius* published in Paris in 1788.

the one hand, the advent of the presence of Europeans, which imposed a culture of cohabitation, broke forever the homogeneity of the Han; on the other hand, Asia was entering the European mind in significant ways through historiography. Think of the geography (cartography) of Asia, its objects, its writings, its languages that seeped into the first French people who crossed the continent. This impression of the East, materialized through physical contact with indigenous peoples, gave free rein to a corpus that would flourish in the nineteenth century. It should be noted that ship owners, officers, diplomats, merchants, or sailors, all promoters of French civilization outside of France, published innumerable writings, to the best of their ability. This was a time when the challenges facing Asia were changing and the French corpus of France-Asia crossings was expressed first, we believe, in the form of the literature of the intimate.

Thus from the angle of the ‘self’, the East is displayed to the European public of the nineteenth century, which travels through this world via the first person. Doubtless, the popularity of writing the ‘self’ from the East cannot be detached from the vogue of Romanticism that had attracted a public initiated in the genre of the writing of the intimate. In fact, the disclosure to the general public of diaries, memoirs, and correspondences of writers in the metropolis makes the genre well known. The long letters of Delphine and the languor of Oberman’s solitary melody solicit the public to savor the monologic or intimate ‘self’. Within this huge body of work on the ‘self’ from the East, there are certain masters of the writing of the Levant:

And now the modern age becomes planetary. The big names come to the fore: Loti, this Hamlet of the sun, who seeks, in the countries of light, the joy that will always escape him. [...] It is Paul Claudel, who lifts the veils on the *Connaissance de l’Est*’ (Hanotaux 138-139).

Considered as repositories of experiences of living in the East, the works of Loti and Claudel, among others, take the place of first-hand documents. Thus the virtue of this important personal literature written by the hand of the ‘colonizers’ is to offer the other version of the cultural crossings between France and Asia. Their contemporary publication in major nineteenth-century journals provided direct eyewitness accounts of the East to the European readership.

The memoirs of Auguste Haussmann, a member of the first French missions in the Far East, serve as a prototype of this eyewitness literature:

Towards the end of August 1844, all the members of the mission under the orders of M. de Lagrené, the extraordinary envoy of France to China, were assembled at Macau [...]. The imperial commissioner Ki-ing, was responsible since 1843 for all the negotiations of the Chinese Government with the foreign maritime powers [...]. It was on board the Archimedes, as we know, that the treaty of commerce concluded between France and China was signed on October 24, 1854, the day of the niai-tsz, which the Chinese regard as the most favorable phase of the moon for wedding celebrations. (Haussmann 298-299)

Straddling memoir and autobiography, this type of writing reflects the progress of French interests in Asia by tracing in the first person the details of the events experienced by the writer. The genre also has a variant called souvenirs or ‘memories’, such as ‘La colonie européenne en Chin: Souvenirs d’une station dans les mers de l’Indo-Chine’, published in the Revue des Deux Mondes in 1851:

After a long journey going against the monsoon, we had anchored in front of Macau on January 4, 1848 [...]. The treaty of Nan-king had consecrated the admission of foreigners in the five maritime towns open to European commerce [...]. The government of the two provinces of Kouang-si and Kouang-tong was then entrusted to the viceroy Ki-ing, the most honest Tartar who ever wore the peacock feather and the red button [...]. Ki-ing understood the helplessness of the Chinese armies and the almost insurmountable obstacles to the introduction of the military organization and tactics of the Europeans into the heavenly Empire. [...] he inaugurated in China the policy of concessions. (Gravière 785-786)

Compared to the classical memoirs that readers were used to,¹¹ these memoirs adapted into the form of journal articles reached a wide readership. No matter the variants in style or content, this writing of the ‘self’ that traces the first instances of France in China and Asia invaded the Revue des Deux Mondes with a systematic publication in almost every issue; this undoubtedly confirms the popularity of the genre.

¹¹ For example, La Chine et le Japon, mission du comte d’Elgin de 1857 à 1859 de Laurence Oliphant (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1860).
In parallel, epistolary writing also brushed with the autobiographical genre and sought a wider readership. The correspondence of the famous Irish specialist of Japan (a naturalized Japanese)\textsuperscript{12} stationed in Kyoto illustrates this well. Through his letters one reads about Japan, its people, its customs. The ‘self’ from the East, even of Irish origin, meets the needs of the French readership.

The following letters are taken from the correspondence of Lafcadio Hearn, one of the most beautiful, the most complete and the most varied published to date: a true autobiography whose sincerity and spontaneity form a precious literary document […]. The few letters that we publish here were chosen with the aim of giving a succinct but as complete an idea as possible of the evolution which took place in Lafcadio Hearn’s thinking toward Japan. (Hearn 1924, 319-320)

To Elisabeth Bisland

Yokohama, April 1890

Dear Elizabeth,

I have an indescribable feeling about Japan. Of course, the nature here is not the nature of the tropics, which is so splendid, so wild, so powerfully beautiful, that at the very moment when I write to you, I feel in my heart the same pain that I experienced leaving Martinique. […] And, of course, I study Buddhism with all my heart, with all my soul. My companion is a young student from one of the temples. If I stay in Japan, we will live together. (Hearn 1924, 321)

According to the publisher, the journal discloses this type of correspondence frequently because it is a ‘true autobiography’ and ‘a literary document’. In the same vein, there is the diary-type genre that presents the introspective ‘self’ through the writer’s monologues. In a fragmentary and intermittent structure, the diarist tries to preserve the experience in the East through his daily transcription. An excerpt from Loti’s journal entitled ‘Escales au Japon 1902’ is illustrative:

Saturday, December 8, 1900 – the horror of a winter’s night, by gust of wind and torment of snow, at sea, without shelter, on the disheveled sea,

\textsuperscript{12} The case of Lafcadio Hearn is reminiscent of Joseph Charignon (1872-1930), a naturalized Chinese.
in full black turmoil. A battle, a revolt of heavy and cold waters against the great worldly wind that howls as it whips them up. (Loti 1904, 721)

Sunday, December 9, 1900 – Waking up late, after such a disturbed night, I open my porthole to greet Japan. And it is there, always the same, at first glance at least, but uniformly felted with snow, beneath a pale sun that confuses and is completely unknown to me. (Loti 1904, 722)

As the genre contains an intrinsic dichotomy in itself, whether the diary belongs to the real world (the intimate diary) or the fictional world (the fictional diary), ambiguity is all the more acute when it comes to Loti. Affirmed by the diarist as an authentic journal (an intransitive text closed to the intrusion of others and having excluded any sense of fictional expectation), Loti’s text offers no indication that could betray the modes of presupposed enunciation. That is to say, it may be a matter of a diarist of the ‘self’ as eyewitness of the Orient or of a fictional ‘self’ that comes from the imagination.

But there is more. The fact that the text reaches the public sphere during the lifetime of his writer suggests that it is not the diarist Viaud, but rather the writer Loti. Loti’s ostentatious recourse to the first person in his writings on the Orient points in the same direction. In a counter argument, whether it is a fictional or real diary does not alter the quality of the French ‘self’ to safeguard events from France in Japan, since all attempts to categorize the diaristic text may result in a false debate. After all writing in itself is a natural drift towards a ‘sociolectoral universe’ as advanced by Michel Butor (Butor 1960, 127). And the fictitious or real Lotian ‘self’ encompasses this innate propensity toward the public world contained in all writing.

The Levant in French-language journals and newspapers 1840-1940

We reiterate that this subdivision does not rest on the approach of Orientalism vs. counter-Orientalism. Far from the currents of Edward Said and his followers who had drawn up the Western typologies of the East, the texts evoked here will serve as clues to the evolution of the French readership on the Levant. First of all, the long period of existence of several periodicals is remarkable, a sign of a time preoccupied by the Levant. In Paris, we can mention as examples, Mémoires de la Société des études japonaises, chinoises,

13 In the same vein, see the journal by Ed. Du Hailly titled ‘Souvenirs d’une campagne dans l’Extrême-Orient’ published in Revue des Deux Mondes (juillet-aout 1866, 957-983).
tartares et indo-chinoises (E. Rouveyre, 1877-1901), Bibliothèque orientale (Maisonneuve, 1872-), Relations de Chine (Compagnie de Jésus, 1903-1940).

Certain journals are the fruits of Franco-Chinese collaboration, such as Aujourd’hui la Chine: revue de l’Association des amitiés franco-chinoises. Others circulating in Asia were printed locally for the local French-speaking readership. In the first place, we should mention L’Écho de Chine (1901-1919, l’Imprimerie de La Presse orientale) (Claudel 2005, 228-229) whose merit is not only as key reference point as a French newspaper in China but also in the considerable duration of its existence. Published weekly every Wednesday in Shanghai, L’Echo transmitted first-hand information about France to China and the Far East for every Frenchman in Asia.

Classified to date under the label of Orientalism, these journals and newspapers deserve to be considered in another way, for example, as the product of cultural cross-fertilization that created and enacted a different kind of dynamism. What, then, are the subjects addressed in this privileged forum, which provides a barometer of the interests of the readers on the Orient? Once again, the examination of the Revue des Deux Mondes gives a clue for the fact that this vein is composed of thematic studies, the translation of masterpieces of Asian literatures, and oriental-inspired literary creation. For example, Buddhism is a widely treated theme. Introduced in Europe in the seventeenth century, this religious philosophy attracted many followers, such as Jules de Gauthier and Leon de Rosny, whose work describes its anchoring, its practice, as well as its seizure by the French readership (Gauthier 367-394). In the opposite direction, Christian proselytism in the Levantine countries remains another point of interest. Among the many studies devoted to it, those carried out by Alexandra Myrial are essential. They trace the history of Christianity in Asia back to the origins of the Christian congregation in China. If the notoriety of the great naturalists and travelers (such as Dabry de Thiersant, 1826-1898) marks the conjuncture of interest of the nineteenth century, the literary specialists, sinologists, and Japanese specialists such as Henri Cordier, Leon de Rosny, and Soulié de Morant also assert themselves with their writings and translations on the civilizations of the Levant.

14 Paris: L’Association des amitiés franco-chinoises, 1900-.
15 The seriousness of this house that published the only French newspaper in China is emphasized in a letter from Claudel.
16 These are ‘La congrégation en Chine’ and ‘Clergé tibétain et ses Doctrines’.
17 Journalist, diplomat, and essayist, De Morant left many studies on the Levant. Let us mention his translation of the work by Chen Yubao, La piété filiale en Chine (Paris: E. Leroux, 1877), as well as his work Histoire de l’art chinois, de l’antiquité jusqu’à nos jours (Paris: Payot, 1928, 301).
Thanks to the progress of systematic and sustained commercial missions, the second half of the nineteenth century saw a profusion of texts that examine the Levant from every angle. As a sign of the time, knowledge about the Far East made a big leap forward in the enlightened twentieth century, which charges itself with bearing witness to the Oriental works, targeting stereotypes:

For fifty years, the more and more intimate contact we have made with China and Japan has revealed to us what divergences, contrasts, and even incompatibilities separate the Indo-European families and the peoples of the Far East. (Tailhade 63)

It is really time for free spirits to be enlightened on this Chinese civilization, which has been unknown, scorned, despised by the greatest number, and who, against all proof, retains a stupid prejudice of a priori superiority. People of high culture still share the popular prejudice against China. (Nesles 290)

It is time to sound the death knell of the period of obscurity regarding the Levant. We are no longer at the stage of introducing these distant lands through the panoramic overview of the Orientalists that touch on the civilizations of Asia, but rather the time has come for profound, even erudite works. Highly specialized topics are emerging. Thus Léon Charpentier introduced in 1901 ‘Les transmigrations de Yo-Tchéou, comédie chinoise’, which parodies the Taoist school, initiating the French readership into the various schools of classical Chinese literature:

The Tao-see comedy ridicules the ceremonies and superstitions of Taoism [...]. The comedy of which we present here the first two acts is an adaptation of two tao-see plays [...]. It should be added that no tao-see play has yet been translated into a European language (Carpenter 25).

It is fair to say that the twentieth century has seen an informed and passionate readership of connoisseurs of the East. The bland essays in the exoticist vein disappeared. On the contrary, advanced studies capable of bringing an in-depth knowledge of scholarly subjects flourished, for example on the various poetic schools of the Tang, Song, and other dynasties. From a general

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18 In 1920 the Parisian house Société Anonyme d’Éditions et de Librairie published this study in volumes.
point of view, the immortal verses in ancient Chinese cumulated from a time-immemorial form to contemporary Chinese. Few were translated. Yet Soulié de Morant was able to translate those of the Song dynasty and decided to share them with the French readership:

Chinese poetry is no longer unknown to us. However for entire periods we still have only a few works cited in some general works [...]. The too few published poems of the Song Dynasty gave rise to the curiosity to know more about this period [...]. The means of Chinese poetry are more numerous and more varied than ours. French poetry is recognized as simply syllabic. [...] Chinese poetry is not only rhythmic, that is to say formed of a series of longer and shorter sounds, but more, truly sung. (Morant 1919, 611-612)

A colleague of Claudel, the diplomat Morant carried out important work on Chinese and Japanese literatures and societies, some of which was translated into local languages, for example one of his reports, entitled Ce qui ne s’avoue pas, même à Shanghai, ville de plaisir.

Of course, other Asian civilizations also came to be better known in France. In fact, in this period of effervescence regarding the Levant, Japanism and studies on Japan were especially in vogue. In particular, the Japanese theater (Tailhade 63-73) including the Noh genre, eclipsed all other subjects and seduced many specialists (Seche & Bertaut 673-684). The rise of Japanism was also due to the efforts of Albert Maybon, whose studies of poetry and Japanese theater are masterful works (Maybon 1920; 1923). Georges Bonneau (director of the Maison Française in Tokyo), whose essays appear systematically in the Mercure (Bonneau 1931; 1932) also deserves mention. The flourishing of literature on the Levant during the twentieth century is also reflected in literary creation, particularly the genre of the novella. For example, Gilbert de Voisins and Alexandre Arnoux devote themselves to the novella, publishing theirs in the Mercure (Voisins; Arnoux). As for the genre of the novel, it appears in the form of excerpts, for example, that of Jean Marquet entitled ‘Master Lou Po To Capitaine Marchand’ published in series form in the Mercure. Let us also mention in this vein, Mollard’s novel published in L’Europe (Wei-Kin-Tche 501-508) from the translation of a readapted, modified, and reconfigured Chinese text. Certainly we could continue to cite a prodigious repertoire of this literature on the Levant in nineteenth- and twentieth-century journals and newspapers; the few examples mentioned above serve as illustrations of the genre and especially the content of this literature, which is relevant to this book.
On publishing houses and their collections

The cultural crossings between France and Asia informed the policies of certain publishing houses in the metropolis. For example, Ernest Leroux, whose flamboyant career is closely related to the reputation of his publishing house. From the translation of the ancient texts of Ma Duanlin (1254-?) (Bibliothèque orientale) or the Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130-1200) (Zhu; Kia) to Japanese classics (Dautremer), the Leroux house enriches the corpus of works on the Orient through texts based on the original documents. For example, Un mariage impérial chinois cérémonial (1887) comes from two documents, one of which is from the Ministry of Rites annotating the millennial protocol of marriage ceremonies in China, the other on imperial marriage, originally written by the Intendant of the Forbidden City during his service. In addition to this, there is a series of memoirs on Asia published by the house: Mémoires concernant l'Asie orientale, Inde, Asie centrale, Extrême-Orient (1913-1919). It goes without saying that the authenticity and rarity of these manuscripts translated and published by Leroux contribute to cultivating a readership with interests in the Levant.

Another vein from these houses that enrich the Eastern corpus is their thematic collections, such as the ‘Bibliothèque d'histoire contemporaine’ of the Félix Alcan house. This collection includes on the one hand ancient texts from the Levant countries translated by the famous Sinologist Henri Cordier (Cordier 1920) and on the other, stories about the oldest expeditions or voyages to Asia by the French. The virtue of this kind of collection is that Asia is its major interest. The same goes for the collection ‘Bibliothèque contemporaine’ of the house Calmann-Lévy with works based on historical documentations, such as travel in Voyage en Asie: le Japon, la Chine, la Mongolie, Java, Ceylan, l'Inde (1874). What distinguishes this collection are the works of Pierre Loti, which are its most important publications, such as Japoneries d'Automne and Les dernier jours de Pékin. Finally, there is the ‘Bibliothèque orientale’ of Maisonneuve & Co., which contains works of high historical value on civilizations in Asia, the Middle East, and the Far East.

By way of conclusion, I would say that from an idea of the Orient that was confused with and by religion in the Middle Ages to the deployment of the real-time French ‘self’ of the second half of the nineteenth century, the progression of metropolitan knowledge of the Orient, proof of which lies in the informed and aware readership, attests to the evolution of the Levant in the French imagination. Compared to works published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nineteenth-century texts prevail notably through
their authenticity and the transmission of a personal experience lived in the field. This personal literature comes from the perspective of European Orientalism, which is traditionally contiguous with it.

**The oriental ‘self’ in Loti and Claudel**

Another major component of this corpus of crossings is the representation of the Levant in fiction. Not that every work of fiction touching Asia will be integrated into this corpus, only those whose creative conception draws on the oriental universe. As we have just shown, the Europeans, especially the French, have been writing about the Levant for a long time, and in the minds of many, Marco Polo’s *Book of Wonders* (1298) marks a first step towards the emergence of the Levant in European historiography. In fact, the catalog of Ternaux-Compans mentioned below gives a concrete sense of the first writings on Asia. It does not matter who was the first, but it is worth pointing out this intoxication with a fabulous, seductive Orient, which never faded for these Europeans. Once again, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries break the ice to see this literature free itself through the agents of the French Eastern Empire whose writings contrast with the version of the Orient ‘incubated in a Parisian salon’. From then on, French historiography is enriched by a host of archives, fiction, personal literature (diary, correspondence, memoirs) on the Levant, as demonstrated above.

Within this profusion of writings on the Far East, *Madame Chrysanthème, Le Soulier de satin*, and *Comment Wang-Fô fut sauvé* offer emblematic examples of oriental-inspired works within the French tradition. With divergent forms, these texts, whose imaginary relies as much on the firsthand experience of an Eastern author-witness as on translated documents, cut across the flagrant versions of the Orient in texts published in the preceding centuries. What is more, Loti as much as Claudel, the indisputable orientalist with an experience marked by the ups and downs of the French Eastern Empire, undermines any previous fabrication of the Orient conceived from the metropolis. The experience in the Levant vouches for the authenticity of the Orient in their works, even if they are classified as belonging to the French tradition.

**Madam Chrysanthème in Asia**

A major literary figure marked by the Levant, Loti leaves to posterity a fictional writing of the public space that runs alongside that of the intimate, the private space; both converge to create the parameters of the Eastern corpus.
From the glorious pages authored by a seaman in Asia to the prototypical work of literature of the East, Loti and his followers remain a living source for French literary history in the East. Unlike Paul Claudel, who is significantly less well known in China than in Japan, Loti is equally well known in China and Japan. Thus *Mon frère Yves*, his first novel translated into Chinese, appeared in 1900 in Hong Kong (Loti 1900), five years after *Madame Chrysanthème*, his first novel published in Japan. Thanks to Lin Xu his *Pêcheur d’Islande* was translated into ancient Chinese and appeared in 1915 with Shang Wu Publishing House (Han 2008, 331). His ‘Alsace’19 (Loti 1917) translated by Liu Bannong20 from the English version *Alsace Reconquered* (New York Times 1916) appeared in the *Nouvelle jeunesse* in 1917 (Han 2008, 334).21 This means that Loti’s texts, written in French, published in mainland France and translated into English and published overseas, were quickly translated into Chinese, suggesting that Loti is from the start a targeted French writer due to the nature of his writings. Within this profusion of works by Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème* stands as a prototype, merging a real-life experience in the East with an imaginary one that bears witness to the Western imprint.

It goes without saying that to belong to the French literary tradition, the work should employ the French language, and should be written by a French author. Of all the studies written on this work since its release, from the apology of Japanism by its first metropolitan readership to the worst critiques of its detractors (Bonneau 1931, 526-543),22 no one deigns to dispute the origin of the work and, therefore, its belonging to the Eastern corpus. Hence the interest of the first Chinese and Japanese Francophone studies of the work. It is not surprising that the work’s transfer to Asia passes first through Tokyo where the work made its first appearance on the continent in 1895 (Loti 1895), 34 years before its publication in Shanghai. According to Qian Linsen, it was Xu Xiacun who brought it for the first time to China on his return from Paris around 1930 (Qian 2004, 211), a claim that was partially proven in the *Catalogue des livres traduits du français en chinois*. The French work, according to the Shang Wu publishing house, was translated into Chinese from the English version (Loti 1929). If this source is correct, it would mean that the French version did not penetrate or circulate in China at the time. Yet other sources claim the opposite.

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19 Dated July 1916, the French text appears in pages 83-96 of this collection.
20 Classical scholar, professor at Peking University, and biographer of the heroine of Zeng Pu’s masterpiece, *Fleur sur l’océan des péchés* (1903-1936).
21 See vol. 2, no. 6 of the journal *Xin Qingnian*, cited by Han Yiyu.
22 *Madame Chrysanthème* by Loti is ridiculed in terms of a ‘Japanese farce in the French contemporary novel’, by Georges Bonneau, director of the Maison de France in Kyoto.
In the ‘Prologue’ of the 1932 edition, Xu states that his translation, published in 1929, is based on the seventeenth edition of the novel (published by Lévy Frères), together with the English translation of the Ensor house (Loti; Xu v), without specifying, however, which of the two served him as the mother-text. Such a revelation means at least from that perspective that the French work circulated alongside the English version. Unable to determine what leads Shang Wu to claim that the English translation is the mother-text, Xu’s revelation about the use of two versions casts doubt on its place of re-entry (the physical path of the book) such as advanced by Qian. Was it via Paris or elsewhere? The questioning of the route taken by the French work is particularly significant if one considers the displacement of the work from the perspective of transcultural writing. Namely, that a book’s journey from its original culture to its host culture is often accomplished through a third (intermediate) culture. If the transfer of Madame Chrysanthème followed a Paris-London-Shanghai or Paris-Tokyo-Shanghai route, the fact that its Chinese translation is based on a double version (French and English) would be self-evident. Otherwise, it would be unlikely that French-speaking Xu returned home from Paris with an English version. In spite of these plausible presumptions, any conjecture cannot solve the enigma. We need to focus on the work itself.

The displaced French ‘self’

As the diary genre proves to be the favorite form for Loti’s writing on the East, the novel unfolds in fragmentary style the naive ‘self’ of a displaced Frenchman:

At dawn we saw Japan. Just at the appointed hour, it appeared, still distant, at a precise point of this sea which, for so many days, had been an empty expanse. It was at first a series of small pink peaks (the advanced archipelago of the Fukai, at sunrise).\(^\text{23}\) (Loti 652)

good men and women enter in a long uninterrupted line [...]. On their backs they brought small baskets, little boxes, containers of all shapes. [...] out of these came unexpected, unimaginable things, screens, slippers, soap, lanterns; cufflinks, live cicadas singing in small cages; jewelry, and tame white mice who were able to turn small paper wheels [...]. (Loti 654)

\(^{23}\) The excerpts come from the 1989 edition of the Presses de la Cité (Azizadé; Le mariage de Loti; Le roman d’un spahi; Mon frère Yves; Pêcheur d’Islande; Madame Chrysanthème; Ramuntcho; Les Désenchantées).
The new sensation experienced by the sailor approaching the coast of Japan for the first time, as well as his astonished observations of the natives, corroborates the common experience of the French treading the Japanese soil for the first time. From this ingenuous gaze, the Fukaï archipelago and Mount Fuji, wrapped in its layers of snow, take on mythical meanings. From the fascination that imperial France has with Japan at sunrise, to the theme of mixed marriage with an oriental woman, Loti poses some of the first paradigms of the genre. The work seduces through the change of scenery and the singularity of its plot of a scandalous marriage. Its publication for a readership hungry for the elsewhere was a big success. It was not until half a century later that the superficial gaze and the fresco of a fake Japan riddled with the prejudices of a European sailor were decried:

There is in world literature, and, as much as in our contemporary French literature, a Japanese farce. Poets in search of exoticism, sailors in search of love, day-trippers in need of thrills, there is no one who has not taken it to heart and added their own meanings. [...] Literature, mediocre literature, this Japanese theory of the kiss complacently imagined on page 250 of Madame Chrysanthème. (Bonneau 1931, 526)

Despite these harsh words from the director of the Maison Française in Tokyo, one of the finest connoisseurs of Japan, posterity must nevertheless be grateful that Loti was able to set out, under the guise of marriage, the inner heart of a displaced European.

**Loti: creator of the Oriental woman**

The legendary fortune of *Madame Chrysanthème* in and outside France not only provoked a renewed interest in the theme of exile, but above all it exposed fully the figure of the oriental woman. Loti is an unequaled inventor of the Oriental woman of his time. A century of studies devoted to this work and its translations converge on Loti’s oriental woman, who merges animality with fugacity. From Africa to Japan, from Aziyadé to Kikou-San, Loti constantly portrayed Oriental women based on mythical or anthropological archetypes in which the woman is often compared to butterfly, fish, cat, or bird (Yee 2002, 258).24 Thus the ‘little made-up doll’ embodies the fugacity of Loti’s Oriental woman. The seemingly benevolent

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24 See in particular the recurrence of these animals in the cultures of the countries in the Middle East.
and graceful descriptions, such as ‘the unpardonable Gentiles, the pickets of planted flowers’ (Yee 2002, 258), at the place frequented by ‘Miss Jasmin... my fiancée’, betray, in spite of themselves, an underlying perspective tinged with a complex of superiority (Barthèlemy 1992, 36), which imperialist Europe employs to characterize the Oriental woman:

Oh! The astonishing little company that we drag in our wake, in the tea houses, in the evening! The unpardonable little ones, the flowers, which are frightfully planted on childish and comical heads! [...] Yves accompanies us when it is time to go back to our home, – Chrysanthemum lets out big sighs like a tired child, stopping at each step, leaning on our arms. (Loti 689)

The small woman Okane-San won over the readership of the time with her exotic face, the carefree nature of a woman-child (‘sighs like a tired child’), and all against a background of a folkloric world that is foreign and strange to European customs. In spite of this, Loti’s ingenuity does not reside in revealing a common shared feeling, but in another register, in an arranged ‘transcultural’ marriage whose variant reappears in others, notably with Puccini.25

Alongside Mademoiselle Jasmin, who stands as a model of the Oriental woman for a readership enamored of the theme of exile and the elsewhere, scholars also point out other common Lotian tropes (Barthèlemy and Yee) that are crystallized in particular in the tone and condescending approach of the French sailor landed in Nagasaki:

‘Where should I lead you, my bourgeois?’ To which I reply in the same language: ‘To the Garden of Flowers, my friend!’ [...] this Garden of Flowers is a tea house, an elegant meeting place. One time, I will ask a certain Kangaroo-San, who is at the same time an interpreter, a launderer, and a discreet agent for racial crossings.26 (Loti 18)

In an apartment as bare as mine, there are a dozen of them sitting in a circle on the floor; long blue cotton dresses with pagoda sleeves, long greasy, flat hair topped with a European bowler-style hat; foolish, yellow, exhausted, pale figures. (Loti 25-26)

25 The famous opera Madame Butterfly is played not only in European languages but also in Chinese and Japanese. I attended its first post-Maoist staging in autumn 1982, at the Peking Opera.

26 The excerpts come from the Calmann-Levy edition of 1887.
Certainly, with almost a century and a half of distance, the artifices of such scenes are obvious to us. These futile and superficial statements, wordy and endowed with a naive perception of Japan are lacking, no longer able to stand before the 'worldly reader' for whom world literature has broken down the barrier of exoticism. Nevertheless, this should not erase the incredible oriental importance of the work regarding the corpus that interests us here. From the ingenuous oriental universe experienced by the first French on Japanese soil, to the evasive fugacity of Jasmin, completely new to the French readership, Loti widens the horizon of this French readership to a world of the elsewhere. As for the critical gap, even the polarized criticism of the work, this highlights the evolution of the Western world in its perception of the Eastern world and reaffirms the pioneering milestone that this work sets, conceived in and drawing on the East.

From the Spanish Golden Age to Chinese legends

The example of France-Asia crossings that we have chosen to focus on is *Le Soulier de satin*. This is because in terms of literature on the East, the name of Paul Claudel is unavoidable. In fact, few poets of his time can boast of having spent as much time as he did in China and Japan: ‘I spent fifteen years of my life in China as consul, five years in Japan as ambassador’ (Wasserman 207). In this sense, Claudel remains of unrivaled importance. However, it would be foolhardy to rely on appearances only. Despite this long stay in China (twice as long as in Japan), Claudel seems to be better received in Japan. First, his theater was played in the Meiji era (Yamata 295) and none of his plays, to our knowledge, were played in China at any time. Also, his works reached the Japanese readership as soon as they were published; while it would take more than half a century to see only two of them translated into Chinese. Despite the lack of first-hand documents to elucidate these facts, one thing is certain: this substantial time lived in the East not only grants him legitimacy, but especially guarantees the authenticity of the oriental world evoked in his writings, with one exception – Claudel has no knowledge of oriental languages. Nevertheless, this trip to Asia allows him to compose a profusion of correspondence, consular notes, and plays in which the East comes alive. At the same time, this panoply

27 The period is 1895 to 1909.
28 In his article published in 1924 in the *Mercure de France*, the author evokes the performance of Claudel’s plays at local theaters.
29 See the Japanese translation of the *Soulier de satin*. 
of works also invites Claudel scholars to critique the blatant borrowing of Chinese and Japanese myths and legends that are involuntarily mixed together in Claudel's work.

As pointed out above, from the perspective of Claudel and the Orient, one aspect exceeds all expectations: the disparity between the immense merit of the Claudel corpus and the relative lack of translations into Chinese. The only works that have been translated are *Le Soulier de satin* in 1992 and *Connaissance de l'Est* in 1997. Too little, too late, and moreover, neither was endorsed by a renowned publishing house in Shanghai or Beijing. In other words, Claudel's works are not among the ones targeted by centuries-old and well-known publishing houses in China. Such a fact leads to much conjecture. One thing is obvious. If the Chinese have translated only two, it is certainly not because the *Partage de midi*, *Tête d'or*, and *Figures et paraboles* have less literary merit, but because from the outset it was obvious to the Chinese that the *Soulier* belonged to the Eastern corpus.

Yet at first glance, this play has nothing Chinese or Oriental about it, nothing but the common Claudel tropes: divine evocation, a Mediterranean context, a Christian protagonist, references to God everywhere. Michel Butor, with his prodigious perspicacity, identifies one of the threads of the play:

> The action takes place in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century during the conquest of America. Don Rodrigue, after many adventures, becomes Viceroy of the West Indies, but the new King of Spain, Philip II, who succeeds Charles V, is wary of this character who risks becoming too important, and disgraces him. (Butor 1995, 119)

Even with Butor's groundwork, the question remains: how can such a work belong to the oriental corpus? This is not the case, since this 'Christian' staging serves as a mise-en-scène in the true sense. Beyond the southern sun and the route of the conquistadors, the meandering links underlying this play with the Chinese world are undeniable once the veil (the staging) is lifted.

Not only could the *Soulier* not be interpreted through its pageantry of Christianity, tinged with great military feats in its doxology of the Spanish Golden Age, but it would also be impertinent to isolate it from the whole of Claudel's corpus:

> The structures of all Claudel's theatrical productions are based on the complex foundations of theology, a finalist philosophy of history, as well as human psychology and dramaturgy, whether they be gods or demi-gods
from the ancient myths, or that the author manipulates the agents of the Christian universe. (Maëstre 60)

And the Soulier conforms to this Claudelian paradigm. The Christian content, the divine call and theological resonances that alienate or hinder the initial action of the love protagonists are but commonplaces in Claudel’s work. And this is true, even if the work belongs to the oriental corpus, in the case of Soulier. Two guiding threads cut across each other: on the one hand, the Christian staging in every Claudel play, on the other the sacrifice of the woman, embodied by the women’s shoe on which the whole work rests. Evidently, its evocation in the play, when the protagonist leaves to join her estranged lover, does not disclose the oriental mytho-cultural background in which the work is anchored: ‘Don Balthazar holds the head of the mule. Prouhèze rises, standing on the saddle and taking off her shoes, she puts her satin shoe in the hands of the Virgin’ (Claudel 41). Here the shoe serves as a relic, a depository of the female sacrifice and of the redemption of forbidden love.

Still, the question is not resolved: How does any of this relate to the Eastern world? According to Maëstre: ‘The atmosphere and the theme of the original Soulier de Satin do not have the formal simplicity of a purely passionate drama, evoked and lived in the historical, religious and cultural context of the Spanish Golden Age’ (Maëstre 44). Despite its Western and Christian framing, the Spanish context, the spiritual framework and the psychological framework are only a dramaturgical frame, typical of Claudel. Stripped of these ornaments, the play remains genuinely Chinese. For in addition to the initial sketch drafted by Claudel in China and completed in Japan, and the nourishing roots of Chinese legends, the play is further enhanced by a heartfelt memory in Fuzhou. Although at first the meanderings between the control of the Spanish conquistadors against a background of obedience to God, and the time immemorial of the Chinese dynasties from which the legends are drawn, seem fundamentally distant from each other, the two universes come together in the image of the female shoe, which crystallizes forbidden love and its redemption. Thus the Soulier comes out of the Christian universe despite the appeals to God by Rodrigue or Prouhèze. The Mediterranean decor, the backdrop of the century of the conquistadors, and the piety of the protagonists to God are only the most apparent elements.

30 References are to the 1962 Gallimard reissue.
Cinderella and ‘the forgotten slipper’

Such a spatial and referential straddling between the oriental, nourishing foundations of the work, and the structural configuration based on a Spanish background is the audacious uniqueness of the Soulier. And how eloquent is its title especially if one observes Claudel’s nod to the Chinese slipper, symbol of female sacrifice. Its recurrence with Claudel is underlined by Gilbert Gadoffre who states that ‘The Bell’ in Connaissance de l’Est stems from the reminiscence of a Chinese legend. In order to save her father, a young girl throws herself into a boiling gold foundry, and loses her shoes, which remain as the ultimate testimony of sacrifice (Gadoffre 350-351). From the lost shoe to the forgotten slipper, Claudel nods in the direction of the same image:

The first idea for the Soulier de Satin came to me from a forgotten slipper, like Cinderella’s, in the pages of a Chinese novel. [...] Formerly, out of the pages of some novel I flicked through in a club in the Far East, escaped a shoe that became, twenty years later, The Soulier de satin. (Hue 195)31

The reference by Claudel to Cinderella as the source of inspiration for the Soulier quickly spread among the Claudel readers who returned to this myth – considered emblematic of the Western imagination – as the starting point from which the work originates. Is this the true purpose of the Soulier? If Claudel, and his followers, refer to Cinderella as a prototype of a European referent, in other words as a mother-image, a rectification is necessary. The myth of Cinderella is not part of the European imagination, but has its source in southern China at the time of the Qin (221 BC). This is a time before the Han (206 BC), to take a chronological marker known to Westerners, a time when the myth would be transmitted orally. Its first written version would date from the ninth century in Youyang zazu (Varied Tables at Dusk). We owe the revelation of this source to the Japanese folklorist Kumagusu Minakata who, in 1911, unveiled it in Tokyo Jinruigaku Zasshi (Journal of the Tokyo Anthropology Society) (Watanabe 151-155). From its ninth-century version to the various European adaptations, including that of Perrault, the myth undergoes major changes in its attempt to acculturate to host cultures. But the immutable and transcendental axis that runs through all versions is the image of the female shoe.

31 Cited by Bernard Hue.
From embroidered shoes to satin shoes

While Cinderella accumulated in the West a mytho-imaginary currency symbolizing innocence and the promise of princely love, the theme of the female shoe generated a repertoire of songs in the Chinese imagination. Poets write about the shoe (of a bandaged foot) – as an emblem and a depository of patriarchal values. Its tininess – requiring a deformed and damaged foot to fit it – and the vulnerability it denotes, corroborate the virtues imposed by feudal society on the Chinese woman. How many songs sung over the centuries, how much ink poured over the image of the woman’s shoe, including most importantly that of Yang Kwei-fei.

Since no Claudélian can determine in which Chinese novel Claudel was touched by the ‘forgotten slipper’, we fall back on the embroidered shoe of Yang Kwei-fei, the imperial concubine of the Ming. From a constellation of footwear legends lost as a symbol of female sacrifice, one of the most popular of all the centuries has remained: the one that enchants the Ming. The beauty of this idolized and spoiled courtesan is proverbial. Yang hangs herself to save the Empire, which is threatened on all sides by rebellious troops, who demand the head of the favorite, accused of bringing about the misfortunes of the Empire:

After the death of Yang Kwei-fei, who had to hang herself to appease the rebellion, an old woman entered the temple who had been sheltering the rulers during the last hours of the tragedy, and ‘on the steps of the altar she sees a small embroidered shoe, then a silk stocking fallen from the enchanting foot of the victim’. She picks them up respectfully and carries them away. (Gadoffre 351)

After the legend of the daughter of Master Bell, Gadoffre resorts to that of Yang Kwei-fei by quoting De Morant to shed light on the mythical terrain from which the Soulier draws its inspiration. Note that this moving story signed by De Morant, which seems to clarify the origins of the work, was published two years earlier as an article. However, neither Gadoffre nor De Morant was the first to introduce this legend. It is presented to the French

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32 In ancient China an empress and four imperial concubines were ranked hierarchically, the first being kuei-fei (precious concubine).
34 See the article published in the *Mercure de France* (September 1922, 439-478).
readership via its Japanese adaptation under the name of Yokiki, thanks to the esteemed Japanist Lafcadio Hearn. Despite an unfortunate typographical error on the very name of Yang Kwei-fei in the French translation, Hearn's text has the merit of having introduced the legend:

I would also like to be better informed about the Emperor Genso's butterflies; he forced them to choose his loves! [...] The Emperor had a beautiful garden where he invited all his friends to join him and refresh themselves [...] He also invited the women most famous for their beauty. [...] But when the Emperor saw Yokiki, whom the Chinese called Yang-Kwei-Tei [sic], he no longer allowed the butterflies to choose in his place, which, moreover, brought him bad luck, because the graceful Yokiki caused him very serious trouble. (Hearn 1909, 250)

The Japanese variant adds to the Chinese legend to crystallize the sublime image of the woman-object, who is to be sacrificed. Coming from Cinderella, this legend, transcended from the Chinese (and Japanese) imagination leaves its mark on the Soulier to signify the sacrificed woman (the missing one) and her shoe (which remains) as a witness to the disappearance.

**The archetype of Bouvier et Tisserande**

The scholars' bold recourse to the repertoires of Chinese myths and legends in search of the Soulier's mother image is not controversial, as Claudel more or less affirms his source. After Cinderella and the ‘forgotten slipper’, he revealed many years later another piece of the puzzle in an address given on 23 March 1944 during a gala in front of an audience of railway men:

The subject of the Soulier de satin is that of Chinese legend, the two stellar lovers who each year after long wanderings come to confront each other, without ever being able to join up, on either side of the Milky Way' (Autrand 93).

Here ‘the Chinese legend of the two stellar lovers’ is called Bouvier et Tisserande. It tells the tragedy between a cattle boy named Niu Lang and a fairy wizard called Qi xingnu. Their alliance would have transgressed the matrimonial code of Heaven; the couple is separated by divine force and condemned to see each other once a year on the seventh day of the seventh month, without ever being able to join up. If the reader sees a loaded reference to the lost female shoe drawn from the legends of Cinderella,
Yang Kwei-fei, Yokiki, what connotative enrichment does the reference to *Bouvier et Tisserande* bring?

In the various rehabilitations of this legend by modern societies over the centuries, the superhuman sacrifice shown by the Weaver (the titular *Tisserande*) in an infinite wait to see the cattle boy (*Bouvier*) is transmitted from generation to generation:

He was about to reach Shokujo, at the gates of the Kingdom, when the Empress put an end to this pursuit. She removed a gold pin from her hair and threw it between the two lovers. At the same moment, the hairpin turned into a wild river. A wide and tumultuous river that no human would think of crossing. The cattle boy placed his children on the bank and entered the water. […] On the other side, Shokujo, helpless, was sobbing with pain […]. Feeling deeply sad, her song rose above the rough water. (Bergeron 54-55)

Fervently revered in oral literature, this legend signifies immutable love and integrity, ennobled in the ordeal of separation. It connotes the sense of sacrifice to which the *Soulier* refers: the pain of the separation from the lover from which the woman suffers. Thus the Chinese imagination takes to its heart the separation of the lovers, which, instead of weakening or altering their love, is supposed to strengthen the couple. Between the sobs of Tisserande and the heartfelt cry of Fuzhou's lover, who languishes following the separation with the beloved (Claudel), there is only a small step to make. Although distant, this heartbreaking memory of Fuzhou cuts across Tisserande's suffering: the embodiment of the ideal of love rocked by ‘the descendants of the Dragon’ (the Chinese people). It is to this unattainable happiness that repels every human of the profane world that are dedicated, from ancient China to modern China, the ideals of love:

I allow you to see your children again and Kengyu the cattle boy. Once, every you can join them. The seventh day of the seventh lunar month [...]. At the dawn of the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, a fine drizzle falls on the Earth. It is the tears of the Tisserande who, tenderly clutching her children and her husband against her, weep for that short moment of happiness that is granted her. (Bergeron 62-64)\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\) In the modern version of the legend, Tisserande embraces her children and the husband instead of seeing them on the other side of the Milky Way.
The longevity of a love that survives the test of the separation of lovers, dismissed by the divine force as much as by the human force, forms the basis of this legend. The borrowing from tragedy in *Bouvier et Tisserande* lies in this lifetime fidelity to see (even for a moment) the beloved, who is consumed by the ideal of love. Claudel's reference to the archetype of Tisserande for the self-denial of women takes on its full meaning here.

It is not surprising that such a languor is seen by some Claudel scholars as a reference to the stormy residence of the poet in Fuzhou: ‘in the entangled imbroglio of deceits, invented by the King of Spain, Rodrigue and the Actress to deceive each other, there may be the reflection, if not the transfer, of lived biographical episodes’ (Maëstre 52). And others are quick to point out the ‘fault’ committed by the poet:

> in relation to a real event borrowed from his lived experience and already used, fifteen years previously, in a confidential, openly autobiographical work, a transposition of the drama of love-passion lived in Fuzhou (Hue 13-14).

The passions of Fuzhou do not resurface only in the *Soulier*; this reminiscence also serves as an axis in other works such as *L’Homme et son désir* (1921), especially the agitated and feverish dark nights suffered by the man struggling with his tenacious insomnia:

> it is the eternal dance of Nostalgia, Desire and Exile, that of the captives and the abandoned lovers, the one that for whole nights leads those tormented by insomnia to walk back and forth on their verandah [...]. We are close to a certain night of paroxysm in Fuzhou [...] and in *Le Soulier de satin*. (Wasserman 115)\(^\text{36}\)

This passion enriched with the personal episode in Fuzhou appears in several works and forms the background of the *Soulier*, which also draws on other oriental sources. Of his years spent in Japan, Claudel, the playwright in love with mysticism, ostensibly adheres to the Noh genre (Kawanabe 205-218; Mayaux 145-163)\(^\text{37}\) whose form is present in the *Soulier*, especially at the end of the play where the Claudelian mysticism merges with musical singing.

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\(^{36}\) Paul Claudel, *La Danse des morts*, cited by Michel Wasserman.

\(^{37}\) In the Noh genre, the penchant for religious mystery makes it all the more appealing to Claudel.
At first glance the *Soulier de satin* does not relate to the Eastern sphere, with its Christian protagonists in a world of Spanish conquistadors. Quite the contrary, if we look behind its screens. Its borrowing from the Western world, such as in the decor, the site, the god, and the piety of the protagonists are only part of the staging. Composed on a background of lived experience in Fuzhou, this piece is anchored in several themes that come from the Chinese imagination. In this sense, Claudel and his emulators remain essential examples in the corpus of France-Asia crossings by the transcultural character of their works, where the oriental universe serves as a conceptual foundation. For the biographical displacement of Claudel, central to the creation of the *Soulier*, offers an emblematic case from a French author. If Claudel, Loti, and Segalen, to name only the best known, proclaim themselves travelers of the East whose works inspire authenticity, others, who have never set foot there, also contribute to this corpus.

The Oriental fortune of *Comment Wang-Fô fut sauvé*

This novella by Marguerite Yourcenar is another example of the corpus of cultural crossing. Its belonging to the literature of the Levant seems indisputable both thematically and imaginatively, especially since the work is related to a Taoist tale. Under the cover of the Taoist world, the life of an imperial painter and the veneration of his disciple in the ancient Han era are presented. As an apology for Taoist wisdom through the fate of the painter Wang-Fô, the Taoist-descended narrative is accompanied by a touch of the marvelous, where the old painter flies off into the horizon that he paints and the disciple rises from the dead. From the backdrop borrowed from the Taoist world to utterances drawn from Chinese figurative rhetoric, the content of the text ostensibly displays its belonging to the Eastern world. In fact, based on the five components of nature – emblematic of the Chinese imagination – the mimesis of the oriental universe in Yourcenar’s narrative is flawless:

The old painter Wang-Fô and his disciple Ling wandered along the roads of the kingdom of Han. They were advancing slowly, for Wang-Fô stopped at night to contemplate the stars, the day to look at the dragonflies. [...]

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38 Taoism has long been introduced to and translated in Europe. See on this, Léon de Rosny (*Le taoïsme*, Paris: E. Leroux, 1892).
They were poor because Wang-Fô traded his paintings for a ration of millet porridge and disdained the silver coins.\textsuperscript{39} (Yourcenar 11)

The kingdom to which these evocations refer, the mentions of the ‘kingdom of Han’, ‘the old painter Wang-Fô’, ‘to contemplate the stars’, ‘to look at the dragonflies’ frees the reader from the Western imagination. Wang-Fô’s harmonious fusion with nature is akin to Taoism, although one can sense that disdain for money is more akin to Confucianism, a concurrent school to the Taoists.

From the earliest evocations, throughout the story, common places of the Chinese imagination are inserted into the universe of protagonists: ‘Mountain under the snow’, ‘rivers in spring’, ‘face of the moon’ (Yourcenar 11). The imprint of the Taoist world is accentuated as the text goes on: ‘Wang-Fô dreamed of portraying a princess of old playing the lute under a willow’ (Yourcenar 14). The lute, referring to the pipa (or bipa)\textsuperscript{40} and symbolizing traditional music, just as referring to the weeping willow\textsuperscript{41} serves to flesh out an oriental background. Yourcenar would not have mentioned them except to break with the Western imagination. Such knowingly arranged references continue:

The soldiers made Wang-Fô pass through innumerable square or circular rooms whose form symbolized the seasons, the cardinal points, the male and the female, longevity, the prerogatives of power (Yourcenar 17).

The complementary harmony composed of Yang with its opposite Yin, such as day and night, sun and moon, fire and water, one being masculine and the other feminine, refers to the cyclical alternation of the universe. Hence the complementary pairs of images, such as the square room and the circular room, the four seasons and the cardinal points, the male and the female, are part of a continual effort to drive the Western reader’s imagination toward the Eastern world. Alongside this ingeniously arranged expression, other elements are lacking, suggesting gaps, and struggling to camouflage failings: ‘The Heavenly Master sat on a throne of jade, and his hands were wrinkled like those of an old man, although he was barely twenty years old’ (Yourcenar 18). Although jade, like emerald, represents stones prized by the

\textsuperscript{39} The extracts come from the Gallimard edition of 1999.
\textsuperscript{40} The Chinese musical instrument, dated from the 2nd century BC, which has been popular since the Tang dynasty.
\textsuperscript{41} From its original name Salix babylonica (originally from China).
Chinese, in the same way diamonds are in the West, Chinese historiography does not confirm that the throne of the emperors was made of jade, but rather wood in ancient times and golden for the Qing. As for the evocation of ‘wrinkled hands’ attached to the Son of the Dragon, it may appear crude, even if many emperors were drained in the prime of life due, among other things, to the millenarian protocol of cohabitation maintained with hundreds of courtesans, if not more.

Another imprint of Taoism is the tragic tone that permeates Yourcenar’s narrative. Following the esthetics of Zhuang Zi (the father of Taoism), tragedy is the compassion for the righteous man ruined by others (Jiang 2007, 55). This inheritance lives in Wang-Fô, the tortured one at the moment of having his eyes bored out by the Emperor:

Wang began by tinting pink the tip of the wing of a cloud that rested on a mountain. […] The jade pavement became singularly damp, but Wang-Fô, absorbed in his painting, did not notice that he was working while sitting in the water. The frail canoe swollen beneath the painter’s brushstrokes now occupied the whole foreground of the silk scroll. The rhythmic noise of the oars suddenly rose in the distance, swift and lively like a flapping wing. […] For a long time, the red iron destined for Wang’s eyes had lain extinguished on the executioner’s fire. (Yourcenar 24-25)

The touch of the marvelous that extinguishes the executioner’s red-hot iron comes from Taoist tragedy, used here to rescue the old painter, who has been ruined by others. To the question of how Wang-Fô was saved, the answer would be: by Taoist thought. The very title of the novella gives a clear hermeneutical explanation of Taoist tragedy, which culminates in the harmonious fusion of man with nature:

The scroll completed by Wang-Fô remained on the coffee table. A boat occupied the whole foreground. It was moving away little by little, leaving behind a thin wake that closed on the still sea. Already, no one could see the faces of the two men sitting in the boat. (Yourcenar 26)

From a Taoist perspective, Wang-Fô merges with his painting and his painting fuses with nature. The duality composed of concrete/abstract, light/dark constitutes the axis of Yourcenar’s story. Using the concrete as a metaphor
to explain the abstract, Taoism, in its attempt to interpret the origin of the universe, signifies the truth (Cheng 2009, 4). It gives meaning to the cognitive abstract idea through the concreteness of an image. In other words, borrowing an image to capture meaning (Jiang 2007, 24-25) is the path of Taoism. In a counter-argument, Taoism advocates that meaning can be felt only through the heart; it falls apart in its transmission in language (Jiang 2007, 28): ‘If the Tao (truth) could be communicated, said Chuang Tse, the husband would communicate it to his wife and the father to his child.’ Under the guise of the Meng-Long (equivocal/ambiguous) referring to the real/unreal antagonism, present/absent, covered/discovered (Jiang 2007, 66), the Taoist school advocates harmony between man and his integration into nature (Jiang 2007, 73), a harmony fully incorporated into Yourcenar’s text. Thus Wang-Fô is saved thanks to the boat he paints, the boat emerges from the water he paints, and the water thus painted creates the sea.

The unknown oriental genesis of the work

Out of an important body of works published by Yourcenar, only the Mémoires d’Hadrien, L’œuvre au noir, and Nouvelles orientales have been translated into Chinese, another revealing sign of how this collection belongs to the corpus which interests us. It is the same story on the French side, which takes interest in the Taoist inspiration of the collection. As evidence, Yourcenar’s words on the provenance of her new ‘Taoist apologue from Old China’ (Poignault 174) were systematically relayed by Western scholars who do not deign to demonstrate its genesis (Laude 83). It would thus be a transcription of a fable, a Taoist apologue. What is it really? My research on Chinese and Japanese tales and legends of all eras, published in the original language or in translation (Contes en peinture) cannot identify any mother-text for Yourcenar’s novella, apart from little bits and pieces of reminiscences in a prototype of tales focused on the representation of the world through painting. Thus my ambitions to find the mother-text are immediately frustrated.

44 The philosophy of Zhuang Zi, cited by Jing Yinyu.
45 Sandra Beckett, ‘La réécriture pour enfants de Comment Wang-Fô fut sauvé’, Rémy Poignault & al. (eds.).
46 For example, this book contains 300 apologies, legends, and Chinese myths, but I have not found any that could serve as a source text for Yourcenar.
As an alternative, I turned to stories about painting in order to highlight some invariant features. The Portrait of an Ugly Man offers a beautiful illustration. It reads: ‘An ugly man thinks himself beautiful. He asks a painter to make a portrait of him. The painter paints several and all these portraits, according to the man, are lacking. He blames the painter for having made him ugly in the portrait’ (Ma & Zhang 1996, 90-92, my translation). The antagonism between the ugly man and the painter recalls that between Wang-Fô and the Emperor, but in the opposite direction. For the punishment that Wang-Fô merits is not to have failed to embellish but to have deceived the emperor on the bitterness or ugliness of the real world:

You made me believe that the sea was like the vast sheet of water spread over your canvases, so blue that a stone falling into it can only change into sapphire, that women would open and close like flowers [...]. You lied to me, Wang-Fô, you old impostor: the world is only a mass of confused spots, thrown onto the void by a senseless painter, ceaselessly erased by our tears. (Yourcenar 20-21)

This antagonistic duality between the beautiful and the ugly appears in most of the tales that bear on the lives of painters. Thus Yourcenar’s text is more a quintessential abstraction of Taoist fundamentals than an imitation of a particular tale. The analysis of various repertoires of Chinese and Japanese legends continues to reinforce our feeling. In this sense, Le Plus grand peintre (Solet 77)\(^{47}\) offers another example of a prototype:

His name was Ku K’ai-Chih and he was a famous painter in China; the great lords came from everywhere to have their portrait, or that of their wife. They paid him a lot, Ku did not want for anything. (Solet 80)

It was said that Wang-Fô had the power to give life to his paintings by a last touch of color that he added to their eyes. The farmers came to beg him to paint a watchdog, and the lords wanted from him pictures of soldiers. (Yourcenar 15)

It is unfortunate that our attempts to retrace the original version of this Chinese tale have been unsuccessful. Despite this, the similarities between its French translation and Yourcenar’s text are palpable. Beyond the innate

\(^{47}\) Grouped under the heading ‘Three Strange Tales’, and originating from the provinces of Shandong and Fujian, these tales remind us of those of Pu Songling.
differences of any translation, the French version places the reader in a universe similar to that of the imperial painter Wang-Fô, with from the outset, the set tone, the revered status of the painter and the setting in the ancient era. Beside this similar textual background, certain statements overlap too. In the Chinese tale ‘the daughter of her neighbor [was] frail as a reed’ (Solet 80, my emphasis); with Yourcenar ‘Ling’s wife was “frail like a reed”’ (Yourcenar 12, my emphasis). As promising as they may be, such similarities are more fortuitous than signs of pastiche. Anchored in ‘a legendary soil’ (Autrand 93) of the same type, the statements of the two texts draw on identical images. In any case, these tales that relate the vicissitudes of a painter come together in the transcription of the real world into painting. Moreover, Yourcenar had not gone through all the Taoist tales before creating her own; they still had to be translated into French. A fortiori, her lack of contact with Asia, and China in particular, as well as her non-familiarity with the Chinese language forced her to work from translated documents. All these aspects come together to explain that the resemblances come from the transformation of Taoist quintessence and not by copying a particular tale.

Where is the Taoist background to be found then? It culminates according to Anne-Yvonne Julien in the very title of the novella, notably the ambivalence contained in the past participle ‘saved’:

the ambivalence of the ‘saved’ participle that refers as much to the process of the ‘saving’ of a character at risk in a ‘romantic’ context as to the journey towards the ‘salvation’ of a being whose journey deserves to be thought about (Julien 121).

This statement amounts to half a truth. Admittedly, the title turns out to be a promising vein, the Taoist heritage is channeled not in the participle ‘saved’, I believe, but rather in the choice of the name Wang-Fô, which is very emblematic in the Chinese imagination. Ranked among the most popular in the Register of Family Names, that ‘Wang’ is attributed to the protagonist as a surname is not surprising; but it is the name Fô which denotes the oriental genesis of the short story.

Since time immemorial, this name, whose origin goes back to a thousand-year-old legend has enjoyed popularity among boys:

48 To borrow Michel Autrand’s expression.
According to legend, the Emperor Ming-Ti lived in a dream, a man of gigantic stature whose face had the color and brilliance of gold. When he awoke, he consulted his ministers on the meaning this dream could have. Now, among his counsel, was a character who, no doubt, had traveled or, at least, had been in contact with merchants from India: he told the emperor that in the West [India and Tibet], a genius named Fô was held in great honor, and whose statue, of considerable size, had a gold-colored face. (Myrial 1903, 291)

First published in 1903 in the Mercure de France, this story might possibly have escaped the attention of Yourcenar. But that is not so. The ostentatious use of this name in metropolitan literature since the eighteenth century could not have escaped her attention. For in its oriental frenzy the metropolitan literary world was already aware that the name Fô meant fortune, luck, and happiness. Francis Jacob confirms this: ‘It is by the name of Fô that is designated, in the vast majority of writings relating to the Far East in the eighteenth century, Sakyamuni Buddha’ (Jacob 30). The popularity of this name is further confirmed by Thomas-Simon Gueullette who, in his reproduction of the prototype from the Arabian Nights, created the Aventures merveilleuses du mandarin Fum-Hoam. No doubt Gueullette took this name from La Chine illustrée by Father Athanasius Kircher, which reveals a different version of the origin of the name Fô: ‘we find certain birds in China that we do not see in other kingdoms [...] this royal bird that he [they] call Fum Hoam [...] The male is called Fum and the female Hoam’ (Gueullette 833). Fô and its variant Fu converge toward the standard Mandarin Fu to mean fortune/happiness, as we mentioned above. As erudite as she was, and a proven historian whose talents are clearly shown throughout the magisterial Mémoires d’Hadrien, Yourcenar knowingly chooses the name Fô for the mytho-cultural connotation and the sociolinguistic denotation that it contains.

I will limit myself at this stage of my study to the Eastern genesis of the short story. Although I have not been able to retrace the mother tale on which the story is modeled, I have succeeded, on the other hand, in demonstrating how it intersects with the East in terms of its conception, its references, its content, and its themes. The analysis of these three works means that even if they are the creation of French masters, consecrated canonically, addressing at first sight the French readership, they do not in any way renounce the oriental background in which they are anchored. Admittedly, such an osmosis would need to be confirmed with many other cases of
French writers and their works. Nevertheless, the three works analyzed remain prototypical examples of France-Asia trans-literary connections. For the Orient does not serve as an exotic decoration or ornament, but as an innate attribute from which the work is conceived. What is more, with Loti and Claudel, the work is enriched by a biographical experience in the Eastern land. The mimesis of the Orient realized in these three works must therefore be apprehended from the transcultural approach, which would be the keystone for the methodological approach to Francophonie in the East.

Composed of different components and different materials, the French heritage as we have just mentioned is an integral part of the corpus of France-Asia crossings. From the intimate writings of the agents of the French Eastern Empire to the French publishing houses displaced in Asia, through the fictional works of Loti, Claudel, and Yourcenar, the various parts treated in this chapter will have value as examples that illustrate the other direction of the France-Asia transfer. Finally, from the fugitive appearance of a mystified Orient in the Middle Ages, to the major expeditions carried out in the nineteenth century, not to mention the refinement shown by the readership of the metropolis of the twentieth century, the evolution of the Orient in the French imagination bears witness to the penetration of the East into the European spirit.