

# 13

## Spotlight on China – An Analysis of *L'Empire Chinois* Illustrated by Thomas Allom and Described by Clément Pellé

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“The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that each of them is; and this we can contrive with an Elstir, with a Vinteuil; with men like these we do really fly from star to star” (Proust, 1929).

### *L'Empire Chinois* (1845) – a romantic picture

Have you ever thought of China as more than a place rich of rice fields, where small people wear traditional uniforms and have yellow skin? I do think it is worth a try going beyond the pointed hats and other main stereotypes or even beyond the severe Chinese political system most of us have in mind and to explore and discover China much deeper in order to “have new eyes”, as Proust suggests. When I got the chance to look at and to hold ‘old’ and sometimes lavishly illustrated books from the nineteenth century written by travelers, missionaries and scientists, I was captured - just simply by holding them: their fragile beauty was and is amazing. One of these books seemed to me ideal for the Chinese exploration

I was aiming to undertake. Inspired by Proust's words I was convinced that thanks to this book I could "behold the [Chinese] universe through the eyes of a hundred others" (1929). Confronted with several versions, I choose the one written in my native language, titled: *L'empire Chinois, illustré d'après des dessins pris sur les lieux avec les descriptions des mœurs, des coutumes, de l'architecture, de l'industrie & du peuple Chinois depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours*. This book was illustrated by Thomas Allom, written by Clément Pellé and published by Fisher - London, Paris - in 1845. The original version was written in English by Georges Newenham Wright and was translated in three different languages: French, German and Italian. The first requirement for analyzing this popular book is to know about the broader background of the publication. Who were the author(s) and who was the illustrator and what did they want to achieve with this book? So, the first part of the chapter describes the context in which the writing of the book took place: the authors and their background but also the book itself in terms of its content and publishing (1845).

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Western world living in (the aftermath of) the age of Enlightenment, was highly intrigued by China. Although it had already been discovered in the past, its image was still unclear in the West. Not only did the latter develop interest for this new country but it was also fascinated by the Chinese culture; a true admiration for Chinese notions became the vogue at that time (Yetts, 1926). This is illustrated by Pellé's first sentence of the preface in *L'Empire Chinois*: "Si les regards se tournent vers la Chine maintenant, c'est parce qu'elle n'a pas été bien explorée auparavant... Son refus pour tout changement a donné un aspect original à la population Chinoise qui la rendu unique". Consequently, this book is contextualized against the background of the rising interest in 'other' countries and 'other' cultures. In this line, it is interesting to have a look at the cultural process explaining how Western identities were formed in opposition to an image of the East, a process that Edward Said - professor of English literature and literary theorist - called 'orientalism'. The second part of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of the depiction of the Chinese. In *L'Empire Chinois*, the illustrations of Thomas Allom are sumptuously drawn and they present an undeniable romantic image of China. So, I will try to answer the research question: how to interpret this romanticized perspective on China evoked by Allom and Pellé? Therefore, the historical context, with the specific factors which influenced the authors, is of the utmost importance. It will be clear that the idyllic image of China in *L'Empire Chinois* and the representation of the *other* are inextricably bound to Pellé and Allom themselves.

## Context and genre of *L'Empire Chinois*

Before starting the analysis of the book, it is useful to briefly discuss the historical context in which the author wrote, especially regarding the relations between China and the West. In the eighteenth century China was seen as an attractive country for its culture, its rituals and its geography as well as for its economic position. When the world trade increased after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, commerce with the Occident took off gradually and the high demand for silk, tea and ceramic - but in particular for opium - became rapidly an issue. Thereupon a large conflict emerged, namely the Opium Wars, between China and the United Kingdom (1839-1852 and 1856-1860). During this entire conflict, the British military power was by far stronger. The English easily beat the Chinese tribes notwithstanding all attempts of the Chinese to limit or to stop the opium trade. The Treaty of Nanking in 1842 showed again the British superiority. The treaty granted Hong-Kong to the British and opened many harbours for world trade and it became a symbol of the succession of unequal treaties which occurred in favour of Western power during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Besides, the religious aspect has to be taken into account. Missionaries and in particular the Jesuits represented an important stage in history. Although the Jesuit's missions in China occurred mainly in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, their influence could still be felt in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The Jesuits tried to propagate Christianity, but they were also focussed on the exchange of knowledge; so thanks to the Jesuits Chinese knowledge came to Europe, for example translations of Confucius' works (Brockey, 2007; Standaert, 2010, p.2)

*L'Empire Chinois* didn't come out of the circle of Jesuits. However, Pellé was certainly influenced by the Jesuit's publications in relation to China. *L'Empire Chinois* was / is an illustrated book that must be seen as a 'descriptive discovery' or an 'historic romance'. Furthermore, it would not be quite correct to include *L'Empire Chinois* in the category of travel writing books. In order to present his pieces of art, Thomas Allom (1804-1872) recalled many travels and visits of museums, and he was inspired by publications, sketches and illustrations (fashionable in the eighteenth century) of visitors of China such as missionaries, pilgrims, conquistadors explorers or travellers. One of these men was Jan Nieuhof (1618-1672), a Dutch explorer who took part in the mission in China undertaken by the Dutch East Asia Company in 1656 and who wrote a book about the first Dutch embassy in Peking in 1665. He was familiar with Athanasius Kirchner (1601-1680), a German Jesuit who wrote a very famous book called *China Monumentis Illustrata* (1667). Moreover, he was acquainted with Karl Gützlaff (1803-1851), a German missionary who wrote the *Journal of*

*Three Voyages along the Coast of China in 1831, 1832, 1833*, and he knew Sir George Thomas Staunton's (1781-1859) publications about China (Yetts, 1926, p.12; Wright, 1845, preface). *L'Empire Chinois* therefore profited from other travel writers' works. On the one hand, one could criticize this procedure by arguing that it gave an untrustworthy aspect to the book. On the other hand, it shows clearly that the latter was not designed to be a travel account in the narrow sense, but it wanted to be 'an exhibition' of several ideas about China in order to please the expectations of curious audience and probably in order to *entertain* at the same time. I used the word 'exhibition' deliberately to underline the importance of the illustrations in *L'Empire Chinois*. In 1996 Dianne Sachko Macleod characterized, in her *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, the second half of the nineteenth century as the 'Golden Age of Illustrated Picture Books' (Macleod, 1996).

## Whose pen are we talking about?

Allom (1804-1872) was seen as the "main artist of the Illustrated Picture Book genre" (M'Kenzie-Hall, n.d.). He was famous for his precise and outstanding illustrations of travel books and was considered as one of the two "most prolific designers from the late 1820s to mid-1840s (M'Kenzie-Hall, n.d.; Stratchan and Bolton, 2012). His talent in question is clearly observable in *L'Empire Chinois* through his 124 engraved plates. Hence, it is worth presenting Allom in more depth. M'Kenzie-Hall states in his paper that although Allom is now part of the new edition of the *Oxford DNB (2004)*, no full biography of him exists (pp.17-18). He was, however, famous and well-known as a topographical illustrator *and* as an English architect – one of the founding fathers of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Allom loved to travel a lot through Europe, and outside to make sketches.

Thomas Allom was not the only one involved in *L'Empire Chinois*. As much as for the illustrator, it is important to know more about the background of the author, namely Clément Pellé. During the nineteenth century, many books were written in order to present a biography of French authors, journalists, painters or simply of men who marked the French history (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2009). The fact that Clément Pellé is not mentioned in these publications proves the lack of academic and relevant sources about the writer. For example, his precise year of birth and of death cannot be allocated. Nonetheless, some relevant information has been found about him. Clément Pellé lived in the nineteenth century and wrote many books about different countries. He seemed to have travelled gladly through Europe, especially Great Britain. He was editor of *La revue Britannique* and one of his famous books was titled *Angleterre, Ecosse et Irlande* (ibid.)

Clément Pellé also wrote, among others, *L'Empire Ottman illustré, Constantinople Ancienne et Moderne*. In this case, he is the translator of *L'Empire Chinois*. However, Pellé went further than a simple translation: he considerably modified the text here and there. And what about the first author, Georges Newenham Wright? He was an Irish writer and Anglican clergyman. Born in 1794 in Dublin and deceased in 1877, he spent most of his life in the nineteenth century. Newenham Wright was also teacher of classics and of antiquities, and he used to publish school and guide books.

## *L'Empire Chinois's journey*

Georges Newenham Wright is thus situated at the start of 'the long journey' *L'Empire Chinois* went through. Indeed, after the English version, the book was published in three more languages: German<sup>1</sup>, French and later Italian<sup>2</sup>. The first publication was called *China Illustrated or China-The Scenery, Architecture and Social habits*. In regards to this English title, one could claim, as a potential hypothesis, that Wright wanted to succeed Athanasius Kirchner as such was inspired by his famous title *China illustrata*. Both the English and French versions were published by publishing house Fisher, Son & Co, having with headquarter in London and Paris. This publisher produced illustrated picture books massively from the mid eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century. M'Kenzie-Hall argues that this publisher employed Allom "precisely for [his] skill as architectural draughtsmen and watercolourists". According to the former, engravers at that time formed a small community and thereby a real relationship could be established between the artist, the author and publisher (M'Kenzie-Hall, n.d., p.20).

## The story briefly told

Next to Allom's, Pellé's and Wright's biographies, the translations, the genre et cetera; the most captivating part is the story itself. As previously mentioned, Thomas Allom was inspired by several works of artists and travellers. Clément Pellé hardly used the 'I-form', and neither the 'we-form', but he referred oftentimes to other experts, like travellers and

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1 *China; historisch, romantisch, malerisch* and was edited and published in Karlsruhe by im Kunst-Verlag in 1844

2 *La China considerata nella sua storia* and was edited in 1847 in Milan by Luigi Bardi Editore.

artists to convince his readers. For example, when explaining a natural phenomenon, Clément Pellé stated:

“Voici ce que dit Mr. Tradescant Lay, naturaliste anglais, spécialiste de la Chine qui y a vécu longtemps ...Nous extrayons les passages suivants d'un livre récemment publié par un officier anglais qui faisait partie de l'expédition anglaise en Chine” (Pellé and Allom, 1843, pp. 35-51).

The main idea of *L'Empire Chinois* was to illustrate the scenery, customs, arts, manufactures, religious ceremonies, and political institutions of a people “so unlike the rest of mankind, so attached to established usages, that they exemplify the manners of thousands of years back” (Pellé and Allom, 1843, pp. 3). The beauty and particular aspect of the book lays in the illustrations which represent a great artistic work. The link between the image and the text showed M'Kenzie-Hall: “The format or size of the drawings, along with the style and technique, has a direct bearing on their destination as designs to be engraved” (M'Kenzie-Hall, n.d., p.11). Indeed, these engraved plates which capture sights of daily activities of China are drawn in fine details and give a visual idea, more lively and concrete, of how China should be perceived. They show various scenes such as daily life and geographic landscapes but also key moments that change the course of history in China. As a significant insight of the book, the illustration called *A street in Canton* - famous harbour for world trade back in the nineteenth century - and part of its description are shown here.



**Fig. 1:** *A street in Canton*

Source: Pellé, C. and Allom, T. (1845). *L'Empire Chinois, illustré d'après des dessins pris sur les lieux; avec les descriptions des mœurs, des coutumes, de l'architecture, de l'industrie & du peuple Chinois depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours*. Londres-Paris: Fisher.

While depicting the environment of Canton, Clément Pellé explained how noisy and crowded the streets were over there or what kind of material was used for the building of the houses. In regard to the rituals, the author described for example, the Chinese habit of being, what we – as Westerners – would call unclean or even unhygienic: they did not change their clothes daily, tissues were unknown and spitting was usual. Although these customs differed from the ones in the West considerably, Pellé tried to keep a neutral tone such as “La propreté n’est point au nombre des vertus des Chinois”; or even a positive, kind and respectful tone: “Le maintien de la foule est doux, bienveillant, gracieux et plein de provenance” or “Il règne toutefois dans les rues de Canton, un certain air de bonhomie et d’honnêteté qui réjouit le cœur” (Pellé and Allom, 1843, 1843, p. 54).

In order to give a greater overview of Allom’s works, two more illustrations are relevant. These are chosen because they represent symbolic items of China: the Great Wall of China and the Dragon Boat.



**Fig. 2:** *The Great Wall of China*

Source: Pellé, C. and Allom, T. (1845). *L’Empire Chinois, illustré d’après des dessins pris sur les lieux; avec les descriptions des mœurs, des coutumes, de l’architecture, de l’industrie & du peuple Chinois depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu’à nos jours*. Londres-Paris: Fisher.

The Great Wall of China was indeed an important turning point in Chinese history since it was built by the first emperor of China – Quing Chi Huang – and it traced the first northern border of China to protect the country from military invasions. The Great Wall of China was described as a ‘wonder of the world’ (Pellé and Allom, 1843, pp. 32-33).



**Fig. 3:** *The Dragon Boat*

Source: Pellé, C. and Allom, T. (1845). *L'Empire Chinois, illustré d'après des dessins pris sur les lieux; avec les descriptions des mœurs, des coutumes, de l'architecture, de l'industrie & du peuple Chinois depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours*. Londres-Paris: Fisher.

The Dragon Boat was chosen here because Chinese dragons were legendary creatures in Chinese mythology and art. This symbol stands for immortality, power, good luck, fertility and strength.

## The other.....

As previously mentioned, *L'Empire Chinois* must be seen against the background of the rising interest in the *other*, in China, in the 'orient'. So, it is interesting to have a look at the relations between China and the West and in particular at Edward Said's analysis about the *Western Representation of the Orient*. Said was an influential person in the critical-theory field of post-colonialism. In his famous book *Orientalism* (1978), the literary theorist insisted on the fact that the received idea of Europe identifies 'us' as against other societies and civilizations. According to Said, the Western approach when dealing with the 'orient' is an "airy European fantasy", a mere "willed imaginative and geographic distinction between East and the West". "Other societies and civilizations" – implying the Orient - are put in a defined category created with prejudiced ideas shaped by certain political forces such as the imperialism of Europeans and Americans in the Orient. While taking many factors for



granted, the Orient is thus often brought into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western Empire (Said, 1978, p.4). Said rejected the idea of 'orientalism' being a "diffuse collection of texts about imperialist plot to hold down the Oriental World" (Said, 1978, p.5). He wanted to remind the reader that the 'orient' is an entity being as rich as the West in regard to its description, history, tradition and that it could not have existed without the West. He stated that the relation Orient-Occident is not solely a geographic distinction implying negative inputs. Orientalism is a "system of knowledge" which should not look only at the visible differences but also at the untouchable positivity of the basic content of 'orient' (Said, 1978, pp. 1-4). Once the perspective of Said is acknowledged, one can therefore wonder to what extent *L'Empire Chinois* reflects it.

This book presents a description of China, an entity which differs from 'us' by its culture, its landscape, its lifestyle et cetera. The concept of the *other* is therefore obviously applicable hereby. It is thus interesting to look at the way *other* - in this case the Chinese - was depicted. First of all, it could be said that Clément Pellé joined Said in his way of presenting the 'orient'. Indeed, even while presenting the differences between China and the West such as languages, literature, history and sociology (what Said calls "manifest orientalism" (Said, 1978, p.6)), Pellé did not present China as an inferior entity where imperialism had taken place or should take place. Neither did Pellé make a clear distinction between modern transitional world and traditional societies as other scholars did when dealing with the concept of the *other*. Secondly, the powerful aspect of the book rests on Thomas Allom's illustrations. Therefore, the image of the Chinese is already embellished only by the wonderful appearance of the engraved plates. M'Kenzie-Hall mentions in his work that the relation between text and image must be considered carefully (M'Kenzie-Hall, n.d., p.12). This is why the tone adopted in the description matches the beauty of the illustrations by being idealistic, admiring with sometimes a dreamy, mysterious and mystical connotation. This confirms the positive emotion aroused from the depiction of the *other* in *L'Empire Chinois*. A concrete example with the abundant presence of positive adjectives:

"Richesse et beauté du pays, fertilité extraordinaire de son sol, pays magnifique, marchandise arrangée avec beaucoup de symétrie et de goût, exubérance de richesse naturelle, la volonté et le sourire dans le travail, le souci de bien faire, nulle part l'autorité souveraine n'est aussi respectée" (Pellé and Allom, 1843, p. 20-23).

Thirdly, it is remarkable that Pellé was not very positive about Chinese religion. According to him the Chinese cult should be considered as immoral in view of the fact that

it wanted to overwhelm other religions; for Pellé the Christianity came close to perfection. So, he showed a strong idea of Western superiority when dealing with religion:

“Le triomphe de culte Païen sur le culte Chrétien est le triomphe de l'idée moins parfaite sur l'idée parfaite..{et donc} un coup fatal porté au bien être d'un grand peuple... La Chine continue a se tenir a l'écart mais déjà les feux de la civilisation de l'empire Chinois commencent à pâlir devant ceux de la civilisation Européenne” (Pellé and Allom, 1843, p. 40).

Remarkably, the Chinese population should be grateful to God for offering such a fascinating land according to Pellé: “son visage, celui de sa femme et de ses filles respirent la satisfaction, la reconnaissance dans Dieu qui a fécondé le champ, qui lui a donné la fertilité. Les champs rétentissent dans la campagne” (Pellé and Allom, 1843, p 40).

## A positive attitude towards China

This section aims to explain why *L'Empire Chinois* depicted China as an almost ideal civilization, almost like a model. And, why did make religion the exception? Even if Clément Pellé was in fact not the 'real' traveler in *L'Empire Chinois*, one might wonder why, he chose to present China in the positive way he did. Which factors could have influenced him?

Since Pellé was French, it would be logical then to investigate deeper on the relations between France and China at that time. In order to do so, the article of Jean Chesneaux called 'China in the eyes of French intellectuals' is relevant. He elaborates on the term “French exoticism”, that is to say “the tendency to look for a political homeland and model of reference in distant, exotic countries” (Cheseaux, 1996, p.55). During the seventeenth and the eighteenth century the French intellectual climate was quite positive about China. French Jesuits and French philosophers admired the 'natural morality' of the Chinese empire and introduced a very idealistic image of this country in France (Lach, p.39). For example, Pierre Poivre, philosopher in the eighteenth century, and “one of the very few who actually visited the Far East” declared China to be “the perfect image of Heaven” (Chesneaux, 1996, p. 52). According to philosophers such as Voltaire or Diderot for example, China was a “powerful war machine”, “a model government”, “a symbol of bureaucratic rigidity”, “an empire ruled by an intellectual elite, a man of wisdom” (Chesneaux, 1996, p. 51). All Europeans were impressed by Chinese culture and style at that time, especially due to the fact that they created their civilization in a spontaneous and unassisted way.

Nevertheless, France went further than the fashionable *chinoiseries* in their commitment to China: “French always like to perform and to find an audience” (Chesneaux, 1996, p. 55). Consequently, this could give an explanation to the tone already described used by Pellé in *L’Empire Chinois*.

Moreover, Chesneaux makes clear that the image of China as a “powerful war-machine against the Catholic monarchy” was ironically introduced into the French intellectuals by the Jesuits (Chesneaux, 1996, p. 52). The Jesuit mission was already presented at the beginning of the chapter. An important element to recall is the fact that all Jesuits were from the Western world and many of them were French and very influential in France indeed. In the introduction of his book *Journey to the East* Brockney makes clear that the Jesuits wanted to spread Christianity in China (Brockney, 2007, p.6). However, they hardly achieved their primary objective: the conversion of Chinese to Christianity. This did not prevent them from being reputed as heroic and the “forerunners of ‘modern’ and ‘tolerant’ attitude” even as the early French intellectuals (Brockney, 2007, pp. 8, 13, 15; Chesneaux, 1996).

## Pellé’s intention

In order to give an explanation to the taking of that particular perspective by Pellé, it is important to investigate more on his intentions and his aim when writing the book. Indeed, the choice of his writing style and thereby of a certain depiction of the Chinese is tightly related to his very first intention? The writing style of *L’Empire Chinois* is rather catchy, entertaining and romanticized; this even somewhat gives an impression of fiction. Why did Pellé decide to give this tone to his book? Firstly, it could be stated that this ‘Romanization’ was ‘en vogue’, thus not definitely archaic as it can be seen by current Westerners nowadays. Secondly, Pellé, who was facing a public with unclear expectations about the country represented, might have chosen to give a fictional aspect to his story and to present it as an “uncontaminated elsewhere” in order to seduce his audience and to trigger curiosity (Thompson, 2011, p.5). The prestige and the popularity of the genre of travel writing was indeed due to its capacity to give “taste for exotic, or for adventure... [but also its capacity to give] important insights into the fraught encounters and exchanges (Thompson, 2011, p.1). Thirdly, by making its text entertaining and in giving another version of the featured location from a different angle in its descriptions the author avoids to result in having “uninspired, unconnected, insipid poetry or moralizing” descriptions of the illustrations as it is often the case when the plates are presented in a different context from their original (M’Kenzie-Hall, n.d. 51). Also, given that travel book is a “medium

through which human celebrate this freedom”, the writer’s intention might have been thus to combine celebration of freedom and entertainment (Thompson, 2011, p.6).

Moreover, the fact that Clément Pellé was apparently willing to make the distinction between *us* and the *other* less sharp than the other authors usually do, delivers a “consoling, self-congratulatory message to the readership” and shows a worthy attempt to overcome cultural distance through a protracted act of understanding (Thompson, 2011, p.6).

## Conclusion

While providing an overview of what *L’Empire Chinois* is about and what is hidden beyond it such as its authors, its illustrations and its different versions, this chapter aimed to show that this book could be seen, coming back to Proust’s words, as a “true voyage of discovery”, as a way to “possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of hundred others” (1929). Not only does *L’Empire Chinois* trigger interest in China in general, but it deepens also the knowledge about illustrated books and publications from the nineteenth century. In addition to the presentation of the book, this chapter wanted to investigate the depiction of the *other*. The claim was put forward in the chapter by showing through several extracts of the book that the *other* – here China – was presented like an ideal civilization. The question asked at the very beginning was precisely: how to interpret the romanticized perspective taken by Pellé and Allom when depicting the Chinese in *L’Empire Chinois*? To come up with a potential answer, this chapter provided an overview of the factors which could have influenced Pellé’s way of writing and Allom’s way of drawing. These factors are first the historical context and second the more specific intentions of the authors. Firstly, the French exoticism and the great influence of the Jesuits in France in that period might explain Pellé’s point of view, being French himself. Secondly, what he wanted to achieve before starting to write probably impacted his manner to present China. He seemed to have been willing to meet people’s expectations by giving a comprehensive idea of what China was about and especially by entertaining them. This resulted in this case probably in a romanticized and idealized perspective.

The analysis of this chapter tried to set in context *L’Empire Chinois* in order to inform the reader, but also, and more particularly, to give an explanation of the writing style - and so to enable the reader to read between the lines. This subsequently makes the latter required to have a critical eye not only on China and its history described but also on the depiction of the *other*. Although this depiction in question is shown here rather positively and as good way to step back from the “fruitless debates” about modernization and the

evolution of capitalism (Said, 1978), the audience has to keep judicious. In this line, the critical eye of Chesneau on the French idealization of China is very relevant. He wonders whether these philosophers did the right thing when making this rosy picture of China “conveyed by short-term visitors”; it was indeed an “essential ingredient of [the] social prestige, [the] publishing careers and [the] popularity with the media” (Chesneau, 1996, p 61). As far as the reader of *L'Empire Chinois* is concerned, he should also have the same critical eye when reading the book.

Furthermore, this chapter aimed to render the public aware of different elements. Firstly, the difficulty to illustrate and write such a book somehow reminds the enriching aspect of art which is sometimes forgotten nowadays. This is confirmed by Landon's quotation:

“It is not an easy thing to write illustrations to prints, selected rather for their pictorial excellence than their poetic capabilities; and mere description is certainly not the most popular species of composition... a book like this is a literary luxury, addressed chiefly to a young and gentler class of readers...” (Landon, 1832).

Secondly, the reader must be aware of the fact that the abstract construction of China presented in *L'Empire Chinois* reflects especially Westerner's abstract ideas of China or even of the *other* in general (Chesneau, 1996). It is necessary to wonder whether it is correct to judge and place other entities in a certain category in spite of the fact that a more concrete idea of these other entities is often lacking.

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