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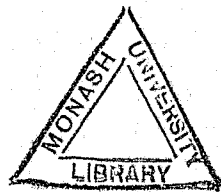
# **INSCRIBING CHINA: AUSTRALIAN FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS 1979-1989**

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A minor thesis submitted to the Department of English, Monash University, in  
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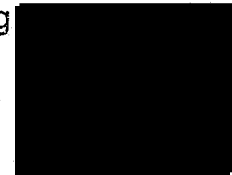
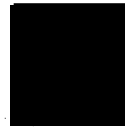
## SUMMARY

This thesis critically examines Australian representations of China and the Chinese in contemporary Australian fiction published between 1979-1989. It argues that the Australian representation, like representations elsewhere, are influenced by historical and cultural factors. To a marked degree they are influenced by ideological imperialism and 'Orientalism' of Western culture generally, as well as by a stereotypical bias that is distinctively Australian. For contemporary Australian writers, most of whose cultural roots are firmly planted in Europe and who are imbued with the structural principle of binary opposition in thinking and in language, the 'East' or the 'Orient' (here China in particular) stands for the Other against which the West has been able to identify itself as intrinsically superior. This kind of narrative reflects not only the imperialist world view, but also a deep-rooted racial bias. Yet some kind of evolution of Australian attitudes toward Asia, especially toward China and the Chinese, is reckoned with in this thesis, though real change is slow in coming and stereotypes die hard, as the discussion shows. I conclude this thesis by arguing that only when China is recognised as the *truly* Other, that is, an actual different country with its own history, not some fantastic, barbaric 'Cathay', will Western writers be in a position to disperse fantasies and thereby help audiences understand the country's rich cultural tradition and character. Only then, will the real differences---and similarities--- between China and the West be presented with some authenticity and integrity.

## Statement

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by any person, excepting when due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

Yuan-fang



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## INTRODUCTION

China, the so-called 'enigma of the Orient', has challenged the Western imagination for centuries. 'From the earliest traveller's tales to reach Europe', the Australian novelist and diplomat Nicholas Jose notes, 'to Voltaire and Coleridge, and on to the present day, China as strange, curious, awe-inspiring Cathay has attracted writers as a realm for tall tales, fantasy and the revelation of profound mysteries, a fabled zone of difference.'<sup>1</sup> As China has emerged as a power to be reckoned with politically and economically, the Western world's interest in it has increased. In Australia, for instance, Asianists have come to the fore in intellectual circles, and a 'new wave of interest and activity is occurring'.<sup>2</sup> Books about or referring to China have been published with increasing frequency. With the appearance of critically acclaimed novels such as Alex Miller's Miles Franklin award winner *The Ancestor Game* (1992) and Brian Castro's *After China* (1992), the judgement that 'China has attracted writers, and turned people into writers, but has not helped to produce masterpieces', perhaps needs revising.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis, however, is not primarily concerned with works published recently. Instead, I shall essentially confine my discussion to Australian novels published between 1979-1989 and set in mainland China. I have chosen this period

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<sup>1</sup>Nicholas Jose, 'Non-Chinese Characters: Translating China', *Southerly*, 52, no.2 (June 1992), 5.

<sup>2</sup>Jose, 'Sensitive New Asian Country', *Island*, no.53 (Summer 1992), 46.

<sup>3</sup>Jose, 'Non-Chinese Characters: Translating China', 7.

as my focus for a couple of important reasons. First of all, 1972 saw the establishment of diplomatic relations between The People's Republic of China and Australia, a historic rapprochement which allowed Australia-China relationships to enter a new stage. Nevertheless, as Alison Broinowski points out in *The Yellow Lady*:

Australian novelists hardly became instant sinomaniacs in 1972 as some politicians did. By the time new Australian novels about China began to appear, the China euphoria had already degenerated into disillusionment with the Cultural Revolution.<sup>4</sup>

The few writers 'instantly expert enough to make fictional comment on China', Broinowski continues, 'were not dewy-eyed idealists but experienced journalists'.<sup>5</sup> One of these was Margaret Jones, who worked in Beijing as a correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1973-1974, a period 'of geostrategic uncertainty compounded by a sharp internal power struggle' in China.<sup>6</sup> Both her professional experience and the political situation expedited her powerful fictional representation of China, *The Confucius Enigma*, published in 1979. Ian Moffitt had been in China during the Chinese Civil War and worked as a correspondent for the *South China Morning Post*. Then, he worked in Hong Kong, also as a reporter. All of this is reflected implicitly in his novel *The Retreat of*

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<sup>4</sup>Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.176.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Richard C. Thornton, *China: A Political History, 1917-1980* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), p.361.

*Radiance* (1982). Since then, new Australian books about China were published in quick succession: *Birds of Passage*, by Brian Castro, in 1983, *Julia Paradise*, by Rod Jones, in 1986, *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, by Nicholas Jose, in 1989, to mention only three.

1979, the year *The Confucius Enigma*, the first of the new wave of Sino-Australian fiction, appeared, was also the year in which the Chinese government officially 'opened its doors' to the world. In December 1978, the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress was held, marking a crucial turning point in the history of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic. It proclaimed the end of the era of political mass movement, including those aimed at criticising Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, and declared the year of 1979 to be a new beginning whereby the entire Party's work was to be directed toward implementing the socialist modernisations. The communique states that "the major missions of the new historical era" were to accelerate socialist modernisation, to increase production and to improve people's livelihood.<sup>7</sup>

In order to accelerate 'socialist modernisation', China's economic relationships with the rest of the world were also significantly redefined. In early 1979, Deng Xiaoping stated that while 'self-support' would remain as the basic principle, it must be complemented by efforts to win foreign assistance and to

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<sup>7</sup>'Zhongguo gongchandang di shiyijie zhongyang weiyuanhui disanze quanti huiyi gongbao' (December 22, 1978), quoted by Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *Politics of Disillusionment* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), p.15.

introduce advanced technologies from the West.<sup>8</sup> In July 1979, the People's Republic of China promulgated its first set of regulations governing Sino-foreign joint economic investments as a measure to attract foreign capital into China. 'The new policy promised to foster an even closer economic relationship with the outside world.'<sup>9</sup> Since then, economic, cultural and educational exchanges between China and the rest of the world have increased. That makes it possible for those who have strong interest in China to 'turn to matters Chinese to present a source of power or a realm of values concealed within, or alternative to, the visible and familiar'.<sup>10</sup>

Ten years later, however, the June Fourth Tiananmen massacre jolted Australia's sinologists out of their conventional ways of representing China. They found themselves 'drawing on their knowledge of China's past to address the riddles of present and future, seeking to cut through conventional views with the urgent contemporary energy of their insights'.<sup>11</sup> A shift in emphasis can be discerned in the novels published after 1989, especially *The Ancestor Game* and *After China*, in which the uncompromising anti-communism in the novels of the former decades is replaced by, in Nicholas Jose's words, 'obscure intimations of

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<sup>8</sup>Deng's speech, 'Shixian sige xiandaihua bixu jianchi sixiang jiben yuanze' (March 30, 1979), see *ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>9</sup>Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *Politics of Disillusionment* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), pp.17-18.

<sup>10</sup>Nicholas Jose, 'About books, China matters', *National Library of Australia News* (September 1992), 8.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.



profound wisdom coupled with highly intricate, highly indirect plotting, rich with the matter of China'.<sup>12</sup> This change, it seems to me, means that the most recent Australian novels about China represent a new maturity in the fictional inscription of China, and therefore need separate consideration and appreciation elsewhere.

Scrutinising the novels published in the period 1979-1989, I have noticed at least two revealing features. With the growth of direct contact with Chinese realities, Australian authors seem to feel more confident than ever before to make a fictional exploration of China and the Chinese people. Previous writings concerning China and the Chinese are mostly set in Australia, with coolies, hawkers, gardeners and cooks the customary caricatures. In the period under consideration, however, most of the novels are set in mainland China and China becomes, as in the case of Nicholas Jose talking about *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, 'the element in which [the image-maker's] work is plunged'.<sup>13</sup> The major images of the Chinese are workers, peasants, artists, Confucian scholars, intellectuals, students, communist cadres, a panorama of characters of contemporary China, although the conventional stereotypes---such as coolies, eunuchs, prostitutes, still appear now and then.

The other feature is that the main focus of the themes has changed. Contemporary Australian authors show a strong interest in politics in their writings -

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>13</sup>Nicholas Jose, *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, p.299. Note that page numbers for all quotations from *primary texts* will henceforth appear in my text within brackets; the page numbers refer to the editions listed in the Bibliography.

-- as Bruce Bennett has noted, politics is the principal subject in the novels of the 1970s and the 1980s. He assumes that a 'deepening consciousness of politics within Australia following the election of the Whitlam Labour Government in 1972 and its dramatic dismissal in 1975 may have contributed to an enhanced interest in this subject in neighbouring countries, which were by now widely termed "the region"'.<sup>14</sup> But as far as the works about China are concerned, I would contend that the impact of the twenty-three years' anti-communist policies of Australian Liberal Government (1949-1972), the prevailing imperialist ideology and the political situation of China in the 1970s and the 1980s all exert influences on the fiction-makers' interest in and perception of China and the Chinese.

In my thesis, I shall try to argue that Australian representations of China and the Chinese, like any other representations, are time-and-culture bound. To a marked degree they are influenced by cultural imperialism and Orientalism, what Alison Broinowski calls 'the European vision of all Eastern peoples as exotic, remote, inferior, and subject to the political, military, economic, cultural, and sexual dominance of the West'.<sup>15</sup> As Edward Said has argued, 'Orientalism is a praxis of the same sort...as male gender dominance, or patriarchy, in metropolitan societies: the Orient was routinely described as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual women, the harem, and the despotic---but curiously attractive---

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<sup>14</sup>Bruce Bennett, *An Australian Compass* (South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Center, 1991), p.201.

<sup>15</sup>Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p.2.

ruler',<sup>16</sup> which contrasts sharply to its masculine, European Other. The Australian representations of China and the Chinese are inevitably bound by this praxis, as my discussion will show.

Despite the new generation of Australian writers having a distaste for the colonialist racism of old generations, their writings are also tinged by the stereotypical bias that is distinctively Australian. Since 'knowledge of Asia acquired by Australians over 150 years had not effectively been passed on, or only in stereotypical terms', Broinowski writes, 'this generation of novelists wrote as if they were discoverers of a new world, yet they inherited the predispositions of the past to its hygiene, morals, poverty, danger. The journalist writers were merely the latest to reflect them.'<sup>17</sup>

Influenced by cultural imperialism and stereotypical bias, the image-maker inevitably provides his own society with representations of the Orient, Edward Said writes:

...(a) that bear his distinctive imprint, (b) that illustrate his conception of what the Orient can or ought to be, (c) that consciously contest someone else's view of the Orient, (d) that provide Orientalist discourse with what, at that moment, it seems most in need of, and (e) that respond to certain cultural, professional, national, political, and economic requirements of the epoch.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Edward W. Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', *Cultural Critique*, no.1 (Fall 1985), 103.

<sup>17</sup>Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p.181.

<sup>18</sup>Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p.273.

In the journalist novels of the late 1970s and early 1980s, China is portrayed as a dystopia, an imaginary place where everything is as bad as could possibly be: a nation filled with death, violence, danger, poverty, corruption. And its people are described as hostile, barbarous and enigmatic creatures. In the later literary constructions of the 1980s, China is either depicted 'as a country coming out of colonialism, and one that suggested "notions of the exotic, the East, Kubla Khan and all that"',<sup>19</sup> or portrayed as an autocracy, in which people have enjoyed no freedom, no democracy and no individuality. And its material and social possibilities are so limited and 'an evolution so slow and chancy', Nicholas Jose writes in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, 'as scarcely to deserve the name of progress'. (p.225) The Chinese are described as an inscrutable people whose unreadable character denies the access of outsiders.

In the narratives of this period, hostility to communism is an integral part of most of the writers' ideological approach. The Communist system becomes the major topic for fictional interrogation. Not all the representations that result are pernicious. Nicholas Jose's *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, as Bruce Bennett remarks, 'highlights the challenges for contemporary Australian authors when they tackle the "foreign" cultures to Australia's north---in this case China'. It 'negotiates contemporary perceptions and counter-perceptions of a complex nation with a sophistication which would have been inconceivable a generation earlier'.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p.131.

<sup>20</sup>Bennett, *An Australian Compass*, p.207.

But in the ideological play of contemporary perceptions and counter-perceptions, the resurfacing of the old Orientalist dichotomy (the division of the world into an imaginative geography of East and West) is revealing. China, in the eyes of Westerners generally, is female, weak, emotional, instinctive, subservient, 'a receptacle to plunder', while the West is male, strong, pragmatic, rational and masterful. The Chinese are mysterious and barbarous while the Westerners are straightforward and civilised. In such cases, I would contend, the Australian portrayal serves primarily as a foil to describe the Occidentals as 'not' Oriental. As far as Chinese women are concerned, they are either desirable sex objects or tasteless 'dragon ladies' who are warped by communist ideology. This kind of narrative reflects not only the imperialist world view, but also a deep-rooted racial bias, which entails a ranking of races from superior to inferior.

Not that Australian literary representations of China and the Chinese in this period are mere reprints of western stereotypes. As my discussion will show, some fruitful changes are taking place. Firstly, international travel, as Mimi Chan has observed, 'has made the world smaller; direct contact with the reality from which images have been drawn has certainly helped to sharpen and to make more just the images drawn.'<sup>21</sup> Australian image-makers are aware of the dangers present in the temptation to offer pejorative summaries of races or nation, and of the differences among individuals. Jose writes in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*:

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<sup>21</sup>Mimi Chan, *Images of Chinese Women in Anglo-American Literature* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1989), p.275.

Why do we always end up talking of them as 'the Chinese', 'they', 'them', as if they're a different species. As individuals they're as different from each other as chalk and cheese. (p.117)

Secondly, with the emergence of self-consciously multicultural writing by the early eighties, some writers began to interrogate Australian stereotypes of China and the Chinese, those popular images of 'coolies, eunuchs, gnomes, dwarfs, or opium-crazed sex maniacs'.<sup>22</sup> Journalist novelists of the late 70s and early 80s still showed some interest in these images. *Birds of Passage*, however, 'signals the gulf between Castro's imagination and the literary products of those older cultural traditions', as Andrew Riemer notes.<sup>23</sup> In this work, Castro depicts both Shan and the contemporary Australian born Chinese, Seamus O'Young, with a sense of kinship. Through the construction of the two generations' experiences in Australia, the author seems to convey, implicitly, 'the sense that there is somehow a norm in Australian society, and that both Shan and his twentieth-century descendent are alien in the light of what is considered normal or legitimately Australian.'<sup>24</sup>

Finally, with the growth of a stridently post-colonial consciousness, Australian writers began to write self-consciously against colonialism and cultural imperialism. (Nevertheless 'settler Australians', as Les Murray has asserted, 'were still guided

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<sup>22</sup>Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p.29.

<sup>23</sup>Andrew Riemer, 'Castro's Worlds', *The Independent Monthly*, 4, no.7 (February 1993), 27.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

mainly by the imported traditions of distant lands and climates' in the 1980s.<sup>25</sup>) The fiction-makers, aware of the peripheral status of Australians in the West, turned to Asia as their new world, in which 'Australians could stop cringing or snarling at the West', as Broinowski points out.<sup>26</sup> This trend is to a certain degree reflected in contemporary Australian fiction about China. The modification of the traditional image of China and the Chinese will be reckoned with in this thesis, though my focus is on the historical and cultural determinants of the representations under consideration.

I have divided my thesis into three chapters. Chapter One, 'China as Dystopia', examines Australian representations of China. In this chapter, Australia's attitudes toward China, the world's political Zeitgeist, imperialist ideology, China's specific political and economical situation, and cultural, racial and political stereotypes are all considered. Chapter Two, 'The Chinese Puzzle', will critically analyse Australian images of the Chinese and identify to what extent the perceptions are influenced by Orientalism. Chapter Three, 'China Girls', mainly discusses the typology of Chinese women constructed by Australian authors in this period. I will show how deep-rooted misogyny, racial bias and political stereotyping impact upon the fiction writers' construction. Through critical analysis, I attempt to demonstrate to what extent Australian conceptions of China and the Chinese are influenced by Orientalism and cultural imperialism.

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<sup>25</sup>For Les Murray's points, see Broinowski's discussion in *The Yellow Lady*, p.202.

<sup>26</sup>Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p.176.



## Chapter One

### China as Dystopia

'What does China mean to most people, I wonder?'

To this question, Quinn, the Australian protagonist in Ian Moffitt's *The Retreat of Radiance*, ironically provides the following answer:

It's whatever you want it to be---sort of a territory of the mind you can re-shape without touching the original. Depends who you are--- politician, soldier, businessman, missionary; depends what you want. You don't have to *know* China; just make you own facsimile...you don't need the reality---wouldn't get any history written then. Easier to use it as a model for our changing needs. (p.226)

If representations of China in recent Australian fiction are closely examined, it will be noticed that no better answer than the above could be found to the question of the 'meaning' of China. According to different needs, each image-maker in this period creates her or his China or Chinas. In *The Confucius Enigma*, China is portrayed as 'an authoritarian society' (p.23), nothing but 'socialist fascism', which has 'turned the state machine of China into a meat-grinder for mutual slaughter and repression, and the Party's and the nation's political life into a patriarchal life of the feudal, autocratic and dictatorial type.' Mao, 'making lavish use of the trust and position bestowed on him by the Chinese people', has in fact 'become a contemporary Emperor Chin Shih', the biggest tyrant in Chinese history. (p.10) Under the dictatorship, the Chinese citizen is either 'sold on revolutionary purity' or regarded as mentally disordered 'if he persisted in going against the Party, if he



resisted struggle sessions, if he failed to remould his world outlook'. Thus, he would possibly sent to a mental hospital. (p.124) Those who 'wanted to survive had become adept at changing sides'. (p.48)

The fate of foreigners living in China is no better. Life really is very inconvenient for them---even the desired drinks are hard to come by:

When you live in Peking, the nearest liquor store is in Hong Kong, two days journey away, and even then---if you are a foreign correspondent---you have to pay 400 per cent duty on every bottle, unless you can persuade a diplomat to bring in an order for you. (p.2)

Moreover, the abysmal lack of recreational activity drives the foreign correspondents and their wives mad. 'Peking had finished Kate', the wife of the protagonist of *The Confucius Enigma*, Brock, 'as it had other wives'. She could not work, and there was nothing to learn but Chinese, a language she found impossible:

Cut off from any real communication with Chinese, the Foreign community was unusually incestuous. Both she and Brock quickly became bored with cocktail parties and national day receptions. Brock liked to stay up most of the night drinking with male correspondents, though a few women were admitted to the circle. (pp. 3-4)

Brock, a British journalist, was a 'hot-tempered, energetic man who like to work hard, and Peking did not suit him.' 'The slow pace and monumental intricacy of Chinese politics bored and baffled him. He felt he was beating his head against a non-existent wall'. (p.4) As for Joanna, the Australian female protagonist, she felt

'scratchy, both mentally and physically'. (p.17)

To make matters worse, the foreigners perpetually feel threatened. Chinese political tricks and an 'anti-foreign' atmosphere placed the 'vulnerable' foreigners in a perpetual nightmare. In order to convey a sense of impending danger, the author creates one anti-foreign episode after another. In this 'true-to-life' melodrama, foreigners are either arrested by the men of the Public Security Bureau or beaten without reason.

Perpetually tense, Westerners are susceptible to melodrama. 'If you're not melodramatic', Joanna thought, 'it makes you that way. How can you avoid it when the Chinese themselves turn everything into a three-act thriller.' (p.36) Brock, who was pursuing the story of the late Marshal Lin Piao, was involved in such a conspiratorial trick and suffered inhuman treatment. He was first made use of and then arrested. In order to cut the correspondent from the outside world, the conspirators first put him in an 'infectious disease hospital on the outskirts of Peking' and let him share a room with a Chinese peasant who was suffering from 'meningitis'. (p.167) Then, they transferred him into 'underground', with rats as companions. The climax of the melodrama is the scene where Brock is struggled and assaulted by the 'barbaric' Chinese in a gymnasium:

It was very loud, frightening, hysterical. The people in the stands were clearly only waiting for a signal to move forward, and physically assault him. As the tumult grew, his guards seized Brock again, and ran him around the arena, pausing in front of each section. Every time they stopped, arms reached out to tug at him, trying to tear his jacket, pulling painfully at his hair and his ears, punching his face.

One girl---Brock thought she could not have been more than 17--- caught him across the mouth with her nails, and he was spat on, over and over again, so that by the time they completed the circuit, his face was dripping. (p.214)

In *The Confucius Enigma*, Margaret Jones uses post-Cultural Revolution China as background, seeking a macrohistorical model in order to come to terms with a teleology of her contemporary society. In past decades (from 1949 to 1972), 'Red' China had been described in Australian public propaganda as a 'threat', 'predatory' by virtue both of her communism and of her old imperialism.<sup>1</sup> In 1954, one writer described China 'as she is':

a dictatorship, expansionist, showing every sign of becoming the Great Imperialist and colonising power of this or the 21st century---a dictatorship without contradiction, though the Stalinists might qualify it as a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1960s, China became the 'Arch Enemy': in the words of the conservative Sir Garfield Barwick, 'the greatest threat to the security of the region in which we live',<sup>3</sup> representing 'all that is most illiberal and backward-looking and violent in communist thought'.<sup>4</sup> In the 1970s, though there were people who threw considerable doubt on the concept of China as a threat to Australia, public and academic opinion was slowly influenced by these moves. A 'narrow majority still

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<sup>1</sup>E.M.Andrews, *Australia and China* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1985), p.182.

<sup>2</sup>H.Clifford, 'China Australia', quoted by E.M. Andrews, see *ibid.*, p.172.

<sup>3</sup>Wilkie, J. (ed.), *Asia and China*, see *ibid.*, p.181.

<sup>4</sup>*Current Notes* (September 1965), see *ibid.*, p.186.

thought that Australia was threatened by outside powers, and of these China was the most frequently mentioned.<sup>5</sup>

As far as the Chinese are concerned, the Australian images of them in this period to a great extent remained unchanged: they remained the 'immutable Oriental', the 'Yellow Peril', the 'Barbaric Heathens', the 'inscrutable' Chinese. In order to fulfil popular needs, image-makers such as Margaret Jones inject all these stereotypes, political and racial, into their fiction. This kind of representation is not intended to encourage an understanding of China and the Chinese, but to make the country even more exotic--- *The Confucius Enigma* poses as realist fiction but operates as anti-Chinese propaganda.

Compared with Margaret Jones's representation, Ian Moffitt's image of China seems more vivid and 'real'. Unlike most Western mythmakers of China as analysed by John M. Steadman, he does not treat China as a changeless entity and postulate 'a unity that has no real existence outside his own imagination', but represents it in a dialectical way.<sup>6</sup> In *The Retreat of Radiance*, he creates several Chinas: The Republic of China in the late 1940s; the People's Republic in the 1970s; the China that was Hong Kong in the past; the China that is Hong Kong now; the China that is Taiwan. When his protagonist Quinn returns to China thirty years later, he finds that great changes have taken place both in Hong Kong and in Kweilin.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.203.

<sup>6</sup>John M. Steadman, *The Myth of Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp.14-15.

Arriving at Hong Kong, Quinn notices at once that the 'clang and crash of Cantonese opera' that had assailed him here once: the strange shouts and high wails of the beggar-moths; the crying babies nuzzling flat breasts; the dying scrape of the wooden clogs; the bad time, all have changed. (p.131) All the beggars and prostitutes have vanished, just as they have swept from the main tourist area of Kowloon. (p.145) Hong Kong now is familiar to him 'not because he had lived here long ago, but because its metamorphosis echoed the other cities around the globe'. (p.146) The Chinese are no longer 'as alien to him as insect creatures from another planet, but a global middle-class among whom he felt at home'. (p.148)

In Kweilin, Quinn notes with surprise that there is not the resentment which he had expected:

...the brown faces lit up with unguarded delight when they spotted the tourists, as if virulent hatred of the West, bred in post-Revolutionary nurseries for generations, had been expunged from their memories, or had never been despatched here from Peking. (p.236)

Here, 'Man blended naturally with river and field, peak and sky; slowly absorbing their deep truth while the bureaucrats frantically planted their lies.' (p.244) This representation forms a sharp contrast to that of Margaret Jones. The Chinese are no longer portrayed as hostile, barbarous creatures but a people who harmonise with nature.

What has changed most is the living conditions of the Kweilin People. The half-ruined hovels which had staggered along the narrow alleys have been

replaced by solid white buildings with black slate roofs. The many curs which had infested the site have disappeared, along with other useless mouths. Cement paths curve around the houses, and on three sides stretch the neat bamboo trellis-works of the bean field. (see p.252)

Underneath the surface changes, however, things supposed to be fundamentally Asian remain intact: violence, corruption, hygiene, and so on. The novel exudes a fear of death, sex and corruption. For Quinn, 'China was to remain ... a poison woman; a phantom flicker of pain in the penis of the West.' (p.77) Thirty years ago, he, like many other Westerners, had been drawn to China not by 'Good Works' but by violence. 'Infected with the manly need to kill', like Larson, his American 'protector' and partner during the Chinese Civil War, he had been lured to that country in search of glory by the image of China which he had never known:

A land without soldiers, where old men drowsed over their wine, and maidens languished at night on cold pillows, listening to the scrape of *wu-tung* leaves in empty courts, the dripping of water-clocks, the beating of their hearts. (p.110)

But as soon as he arrived at Hong Kong, his life 'had begun to unravel'. The Hong Kong of his youth 'had mocked his adolescent naivete and corroded his schoolboy idealism, traded fear of syphilis for love, degradation for narrow decency: the usual swap.' (p.146) In mainland China, his life had been further destroyed. He had witnessed the corruption of the Nationalists, 'the brutality at their shoulders' and the needless death of innocents. Whenever he recalled these

horrible experiences, he was ashamed that he could have accepted such cruelties without inquiry and complaint. What had particularly horrified him was the atrocious massacre, committed by the corrupt Nationalist Chinese, General Keh, in the field beneath a Buddhist monastery called 'The Retreat of Radiance', in which young girls were buried alive. That cruel, unforgettable crime had haunted him like a nightmare for thirty years. 'The massacre and his guilt and anger at his ineffective reaction had weighed on his mind ever since and become an obsession'.<sup>7</sup> His inviolability had ended; his long peace, of sorts, had shattered forever.

In order to expunge the guilt and the fear originating from the massacre, Quinn decided thirty years later to return to the scene of the crime, the monastery, and act as the nemesis for the perpetrator of the massacre, who now is a wealthy heroin-dealing socialite. Again, he is pursued by violence and killing as well as corruption since his arrival. The sleazy Chinese detective Lancelot had attempted to corrupt him with a Chinese woman, a 'Soochow girl---helluva good!' (p.165) Soon after, his room was robbed and his documents were stolen. Then, he was beaten by Keh's 'underworld' force. Keh even sent a man to order Lancelot to kill him. At that moment, Quinn had a choice. 'The uncertain danger of a knife-thrust in Asia or a slow puncture at home: a bullet in the brain or a fist squeezing the heart; the old staghorn, cancer, quietly sucking away in the belly.' (p.171) In the end, Quinn chose to face the danger and 'to acknowledge the dead'. This choice, it seems to me, reflects that Quinn, as well as his creator, begins to face China fearlessly. His action against his enemy Keh and his former protector Larson, the American who

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<sup>7</sup>Janet Hawley, 'Long Wait for Success', *The Age* (9 October 1982), p.11.



had called him 'My Anglo-Saxon child' and who had joined in the killing, shows that Quinn begins to play his role independently, though they don't take him seriously.

Returning to Kweilin, he finds that violence has not been wiped out. 'Up on the first floor of a crowded tenement', he saw 'several people were fighting'. The scene startled him. He had assumed that violence did not exist in contemporary China and 'that Communism had eliminated personal passion, babies had been conceived without lust, theft eliminated with prostitutes and flies, random murders abolished by decree.' (p.236) Now he recognises that his assumption was wrong. China is not safe. It's no wonder he 'found himself in a minimum-security gaol with views of the river---and segregated tourist dining rooms permitting no contact with a populace forbidden to enter the grounds.' (p.243)

To the protagonist as well as the narrator, Asia is inherently evil. Living in that evil world, people are wicked or turned to be wicked if they are not. 'All men, under Chiang, were decidedly not brothers.' (p.118) They killed each other or the innocent with sensation. The Hong Kong people like Chen don't have much brotherly love for the squatters. 'They'd sell their own grandmothers.' (p.194) The most wicked Orientals created in the novel are Keh and his Japanese bodyguard Shiozawa. For them, killing is a sensation, 'a little sport'. Their cruel natures are thoroughly exposed when they bury the children alive in Kweilin. Larson, the UNRRA misfit, turns to be as wicked as his Oriental counterpart.



Like Quinn, Larson was attracted to China not by good works but by violence. At Halloween, he told Quinn, he used to shoot pumpkins; during the Chinese Civil War, he shot the innocent Chinese as if they were 'pumpkins'. In the Kweilin massacre, we see him 'wheeling around, his hand fling to the revolver'. He joins the troops firing from doorways and dragging children out from the alleys between the huts. While the girls are buried, Larson fires at one girl. 'Fragments of bone scattered from her head, and then Larson rushed away behind a hut to vomit.' (p.121) In Asia, as Larcelot is made to say, 'The Japanese kill! The Chinese kill! Everybody kill!' (p.168) If he does not kill, he is possibly to be killed.

Asia is also a dangerous place in another sense: it acts as a corruption of the Western character. While talking about *The Retreat of Radiance*, Ian Moffitt says:

I think it's dangerous to stay too long in Asia. I knew I had to get out before I was ruined. If you stay long, you drink too much and your professionalism crumbles...You see it happening to Westerners all the time. I've used some of these dislocated Western eccentrics in the book.<sup>8</sup>

In order to convey that sense of danger, Hong Kong emerges as a sort of moral limbo where Western misfits await death amidst crime, self-pitying drunkenness and shabby sex. There, Quinn concludes, he had only managed to meet bizarre and incomplete people. 'He hadn't known one normal Chinese, one whole European, then and now:...the dislocated and despairing, the mad and half-mad, the comic-

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<sup>8</sup>Hawley, 'Long Wait for Success', p.11.

strip people who thought they were real!' (p.318)

Like violence and decadence, the concept of the dirty Orient is another motif of *The Retreat of Radiance*. In Occidentals' minds, Orientals are inherently dirty. Larson believed that the Chinese never 'had a bath in their lives'. 'Eat their own shit. Monkeys at the zoo. What use are they?' (p.76) Quinn's mother used to tell him: 'Put that down. A Chinaman might have touched it.' (p.76) When Quinn returns to China thirty years later, he observes that the hygienic habit of the Chinese has not changed. At a ferry in Hong Kong, an elegant Chinese woman beside him 'suddenly hawked and spat, smearing the spittle in an arc with one dainty shoe: the old Chinese national anthem, "Symphony in Green"'. (p.139) When he arrives at Guangzhou, he finds it 'sprawled as of old around the muddy delta of the Pearl; mildew-streaked buildings under giant posters shouting for progress; stocky little southerners overflowing the streets while their chocolate river sucked restlessly at its crowded banks.' (p.223) In Kweilin, he notes that the hotel, a modern building, is 'already scruffy':

a foreign toy which was serviced, but not cherished. The neglect seemed to be working through from its core, the dirt surfacing, not settling; the pens and ink in the rooms, the ancient Par Avion stamps in the lobby post office, were artefacts of the pre-jet age, the pre-package tour. (p.243)

The hygienic condition in capitalist Taiwan is no better. At a police station which let rooms at the same price as the hotels, Quinn is shocked to find out how dirty the bed is: 'scores of lice were moving on the pillow and the sheets. He

dropped the cover and looked out the window. A mountain stream was rushing through stands of bamboo behind the building---behind the dirty sink and broken cistern in an adjoining bathroom'. (p.268)

To represent China that way, the author obviously aims not at interrogating one kind of regime, but at exposing Asia generally and a nation in particular. This kind of representation inevitably exposes the author's racial bias.

Rod Jones's China in *Julia Paradise* is the Shanghai of the 1920s and the 1930s, a city of corruption, violence and poverty. It is also, in keeping with Brionowski's definition of Asia, an 'Adventure Zone' where 'Western men had erotic experiences with women [here with children prostitutes] who could be manipulated, abandoned or bought off, or who might, like Butterfly, "somehow disappear".<sup>9</sup> Julia's 'night pictures' just reveal the unpleasant reality:

...a legless beggar sitting on the footpath outside the entrance of a bank; coolies carrying huge bales on either end of bamboo poles bent over their backs; the girl-prostitutes, scarcely twelve or thirteen, lifting their skirts to expose themselves, hungry eyes grotesque above their mannequins' figures; a man wearing a gas mask, and behind him an open tray truck piled with corpses. (78)

Living in this city, Western men are corrupted and the Englishwomen, 'even the healthy ones', look pallid and ill. (p.3) The 'young adventure-seekers, the aspiring painters and writers' are 'on the cadge for a fiver'. The 'fresh-faced young American missionaries who hoped...to spread Christ in China by their sheer

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<sup>9</sup>Brionowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p.131.

numbers are exhausted and fanatical and 'would talk of nothing else but Christianity and China in the same sentence.' Others are frightened. The new ones who had not had much experience of a big city before they came to China and who now face with 'the sights and sounds of eight million heathen people', suddenly feel their faith grow 'brittle and crack'. They are sweaty-palmed and hollow-eyed, hoping the fear does not show on their faces. Sometimes they would turn up months later, broken men and raving women, reduced to being a part of the detritus of the city, and often victims of the various drugs of addiction. (pp.3-4) Both Julia Paradise and Dr Ayres are such victims. Julia has been driven to hysteria and morphine addiction, and Ayres to depravity and culpability.

China is 'a dangerous stretch of ocean', where Western individuals are 'small fish'. They can 'simply disappear', like Willy Paradise:

Willy Paradise was a small fish swimming in a dangerous stretch of ocean, as the First Secretary, Gerald Cole, pointed out to Ayres in the Long Bar. He would see what he could do, but really what was the point of a diplomatic Note, except to give some Chinaman a laugh, when it was taking every British and American marine available to keep the nationalist troops out of the Settlement? So Willy Paradise simply disappeared. (p.82)

The Chinese in this novel are coolies, beggars, Heathens. Chinese women are sex objects, whom the Western males can use as they please.

While depicting Little Lucy, the child prostitute, however, Jones, via the British artist Morgan, captures something that the other image-makers under consideration seem not to have noticed: the despair of rape:

There is a message written clearly in the drooping languorous lines of her body, her lank blue-black hair which hangs as though sodden with sweat, the tangle of the bed mat in the background, this same bed mat now rolled up against the wall: Morgan has captured there the sadness of a man's receding desire, a desire not entirely satisfied, and on the girl's face, the despair of repeated rape. (p.81)

This description conveys a sense of distaste for colonialism, in which both the explorer and the explored are victims.

With the development of cultural, educational and diplomatic exchanges between Australia and China, Australians have begun to reveal a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of China and its people. This is clearly reflected in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, in which Nicholas Jose shows an astute knowledge of Chinese politics; his fascinating portrayal of the variety and difference of China would have been inconceivable even a decade ago. In this novel, Wally Frith, the Australian cancer specialist, having failed to prevent his wife's death from cancer, goes to China in search of insight into non-Western approaches to the disease. Through his eyes, as well as through the eyes of many others, Westerners as well as Chinese, a many-sided China is presented to the readers: China physical, China political, China cultural, China the people.

Physically, China is unpleasant for the foreigner. 'There was no green thing in sight, only the grey sky suffused with silver brightness, liverish bricks and tiles, and slashes of scarlet woodwork on the old rooftops.' The buildings of Peking Union Medical College, for three-quarters of a century China's leading teaching and research hospital, are 'moored like a fleet of galleons in the pale and frozen world.'

(p.2) Confined in this unpleasant world without anything to do but 'pick his way grumpily across the frozen mud to the canteen three times a day', Wally 'felt cooped up, his curiosity mounting into restlessness'. (p.3) Under such circumstances, the chaos in a restaurant 'made him euphoric', since outside was 'a grey wall, and another wall, and another wall, in mighty order'. (p.5)

During his time in China he has encountered time and again the disorganisation of the place. So much seemed to be a formless, fluid mess; a sluggish, surging river of mud and sand and fertile slime and debris pouring itself into the sea of a present that was endlessly disappearing into the past, always threatening to burst its banks, sometimes doing so, recording its progress by the silt deposited. (p.84)

But, as a close reading of the novel reveals, the author's major concern is the Chinese Communist regime. Through negotiating 'conceptions and counter-conceptions', the author constructs an authoritarian and backward 'New China', where 'everything is possible'. (p.114) There is no freedom, no democracy, no law; under such autocratic regime, both the foreigners and the Chinese suffer greatly.

According to the narrator, there are six categories of Foreigners in Peking. They are diplomats and embassy types, journalists, the business operatives, the teachers, the students and scholars of all kinds, and tourists and transit passengers. Among them, the first three categories have suffered the most. The diplomats and embassy types either 'battled on beneath a required gloss of optimism and discretion', or 'enjoyed an exalted station, miserable, sarcastic, half-mad as they shopped in vain for the washing powder, the breakfast cereal, the beer to which they were accustomed'. Journalists have suffered from 'no-news no-

information China',

but loved her because by sheer dint of hanging on they became lone authorities to a gullible world. Clubbable, joking creatures with a magnanimous streak, they became weirder as restrictions and surveillance pressed in on them, driving them eventually to drink, sex, paranoia, outrage and outrageousness. (p. 104)

The 'sleekest' and 'most disgruntled' are the business operatives. They are 'victims of the notorious joint ventures and other forms of economic cooperation, with a fund of stories as to how the Chinese screw without being screwed'. (p.104)

Life for the common Chinese in the 'New Age China' is even harder. Prices increase, and it's 'getting harder and harder to make ends meet'. Eagle's family is a good example:

Life in Peking opened like a paper flower with changes in the economic policy, but still Mother Lin queued for rational noodles, Old Lin had to beg for his medicines, when Sunshine called it was to scrounge spending money, and Eagle felt buried alive. (pp.56-57)

Worse than the living conditions is the repressive political atmosphere. As there is no law, or as implied, the authorities are law, there is no security for the people. Lao Men is executed without proof. Philosopher Horse is put into prison owing to his demand for democracy. Jin Juan is deprived of a better position at the medical college because of some hidden reasons. Professor Hsu is driven out of his research post, and his research material is plagiarised by the 'morally untouchable' Director Kang.



In China, the artistic environment is wretched and individuality is washed away. Here, as Jumbo remarks, 'to seek individuality is blasphemy, swimming against the stream of the great state river. Here individuality is the waste product to be washed away by the mighty current of tradition, the Party, the people.' (p.49) Foreigners enjoy no more freedom than the Chinese do. Sabina, 'the zany Jewish correspondent', is followed by the Public Security Bureau men because she 'wrote a review ridiculing a film that the propaganda people want to win the Golden Cock'. (pp.106-107) As a result, she has to cut the contact with her friends for three weeks. Wally, participating or observing the students' demonstration, was arrested, and then released.

Living in such a stressful country, people dare not to express their opinions freely. Their natures become warped. They 'were either as passive as sheep or idiotically obstructive, one as irritating as the other', like Meredith's people in George Johnston's 1962 novel *The Far Road*. (p.17) Old Lin, a Communist officer and soldier, 'had grown cautious, punctilious, maintaining ideological correctness and discouraging contact with outsiders.'

Since Old Lin was wary of milking connections, living conditions did not advance and few favours came their way, until existence was as scant and furtive as a mouse's in a borrowed hole. Out of what surprise his wife as terror, Old Lin permitted not one grumble, even within their walls or under the covers at night. His nature warped; the scholar's ideals became nasty puritanism, disguised as the uprightness of a self-denying Party member and family man. When even the smallest good fortune fell his way, Old Lin distrusted, and when the new season came he was unable to adjust. (pp.54-55)



Eagle, a seventeen years old boy, 'had never been a dreamer, he was almost without self-consciousness or aspiration, not even aware of his own naivete'. His elder brother calls him a straw dumpling. But his passivity, 'the stupefying creation of Mao Thought', allows him to be pliable, to live for the day. (p.55)

Director Kang and Mrs Gu are just the opposite. While Wally is seeking for Professor Hsu, they are as obstructive as they could be for some hidden reasons. Kang, an academic fraud, had made use of his power for self-profit. He is supposed to have 'engineered Professor Hsu's removal once he had his hand on enough material to ensure his own rise'. (p.183) Once he knows who Jin Juan is, he tries to keep Jin Juan away from working in the Medical College in case his plagiarism is exposed.

Obviously, Jose's representation reflects to a certain extent the historical moment of China in the 1980s. After China opened its doors to the world and initiated its economic reforms in the late 1970s, the Chinese Government began to send people to the West to learn Western science and technology as well as to import them so as to speed the modernisations. However, it is impossible 'to modernise one aspect of society---even the "material" aspect---without endangering the entire fabric', as John M. Steadman notes in *The Myth of Asia*.<sup>10</sup> Western science and technology cannot be dissociated from other aspects of Western civilisation. In admitting them, all the other aspects, such as culture, ideology, are all brought in. The Chinese, having been shut off from the outside world for more

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<sup>10</sup>Steadman, *The Myth of Asia*, p.28.

than a century, become vulnerable to 'a host of subtle, invisible viruses---endemic in the culture of the West---toward which they had no inherited immunity and for which they could find no easy remedy.'<sup>11</sup> Influenced by Western culture, especially Western ideology, the Chinese people, especially intellectuals and students, began to question the 'traditional Chinese fetishes'<sup>12</sup> and 'Confucian ideology, whose monolithic social system resists plurality and change'.<sup>13</sup> While interrogating Chinese culture and the current official ideology, the Chinese 'painted the Occident as an oppositional and supplementary Other'.<sup>14</sup> Chinese authorities, however, wanted 'only Western science and technology' for their economic reforms, while wholly rejecting Western political and legal systems.<sup>15</sup> Thus, there was a tension between Chinese authorities and the voice of the Chinese people, as represented by intellectuals and students. Nicholas Jose, a 'foreign expert' teaching in China, caught that historical background and constructed his various and disparate 'Chinas'.

Jose's portraits of individuals--- such as Jin Juan, the old scientist's granddaughter; Eagle, the naive athlete; Jumbo, the rebellious artist; Dr Song, the flexible practitioner; Zhang, the new-style Chinese bureaucrat; the 'enigmatic' and

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p.29.

<sup>12</sup>Xiaomei Chen, 'Occidentalism as Counterdiscourse: "He Shang" in Post-Mao China', *Critical Inquiry* 18, (Summer 1992), 693.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 694.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 704.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 706.

sage Hsu Chien Lung---also 'offer a sense of knowing the individuality of the Chinese', as Paul Salzman notes.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, *Avenue of Eternal Peace* might be 'blessed with timeliness'.<sup>17</sup> But what I want point out here is that while his representation shows a sophistication, Jose's perception is still time-and-culture bound. His view of China, though markedly true to the Chinese self-image, bears the imprint of imperialist ideology, because the Chinese images of both China and of the West are 'determined--- and overdetermined---by the way the West has understood itself and China.'<sup>18</sup> Chinese Communism, a backward and repressive ideology, has prevented society from progressing economically and politically. It needs to be substituted with the advanced Western ideology--- capitalism, which offered 'riches and freedom without which there was no possibility of self-fulfilment'. (p.24). His image of the Chinese does not transcend stereotyping. The Chinese are still portrayed as weak, passive and inscrutable Orientals. They can not control their own fates. They need Westerners, their superior Other, to liberate them, to 'change China'.

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<sup>16</sup>Paul Salzman, 'A Testament to What Might have been', *Australian Book Review*, no.115 (October 1989), 8.

<sup>17</sup>Jane Freeman, 'Timely Evocation', *Australian Bookseller and Publisher*, 69, no.996 (August 1983), 32.

<sup>18</sup>Xiaomei Chen, 'Occidentalism as Counterdiscourse: "He Shang" in Post-Mao China', 687.

## Chapter Two

### The Chinese Puzzle

'Oriental inscrutability is not dead, in spite of greater Australian familiarity with Asia.'<sup>1</sup> Thus writes Broinowski in *The Yellow Lady*. If one examines the images of the Chinese constructed by Australian fiction writers during the period of 1979-1989, he or she will note that Broinowski's remark is sound. With much being known of China, with travel to and fro relatively easy, the Chinese in contemporary Australian fiction are still portrayed as inscrutable Orientals, very little known, much less understood.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that some writers' representations show an understanding of China and the Chinese. Ian Moffitt's dynamic description of China and Nicholas Jose's portraits of Chinese individuals reveal that Australian attitudes towards China and the Chinese are changing. China is no longer a changeless entity and the Chinese as individuals, as Nicholas Jose's protagonist in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* notes, are as 'different as chalk and cheese'. (p.117) Despite this progress, however, China largely remains entrenched as the exotic, the remote, 'a rich jungle',<sup>2</sup> 'strange, curious, awe-inspiring Cathay',<sup>3</sup> a country, according to Margaret Jones's *Confucius Enigma*, 'where secrecy was a national obsession'. (p.49) The Chinese

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<sup>1</sup>Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p.190.

<sup>2</sup>Ian Moffitt, quoted by Janet Hawley, 'Long Wait for Success', *The Age*, 9 October 1982, p.11.

<sup>3</sup>Jose, 'Non-Chinese Characters', 5.

themselves still remain highly stereotyped. In this chapter, I am going to discuss Australian characterisation of the Chinese.

To summarise the images of the Chinese portrayed by the authors under consideration, they can be divided into two basic kinds of stereotypes: as the brute villains and as helpless, if inscrutable, Orientals. As most of the novels are set in mainland 'New China', the brutal villains include not only the ruthless murderers but also the Communist bureaucrats who use the power bestowed on them by the Chinese people to suppress and harm those powerless. In both cases, the Chinese are cast as the reverse image of their Western Other: when the Asian is heartless and treacherous, the Westerner is shown directly or indirectly as imbued with integrity and humanity; when the Chinese is weak and helpless, the image-maker projects the White Westerner's strength and benevolence so that he can help the helpless Chinese; when the Chinese is inscrutable, the Westerner is described as straightforward. 'A common thread running through these portrayals is the establishment of and emphasis on permanent and irreconcilable differences between the Chinese and the Anglo, differences that define the Anglo as superior physically, spiritually and morally.'<sup>4</sup>

The Nationalist General Keh in *The Retreat of Radiance* is the most eccentric and ruthless villain portrayed in this period. His character can be regarded as a composite of fact and imagination based on the stereotype of the Asian villains. During the Civil War, he had killed numerous innocents and harmed more. For Keh and his men, killing was fun, as Quinn recalled:

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<sup>4</sup>Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature*, pp.4-5.

Keh's artillerymen twinkled around their field-pieces with demoniac gaiety of his puppets; they bowed slightly to each other in grotesque minuets of massacre, their arms bent slightly, as if tugged on strings...(p.222)

The cruelest crime committed by Keh is the needless massacre in Kweilin, where young girls were buried alive. The youngest one was only seven years old.

They stood in the trench facing the village while the soldiers heaped the earth on them. In only a few minutes it had reached the necks of the smaller children. One of them worked her left elbow free, and leaning on it, she began lifting herself earnestly from her grave, until a soldier drove a spade into her arm. (p.121)

While the orange clay smeared their mouths and noses, the girls' heads wagged like clowns. Sitting on his horse, Keh stared dreamily over the ring of soldiers. Some of the girls shrieked and some straggled into a song of sorts, choking on clods. When only four heads of the tallest girls remained above, 'a soldier wearing a baggy pair of mustard-coloured trousers pretended to sit on them, making his comrades laugh'. (pp.121-122) For the helpless Chinese, this brutal and lustful murderer is pestilence, as newsreels and photographs of that time show:

Grandparents dropped their granddaughters down hidden tunnels..., and peered fearfully from their torn paper windows over the soldiers' heads as Keh went past---awaiting Keh bayonets at their withered throats, the discoveries of tunnel entrances, the rapes after Keh had posed for the pictorials. (p.42)

After the Civil War, this villain continues to kill people, not with guns but with drugs. He speeded up the death of Doyle, the Australian expatriate living in Hong Kong, by 'sucking him in on the drugs racket'. (p.197) He got Vera, the Russian-Chinese prostitute, 'hooked and started her pushing'. (p.197) As Rushton, the British

policeman in Hong Kong, told Quinn, he [Keh] 'always loved to get at people through their friends---anyone close to them...He liked to undermine 'em, isolate 'em, get 'em in his paw and squeeze 'em.' (p.197) But he has grown so powerful that nobody can pull him down, except Quinn, the witness of Keh's 'arch crime' and 'the shrewd, tough schemer'. (p.286)

While talking about *The Retreat of Radiance*, Ian Moffitt says, 'I suppose I've written a novel about a man who isn't a great hero nor is he a coward. He is a man who endures and that's a pretty Australian thing.'<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Quinn is not depicted as a great man, but he possesses the virtues of his Anglo ancestors: benevolence, humanity and courage. Although he did not participate the atrocious, needless massacre, his guilt and anger at his ineffective reaction to it had haunted him like nightmare for thirty years. Finally, he decided to revisit the scenes of his youth and to avenge the innocent girls by exposing the General, now a millionaire, heroin-dealing socialite. In the end, he finishes this super villain single-handedly.

The image of the inhuman Communist is a common one in the new Australian literature about China in the period post-1979. Chinese bureaucrats are generally described as heartless, treacherous and inhuman beings. In *The Confucius Enigma*, the villains are Madame Hsieh and her henchmen, whom Brock ironically calls 'her eunuchs'. In order to 'discredit foreigners, screw up any chance of a softer line on the Soviet Union, put off relations with the U.S. for another decade or so', the radicals

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<sup>5</sup>Tom Krause, 'From the depths of darkest Oz, the writer's writer', *The Weekend Australian* (25-26 September 1982), p.9.



within the Chinese Communist Party direct a complicated melodrama, which involves a delivery of Marshal Lin, Mao's designated successor who is said to be alive, over the border to Russia. (p.186) With this trick, the conspirators offer at least three separate scenarios to bait different 'fish'. The first version, intended to attract the curious foreigner, 'involved a real Lin delivered over the border to the Russians'. Number two, aimed at baiting the Chinese General Chiang, involved a fake Lin, briefly resurrected for the benefit of the Army and the masses, and due to disappear again ... after an approach had been made to Moscow'. Number three, the true version that none of Brock and the General had been shown, is the one 'they were working on now'. In this scenario, Brock and the Chinese General Chiang 'conspire to produce a phony Lin, for the purpose of causing general unrest and disturbance'.(p.187)

In the hands of the Chinese Communists, both the foreign protagonist and the Chinese General Chiang suffer shocking mistreatment, as I mentioned in chapter one. In the face of inhumanity, the Westerner shows manly endurance and heroism. He endures hunger, thirst, threat of infectious disease, darkness and especially the 'classic struggle session, that combination of threats, exhortation and pleading, which is claimed to be a peculiarly Chinese invention'. (p.215) In the struggle session, he demonstrates particular heroism. We readers see him withstand bravely the 'astonishing concentration of energy against one man, a physical and mental assault of terrifying proportions'. (p.216) When he was forced to make a confession, he shouted, 'No, you bastard!. I am not confessing, now or ever.' Then, he yelled in his basic Chinese, 'I can't confess! I won't! I am a journalist, and a friend of China.' He struck himself impressively on the chest. 'I am good, They---he gestured to the



rostrum---'are bad people! They are rotten eggs.' (p.217)

Similarly, Nicholas Jose's villains in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* are the Communist bureaucrats, represented by Mrs Gu, Director Kang and Zhang. Mrs Gu is a malevolent woman. She uses her power to prevent Wally from searching for Professor Hsu because of hidden reasons. Kang is 'a fraud and a crook', a morally untouchable person. He is supposed to have 'engineered Professor Hsu's removal once he had his hands on enough material to ensure his own rise'. (p.183) Zhang is a morally corrupt new bureaucrat, a arrogant and self-concerned 'ram'. He had used Jin Juan as his mistress for ten years, promising to marry her, but finally abandoned her. His avaricious use of Jin Juan with little reverence for her forms a striking contrast to Wally's civilised behaviour. Wally respects Jin Juan, helps her and offers to marry her. In *The Retreat of Radiance*, Keh kills people with bullets and drugs. These bureaucrats 'kill' people in different ways, either by depriving them of their rights to work or by making them diminish in awaiting.

Contrary to the powerful villains are the powerless, helpless masses. In most cases, the Chinese are portrayed to accept life with typical 'Oriental' stoicism. The innocent people in *The Retreat of Radiance* show no protest against Keh's ruthless massacre. The masses in Hong Kong try meekly to protest with bottles and stones when they are forced to move out of their huts, but finally give in. David, a middle-aged Chinese doctor in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, is a tamed intellectual whom his younger brother calls a 'coward'. Living in an autocratic society, 'David had found a place for what experience had taught him, that the world cannot be improved and that

life must be endured'. (p.150) Professor Hsu, the sage Wally makes a personal and professional quest for, seems to accept fate as it should be. People, especially the young people, in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* have demonstrated resistance against a communist bureaucracy of forty years' standing, but the powerless are finally suppressed by autocracy. These people, to the British woman Lady Earnshaw in *The Retreat of Radiance*, are 'like little mice. They need someone to jolly them up'. (p.269)

While the Chinese are depicted as pitifully passive Orientals, Westerners project strength and self-importance. They go to China to liberate the people and to change the country. Dulcia, the energetic American 'liberated woman' in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, 'had clear moral convictions. Wilhelm Reich and Tina Turner stood beside Abe Lincoln in her pantheon. She was an agent of liberation waging a personal campaign to help China.' (p.24) Quinn, the Australian protagonist in *The Retreat of Radiance*, goes to China to pull down the Chinese villain, saying: 'My strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure.' (p.295) And indeed, he kills the villain and avenges the innocent dead. Wally in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* befriends and helps Eagle and Jin Juan. 'Because Wally had taken responsibility for his relationship with Eagle, elder brother to younger brother, Jin Juan could taken him [Eagle] seriously as she could never have done otherwise, since their backgrounds were different. They came to know and respect each other, sharing their complex stories.' (p.277) Clarence, 'the British camera,' 'fosters' Autumn, his homosexual partner, who finally abandons him.

To help the Chinese and to change China, however, is not easy. 'Merchants, diplomats, missionaries, generals. They've all tried, all been gobbled up.' (p.23) The

Chinese are inherently unchangeable and inaccessible, mainly because of their 'inscrutable' natures, as most of the novels assert. In order to illustrate the inscrutability of the Chinese, Margaret Jones depicts China in *The Confucius Enigma* as a very peculiar country, where people are used to wearing masks:

In almost any other country in the world---Japan, of course, excepted---a man walking about wearing a surgical mask would be an object of intense curiosity. Not so in winter, in the streets of Peking, when every second person seems to wear one. Certainly they are *de rigueur* for cycling, when the dust-laden winds blow from the Gobi desert.

In summer, masks are rarer, but by no means unknown. They are used partly as dust excluders, but also to guard against Peking Throat and the other respiratory disorders endemic in north China because of the universal habit of spitting. (p.152)

Literarily, the 'mask' refers to the surgical mask that people use as dust and disease excluder; but figuratively, it is used to connote disguise or concealment and is connected, implicitly, with mystery and conspiracy. 'What a country, Brock thought, even with ready made disguises laid on.' (p.152)

With the ready made disguises laid on, China is a conundrum, and its people are mysterious and indecipherable. Wu, the 'Confucius enigma' as the title suggests, seems to wear a mask all the time. His look, his glance, his words and his action are so inscrutable that it is virtually impossible for the straightforward foreigners to understand. He is supposed to teach Joanna Chinese. His choice of Tang poetry, the literary art which every Chinese pupil is supposed to learn, puzzles Joanna:

...why the hell are we reading Tang poetry? We would better off making shopping lists so I can go to the local markets instead of having to buy

everything at the Friendship Store...I really believe with him, it's a sort of wank. Anyway, why complain. Reading this sort of thing and licking our lips over it is probably the nearest I'm ever going to get to an affair with a Chinese man. (p.19)

Joanna has seen Wu more than once staring at her 'sturdy but well-shaped' legs 'sprinkled with glinting ginger hairs'. but 'she could not tell from his glance whether he approved, or was revolted'. (p.20) She has known Wu for six of the seven months she has been in China, because he has been assigned to her as a language teacher. It had been three months before she had even 'wheedled his full name out of him'. (p.20) On this, George Lawson, the Australian Counsellor in Peking, comments:

Chinese are naturally secretive. But in nothing are they so secretive as about their own names. Even in families, they aren't always used. It's Little Sister, Third Brother, and so on. The Chairman is Lao Mao (Old Mao) to everyone except Chiang Ching, or so they say. So I'd stick to Mr Wu or Wu *Laoshi* if I were you. Otherwise he will think you are trying to race him off. (p.21)

As the Chinese are presumed to be mysterious, Wu's frankly-told life story makes Joanna wonder 'if she had come across a Chinese Walter Mitty'. George is also suspicious of Wu's apparent candour. 'What does he wants?' George wonders. 'He sounds as if he is getting ready to make a deal, or he's setting you up.' (p.24)

What especially puzzles Joanna and Brock is the conspiracy that both of them fall for and the role Wu is playing. In that melodrama, obfuscation is practised not on foreigners alone, who are interested in exploring 'a classic mystery', but by the Chinese on each other. The whole plot is so intangible that not only the 'amoral'

protagonist is cheated, but the Chinese General is ensnared before he knows it. Brock is confused when he is 'caught on the spot' and accused of conspiring with General Chiang to 'produce a phony Lin for the purpose of causing general unrest and disturbance'. When he saw Chiang last, Chiang was one of the 'co-directors' of the melodrama. How can he become an actor like him? What role is Wu, his Chinese 'friend', playing? He first induced Brock into the trick, then betrayed him, and finally saved him from the nightmare. Why did Wu risk his own life doing that? How would Wu exist after that daring action? Once at the hospital meeting room, he saw Wu 'watching him with that bright-eyed enigmatic look that was habitual to him', but he could not decipher the meaning. Joanna told him that Wu once mentioned Confucius. What role is Confucius playing in that affair? All of these questions, together with many others, remain unanswered.

To Brock, China is just too complicated. The Chinese are beyond his reach. Life in China is just like the sets of boxes on sale in the antique stores in Liu Li Chang:

...inside a large box was a slightly smaller box, inside that another, and so on, each box growing tighter so it seemed impossible that a smaller box could fit inside. But the craftsmanship was so fine that each time the lid was opened another box was revealed.' (p.198)

By describing China in this way, Jones exaggerates Chinese 'mystery' and dwells on the country's more exotic aspects. She is not representing the Chinese or an event, but mythologising the whole nation and its people. Even Brock's interpreter Lin looks sneaky. Typically, this kind of narrative turns China into 'a pretext for self-dramatisation and differentness', into a 'malleable theatrical space in which can be

played out the egocentric fantasies of Romanticism'. Jones's China, like Asia generally in the Western imagination, 'affords endless material for the imagination, and endless potential for the Occidental self.'<sup>6</sup>

Wally, Nicholas Jose's protagonist in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, obviously knows the Chinese better than Brock does. He notices the differences among the Chinese individuals and realises the danger of generalisation:

Why do we always end up talking of them as 'the Chinese', 'they', 'them', as if they're a different species. As individuals they're as different from each other as chalk and cheese. (p.117)

He even discovers that 'East and West are one, at least in the human struggle with mortality'.<sup>7</sup> But if we go on examining Wally's words, we will find something revealing: 'But it's the larger organism that fascinates us, the group, the nation, the race.' (p.117)

Indeed, it is in his dealing with the nation and the race that the image-maker's cultural and racial limits are revealed. China is still a great mystery of the Orient, 'a country', in the words of Franz Kafka, 'so strange that not even the air had anything in common with his native air, where one might die of strangeness, and yet whose enchantment was such that one could only go on and lose oneself forever'.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup>Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1986), p.11.

<sup>7</sup>Nicholas Jose, 'Screen Dreams and Nightmares', *Modern Time* (March 1992), 22.

<sup>8</sup>Franz Kafka, as quoted by Nicholas Jose in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, see the title page.

Chinese are still 'inscrutable' and oblique; they are a breed who 'don't seem to want anything for its own sake, but only as a way to somewhere else, as a way of keeping in the swim. They slide past us, round us, through us, but afterwards you feel there's been no contact at all'. (pp.117-118)

Reading the novel carefully, one notices that almost all the main characters are tinged with mystery. Jin Juan, the female protagonist, is portrayed as a quintessentially elusive Chinese woman. Her sardonic smile, her impersonation of Azalea, a male actor of female roles in Peking Opera, to seduce Wally, her refusal of Wally's proposal, all puzzle Wally. The naive foreigner does not know that he has been cheated and made use of by the Chinese woman:

Coming to the foreigner had been a trial by ordeal. How could he understand her coldly irrational behaviour. She had been abandoned and had forced herself to act the whore. She had also come for revenge.(p.261)

How can the straightforward protagonist know that, since his creator has intended not to allow him to know?

Like his granddaughter Jin Juan, Professor Hsu Chien Lung is an enigmatic scholar. His passive acceptance of fate perplexes Wally, and the answer the Professor offered disappoints him. 'Was the Professor muddleheaded, out of touch, pleading to be handled gently?' the narrator asks. 'Was Wally a fantasist? Was the greatest secret human ignorance?'



He had come up against not a brick wall but a rectangular stretch of black water that had no measurable depth and no visible boundary, showed no motion and offered no reflection. And where was there boiling water for shaving? (p.238)

Of the other characters, Jumbo, the 'fastidious, fine-boned Chinaman', is 'uncanny'. His relation with the American woman, Dulcia, perplexes the Westerners, who wonder about his motives :

Perhaps he scrupled at taking advantage of the woman he called on for assistance. Perhaps modesty held him back, or, more likely, the paralysing passivity that prefers to manoeuvre the adversary out on the limb first so that, when both are on the limb and it breaks, its breaking can be blamed on the one who first claimed it was safe. (p.50)

Autumn, the homosexual Clarence's lover, is another mysterious creature. He came unexpectedly to Clarence, the kind-hearted Westerner, for help, 'spent all of Clarence's money on new clothes', and abandoned Clarence without notifying him, leaving him to worry about his safety. It was not until two months later that he wrote to Clarence and told him that he had joined the army.

What particularly perplexes Wally is the 'Deep Structure' of China that is brought into Wally's notice by the 'somewhat arbitrary determination to rediscover Hsu': The strength of tradition and the weight of history, the invasion of personal lives by social control, the desperation for change, the supportive yet burdensome webs of relationships...<sup>9</sup> He just can not understand why the Chinese authorities concerned try to prevent him from meeting Professor Hsu. Why would a government office not

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<sup>9</sup> Jose, 'Screen Dreams and Nightmares', 23.



release an employee on the employee's own request? Why are the young people not allowed to express their opinions freely? Why do the Chinese intellectuals, such as Professor Hsu and Wu, accept fatalism passively? 'What laws does it operate by with its revolutions and counter-revolutions, the fanaticism and the inertia that drives you up the wall?' (p.117)

China is a conundrum, and its capital Peking 'a honeycomb of secret worlds within worlds, courtyards behind locked doors'. (p.108) Having stayed in China for a period of time, Wally 'could no more understand China than he could understand himself. Journalists, diplomats, photographers, China was too big for their lenses.' (p.119) Wally is aware of 'a single man's direct participation in the unboundedly complex fate of the planet'. (p.84) While returning from Hangzhou to Peking, Wally considered:

...how little he had discovered on the trip, how few of his questions had been answered, how few even of the old questions remained intact. Yet his brain was sparking with new questions and devising new experiments to follow up when he got back. He repudiated Professor Hsu's fatalism and felt a new determination take hold. (p.246)

Paul Salzman has pointed out that the fictional concentration on the mystery of the East and the confusion of the Western observer in Asia undermines the 'authenticity' of the characters in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the stress on the mystery undermines not only the 'authenticity' of the characters, but also the realistic perspective of the novel as a whole. Nicholas Jose is hailed as an expert

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<sup>10</sup>Salzman, 'A testament of what might have been', 7.

possessing 'well-horned talent for sino-political observation'.<sup>11</sup> His teaching and diplomatic career in China are unquestionably valuable experiences for his understanding of China and the Chinese. A good writer draws not only on the literary skills but also on the hard-won knowledge and experience, and especially on the 'empathy and understanding' that permit him into the lives and characters with whom he shares 'a common humanity'.<sup>12</sup> Reading Jose's characters, however, one may feel that, to use Rana Kabbani's argument, his representation of the Chinese does not depend so much on his 'individual gaze as it does on the education he has received, the myths he for particular reasons cherishes, and the political and social structures he belongs to or functions within.'<sup>13</sup> Why?

According to Nicholas Jose, there are several reasons that have hindered the Western writer in his ability to understand and interpret China---among them, 'the Great Power' at home and 'Chinese human nature' itself. In 'Non-Chinese Characters: Translating China', Jose says that a writer's interpretation of China had to be in tune with the 'strategic picture of the Great Powers'. In order to support his argument, Jose presents three examples. His first example is G. E. Morrison (the famous Australian journalist), who was 'sceptical of Chinese republicanism', and supported the Presidency of Yuan Shikai, and opposed Japanese territorial claims in China. His views were ignored, or relegated to those of a fantasist who had been 'got at' by the

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<sup>11</sup>Bennett, *An Australian Compass*, p.207.

<sup>12</sup>Kim, *Asian American Literature*, p.21.

<sup>13</sup>Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, p.122.

Chinese, because the Great Powers had a different strategic agenda.<sup>14</sup> Then, Wilfred Burchett, who was in a position to know more about post-war Asian conflicts than almost any other Australian writer, was dismissed as a traitor. 'China expertise', Jose asserts, 'becomes a liability when it fails to offer the counsel desired back home.'<sup>15</sup> 'Alternatively', he says, 'when the China expert's interpretation is music to ears back home, then the facts don't matter.'<sup>16</sup>

Then, 'the utopian nature of China to the western mind, whether Confucian or Maoist, lends itself to such artful deception.'<sup>17</sup> Jose believes that the 'Chinese world-view creates a chasm between Chinese and others':

The concepts of insider and outsider are fundamental at so many levels of life. The language, script and culture are expressions of this separateness, the manifestations of a society that is self-enclosed, centred on itself, hermetic and needing hermeneutic translation before it can be understood by outsiders. The visitor is always an outsider. The more expertly the non-ethnically Chinese China expert performs inside the culture, the more uneasy Chinese feel.<sup>18</sup>

The traditional English-language novel, he argues, depends on basic assumptions about human nature, about the individual in society, and about cause and effect in the structure of a narrative. 'China challenges these assumptions, or prevents them from

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<sup>14</sup> Jose, 'Non-Chinese Characters: Translating China', 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 7.

applying.<sup>19</sup> He says that the visiting novelist is largely denied access to Chinese human nature; he or she is restricted to external observation and imaginative projection, and both the processes may say more about the writer than about the fictional characters. Jose assumes that the Chinese may even challenge the assumption that there is one human nature, and that they maybe believe there is one Chinese human nature and foreign human nature. The Chinese may challenge the notion of individual autonomy, finding selfhood constituted by groups to which they belong: family, locality, workplace, class, race, and so on. 'In all these ways', Jose concludes, 'China resists prose narrative. What remains is the foreign writer's reflection in a mirror.'<sup>20</sup>

The first reason is sound. The works of even 'the most eccentric artist', as Said has argued, 'are constrained and acted upon by society, by cultural traditions, by worldly circumstances, and by stabilising influences like schools, libraries and governments.'<sup>21</sup> The regional specialist is required to present his society with images of the Orient, knowledge about it, and insight into it.

The hoped-for Australian readers, on the other hand, affect the writer's interpretation and representation. 'Instead of becoming the best informed of English-speaking peoples about the Asia-Pacific region, as they were well placed to do', as Alison Broinowski points out, Australians 'sheltered from the challenge, accepting

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>21</sup>Said, *Orientalism*, p.201.

Europe's Orientalist constructs as substitutes for knowledge.<sup>22</sup> China in their minds is 'a pastiche', derived from 'the European eighteenth-century image of Cathay, a Utopia of benevolent dictators and harmonious workers, the nineteenth-century one of Chinese heathen tyranny, opiated decadence and mass poverty',<sup>23</sup> and the twentieth-century one of 'mysterious Asia'.<sup>24</sup> With these stereotypes and many others reinforced by books and by the mass media, the Australian readers require the representations of China and the Chinese to be expressive rather than 'accurate'.

The second reason, however, is problematic. To say that 'China resists prose narrative' itself reveals the speaker's deep-rooted Orientalist bias. It is true that Chinese languages, scripts and cultures differ from those of the West. In certain cases, for instance, the Chinese ways of expressing meaning are different from those of English expressions. A typical example is they say 'yes' when they mean 'no'. The Chinese had been isolated from the world for a long time. And the People's Republic of China and its political forebears have emphasised their 'unique and Chinese' way of doing things. All of this increases the difficulty for their Western 'others' to understand them. But that does not mean that the Chinese are somehow a separate species. Nicholas Jose's depiction of Chinese individuals proves that the Chinese characteristics are decipherable, artistically approachable and realisable. To describe the Chinese as an inscrutable people 'who can not be read in the normal way' reveals on the one hand that the Australians indeed don't know much about the Chinese;

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<sup>22</sup>Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp.14-15.

<sup>24</sup>Steadman, *The Myth of Asia*, p.183.

on the other hand, it reflects the racism of the writer as well as the readers.

Racism is based upon the myth that genetic factors divide human beings into separate races marked by inherent physical, cultural, moral and temperamental differences. The Chinese, according to racial stereotyping, are an inherently inscrutable people. Somerset Maugham, that arch imperialist and romanticiser of the mythic East, wrote in 1922:

You cannot tell what are the lives of these thousands who surge about you. Upon your own people sympathy and knowledge gives you a hold; you can enter into their lives, at least imaginatively, and in a way really possess them. By the effort of your fancy you can make them after a fashion part of yourself. But these are as strange to you as you are strange to them. You have no clue to their mystery. For their likeness to you in so much does not help you; it serves rather to emphasise their difference....[Y]ou might as well look at a brick wall. You have nothing to go upon, you do not know the first thing about them, and your imagination is baffled.<sup>25</sup>

Maugham's words still strike a chord with Western writers. To undersand Asia, John M. Steadman argues, 'one must first remove not only popular fallacies, but also more learned conceptions' about what constitutes 'the East'.<sup>26</sup> Otherwise, it will remain forever a mystery.

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<sup>25</sup>Somerset Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen* (1922), quoted by Kim, *Asian American Literature*, p.21.

<sup>26</sup>Steadman, *The Myth of Asia*, pp 13-14.

## Chapter Three

### China Girls

Unlike male Chinese, the caricatural 'Chinamen' who habitually appear in colonial Australian writing as comical servants, effete sidekicks, cruel villains, cooks, laundrymen, or other-worldly Confucian scholars, the entry of Chinese women in Australian literature seems to be a very late phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> The White Australia policy, which had insistently banned 'Chinese wives joining their husbands', perhaps contributed to this phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> Without Chinese females migrating to Australia, the Australian writer may have found no real models to utilise. With the end of the White Australia policy and the growth of direct contact with the Chinese, it is less possible for the Australian writers who choose to write about Chinese to dismiss Chinese women characters in their works. However, there are very few fully drawn, individualised and memorable portraits of Chinese, or indeed generally of Oriental, women in Australian literature until late 1980s. Most of the images are highly stereotyped, derived from other Western literature, or public media. In this chapter, I plan to examine critically the Australian images of Chinese women in the works under primary consideration.

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<sup>1</sup>There are, of course, several sketchy examples of Chinese and part-Chinese women in colonial or late-colonial Australian literature--- notably the harassed protagonist in Barbara Baynton's frightening story 'Billy Skywonkie' (published in 1902, written in the 1890s).

<sup>2</sup>Andrews, *Australia and China*, p. 38



Scrutinising the Chinese women created by the novelists in this period, I have found that they can be categorised into three groups. The first category is the nameless, mindless and emotionless 'Oriental siren', who, as Gustave Flaubert envisioned her in the nineteenth century, 'is no more than a machine: she makes no distinction between one and another man.'<sup>3</sup> In *The Retreat of Radiance*, Quinn's first sexual encounter with a prostitute in Hong Kong is such an example:

He never forgot the grinding sequel as she fulfilled her contract; later she slept with the simple trust of a child, exuding warm breath and cheap perfume in his face as he lay trapped in the stifling darkness. (p.66)

This group of sex objects is derived from the most persistent and tenacious stereotype of Oriental women. If we compare Quinn's woman with Flaubert's, we can detect a certain typological similarity:

As for me, I scarcely shut my eyes. Watching that beautiful creature asleep (she snored, her head against my arm: I had slipped my forefinger under her necklace), my night was one long, infinitely intense reverie---that was why I stayed. I thought of my nights in Paris brothels---a whole series of old memories came back---and I thought of her, of her dance, of her voice as she sang songs that for me were without meaning and even without distinguishable words.<sup>4</sup>

The emotionless, beautiful Oriental woman in Flaubert's nineteenth-century travel book is, Edward Said comments, 'an occasion and an opportunity for Flaubert's musings; he is entranced by her self-sufficiency, by her emotional carelessness,

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<sup>3</sup>Flaubert in Egypt, quoted by Said, *Orientalism*, p.187.

<sup>4</sup>Flaubert in Egypt, quoted by Said, *Orientalism*, p.187.



and also by what, lying next to him, she allows him to think.<sup>5</sup> The Chinese women in contemporary Australian literature are created to serve, Moffitt writes in *The Retreat of Radiance*, the very 'unimportant persons from most of the white nations on the globe'. (p.62) In *The Retreat of Radiance*, we see them drifting in the restaurant when the white Westerners gather together after midnight ---

...pockmarks powdered, lizard-bodies rested, glossy handbags dangling from their brittle wrists. Some of the prostitutes joined men they knew, and sat patiently by their elbows while the men ignored them; others arranged themselves like cheap art around the walls. (pp.62-63)

The white Westerners can manipulate, abandon or buy them off as they please. Vera is 'a heavily built Russian-Chinese whose sagging body had received countless strangers, but who saw herself in the role of a wistful romantic---an ingenue peeped bright-eyed from beneath the brow of Marie Drossler. She was flirting hopelessly with Doyle, using dialogue from every bad movie she had ever seen.' (p.64-65)

In *Julia Paradise* China girls are enjoyed by Doctor Ayres and the artist Morgan alternatively:

They were prostitutes whom Ayres himself procured from a house in the Bubbling Well Road. After the painter had made use of her all day, sometimes Ayres went to make use of her at night. As these girls were always thin and small, the sexual contrast with his own gross size was a painful one to contemplate, and what he preferred. In the artist's rooms at night he always took them in the same position: from

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<sup>5</sup>Said, *Orientalism*, p.187.

behind. All such girls were in his mental notation, 'Wendies', with their wispy boy-like figures, unformed breasts, bony hips and slender arms. (p.13)

Because of misuse, one of the children prostitutes, Lucy, died. 'In another country, and besides, the wench is dead,' Doctor Ayres thought. 'What difference between a ruptured uterus and a perforated rectum when a girl dies in the streets.' (p. 81)

The bodies of Chinese women are depicted as stimulating endless sexual desire. When Quinn's steamer dropped anchor in the oily harbor of Hong Kong, he saw through the porthole a sturdy Chinese women in black pyjamas standing in a sampan only an arm's length away.

Her legs were braced apart, and she was rising and falling on the swell as the water sucked and slapped at the hull of the ship, her black garb stirring him as the sensible black bloomers of his female classmates had electrified him only two years before at Wongbok High School. He remembered her years later when he saw the first photographs of Communist propaganda posters looming above the city streets of the New China: giant females in righteous overalls exhorting their scurrying little sisters to storm the sterile heights of industrial production. Her sexuality trailed faintly around their blocky thighs, as discredited as the final whiffs of Chiang's cordite. (p.45)

If that 'sturdy Chinese women' attracts Quinn greatly, the 'small and slender' young woman, a soldier he saw on his way to Shensi, provokes even greater erotic excitement. Her 'thin green cotton uniform', her 'small and slender' body, and 'the silver streaks in her straight black hair' were so sexually memorable that Quinn could not forget her all his life. In Guinn's mind, the young soldier is 'one of the most sensual women he had ever seen. She had an air about her which he could never define; sexuality, danger, her tongue flicking at her lips as she read, the

sunlight glinting on the silver threads in her jet-black hair.' (p.87) This image is obviously reprint of the general image the West has of Chinese women: one of great physical attraction, usually with an emphasis on daintiness, delicacy, and smooth, satiny skin.<sup>6</sup> The stereotype, as Mimi Chan notes, dates from Marco Polo's time,<sup>7</sup> and has been fixed in the minds of the Westerners who 'retained a sense of sexual expectancy from the East, having encountered in both mythological and theological texts the prototype of the seductive Eastern woman.'<sup>8</sup> As late as the 1990s, in Kevin Brophy's novel *The Hole Through the Centre of the World* (1991), Chinese woman is still depicted as 'small, like a child, with a round belly and fragile limbs'. (p.144)

To describe the Oriental as small and 'childlike' is one of the ways to express the West-East relation. 'The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), Childlike, "different"; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal".'<sup>9</sup> To see Asians (and Asia?) simultaneously as female and Childlike reveals the paternalistic attitudes of Westerners toward the East. And also, by portraying the Chinese woman as a sultry Oriental siren, China can be consigned to what Kabbani has called 'illicit space', an 'Adventure zone' (as Broinowski explains) for adults in which 'civilised norms of Western male behaviour could be abandoned and taboos breached. It also became a place where the white adventure could be

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<sup>6</sup>Chan, *Images of Chinese women in Anglo-American Literature*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. p.104.

<sup>8</sup>Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup>Said, *Orientalism*, p.40.

tempted in ways unknown at home, and could do unheard-of things.'<sup>10</sup> It is in China that Doctor Ayres in *Julia Paradise* shows his carnal cruelty. It is also in China that Quinn in *The Retreat of Radiance* has his first sexual encounter with a prostitute as well as his first war, which accelerates 'his journey towards manhood, for it seemed self-evident then that the Gorgons of sex and violence guarded the path up into his eventual fulfilment; only by conquering them could the male of the species hope to win peace.' (p.61)

The second type of Chinese woman is the tasteless political harridan, who presents a counter-image to the aforementioned seductive stereotype. As this kind of woman has sold herself to politics, one can hardly expect her to be attractive. This kind of woman in the Western males' mind's eye is passionless and wicked, because of the paternalistic belief that only wicked women seek power. In Australian fiction, Madame Hsieh and Mrs Gu are such 'hard-faced' bitches.

Hsieh Ming-Wei in *The Confucius Enigma* is 'a middle-aged woman with glasses, dressed in a cadre's tunic and trousers, and with her hair cut in the severe revolutionary style favoured in the upper echelons.' (p.46) One of the senior cadres from the Association for Friendship with Foreign People, she is the 'prime mover' of the political conspiracy which aims at throwing the foreigners out of the country. In order to carry out the dirty trick, the 'lying bitch' first trapped the 'amoral' foreigner and the politically naive Chinese General with different baits and then accused them of conspirators and double dealers, who were 'conspiring with agents of a

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<sup>10</sup>Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p.39.

certain country against the peace and stability of the People's Republic of China.' (p.159) In that cruel woman's hands, both the foreigner and the Chinese suffered unhuman treatment. Brock was first put in a infectious hospital and shared a room with a peasant who suffered from meningitis, and whose cry nearly drove him insane. Then he was sequestered in an underground cell. No food, no drink. When he was brought into a meeting room for confession and watching Madame Hsieh and her like drink tea, Brock became conscious of his own tremendous thirst and involuntarily licked his lips. Madame Hsieh 'caught the movement, and smiled, her eyes running over him with contempt.' (p.159)

The treatment General Chiang received is even worse. When they bring him to the centre of the room, and line him up beside Brock, pulling the blanket from his head, the latter notices that his uniform tunic is torn and dirty, and his dusty face is heavily streaked with blood. (p.158) As he refuses to confess to his 'crime', and reflects on Madame Hsieh's 'personal appearance, her manners, and her morals', Madame Hsieh orders the Captain to fling the blanket back over his head from behind, 'to stifle his shouts.' (p.159) By the time Brock is saved by Wu, he finds that Chiang has been battered and has no hope to survive. As far as Wu's fate is concerned, Brock claims that 'I wouldn't give much for his chances if the Lady Hsieh and her mule-headed eunuchs catch up with him.' (p.232)

Mrs Gu in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* is depicted as a nuisance, a tasteless but cunning woman who is expert at changing face and cheating people. On the first page of the novel, the reader's impression of Ms Gu is set:

She had been all befuddled, bespectacled smiles at the airport, as they lugged his baggage through the frozen night in search of the car. Now, in the overheated room to which she had delivered him, she presented a different face. Perched uncompromisingly on the arm of a chair, she explained the forms that the Foreign Affairs Office required him to complete. (p.1)

In Wally's quest for Professor Hsu Chen Lung, Mrs Gu tries every means to throw obstacles in his way. At first she says that 'we do not know this name'. While saying these words, she 'had the face of a kindergarten child glowing with the consciousness of power.' (p.15) When Wally says, 'I have read his paper', Mrs Gu's calm becomes a shade less congenial. (p.15.) But she retorts, 'Please look again, Doctor Frith, there is no such person.' (p.15) By the time Wally presents a copy of one of Hsu's papers that he has produced Mrs Gu 'had changed the key remarkably,' saying, 'I thought you were insisting that Professor Hsu was at our College, when he is not, because he has retired.' (p.50-51) While uttering these words, Wally notices that there 'was not even a pause for dramatic effect when the professor who did not exist was now declared to be in retirement.' (p.51) Finally, she cheats Wally by letting him meet a 'so-called' Professor Hsu, with whom 'there was scarcely a human individual', 'not a spark of intelligence, but a dough dumpling in official drag.' (p.86) As the story unfolds, the reader is made aware that Mrs Gu is the conspirator of Director Kang, the fraud who plagiarises Professor Hsu's research achievements and at the same time keeps the Professor in the 'dark'.

To portray the Chinese woman as cruel and wicked seems to own<sup>2</sup> something to another generalised image: that of the dragon lady, based most

probably on Tzu Hsi, the Empress Dowager, who is notorious in the West due to a plethora of tendentiously sensationalist books produced after her death.

After Tzu Hsi's death, many 'wild' histories sprang up about her evil ways, and as is always the case with all women (and Chinese women in particular) who come to power, a great deal of censure was directed towards her lasciviousness. As a result, the popular view of Tzu Hsi is unequivocally negative. 'She has become a symbol of the evil, ambitious self-indulgent and incredibly cruel woman.'<sup>11</sup> Her name Tzu Hsi has become synonymous with 'an ambitious termagant,' a domineering woman with fierce ambition, and has become a favourable nickname for women exhibiting qualities of petty tyranny at home and especially in the workplace. Jiang Qing, for instance, was implicitly called Tzu Hsi. Virtually, every Chinese woman, as Mimi Chan notes, even some of those 'whose power is not even a tithe of fraction of the power enjoyed and abused by Tz'u-Hsi, is charged, openly or in whispered gossip, with selling sexual favours to attain power, and of general licentiousness.'<sup>12</sup> When young they are 'on the make'; when old they become hideous old hags.

Besides Tzi Hsi, the image might also have something to do with Yang Kuei-fei and Empress Wu. Yang Kei-fei, the legendary Chinese beauty, is believed to be a very ambitious Chinese woman who had resource to feminine wiles and sexual charms to gain advantage and power. Wu's words quoted in *The Confucius*

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<sup>11</sup>Chan, *Images of Chinese Women in Anglo-American Literature*, p.49.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.



*Enigma*, 'Yang Kuei-fei would have brought down the dynasty if the soldiers had not killed her', just reflects this kind of view. (p.19) Compared with Yang Kei-fei, Empress Wu seems even worse. As the public media shows, she is a cruel woman of fierce ambition coupled with unscrupulous amorality and immorality, a rapaciousness that knows no bound. In order to obtain the Crown of Empress, for instance, she is believed to have killed her own daughter and then transfer this crime to Empress Wang. So, very often, we hear people call those women who have fierce ambition to play politics 'Empress Wu'.

This stereotype also reflects an ingrained misogyny. Patriarchal society finds it difficult to tolerate women in power. In such societies, 'the line is sharply drawn between the sphere of men and women; women are confined within the circle of their domestic responsibilities, while men should explore the ever widening regions of the State.'<sup>13</sup> Women's work lacks career structure; women themselves are locked into a status system in which their position is derived from that of men, or 'it has been on terms decided by men', as Dorothy E. Smith has pointed out.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese, as Joanna says in *The Confucius Enigma*, seem to be more intolerant of females in power than other peoples. According to the Confucian double standards, women have to practice the three obediences: that is, obedience to their fathers and elder brothers when young, their husbands when married, and their sons when widowed.

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<sup>13</sup>Alice Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, quoted by Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), p.5.

<sup>14</sup>Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic*, p.19.



Although the double standards for men and women have been challenged by feminists, power is still commonly regarded as a business for men not women, who are supposed to play peripheral roles. Because of the deep-rooted misogyny, women, when in power, are seen as dangerous and treacherous, and when powerless, are treated as a foil to their masculine counterpart. The Oriental women are thus 'doubly demeaned (as women, and as 'Orientals')'.<sup>15</sup> When in power, they are depicted as wicked and tasteless hags; when powerless, they offer 'a prototype of the sexual', and are 'coveted as the permissible expression of a taboo topic'.<sup>16</sup>

As time goes by, and especially as international contacts intensify, the myth of the submissive, desirable Oriental woman has been updated. Thus, there emerges in the Western mind another image of Chinese woman --- delicacy, beauty, fragility coupled with mind and determination. Jin Juan in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* is such a figure and, as such, is the most fully drawn Chinese heroine in Australian literature.

When Jin Juan first appears in front of Wally, the protagonist is attracted by her physical beauty and elegance. She is a woman of medium height and build, who

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<sup>15</sup>Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, p.7.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

...held herself modestly, and stood with hands loosely clasped. she wore a plain dress of rich pine green, and had a fat braid of hair on one shoulder. Her face was long, delicate, suggestive of vulnerability yet also strength and a fierce quickness. (p.75)

She speaks 'incisive, elegantly modulated English' and has a dazzling sophistication and command of the foreign language, such as only the best Chinese background and education can achieve in the most gifted and diligent student. (p.90) As the narrative evolves, the reader is made aware of a 'new' breed of cultivated, intelligent Chinese woman, of the corruption surrounding her and of her deep sensitivity to the political realities of the time. To a certain extent, this portrait accurately reflects the characteristics of contemporary Chinese women.

With regard to the creation of a 'new' Chinese heroine, however, Western male writers have so far seemed to find it virtually impossible to move away from the stereotypical Oriental siren whose great aim in life is to please Western man. Well-educated and highly intelligent as she is, Jin Juan still can not escape from the role her Western male image-maker assigns to her: a sex object, a seducer, in the end a sort of whore. Indeed, her education and intelligence make her an interesting, invigorating and stimulating friend and companion:

He [Wally] needed Jin Juan who spoke the language with such sophistication that she could satisfy his questions with answers, he needed her to create a sense of contact, he needed her to give him China. (p.193)

But it is her alluring body that Wally most desires. As he tries to collect the body presented voluntarily to him, his imagination becomes abstract:

...softness, slenderness, silkiness, neckness, a child's breasts with a woman's hard nipples, a face that yield no inner life, a being whose lack of human particulars allowed the enactment of a *yin-yang* fantasy, female passivity and male activeness, mysterious Eastern surrender to determined Western penetration. (p.210)

Here in Wally's psyche, Jin Juan is nothing but a sex object. He realises that in 'all sex there was perhaps an element of attraction to otherness', but he has found satisfaction 'in embracing the supple girl-form', and admired 'the silent, lucid way she had sent her instruction'. Gradually, he is in love with her and loves being with her. 'It was not only desire but delight in her presence, in her sharpness and strength. Yet the pleasure of her was also an addiction that he couldn't see beyond'. (p.246) He is not sure 'how much she might reciprocate his feelings, or for what purpose'. He assumes that Jin Juan would want to leave China, as all people do, and he might help her. 'If the result of his visit proved nothing more than to have place him in her path', he thought, 'then he should do the right things and help her, squarely setting the end against the means.' (p.247) Then, he thought of marriage, and asked:

Should he offer to marry her on that basis, as the most useful thing he could do for her? And if they should come actually to live together as lovers, why not? If the condition of helping her out of the country was to marry, he could afford to risk their feelings for such a cause. Or was he seeking means to justify a blind holiday romance, an infatuation with Chinese skin and eyes and fatalism? (p.247)

Marriage here serves obviously as a favour that the Western protagonist might offer to his Chinese lover so as to 'protect' her. And 'true to the self-image of Western (and possible masculine) superiority, each protagonist sees himself as (at

least potentially) the protector, patron and saviour of the Chinese lover.<sup>17</sup> Marriage might also be linked with possession in the male's imagination. If he could marry the Chinese woman, he would possess her and manipulate her as he pleased. Willy's European culture and his concept of racial difference, however, are there, deep in his psyche, to affect him to make a final decision. He is not sure whether he should marry Jin Juan or not. Finally, it is Jin Juan who helps him out of the dilemma. She refuses his offer of marriage and life in the West, 'preferring her integrity and personal independence as a Chinese'.<sup>18</sup> According to the narrator, her refusal greatly upsets Wally, who believes that she 'had profited from his kindness only so far as suited her independence and dignity. He felt cold and lonely, and tossed over onto his stomach in a spasm of rage'. (p.291)

In *Europe's Myths of Orient*, Rana Kabbani notes that 'Europe's feelings about Oriental women were always ambivalent ones. They fluctuated between desire, pity, contempt and outrage'.<sup>19</sup> Wally's feelings toward Jin Juan epitomise this perception. He needs her as a companion, desires her as a lover, pities her bad luck and hates her making use of him. Jin Juan, on the other hand, is portrayed as both (according to Kabbani's categories) 'erotic victim' and 'scheming witch'. Being used and then abandoned by Zhang, the new wave Chinese bureaucrat, she comes to the amoral foreigner to 'act the whore. She had also come for revenge'. (p.261)

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<sup>17</sup>Chan, *Images of Chinese Women in Anglo-American Literature*, p.237.

<sup>18</sup>John McLaren, 'Courage Against the Lies', *Overland*, 116 (October 1989), 23.

<sup>19</sup>Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, p.26.

While Chinese women are described as sex objects, Chinese men are depicted either as lustful or as feeble figures, men who are sexually incapable. They are decidedly inferior in terms of moral and physical appeal compared with their Western counterparts. Wu in *The Confucius Enigma* is a lascivious person. While teaching Joanna Chinese, he is noticed to be indulged in an erotic pleasure aroused by reading Tang poetry. This, for Joanna, is 'a sort of wank', and, for us readers, a kind of rape of the dead, Lady Yang Kei-fei. Joanna has also seen 'Wu more than once staring at her legs, which were sturdy but well-shaped, and sprinkled with glinting ginger hairs'. (p.20) His 'odd bright glance' often disturbs her. The 'smoothness of his skin', the 'unusual redness of his lips' and the 'white, sticklike Chinese legs' form sharp contrast to those of the manly Western men.

General Keh in *The Retreat of Radiance* is an appalling immoralist, as I mentioned in Chapter two. During his service as a young captain with a Chinese Nationalist division in Burma during the Second World War, he had distinguished himself mainly by his sexual excesses. In the Civil War period, his lasciviousness was notorious. For him, lover means 'a sleeping woman'. He is so mean that he 'likes to watch women piss'. (p.275) Time and excess, however, has deflated him gradually. Near the end of the novel, he is nearly finished by Lady Earshaw, who is sent by Quinn, the Australian protagonist, to weaken the lustful villain.

'You've just getting home?' Quinn dropped the cigarette. 'How did you leave our friend?'

'Our friend,' said Lady Earnshaw, 'is a little weary. Bit past it, really. I think it'll be a long time before he gets it up again.' (p.306)

Zhang, the new-style Chinese bureaucrat in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, is 'a glossy, moody, self-concerned young ram', whose behaviour contrasts starkly with the foreigner's 'straightforward friendliness'. He uses Jin Juan as his mistress, promising to marry her, but staving her off for years. 'The relationship had grown stagnant despite the sexual satisfaction'. Finally, he breaks his promise of marriage, and lets Jin Juan lament as the Chinese women had lamented three thousand years ago:

I had hoped to grow old with you,  
Now the thought of old age grieves my heart.  
The Qi has its shore,  
The Shi its banks;  
How happy we were, our hair in tufts,  
How fondly we talked and laughed,  
How solemnly swore to be true!  
I must think no more of the past;  
The past is done with---  
Better let it end like this. (p.139-140)

By contrast, Jumbo, also in *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, is described as sexually incapable Chinaman. Though 'a fast learner and more than a match for her [Dulcia] competitiveness', with Dulcia Jumbo has to subjugate himself. His head is still 'Confucian'.

Although had read Freud and physiological tomes and the Chinese classics of pornography and even stumbled through the copy of *The Joy of Sex* she gave him, his language remained puritanical. What two bodies might do, drifting into his imagination in distressing dreams, came under the sinister shadow of terminology as cold and disapproving as any Victorian circumlocution.(p.109)

The first night they spent together, Dulcia's patience had been exhausted rapidly. She yawned and lay down on his bed. As he covered her with the quilt they came neck to neck; he switched off the light and they were in bed. 'But he lay stiff as a board, not understanding her body rhetoric, and gradually the power was consigned to her. He shrivelled into himself and she used him as a massage mannikin. Afterwards he sat up in the dark for a smoke, sighing deeply in self-criticism.' (pp.109-110) From then on Jumbo became Dulcia's student. Dulcia taught him skills of the 'mouth evil', the 'hand evil' and the 'back entrance evil'.

By portraying the Chinese male as erotic villain or as a desexed figure, who is apparently inferior both to the Chinese female and his Western counterpart, the Australian image-maker on the one hand leaves the Chinese woman free for the Western male to manipulate, and on the other hand makes her emotionally dependent on the Westerner. In the end, this kind of narrative illustrates white European political and cultural hegemony. Furthermore, the characterisation of the Chinaman as either *extremely* lustful or *extremely* feeble reveals deep-seated cultural anxieties about the East as a sexual threat and, by extension, as a potential invader (indeed raper) of Australia.



## Conclusion

According to Edward Said's still persuasive analysis, Orientalism is ultimately 'a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "they")';<sup>1</sup> its essence is 'the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority'<sup>2</sup>. Though diplomatic and economic contacts between Australia and its neighbours have increased and interest in 'the East' has deepened and expanded, the literary imagery of Asia produced in the late 1970s and the 1980s suggests that Orientalism's yoke has not been broken. For contemporary Australian writers, whose cultural roots are firmly planted in Europe and who are familiar with the structural principle of binary opposition in thinking and in language, the East or the Orient stands for the Other 'against which the West has been able to identify itself' as intrinsically superior.<sup>3</sup>

In the journalist novels of the late 1970s and early 1980s, as my discussion shows, China (and Asia) is described as a dystopian nightmare---a backward, even barbaric country characterised by violence, death and all manner of corruption. In the novels of non-journalist writers, such as Nicholas Jose's *Avenue of Eternal Peace*, China (notwithstanding the more profound knowledge now made available

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p.43.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>3</sup>Zhang Longxi, 'The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West', *Critical Inquiry*, 15, 1 (Autumn 1988), 114.

by increased mutual contact) remains a country to occasion despair; its political exactions are so harsh and despotic that its people enjoy no freedom, no democracy and exercise no individuality. Repressive Communism forms a stark contrast to capitalism, which offers its people wealth, individual freedom and relatively unfettered happiness. The Chinese are portrayed either as inscrutable, weak and passive beings or as devious, treacherous and obstructive villains. Their natures are inaccessible to their Western Others' comprehension.

In all the representations of China and the Chinese in this period, both imagery and thematic concepts share qualities of remoteness, of the exotic, the bizarre, the strange and unfamiliar, of 'eternal stagnation, spiritual purblindness, and ignorance' (to use Zhang Longxi's words).<sup>4</sup> As Harold R. Isaacs writes of American views of the Orient, China exhibits 'a lack of connection with the more visibly important affairs of life'.<sup>5</sup> It has served as a foil to the West, in the process revealing the image-makers' deep-rooted cultural imperialism and racial bias. 'Everybody in all cultures', as Colin Mackerras notes, 'bases images on assumptions with which they are brought up and very often cannot or do not articulate'.<sup>6</sup> 'Despite the freedom of thought found in Western societies', Mackerras continues, 'prejudices, bias and ethnocentrism are extremely widespread there'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Zhang Longxi, 'The Myth of the Other', 127.

<sup>5</sup>Harold R. Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Views of China and India*, quoted by Zhang Longxi, see 'The Myth of the Other', 123.

<sup>6</sup>Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, p.62.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

Indeed, ethnocentrism usually results in negative images. Anyone 'who judges China with the standards and value systems of the West will find it deficient and backward',<sup>8</sup> and will ignore its real difference.

Yet some kind of evolution of Australian attitudes toward Asia, especially toward China and the Chinese, is nevertheless reflected in the fiction of this period. In the novels of the 1980s, China is no longer automatically treated as a changeless, timeless entity, and the differences among Chinese individuals are recognised by writers such as Nicholas Jose, who by 1989, 'could declare that China, not the European canon, was "the element in which [his] work is plunged", and dedicate his novel to his Chinese friends.'<sup>9</sup> Influenced by the contemporary intellectual vogue for post (and anti) colonialism, authors such as Jose and Rod Jones have interrogated imperialism; have begun to face Asia and Asians not in an oppositional but in a more comradely way. In the 1990s, more and more Australian writers will turn to Asia and find 'a liberating alternative to Europe, a stimulating store of tradition, a continuing source of modernity, or of perplexity, a locus for personal discovery, and their own new world.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady*, p.202.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p.198.

Real change, however, is slow in coming and stereotypes die hard. Accustomed to the traditional images of China built up in the West, Australian image-makers take few initiatives of their own to develop a deeper understanding of China and its people. In *The Yellow Lady*, Alison Broinowski argues that until Asia is accepted as part of the mainstream of Australian life, Australians will remain uncertain about their status and identity. In concluding this thesis, I would say that by acknowledging the reality of its Asian situation, Australia must first begin to recognise the reality of China and to develop a deeper understanding of the Chinese people, for China, as the most populous country and the advancing economic giant of Asia, has a strong influence both politically and economically on the course of regional developments.

To acknowledge the reality of China may involve recognising the truly Other, that is, 'the Other in its own Otherness, which is not only non-Western but may perhaps have things in common with what the West thinks of itself'.<sup>11</sup> Once China is recognised as a truly different country with its own history, not as some fantastic, barbaric 'Cathay', Western writers will be in a position to disperse fantasies and thereby help audiences understand the country's rich cultural tradition and character. Only then, will the real differences---and similarities--- between China and the West be presented with some authenticity and integrity.

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<sup>11</sup>Zhang Longxi, 'The Myth of the Other', 127.

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