

# Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident: reflections on twenty years of comparative scholarship

Review >  
China

The journal *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* has been publishing continually for over twenty years. A unique comparative journal, it is far less known in the Anglophone world than it deserves to be.

By Lisa Raphals

Founded in 1982 under the editorship of François Jullien, *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* began with the explicit goal of opening Sinology to the human sciences and making it more widely available. This approach parallels an analogous development in classics which, as a field, was revolutionized by the introduction of structuralist and other anthropological perspectives in the 1960s and 1970s by Jean-Pierre Vernant, Marcel Detienne, Pierre Vidal-Naquet and others.

For its first ten years, the journal covered mainly literary and historical topics, focusing on problems that bore on modern China involving complex interactions with pre-modern Chinese culture. The issues were thematic, but as Jullien pointed out (14:8), a single issue can do no more than open a door for investigation. This matters because the objects of 'Sino-logical' reflection are not pre-constituted.

*Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* underwent a shift ten years later. Under the editorship of Karine Chemla and François Martin, its perspective became explicitly comparative. Many of the comparative essays are by Sir Geoffrey Lloyd, who has contributed to almost every issue since. Readers familiar with his recent studies of Greek and Chinese science will find much of their groundwork in these pages. Issues were often individually edited. To illustrate the depth and variety, I will discuss three issues in detail.

## From numbers, the world

Issue 16, *Sous les nombres le monde: matériaux pour l'histoire culturelle du nombre en Chine ancienne*, presents and interprets material for understanding the cultural history of the number in ancient China, covering very different perspectives on the subject. This entails a deliberate departure from the common presump-

tion that correlative cosmology and its numerological corollaries form the basis of the Chinese understanding of the nature of the number. For example, Redouane Djamouri argues in a quasi-Benvenistian manner that the formation of the Shang number system was closely connected to the grammatical function of numerals. Karine Chemla uses the 'Nine Chapters on Mathematical Procedures' (*Jiuzhang suanshu*) to reinterpret the meaning of the term 'number' (*shu*), arguing that Liu Hui's commentary deliberately used polyvalent terms in order to apply the same general procedures to both numbers and algorithms.

Alexei Volkov addresses the finiteness of numbers in Xu Yue's (+3c) *Shushu jiyi*, and examines methods of generating large numbers (like those in Archimedes' *Sand Reckoner*) and the role of counting devices in establishing general notions of number. Isabelle Robinet explores symbolic uses of number in the *Daozang* and the use of arithmetical operations to connect numbers with spatial and temporal aspects of Daoist ritual, alchemy and cosmology. John Major looks at relationships between calendrics and musical scales in *Huainanzi* 3, including a translation of the section on the calculation of the lengths of pitch-pipes and a discussion of the importance of 'cosmic boards' (*shi*) in establishing correspondences between calendric data and astronomical phenomena. Hans Ulrich Vogel considers the 'metrosophy' and 'metrolology' of *Hanshu* 21 and of Liu Xin's incorporation of symbolic correlations into standard measures. G.E.R. Lloyd provides an ulterior perspective by comparing Chinese notions of number to that of ancient Greece.

## The value of the example: Chinese perspectives

A later issue, *La valeur de l'exemple, perspectives chinoises* (19), takes as its point of departure the European tendency, originating with Aristotle, to down-value the use of example as a form of argument. It subsequently presents contrasting Chinese studies revealing the importance of processes of exemplifica-

tion in various aspects of Chinese thought and social practice. Jérôme Bourgon begins with the law, and shows how practices of citing examples from the classics to support legal decisions generated legal norms and categories. Christian Lamouroux contextualizes Ouyang Xiu's idea of the historical example in relation to the *Guwen* movement and *Chunqiu* interpretation, while Anne Cheng discusses specifically Confucian notions of exemplification, including the role of the Sage as exemplar and the implications for ethical and philosophical problems of knowledge and action.

In a very different vein, Karine Chemla asks what was understood as a 'problem' in ancient Chinese mathematics. She uses the *Jiuzhang suanshu* to examine the use of general procedures to solve particular problems of the same category. Additional perspectives are provided by François Hartog and G.E.R. Lloyd. Hartog considers changing notions of 'examples' for understanding life in Greek historical writing, and argues that the notion of the past as a key to the present, for emulation, only emerged in the early fourth century, after the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war. Lloyd attempts to use 'the example of example' to demonstrate some of the pitfalls and value of comparative study in general. He links epistemological attitudes and social practices, arguing, for example, that suspicion of the authority of *exempla* went hand in hand with suspicion of authority in general. He also shows the complex use of example in mathematical proof, and compares Greek and Chinese methods of managing examples in mathematical reasoning.

## Divination and rationality in ancient China

*Divination et rationalité en Chine ancienne* (21) was an eponymous successor to Jean-Pierre Vernant's *Divination et Rationalité* (1974), which addressed the

rationality and coherence of divination and its significance in the formation of social institutions. Vernant showed how the symbolic operations of diviners imposed their rationality and legitimacy on the intellectual and social fabric of the societies in which they operated. This issue explicitly pursues Vernant's original agenda in the context of ancient China, and shows how divination affected the development of medicine, law, philosophy, politics, and the history of science. Redouane Djamouri reviews Shang bone and tortoise divination and argues that divination and writing were distinct practices that involved different kinds of artefacts and different types of rationality. Marc Kalinowski analyses the elements of predictive style in the structure of *Zuozhuan* oracular rhetoric. He argues that predictions had consistent structures and performed significant narrative functions throughout the text within a sequence of circumstance, prediction, argument, and verification. These cycles were used to render ethical judgments and to oppose the predictive wisdom of the text's authors to the failings of its narrative subjects.

Jean Levi explores the hermeneutic continuities between Warring States divinatory practice, empirical conjecture and rationalist critique. John Henderson explores the connections between exegesis of the Confucian classics (especially the *Yi* and *Chunqiu*) and the divinatory arts. Some of the Confucian classics had divinatory origins, and divination itself was considered a form of exegesis, with similar assumptions and functions to the exegesis of texts. Donald Harper explores the common milieu of physicians, diviners, astrologers, and *fangshi* specialists. He uses the *Huangdi neijing* and excavated texts from Baoshan and Shuihudi to show the evolution of iatromantic thought from a primarily exorcistic medicine to new cosmological (and mechanical) methods of hemerological diagnosis. He shows that iatromancy was an important vehicle for the introduction of correlative cosmology into medicine. Physicians imitated the rhetoric of diviners in their diagnoses, and drew on astrological, calendrical, and hemerological systems for their theory. Marc

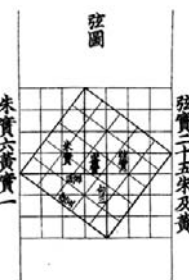
Csikszentmihalyi compares the interpretive practices of diviners and of the Qin legal codes, using debates about technical procedures and their results in both areas, while Jérôme Bourgon examines the role of divinatory schemes in the codification of Chinese law, showing how *Yi* exegesis by the School of Mysteries informed legal codification during and after the Tang Dynasty. Jean-Jacques Glassner prepares the ground for a comparative approach to Chinese and Mesopotamian divination by considering the comparative contexts for the development of writing, the roles of rulers and exorcists, and the relation of divination to modes of rationality and to the writing of history. G.E.R. Lloyd concludes by comparing the roles of Chinese and Greek divination in the development of self-conscious reflection and methods of scientific inquiry.

This brief examination shows how *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* has pioneered and maintained a felicitous approach to the problem of reconciling approaches that nowadays seem hopelessly at war. Individual contributions deal with specific texts and cultural particularities, but under an aegis that is self-consciously and deliberately comparative. In this way the journal has steered a course between the Scylla of historical and cultural particularism and the Charybdis of essentializing generalization and comparison. It merits study and emulation. <

*Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident: cahiers de recherches comparatives*, eds. Karine Chemla and François Martin, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, Université de Paris VIII.

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Illustrations courtesy of *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident*



> Appendix: Issues

1982. *Essais de poésie chinoise et comparée* [Essays on Chinese and comparative poetics]
1983. *L'idée révolutionnaire et la Chine: la question du modèle* [The idea of revolution in China: the question of models]
1983. *Le rapport à la nature (notes diverses)* [Relations to nature: diverse notes]
1984. *Du lettré à l'intellectuel: la relation au politique* [From literati to intellectual: relations to the political]
1984. *La canonisation du texte: aux origines d'une tradition* [The canonization of the text: at the origins of a tradition]
1985. *Une civilisation sans théologie? (A civilization without theology?)*
1985. *Le 'réel', l' 'imaginaire' ["Real" and "Imaginary"]*
1986. *En hommage à Patrick Destenay* [Homage to Patrick Destenay]
1987. *Référence à l'histoire: civilisation sans théologie* [Reference to history: civilization without theology]
1988. *Effets d'ordre dans la civilisation chinoise* [Effects of order on Chinese civilization]
1989. *Parallélisme et appariement des choses* [Parallelism and the matching of things]
1990. *L'art de la liste* [The art of the list]
1991. *Modèles et structures des textes chinois anciens: les formalistes soviétiques en sinologie* [Models and structures of ancient Chinese texts: Russian formalists in sinology]
1992. *Regards obliques sur l'argumentation en Chine* [A sidelong glance at argumentation in China], Karine Chemla, ed.
1993. *Le nom juste* [The right name], Karine Chemla and François Martin, eds.
1994. *Sous les nombres le monde: matériaux pour l'histoire culturelle du nombre en Chine ancienne* [From numbers, the world: materials for the cultural history of number in ancient China], Alexei Volkov, ed.
1995. *Le travail de la citation en Chine et au Japon* [How citation works in China and Japan], Karine Chemla and François Martin, eds.
1996. *Disposer pour dire, Placer pour penser, Situer pour agir: les pratiques de position en Chine* [To speak, position: To think, place: To act, set up: practice of place in China], Karine Chemla and Michael Lackner, eds.
1997. *La valeur de l'exemple, perspectives chinoises* [The value of the example: Chinese perspectives], Karine Chemla, ed.
1998. *Du divertissement dans la Chine et le Japon anciens: "Homo ludens" Extrême-Orientalis* [Entertainment in Ancient China and Japan: "Homo ludens" in the Far East], François Martin, Jacqueline Pigeot, and Karine Chemla, eds.
1999. *Divination et rationalité en Chine ancienne* [Divination and rationality in ancient China], Karine Chemla, Donald Harper, and Marc Kalinowski, eds.
2000. *L'art des jardins dans les pays sinisés: Chine, Japon, Corée, Vietnam* [The art of the garden in sinicized countries: China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam], Léon Vandermeersch, ed.
2001. *La coutume et la norme en Chine et au Japon* [Custom and norm in China and Japan], Jérôme Bourgon, ed.
2002. *L'anticalicisme en Chine* [Anticalicism in China], Vincent Goosaert, ed.
2003. *L'anthologie poétique en Chine et au Japon* [Poetic anthology in China and Japan], Jacqueline Pigeot, ed.