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PASCAL QUIGNARD AS SINOPHILE:

RECREATING CHINESE ANTIQUITY IN CONTEMPORARY FRANCE

Introduction

What does it mean to recreate Chinese antiquity in contemporary France? Does it mean resuscitating the experience of ancient Chinese literature and its ideas so that they can be somehow re-lived in the modern French language? Or, if we take 'recreation' in the sense of a recreational activity, would that mean treating Chinese antiquity as raw material for the author of this recreational act, and his potential French audience? These are the questions about re-appropriating Chinese antiquity which Pascal Quignard (1948-) poses. Quignard studied philosophy under Emmanuel Levinas and is one of the most distinguished and prolific contemporary French writers and artists. His most famous works include the novel *Tous les matins du monde* (1991), adapted later into a film by Alain Corneau, and the essayistic book *Les Ombres errantes* (2002), winner of the Prix Goncourt. But Quignard's creative output also spreads across an incredibly wide range of works including fiction, scholarly editions, philosophical essays, artworks, and theatre productions. Notably, Quignard is also a sinophile, and explicitly acknowledges that 'la Chine ancienne' is close to his heart (Quignard 2012: 4). This is evidenced by his numerous references to pre-modern Chinese literature and writers, particularly in his essayistic and non-fictional writings such as his scholarly prefaces, *Petits traités*,ⁱ *Sur le doigt qui montre cela*, *Rhétorique spéculative*, and the series *Dernier Royaume* (with its ninth volume *Mourir de penser* published in 2014). These works form the scope of examination of this essay, which explores how Quignard's ancient

Chinese sources are reworked into his writing to reflect on his lasting fascination with style, philosophical thought, language, and antiquity.

Quignard's sinophilia is different from the established French sinophilic tradition spanning twentieth-century figures including Michaux, Saint-John Perse, Segalen, and stretching back to earlier advocates of Chinese literature and culture such as Judith Gautier and Voltaire. As this essay will argue, Quignard's engagement with Chinese antiquity involves particular ways of re-interpreting and re-writing ancient Chinese texts, and has a distinctly recreative aspect that is characteristic of the contemporary production of literature and arts. Simultaneously, Quignard's Chinese-inspired works raise important questions about reception and the relation between French Orientalism and cultural appropriation, which provides the bigger framework of cultural politics where I situate Quignard. Now more than ever, much debate is sparked off by the ethics and politics of how the West represents non-Occidental cultures. Classic examples are the contested question of 'Chineseness' in Pound's *Cathay* poems, and the exoticist idealization of the Far-East in French travel writings from Claudel's *Livre sur la Chine* to Barthes's *Empire des signes* and Kristeva's *Des Chinoises*. A more recent example is the controversy in 2015 over the 'kimono Wednesdays' hosted by Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, where visitors were invited to pose in a kimono before Monet's *La Japonaise*.ⁱⁱ Understandably, when the contention about who should claim legitimacy over cultural interpretation and representation is so intense today, in the case of a contemporary French writer's creative recycling of a foreign and temporally remote culture such as Chinese antiquity, even more difficulties arise. There are voices emphatically arguing against such cultural appropriation, especially from an 'Occidentalist' perspective, which is seen by some cultural insiders as a 'strategy' to counter the Orientalist imperialism of cultural outsiders, as Ning Wang notes (1997: 62). In this essay, Quignard's sinophilia will be

discussed in relation to this discursive battlefield of Orientalism and appropriation, for we need to understand the nature of Quignard's engagement with Chinese literary sources rather than make sweeping judgments that slot him conveniently into the category of Eurocentric exoticism.

This approach to Quignard is pertinent because it addresses two problems. First, the scarcity of criticism on Quignard and his Chinese influences, which is partly because the majority of Quignard's works are untranslated. Existing scholarship on Quignard happens almost exclusively within the study of French literature, by mostly Francophone critics rather than Anglophone, who understandably lack Chinese expertise and have rarely studied in-depth Quignard's Chinese references (with the few exceptions of Philippe Postel and Bruno Blanckeman, who work on comparative literature).ⁱⁱⁱ The other group of critics who could examine Quignard's sinophilia, namely, sinologists, do not get to know Quignard well due to the lack of translation and different disciplinary concerns. This critical gap and lack of interaction between French and Chinese studies is what I hope to slightly remedy here. The second problem I address is the view – typical of sinologists – that Western writers like Quignard who produce works inspired by Chinese literature and culture should be viewed suspiciously as problematic cultural appropriators who do not say anything significant about Chinese culture itself. René Etiemble, who on the one hand was a firm advocate for cross-cultural comparison, famously scoffed at French sinophiles from Claudel, Pedretti, to Artaud, Masson, and Michaux, sarcastically contrasting their great enthusiasm for Chinese culture with their superficial and incorrect knowledge of it (Etiemble 1961). Although Eric Hayot argued perceptively (1999: 530) when discussing Pound's *Cathay* that it is important to 'establish a history of the West's representations of China', and Michelle Bloom (2015: 5) demonstrated how Sino-French cross-imaginaries 'deserv[e] a place in French and

Francophone Studies, [and] Chinese studies', such a history that features Chinese-inspired writers like Pound and Quignard is yet to be taken seriously in comparative studies and its relevance to Chinese studies yet to be recognized. The present essay re-affirms this thread of investigation into Western imaginaries of Chinese culture and argues that Quignard's sinophilic works provide a new way of understanding such appropriations. To do this, instead of probing the question of whether Quignard steered clear of cultural misunderstandings and misuses, I show firstly that his engagement with Chinese antiquity centres on the notion of recreation rather than historicist and linguistic understanding; and secondly, that his recreative practices are, despite their ahistoricity and blurring of reality and fiction, nonetheless important because they provide food for critical thought. Thus we may refine our understanding of Quignard's sinophilic practices and think about what to appreciate in them and what questions they provoke, and recognize how Quignard's case contributes to the broader question of the contemporary reception of Chinese antiquity.

Re-reading ancient Chinese texts

Quignard's readerly and writerly processes are inextricably intertwined and his extensive reading on Chinese literature and thought is reworked into his own writing. From *Sur le doigt*, *Petits traités*, to *Dernier Royaume*, Quignard displays an impressive range of references to pre-modern Chinese texts and writers, including: the Daoist classics – the *Zhuangzi* (c. 4th-3rdC BCE), *Laozi* (c. 5th-3rdC BCE), *Liezi* (c.4thC BCE-4thC CE?), *Huainanzi* (2ndC BCE); early Chinese thinkers Gongsun Long, Mencius, Confucius; imperial historians Sima Qian and Zhang Shoujie; Tang literati – Han Yu, Wang Wei, Wang Changling, Li Bai, Li Shangyin. Besides these illustrious figures from antiquity, Quignard also alludes to early modern Chinese writers Pu Songling, Cao Xueqin, Wu Jingzi, the erotic novel *Jin Ping*

Mei (1610), and demonstrates knowledge of modern Chinese writers such as Lu Xun and sinologists such as Feng Youlan, Alfred Forke, Marcel Granet, and François Jullien.^{iv} The abundance and range of Quignard's allusions – to Chinese and non-Chinese cultures alike – are crucial to his image as an erudite 'homme du livre' (Quignard 2011: para.29). This style of abundant referencing relates to Quignard's admiration for the late-Tang poet Li Yi-chan (or Li Shangyin, 813-858), whose biography Quignard wrote in his scholarly preface to Georges Bonmarchand's French translation of Li's *Notes* (1992). Termed *zazuan* (雜纂) in Chinese, this is a book of lists by Li that collects miscellaneous jottings in the form of a poetic catalogue: e.g. '14. Signes de richesse', '17. Choses agaçantes', '21. Choses vaines'. In the preface Quignard highlights Li's erudite style (in Li 1992: 19-20):

Il passait pour être un poète érudit et difficile. [...] Li Yi-chan ne composait jamais sans compulser nombre de documents de référence et on lui avait donné pour ce motif le sobriquet de 'T'a tsi yu'. T'a tsi yu veut dire la loutre qui rend hommage aux poissons. Les anciens Chinois disaient que la loutre avait l'habitude d'aligner le produit de sa pêche dans la boue de la berge et de le contempler avant de s'en nourrir.

[He came across as an erudite and difficult poet. [...] Li Shangyin never composed without poring over numerous reference materials and for this reason he was nicknamed 'ta-ji-yu'. *Ta-ji-yu* denotes the otter paying homage to fish. The ancient Chinese said that the otter had the habit of lining up the fruits of its fishing in the mud on the riverbank to gaze upon before feeding on them.]^v

The Chinese idiom *ta-ji-yu* (獺祭魚), used by the scholar Wu Jiong to describe Li's style,

establishes a striking analogy between the otter that lays out its prey as if counting its treasures and the writer who lists a kaleidoscopic range of references in his own works. The expression therefore figuratively denotes a writing style of erudition and proliferation, characteristic of Li and likewise of Quignard. The character *ji* (祭) is particularly relevant to Quignard, for it means 'to offer sacrifice', 'pay tribute to something sacred', 'hold sacrificial meat', 'kill (ritualistically)', and combines both notions of veneration and violence. This aptly portrays Quignard's attitude to his admired ancient Chinese texts and writers: by incorporating them into his own writing, he pays homage to them while simultaneously devouring them as 'prey' to nourish himself.

This cannibalizing incorporation takes place not only through profuse citations in Quignard's texts but also through Quignard slipping into the style of his favourite Chinese writers. For example, the style of the miscellaneous list in Li's *zazuan*, which Quignard (in Li 1992: 10) sees as 'une façon particulière et harcelante de jouer avec l'univers qui entoure et de jouer avec le langage qui le dissocie' ('a particular and provocative way of playing with one's surrounding world and with language that decomposes this world'). These 'listes-répertoires' appeal to Quignard because they combine the fragmentary, reflective, and taxonomical aspects of writing, without any unifying conclusion. Lists therefore open up to the 'joy' of proliferating the world's myriad facets, which Quignard finds not only in Li Shangyin but also in Li Bai's poetry (2002: 51) and the classical Japanese poet Sei Shonagon's *zuihitsu*, i.e. 'au courant du pinceau' ('following the brush') (*PT.VII: XLIV*), the literary genre directly inspired by Li Shangyin.^{vi} This list style re-emerges in Quignard's own works, for instance in *Sordidissimes*, citations are often presented as lists, e.g. Chapter 'Le 19 mars 2000 à Mons' (2005: 83-9), and in various chapters that enumerate lists of lists (*Ibid*: 157-58; 246; 256-7). Quignard's *Petits traités* also echo Li Shangyin's *zazuan* lists and Shonagon's *zuihitsu* by

combining essayistic fragments, personal reflections, anecdotes, and micro-fictions. The slim pamphlet-like format of *Petits traités* also resembles Chinese *xiuzhen* (袖珍) booklets, – carrying the connotation of treasured personal writings found in Li Shangyin, – which Quignard self-reflexively alludes to (*PT.III*: 125): 'Dans les vêtements des anciens Chinois les manches étaient très larges [...]. Ils y rangeaient de menus objets, [...] un jade, et des livres de petit format appelés "joyaux de manche"' ('The ancient Chinese wore clothes with very big sleeves [...]. In these sleeves people stored various small items, [...] a jade, and small format books called "sleeve jewels" [i.e. *xiuzhen*]).

The style of *Petits traités*, observed by many critics as uncategorisable (Blanckeman 2008; Holter 2017), embodies the 'non-genre' that Quignard (2001: 163) seeks. A hybrid of essay and fiction, lists and stories, this simultaneously intimate and abstract stylistics continues in Quignard's *Dernier Royaume* books. This free style owes to *zazuan* but also, notably, to the *Zhuangzi*, which is Quignard's favourite and most quoted Chinese source. *Zhuangzi* – the alleged author of the text by the same name – is one of Quignard's acknowledged key 'masters': 'Les *Petits traités* sont l'impôt payé à mes maîtres' ('*Little Treatises* are the tribute paid to my masters') (Quignard 1995: 153); 'Mes maîtres sont: [...] Tchouang-tseu, Lucrèce' ('My masters are [...] *Zhuangzi*, Lucretius') (Ibid: 157). *Petits traités* and *Dernier Royaume* also stylistically echo the *Zhuangzi*, for the Chinese text is a syncretist collection of passages and fragments organised notionally into chapters, encompassing myths, stories, dialogues, abstract arguments, enigmatic and religious-sounding utterances. Simultaneously one of the most poetic and most philosophical texts in Chinese literature, the *Zhuangzi* proves to be an important lesson for Quignard. His *Rhétorique spéculative* refuses the distinction between fiction and philosophy to reach towards *Zhuangzi*'s 'paroles révélatrices, [...] l'association libre, la langue dénormée, l'énigme, [...] possèdent un pouvoir

évocateur dont la portée est illimitée./Cette affirmation de Tchouang-tseu est l'axiome de la rhétorique spéculative' ('revelatory words, [...] free association, de-normalized language, enigma, [...] possess an evocative power the significance of which is boundless./This affirmation of Zhuangzi is the premise of speculative rhetoric')(Quignard 2010: 205). For Quignard, Zhuangzi's extravagant language and unbridled imagination re-ignite 'la mystagogie originaire que la philosophie a oubliée [...] cet étrange nœud papillon' ('the primary mystagogy which philosophy has forgotten [...] this strange butterfly problem') (Quignard 2014: 111), – referring to Zhuangzi's famous butterfly dream, where Zhuangzi asks himself whether he dreamt of being a butterfly or he is a butterfly dreaming it was Zhuangzi (*Zhuangzi* 2.14).

Thus, Quignard's Zhuangzian inspiration leads to his self-perception as a Daoist in spirit, since it was by reading the *Zhuangzi* that he came to unburden himself from his identity as a writer:

'Moi, je ne me considère pas comme écrivain.' [...]

C'est de nouveau la persistance querelle entre les taoïstes et les confucéens.

Confucius veut un rôle social, siéger auprès du prince, modéliser la vertu, édicter le rite, [...] etc. Tchouang-tseu ne veut exercer aucune sorte de rôle.

Dès qu'un prince fait appel à lui, il s'enfuit. [...] Bref il y a ceux qui veulent des rôles, le titre d'écrivain, de philosophe, même le salaire qui va avec, etc. Et ceux qui veulent le moins de rôle possible.

J'ai été confucéen et je suis devenu taoïste. (Quignard 2001: 119-20)

[Me, I don't consider myself a writer. [...]

Again it is the persistent dispute between Daoists and Confucians. Confucius wants a social role, to take a position beside the ruler, formulate virtues, enact rites, [...] etc. Zhuangzi does not want to perform any role. As soon as a prince summons him, he runs away. [...] In short, there are those who want roles, the title of writer, philosopher, even the salary that goes with it, etc. And there are those who want as little of any role as possible.

I was Confucian but I became Daoist.]

Quignard sees in Zhuangzi the refusal to fulfil a function or title, otherwise crucial to the rectification of names and social roles (*zhengming*) in Confucian morality. Quignard refers to the story of Zhuangzi turning down the offer from the Prince of Chu to serve as minister (*Zhuangzi* 17.11) and translates this rejection into his own rejection of the professional identity of writer, aspiring to write without being a writer. This apparent paradox in Quignard finds an analogy in the *Zhuangzi's* expressions about wanting to speak without words:

言無言, 終身言, 未嘗言; 終身不言, 未嘗不言。 (*Zhuangzi* 27.1)

[To speak without words: even if you have spoken all your life, you would have said nothing; even if all your life you have not spoken, you would have never stopped saying something.]

This sentence expresses the kind of paradox that Quignard poses: to 'speak' without words, to write without being a writer. Here, Zhuangzi plays on the double-entendre of the term *yan*, which is both a noun denoting 'words, language, theories, or writings that expound one's views' and a verb for 'to speak, discuss'. This ambiguity enables different understandings of how one may '*yan-wu-yan*', i.e. 'to *yan* (express one's views, or convey meaning) without *yan* (speech, theoretical writings)', and vice versa 'to *yan* (speak, verbally expound, theorise) without *yan* (conveying meaning, expressing one's opinions, or attaching significance to one's

words)'. *Yan-wu-yan* parallels Quignard's 'silence parlant' (*PT.I*: 35), referring to Jerome's *silentium eloquens* to assert that 'toute œuvre écrite [...] est un silence qui parle' ('all written works [...] are a silence that speaks'). 'Parler', like Zhuangzi's *yan*, paradoxically includes both sound and silence since it means both '(orally) speak' and more figuratively, 'express/signify (without oral speech and its sound)'. Writing therefore 'speaks' through its silent linguistic expression that conveys meaning. These twists of language and meaning – in both Zhuangzi and Quignard – converge towards the Zhuangzian preference for the un-selfconscious action and experience of something over gaining acknowledgement for it, over achieving a certain desired result from such action, or defining the significance of the action so that it is codified.^{vii} This is why Quignard feels more connected to Zhuangzi than Confucius because he considers his own refusal of the label of 'writer' as a Daoist gesture in the sense that he is concerned about the engagement with the activity and process of writing rather than official recognition for it, its static definition as an identity, and any authorial attachment to his writings that reifies their expressions and forces him to assume the writer's ('auteur') responsibility (Vuong 2016: 45) for their interpretation. In the end, why does Quignard continue writing despite not wanting to be a writer? He provides the answer himself, which evokes Zhuangzi's 'speaking without words' again: 'J'ai écrit pour survivre. J'ai écrit parce que c'était la seule façon de parler en se taisant' (I wrote to survive. I wrote because it was the only way to speak while being silent) (Quignard 1993: 64-5). If writing is an existential matter as natural and necessary as breathing for Quignard (i.e. an un-selfconscious act, as Zhuangzi would see it), certainly it needs no other justification.^{viii}

Quignard's interest in classical Chinese texts also stems from his desire to probe into ideas about language, particularly the question of how ancient languages may enrich our understanding of the nature of language in general. Quignard believes that, like other ancient

languages such as Greek and Akkadian, classical Chinese contributes to the fascinating 'ecstasy' of language that writing (rather than speech) facilitates (Quignard 2001: 103). This linguistic abandonment is expressed prominently through the argumentative style of classical Chinese philosophical texts, which heavily uses aphorisms, paradoxes, and pairs of analogies and contrasts. The richly ambivalent linguistic style and often obscure context of meaning of classical Chinese rhetoric appeal to Quignard's aesthetic and literary sensibilities, which explains his particular appreciation for Daoist literature and Gongsun Long, a skilled rhetorician around 4thC BCE who was notorious for sophistic arguments. For instance, Quignard cites the Daoist text *Liezi* to illustrate his own views:

Tout ce qui se dit n'est pas tout, prétend Lie-tseu. Tout ne se dit pas. [...] Ce qui naît du son, cela s'entend, mais ce par quoi le son se produit n'a jamais retenti. Ainsi disait Lie-tseu. Aussi bien Aristote. (*PT.II*: 30)

[All that is said is not all, Liezi claims. All is not said. [...] That which is born from sound is heard, but that by which sound is produced is never heard. Thus said Liezi, as did Aristotle.]

If we read the *Liezi* comparatively with Quignard, the sentences closest in meaning to Quignard's citation are found in section 1.3: '聲之所聲者聞矣 而聲聲者未嘗發' (that which is sounded by sound can be heard, but that which makes sound heard is never manifest); and in section 4.5: '得意者无言, [...] 用无言為言亦言' (Those who have grasped the meaning do not speak, [...] to use not-speaking as speaking is still speaking). When compared to the original text of *Liezi*, we see that Quignard's quotes are loose paraphrases, though the sentence about sound is more accurate. The parallel between Liezi and Aristotle also seems quite casual, for whether Aristotle's views on sound can be summarised in this way is highly debatable. This

way of juxtaposing different references by loose citation, as Postel observes (in Détrie 2001: 330), is a deliberate stylistic strategy which Quignard calls the 'court-circuit' ('short-circuit'). It aims at making the citation the 'object of an "amplifying" endeavour' (Ibid: 327), which reflects Quignard's view that the author is in fact an *auctor* – one who 'accentuates' and re-invigorates the work of ancients instead of creating her own original works or respecting the historicity of ancient texts (Gorrillot 2009: 72). The 'short-circuit' way in creating loose paraphrases and comparisons, in the case of this *Liezi* quote, shows that Quignard's appreciation for the *Liezi* does not involve demonstrating a close-reading of the Chinese text to understand its precise wording or semantic context, but focuses on the ideas which the text sparks off. Perhaps, Quignard deliberately attempts to obfuscate the reality of the original *Liezi* to surreptitiously mirror the fact that the *Liezi*'s reality and originality have always been questioned by Chinese scholars, – the text being of uncertain date, apocryphal, and accused of being a fake text written in the Six Dynasties (220-589) to masquerade as a genuine early Chinese text. In light of this, Quignard's 'short-circuit' treatment of the *Liezi* can even be understood as a witty way to obliquely comment on the fictional and deceptive origins of the *Liezi* itself.

Quignard's inspiration from Gongsun Long is demonstrated in his reflections on the nature of language and its relation to the world of concrete objects and experience. To begin with, he professes that 'une des pensées à laquelle je dois le plus est celle de Kong-souen Long' ('one of the thought systems to which I owe most is that of Gongsun Long') (1993: 78). In 1990, despite claiming to have extremely limited knowledge of classical Chinese, Quignard published *Sur le doigt qui montre cela*, his own annotated translation of Gongsun's notoriously difficult *Discourse on Pointing at Things* (*Zhiwulun* 指物論), which includes abstruse arguments about the philosophy of language, nominalism, and using language to

classify things in the world. What to make of this translation of Gongsun's text when Quignard claims, at the end of his long preface to his translation, to know no Chinese (1990: 15): 'Je ne sais pas parler le chinois. D'ailleurs je ne comprends plus aucune langue étrangère' (I cannot speak Chinese. Moreover I do not understand any foreign language)?^{ix} In a later interview, Quignard (2001: 136) reveals that he received help in translation from 'un ami Chinois persécuté, dont je cache le nom' ('a persecuted Chinese friend, whose name I keep secret'). By deliberately hiding the identity of this Chinese collaborator, whose presence would suggest more authenticity in the translation, Quignard undercuts the reality of this collaborative translation and makes one wonder if this 'friend' is entirely fictional. Judging from the text of *Sur le doigt*, which includes Quignard's preface, translation, and supplementary annotations, we perceive a tension between Quignard's scholarly exegesis and translation and his creative re-reading and rewriting of Gongsun's text. On the one hand, Quignard's translation is based on his consultation of various sinologists' interpretations and translations of *Zhiwulun*, especially Ignace Kou Pao-Koh's *Deux Sophistes chinois: Houei Che et Kong-souen Long* (1953). Quignard also elaborates on, – in typically philological fashion, – the difficulties of translating the term *zhi* 指 literally meaning 'finger', but interpreted disparately as 'attributs', 'pronoms', 'ce qui indique', 'définitions', 'signe' (Quignard 1990: 8). Quignard states (1990: 9) that he translated *zhi* in the most 'concrete sense' of 'doigt' (finger), which is the meaning supported, as he argues, by the *Zhuangzi*'s parodic reference to Gongsun (*Zhuangzi* 2.6). Quignard's annotations of particular phrases and sentences in small print following his translation reproduce the typical presentation of pre-modern Chinese texts where comments are incorporated in small print after the main text. These features show Quignard's substantial work in reading commentaries and sinological studies to produce his translation. On the other hand, the fictional and creative aspect of Quignard's approach to

Gongsun is also strongly present. At one point in his preface, after a long citation presumably by Gongsun, Quignard ends by stating that this quote is false (1990: 12): 'Kong-souen Long dit: "Ne confondez pas. [...] Tout est indescriptible." J'invente ces mots.' ('Gongsun Long says: "Do not confuse. [...] Everything is indescribable." I am inventing these words.') This invented quote implies a fictionality in his interpretation of Gongsun. Moreover, Quignard unconventionally translates the term *wu* 物 – usually translated as 'thing, being', – as 'cela' (that/this), which significantly changes the interpretation of the whole text, e.g. the first sentence '物莫非指 *wu mo fei zhi*' (*Gongsunlongzi* 3.1), compare Quignard's translation 'Tout cela est un doigt' ('All that is a finger') with 'Of concrete things, none are not objects of reference' (Cheng and Swain 1970: 140) and Reding's (2002: 195) 'Every pointing is at something'. This interpretive stretch in translating culturally specific and often considered untranslatable terms is typical of Quignard, e.g. when he suggests that the German 'ersatz' would be a good translation for 'brahman' in Sanskrit (2002: 70).

Sur le doigt is paradoxically, therefore, a pseudo-translation that tries to be faithful – an inevitably illusory fidelity because the original meaning of *Zhiwulun* is exceptionally uncertain. Quignard shows understanding of the gist of the problem posed by Gongsun – consensual among diverse critics of Gongsun, – which is the difference between linguistic referentiality and the order of real things.^x This question, in the context of French literature and thought, immediately refers to Saussurean semiotics and perhaps Levinas's legacy on Quignard, particularly Levinas's view that 'the signifier [...] is not signified' and 'cannot be articulated' (Kozin 2004: 237). Here, in relation to Gongsun, Quignard further reflects on this question by taking seriously Gongsun's crucial distinction between the 'finger that points' and the 'act of pointing/referring' (1990: 14): 'le doigt devient double, le cela devient deux (choses et mot), tout cela est voilà, et le doigt cesse d'être le doigt' ('the finger becomes double, the

'that' [it points to] becomes two (thing and word), all 'that' is 'there it is', and the finger ceases being the finger'). This directly refers to Gongsun's argument (*Gongsunlongzi* 3.1-9) about linguistic reference in which he tries to show how the linguistic sign used to refer to something in reality is often confused with the real thing it refers to.^{xi} Nevertheless, Quignard's approach to Gongsun is deliberately liberated from – though not unrelated to – its historical and linguistic context. For instance, Quignard later misquotes Gongsun (1993: 79): "Il existe des pensées qui dérivent de nulle part". "Il y a des méditations sans aboutissement." ("There are thoughts that derive from nowhere." "There are reflections without any outcome."). These two propositions are absent in the entire text by Gongsun, nor can anything close to them be found. Perhaps Quignard is using 'l'association libre' here, and cannibalizing Gongsun as the 'prey' of his reading exercise, since reading is 'la relation entre le prédateur et sa proie' ('the relationship between the predator and its prey') (*PT.VIII*: 18), just like hunting. Gongsun's text is significant to Quignard because it ultimately serves as a springboard for his own views about the indeterminateness of philosophical thought.

But why choose Gongsun rather than other early Chinese thinkers who are easier to understand and better known than Gongsun for this translational endeavour? Quignard himself offers an explanation (1990: 8): 'Le *Tche-wou Louen*, depuis vingt-trois siècles, a été considéré comme le plus obscur de ces textes qui comptent parmi les plus obscurs' ('*Zhiwulun*, for twenty-three centuries, has been considered the most obscure of the most obscure texts'). Precisely because of *Zhiwulun*'s difficulty and impenetrability, Quignard chooses to excavate meaning from it, so that its signification further lapses into an infinite regress of enigmas. This reflects on Quignard's pronounced interest – noted by Vuong (2016) and Jean-Louis Pautrot (2007) – in re-examining esoteric and forgotten ancient texts, not only *Zhiwulun* but also the Hellenistic poet Lycophron's *Alexandra*, described as 'σκοτεινόν' (dark,

obscure).xii Quignard's act of translating and producing a re-reading of these abstruse texts from antiquity therefore reaches into the darkness of the past and ultimately of death itself: 'Quand on traduit, la langue la plus souple, la plus vivante, [...] la plus sagace est la morte' (In translation, the most flexible, liveliest, [...] and wisest language is the dead one') (*PT.II*: 20). The vitality of esoteric language – the meaning of which is concealed even in its original language – in translation is the vitality of death, where meaning is constantly reborn but always escapes into the black-hole of meaninglessness. *Sur le doigt* thus attests to Quignard's orphic quest for the origins of significance that ends up in language and signification forever slipping away from the grasping 'hand':

Tout ce qui est saisi est une main. Le langage est une main. [...] Le sujet est une main vouée à prendre et à comprendre. (Quignard 1990: 10)

Je reste avec, à la main, le doigt de Kong-souen Long, [...] On ne voit jamais assez le doigt, [...] avec lequel on montre. [...] Autant que nous parlons, le langage est l'énigme. (Ibid: 34)

[All that is grasped is a hand. Language is a hand. [...] The subject is a hand predestined to take and to understand. [...]

As for the hand, I remain with Gongsun Long's finger, [...] We never see enough of the finger, [...] with which we point. [...] So far as we speak, language is enigma.]

Philosophizing about language via classical Chinese

As mentioned above, Quignard finds in classical Chinese texts an 'ecstasy' of language. This view stems from Quignard's interest in the philosophy of language and how so-called 'dead'

languages can enrich our ideas about language. The 'ecstasy' in writing and reading is an affective power that can be instantiated in many different languages and writers, in Quignard's view (2001: 103), in Zhuangzi as well as Eckhart, Hadewijch, and Chateaubriand; in ancient as well as modern languages. In other words, this ecstatic style lies in particular ways of speaking and writing, and in an aestheticisation of language, which can happen regardless of whether the language in question is considered dead or not. This shows, according to Quignard, that ancient languages are not more 'dead' than the current modern languages. Quignard explicitly rejects the common assumption that ancient languages are dead and irrelevant to our contemporary life, arguing surprisingly that language itself is neither dead nor living, and that the interest of a language is not in the need to use it.

Le langage ne répond pas à un besoin. Son usage ne remplit pas une fonction.

Le langage dit plus qu'il n'est besoin qu'on dise.

Il n'y a pas de langues qui soient en vie. Il n'y a pas de langues mortes. (*PT.II*: 13-4)

[Language does not respond to any need. Its use does not fulfil any function.

Language says more than it is necessary to say.

There are no living languages. There are no dead languages.]

This anachronistic and anti-functional view of language thus radically levels antiquity with contemporaneity, resulting in that antiquity becomes as significant to new investigation and thought as contemporary culture and life. This is in line with Quignard's view that all written languages are a very recent invention seen in the big picture of the history of human existence (*PT.III*: 55). This is why he compares classical Chinese to other ancient languages and argues that, although it is radically different from languages like Sanskrit or Phoenician, it is part of

the advent of writing that signals the prostheticisation of language that makes language external to the human body and increasingly alienated from human existence. This prosthetic, technological dimension of written language is one of the most important commonalities that connects different ancient scripts and languages to each other as well as to modern languages.

In addition to understanding ancient languages under this new light and thus making them contemporary to us, Quignard considers ancient languages more interesting than the modern because their remoteness and more pronounced obscurity excite our curiosity as a message written in secret code would. This shroud of mystery reminds us of the hieroglyphic and shamanic origins of language:

L'étrangeté dans la graphie des langues anciennes, [...] leur apparence extraordinaire ou bien leur inimaginable désuétude, [...] nous intrigue ou qui nous intimide comme quelque chose d'un peu 'sacré', 'sacrié'. (*PT.II*: 35)

[The strangeness in the script of ancient languages, [...] their extraordinary appearance or their unimaginable obsolescence, [...] intrigues or intimidates us like something carrying connotations of the 'sacred' or 'sacrificed'.]

For Quignard, the intimidating power of language manifests itself in the fact that we human beings necessarily depend on language for our actions and constitute our identity through it, although language is a system of codes that has nothing human about them, just like algorithms for machine reading. In this sense, human beings are like materials onto which the linguistic code is imprinted and rendered readable and meaningful. Thus, human beings are 'sacrificed' to language:

Nous nous sommes 'offerts' à la langue. Notre corps est ce 'cadeau' que les livres nous font. Il nous revient des livres: contre-don de l'échange de notre corps sacrifié à la langue. (*PT.II*: 90)

[We 'offer' ourselves to language. Our body is this 'gift' that books give us. It comes back to us from books: the counter-gift of the exchange for our body that is sacrificed to language.]

In Quignard's view, the strangeness of ancient languages makes us more aware of our helplessness before this prosthetic, code-encrypting, and non-human aspect of all language. This brings us to realise that even our mother tongue, seen as 'alive' and close to us, and over which we assume to exercise control, is still non-human and exacts a sacrifice. This human sacrifice to language happens in the way that the mother tongue inscribes itself into our very being – our bodies' behaviour, our emotions, thoughts, and social relations. Stripped of our mother tongue, we would be fundamentally changed. For instance, when we are in a foreign place where our mother tongue is not understood, the linguistic barrier obliges us to act as if our bodies and understanding are impaired; or, for patients who suffer from linguistic amnesia, their customary behaviour and thought are transformed in ways they cannot predict or control. The helplessness of human beings without their mother tongue reduces the human to this '*outis*, l'animal inconnu' ('unrecognised animal') (Gorrillot 2009: 69), which shows that, rather than say we have control over our mother tongue, it is more true that our mother tongue controls us instead. Here, Quignard demonstrates a reverse functionalist view of language, in that humans are instruments used by language instead of language serving as an instrument for human use:

L'homme n'est pas plus maître du langage que la terre n'est au centre des

galaxies et ne gouverne les planètes. (1993: 112)

[Humanity is no more the master of language than the earth is the centre of the galaxies and rules all other planets.]

Si je pense que ma langue maternelle me comprend, cela ne m'a jamais paru réciproque. (2001: 135)

[If I think that my mother tongue understands me, this has never seemed to me to be reciprocal.]

Human powerlessness before language is, for Quignard, a reflection that 'ce qui est vécu n'a pas le "pas" sur ce qui est artificiel, ou littéraire' ('lived experience does not prevail over the artificial and the literary'); and written language is precisely an artificiality because it is like 'les choses nées de l'artifice, [...qui] n'ont aucune attache avec la vie, aucune avec la mort' ('things that are born out of artifice, [...which] have absolutely no connection to life, as well as to death') (*PT.III*: 183). The mother language is no different from foreign languages in this aspect, and thus it is also alienated from us, providing no shelter. Through this realisation, we discover the primary foreignness of the mother tongue, and break the bubble of illusion about the unity, identity, and community constructed by the mother tongue. For Quignard, the mother tongue is not only foreign but also fragmented, because not only is there no universal language to unite all different languages, neither is there a unified language or even shared 'silence' that unites internally each individual language (*PT.II*: 122). Everyone speaks a different language, and the infinite linguistic differentiations between individuals force each individual to float like monadic islands on the sea of languages:

Chacun de ceux qui parlent ne peut être égalé ni à la somme ni à l'articulation d'un idiolecte 'intime' et d'une langue nationale 'convenue'. [...]

Il n'y a pas [...] une 'unité' de langue qui soit une ressource mise à leur disposition, ni une mesure indiscutable, ni même un référent 'national'. (*PT.II*: 15-6)

[Each individual of those who speak can be matched up to neither the sum of nor the junctures between an 'intimate' idiom and a 'consensual' national language. [...]

There is no 'unity' of language that could be a resource available for people's use, or an indisputable measure, or even a 'national' point of reference.]

Languages are infinitely diverse on a microscopic level for Quignard. Despite the existence of linguistic consensus within linguistic spheres, consensus cannot be the basis for any *continuity* between different individual subjectivities. Therefore no language can bind people together as a 'national language' supposedly does. As Mitaut observes, Quignard sees an internal fragmentation and 'schizologie' in every language, – not only fragmented within the linguistic system such as having different registers and dialects of French, but also fragmented within each individual's personal use of French. Therefore, under the illusion of unity the mother tongue provides, in fact a 'matricide' of the mother language is always already carried out, because you can always ask 'Combien de langues dans une seule langue?' ('How many languages are there in a single language?') (Mitaut 2008: 480). This is why Quignard professes to be alienated from his mother tongue, French. The flip side of this linguistic alienation, however, is that non-mother tongues and ancient languages become, on the contrary, less foreign and closer to us than they are supposed to be. As Quignard affirms (2012: 239): 'Les sociétés anciennes [...] ne sont pas exotiques [...] à celles qui en dérivent', and therefore antiquity is not more foreign than modernity, nor ancient languages more

remote than modern languages. Quignard's appreciation of classical Chinese can therefore be considered as his approximating himself to a remote non-mother tongue. If not even French constitutes any stable cultural identity or shelter of intimacy for Quignard, then Chinese becomes less radically Other despite its foreignness and non-Frenchness, because the fundamental alienation of all language levels out the degree of foreignness classical Chinese has in relation to modern French.

Re-inventing Chinese antiquity

It is understood now that Quignard's approach to Chinese antiquity is that of inventing the past rather than 'resurrecting' it, to which Quignard admits in an interview:

Lapeyre-Desmaison: 'Dans *Rhétorique spéculative* vous montrez nettement que votre but n'est pas de ressusciter le passé. Votre travail consisterait donc en une invention du passé?

Quignard: J'espère. Latron, Albucius, Kong-souen Long, Sénèque le père.
(Quignard 2001: 127)

[Lapeyre-Desmaison: 'In your *Speculative Rhetoric* you showed clearly that your aim is not to resurrect the past. Does your work therefore consist of an invention of the past?']

Quignard: 'I hope so. Latro, Titus Albucius, Gongsun Long, Seneca the Elder'.]

Besides carrying connotations of creativity and non-historicism, the term 'invention' also conveys strongly the ideas of discovery, imagination, and fiction. This fictional dimension of Quignard's sinophilic inventions is evidenced by the intellectual figures he often cites, who serve as personae in his imaginary theatre of co-existing antiquities and modernities. Fiction

masquerades as history and vice versa, as in the false historical figure of Geoffrey Meaume, the seventeenth-century French etcher invented by Quignard in *Terrasse à Rome*; and in Quignard's humorous biography of the Tang literatus Han Yu (2002: 95): 'Han Yu naquit en 768, obtint son doctorat en 792' (Han Yu was born in 768 and received his PhD in 792'). Both dates are historically correct, except that Han obviously did not complete a PhD but passed the *jinsi* imperial examination in 792 after several attempts. Quignard's anachronistic use of the notion of 'doctorat' decontextualises the Chinese imperial exams and establishes an analogy which contemporary readers could understand. This playful manipulation of temporal consciousness also shows in Quignard's remark about Gongsun and Gorgias (2001: 131): 'Ils vivaient dans le même temps, mais ils ne vivaient pas dans le même temps' ('They lived at the same time, but they did not live at the same time') – which reads as a self-contradiction. Here, Quignard is exploiting the interstices and overlaps between different notions of temporality such as contemporaneity, simultaneity, historical time, and 'le jadis' (the erstwhile). This temporal parallelism and juxtaposition may be understood through Quignard's view (2012: 283) that 'l'Histoire n'est pas linéaire parce que le temps [...] est cyclique' ('History is not linear because time is cyclical'). This cyclical time-view aligns Quignard with ancient Chinese notions of dynastic time, especially the Grand Historian Sima Qian's historiography, where each dynasty repeats the circular temporal structure of rise and fall. In Quignard's view (2002: 232), Sima is not a 'grand *sensitif* du passé' ('neurotic of the past') because he manifests a 'mélancholie' of temporality that sabotages linear evolution. This melancholic, repetitive time thus orients itself towards what Quignard terms 'le jadis', the eternally resurgent time in the cycle of rebirth: 'Le jadis [...] n'a pas encore fini de surgir' ('The erstwhile [...] has not yet finished arising') (Quignard 2012: 257); 'sans cesse le temps "commence de commencer"' ('time "begins to begin" endlessly') (Ibid, 259). The Quignardian

'jadis' is therefore outside time, not only transforming our understanding of time through a fundamentally 'mythic thought' (Pautrot 2003) about rebirth but also positing an ahistorical understanding of language, human existence, and the world. Measured against 'le jadis' that is constantly *in statu nascendi*, all temporalities are the same. Gongsun who lived around 320-250 BCE did not live at the same historical time as Gorgias, who lived around 485-380 BCE ; but Gongsun and Gorgias are exactly parallel in relation to the constantly restarting 'jadis', i.e. one point that has no duration and is immobile.

Thus we understand Quignard's anachronism, as in 'il y a peu de différence entre quelques heures qui nous séparent d'autrui, et quelques millénaires' ('there is little difference between a few hours that separate us from others, and several millenia') (*PT.II*: 39). Are we really closer to our contemporaries than we are to the ancients? Does a contemporaneous relation between two things necessarily say something essential about them? Quignard asks (2001: 131):

De quoi est-on contemporain? De la cafetière électrique qui est en train de bourdonner dans la cuisine? De la sexualité génitale? Du rayon de sol qui traverse la pièce?

[With what are we contemporaneous? With the electric cafetière buzzing in the kitchen? With genital sexuality? With the ray of sunlight crossing the room?]

The most ephemeral phenomena – boiling water bubbling for a few instants and sunlight passing through the room – can coincide temporally with human sexuality and the sun, which have existed since the distant past. Quignard proposes that the most ancient can be alive and contemporary, and vice versa. The Daoist sage Laozi, the 'Vieil Enfant' ('Old Child'), whom Quignard recurrently cites (2002: 193), embodies this *coincidentia oppositorum* between the

ancient and emergent contemporaneity because in Chinese hagiographical legends, Laozi was born an old man after 81 years in his mother's womb. 'Que le proche soit très lointain et le lointain extrêmement proche' ('May what is near be very distant and the distant be extremely near'), Quignard asserts (1994-5: para.11). His writing always points towards 'le jadis', atemporal and transhistorical experiences, and towards a language that 'redonn[e] vie aux expériences que ces siècles, en [la langue], ont lentement tissées' ('bring back to life the experiences that these centuries have gradually woven into language') (*PT.IV*: 111). The pleasure in thinking, reading, and manipulating language is therefore a transhistorical experience that is universal for both the ancient and modern:

Plaisir de la pensée articulée. Plaisir du lecteur [...] En langue grecque: spécifiquement les trois traités qui restent de Gorgias. Dans la vieille Chine: Kong-souen Long. À Rome: De Natura Rerum – de Titus Lucretius Carus. En langue française: Jean de la Fontaine. (Quignard 1990: 58)

[The pleasure of articulated thought. The pleasure of the reader [...] In the Greek language: the three extant treatises by Gorgias, in particular. In ancient China: Gongsun Long. In Rome: *On the Nature of Things* – by Titus Lucretius Carus. In the French language: Jean de la Fontaine.]

These different writers – all known for extraordinary rhetoric and style – are posited in comparison and parallel to each other because Quignard thinks they all provide readerly pleasure by provoking thought. This deliberately constructed parallelism again highlights Quignard's generalist perspective. By giving a 'universal nature' to both Chinese and European writers (Postel in Detrie 2001, 335), Quignard strategically asserts fundamental commonality rather than difference between East and West. In this way, writers from

disparate cultures and historical eras are contemporary to each other because the commonality of experience that they evoke in today's reader – who does not belong to their historical contexts – makes them comparable, and therefore on a par.

Here, although Quignard's common framework for both Chinese and European thought may be criticised as an imposition of a Eurocentric, perhaps even typically French understanding of the universal on Chinese thought, one might also argue that Quignard's universalism breaks the Eurocentric bubble. If, as Jean Chesneaux argues (1996: 14), the seventeenth-century French *philosophes* who reconstructed China as a 'genuine philosophical universality [...] for a world-wide approach to human nature' broke away 'from a Eurocentric view of world history, founded only on Greek and Roman cultures and on earlier Hebrew traditions', then Quignard is analogous to the *philosophes*. Because likewise, Quignard's taking recourse to Chinese antiquity as much as to the Classical tradition to inform his views on language and temporality precisely goes against the exoticization of China that insists it is absolutely different from Europe, and therefore of no significance to it except in re-affirming European self-identity. This universalist outlook enables Quignard to carry out comparative thinking between antiquity and modernity, to re-read classical Chinese texts and transform their relation to us. The use of a generalist comparative framework on non-Western cultures to understand them in relation to the West can therefore turn out, surprisingly, to be a method that is neither Eurocentric nor reductive. The sinologist Michael Puett points out in his foreword to Roberte Hamayon's *Why We Play* (2015: xvi-xvii) that 'it is precisely by *not* undertaking comparative studies that we are most at risk of recapitulating our ethnocentric biases. It is on the contrary through generalizing works [...] that we begin to alter our understandings'. Coming back to Quignard, therefore, his generalist and comparative consideration leads to a re-invention and renewal of Chinese antiquity and its ancient

language, which becomes an eternal return of the ancient as the new as well as the constant novelty that is disguised as the old.

We may now understand that Quignard is exemplary of a certain strand of twentieth-century French sinophilia, namely, an aesthetically creative sinophilia that follows upon Segalen's track and can also be found in other French figures such as Balthus, Michaux, and Gerard Macé. Like them, Quignard is primarily interested in aesthetic forms extrapolated – even decontextualised – from Chinese antiquity, and how they can be recreatively used for literary experiments to reflect on his own concerns. Nevertheless, Quignard also attests to a significant change in the history of French Orientalism because he is devoid of Segalen's insistence on returning to the European Self. Compared to Segalen and to some extent Michaux, Quignard's main novelty is that he no longer has an idealized vision for the Far-East that sees, in a reverse Orientalist way, Chinese antiquity as superior to Western modernity.^{xiii} Quignard respects Chinese antiquity as an extremely rich and complex tradition in its own right, but does not rank it above other cultures or antiquities, for instance Heian Japan and classical India, which he frequently refers to through Shonagon, abbot Kenko, and the *Rigveda*.^{xiv} Ancient China is simply one among the many antiquities that Quignard is interested in, and has no special status in providing remedies of 'wisdom', a 'holistic worldview', or an 'alternative non-logical rationality' in contrast to ancient Greece or modern Europe. These views of China, extending from Levy-Bruhl's 'Eastern mentalities' to sinologists such as Needham and Harbsmeier whom Adrian Chan criticises in his *Orientalism in Sinology* (2009), are notably absent from Quignard. Quignard's engagement with China and other Asian cultures is not a critical or political gesture to resist Eurocentrism, simply because Quignard is a cultural egalitarian and engages with both European and non-European cultures in a universalist way. He brings Chinese writing and thought into broad discussions

about literary style and the human relation to language, without insisting on any Chinese particularism that fetishizes Chinese antiquity as an irreducible Other to European thought and experience. In fact, Quignard's frequent juxtaposition of different Chinese references with a multitude of other references from different cultures and across time^{xv} has a levelling effect that de-exoticizes and un-discriminates his Chinese references for his readers, who would tend to see these references as part of the erudite body of Quignard's influences rather than pick them out as indicators of any unique Chineseness. As Quignard declares (1995: 139-40) 'Il n'y a pas d'Orient à ce monde./Ce monde est sans accueil' ('There is no Orient in this world./This world is groundless'). With Quignard, therefore, the kind of French Orientalism that perpetuates the fetish for the Far-Eastern Other – either in fearing or adoring it – can be said to have died.

We may now try to assess the merits and drawbacks of Quignard's sinophilia, for it highlights in particularly problematic and interesting ways the question of how to treat an ancient tradition to which one has no claims. On the one hand, we find several commendable aspects of Quignard's approach to Chinese antiquity. Firstly, Quignard's declared admiration for classical Chinese language and literature makes his readers (predominantly European) aware of the richness of the Chinese tradition. Quignard's avid attitude of learning towards Chinese and other non-European antiquities brings to the French public's attention esoteric ancient Chinese texts and thinkers such as Gongsun and the *Liezi*, which they would very likely not know about otherwise. Thus, Quignard's readers may develop an interest in Chinese culture and be led to engage with it on a deeper level. Secondly, Quignard's frequent references to Chinese and other non-European cultures go well beyond the European canon and break through Western writers' tendency to nourish themselves on and respond to exclusively European and Anglophone literary traditions. With Quignard, this is impossible,

because his encyclopedic range of inspirational sources affirms the need to think comparatively across different languages, literary traditions, cultures, and temporalities. This approach is also symptomatic of the conceptual death of the French Orientalist tradition mentioned above, and shows the uniqueness and paradoxical nature of Quignard's sinophilia as a love for Chinese antiquity without a fetishizing Chinese particularism.

Nevertheless, we can also view Quignard's sinophilia and general approach to antiquity more critically. To start with, Quignard's profuse referencing, – whether to Li Shangyin, *Sîn-lēqi-unninni*, or vedic literature, – has been criticised as a stylistic defect and misleading cultural appropriation by critics such as Mazzella and Blanckeman.^{xvi} It gives the impression of superficially plucking references out of their historical contexts and bunching them together as illustrations of Quignard's own views or some 'invariable human behaviour', as Pautrot criticises (2003: 754). A specific example is when Quignard writes on his ideas about language and writing systems in *Petits traités*, he does not discuss any concrete linguistic details of any particular language, but cites fragmented and decontextualised etymologies from different languages to make generalisations. Secondly, there is the uncertainty about Quignard's linguistic knowledge, since Quignard professes to not know Chinese or any foreign languages – other than Latin and Greek – the importance of which he emphasises. We may pause here and ask: should Quignard's statement be taken at face value? Is this actually an understatement of his linguistic knowledge, so that his erudition becomes also 'material for fiction' (Vuong 2016: 68) contributing to the Quignard's persona of the 'docte ignorant' (à la Cusanus)? If, however, Quignard's statement is true, we may ask why Quignard has puzzlingly not made the effort to become more multilingual. His understanding of Chinese antiquity and other non-european cultures is compromised, for although a project such as translating Gongsun without knowing classical Chinese is telling as a literary and

translational experiment, his linguistic limitation undercuts the inspiration he draws from Gongsun. This problem can also be posed as: will the understanding of classical Chinese boost the reader's inspiration and pleasure from it or make no difference? The likely answer is that linguistic understanding should enhance the reader's experience, and that Quignard would find reading and creatively translating classical Chinese more rewarding if he learnt more Chinese. But we might also say no and take the view that understanding classical Chinese will not necessarily enhance the reader's experience of Chinese literature and provide more possibilities for inspiration, as when Gyung-Ryul Jang (1985: 353) argues that Pound is true in 'spirit' to Chinese aesthetics in *Cathay* not despite but '*because of his ignorance of the Chinese language*'. If we take this view on Quignard too, however, then the linguistic medium itself – the very thing that Quignard emphasises – becomes negligible. In that case, what incentive would there be to learn any language other than one's own?

Nonetheless, stepping back from the above criticism, Quignard is in fact self-consistently paradoxical in not learning Chinese and other foreign languages. According to his view that all languages are alienated from humanity and therefore foreign, French – supposedly his native language – is foreign to him just as Chinese is foreign, and is internally fractured by a schizology of different varieties and individual uses of French. By this logic, Quignard has always already been speaking, writing, thinking, and translating in a foreign language. Although this may set a bad example for his readers, or make Quignard easily dismissible to sinologists, seen from another perspective, it is also a contribution because Quignard highlights the illusion of linguistic continuity and inheritance. For if every language is foreign and there is no mother-tongue-versus-foreign-languages split, then cultural 'insiders' do not necessarily have more access to the 'truth' about their tradition than cultural 'outsiders'. Interestingly, this is precisely the view that recent scholars studying cultural

appropriation have maintained: e.g. Subha Xavier (2016) and Ileana Chirila (2017) both show that Chinese Francophone writers strategically use self-Orientalising images in their writings about Chinese culture; Xiaomei Chen (1992: 709) argues via the case-study of the anti-nationalist Chinese TV series *Heshang* that 'it is a serious mistake to claim that a native self-understanding is by nature more liberating or "truer" than the view of it constructed by its Other'; and James Young (2005) supports appropriative artistic and literary practices by cultural outsiders as long as the aim of appropriation is not to 'profoundly' offend, because misrepresentation does not necessarily arise from appropriation. If we relate Quignard's Chinese-inspired works to this questioning of the cultural insider/outsider split, we understand that Quignard has broader relevance outside Hexagonal French literature, for he reflects on the bigger question of how modern China and Chinese people connect with their own tradition. Quignard's radical rethinking of the relations between antiquity and contemporaneity, mother tongue and the alienation of human subjectivity through language brings out forcefully the problems with the facile view that language constitutes a continuous and unified cultural identity. In particular, Quignard's debatable French translations and appropriations of classical Chinese texts starkly pose the question of how we moderns can access and understand antiquity without distorting it through our perspectives and misusing it for our contemporary needs. This question is important for creative writers like Quignard as well as sinologists and modern Chinese people who are concerned about understanding their cultural tradition. Ancient Chinese culture and language, if not seriously studied, are very remote from contemporary China and difficult to access for Chinese people themselves. Here, Quignard's re-reading and re-writing of ancient Chinese literature and thought reveal that they cannot be directly transmitted but are necessarily fragmented and transformed over time, across different contexts, between diverse subjectivities and perspectives. Chinese antiquity –

all antiquities in fact – is not something out there for us to retrieve; it needs to be interrogated, reconstructed, and translated into our modern understanding, though always partially and imperfectly. Thus, Quignard's deliberate failure to grasp the historicity of Chinese antiquity shows indirectly that cultural traditions – even one's own – need to be learned rather than automatically inherited. If, according to Quignard, even one's own mother tongue needs to be questioned, only to reveal its fundamental foreignness and discontinuity from one's body and experience, then ancient languages such as classical Chinese would hardly justify any stereotyped cultural identification or inheritance that insists on a notion of transhistorical 'Chineseness'. In other words, for Quignard, a language is not the property of a certain people or culture, or provides a definition of any stable identity, or is a cultural label to be easily pinned to oneself. Although this view disrupts the feeling of cultural belonging and unity, it breaks down the Self-Other dichotomy and dislodges the belief that insiders necessarily occupy a more privileged position than outsiders in regard to understanding the former's culture, and have more authority or even ownership over its interpretations and debates.

Finally, the questionable linguistic knowledge and ahistoricism in Quignard's treatment of Chinese antiquity are precisely the aspects that affirm the recreative nature of his sinophilia: for being recreative is to play with one's sources, to create 'l'illusion linguistique' through a 'mise en jeu' of language (*PT.VI*: 145), and even assume a deceitful imposture of parody in experimental writing and translation. Consistent with his playful and decontextualising treatment of his ancient sources, Quignard is happy to be misunderstood and contradicted by his readers too, as he demonstrated at the Cerisy-la-Salle colloquium in 2004.^{xviii} Quignard's playful attitude towards writing that respects neither the original author nor the original text is also representative of the diffuse approach of contemporary writers

and artists who adopt an increasingly broad and comparative outlook on a multilingual and culturally hybrid world. This outlook typically involves a profusion of citations, keywords, and references that mimic internet search and hypertexts but are often insubstantial, misappropriating, delighting in eclecticism, and created for their word-cloud effect rather than intellectual depth. There is something of this spirit in Quignard's approach to Chinese antiquity, namely, the ludic and deliberately fictive way in which he recycles Chinese texts, philosophical thought and history, albeit always in notably reconstructed forms and without any claim to fidelity. In sum, parallel to keeping French interest in China alive and the disregard for – if not refusal of – the Orientalist fetishization of Chinese antiquity as a unique therapeutic alternative to Western modernity, there are also anti-historicist and creatively salvaging dimensions in Quignard's Chinese-inspired works.

Conclusion

To conclude, firstly, Quignard's case allows us to understand how he can be positioned within a literary practice that involves Sino-French intertextualities and therefore makes Hexagonal French literature inherently transcultural. Secondly, Quignard shows that Chinese antiquity is not only of interest and significance for modern China. Globalization means globalizing not only contemporary cultures and societies but also ancient cultures, or rather, the knowledge of ancient societies that spreads in a global context and is increasingly incorporated into discussions that compare the past with the contemporary to understand both better. Thirdly, Quignard's sinophilia reveals disrupture and fragmentation in the Chinese language and the identity and cultural unity it is supposed to sustain. We may ask to what extent can a modern people lay claims to an ancient culture, for example, when contemporary Chinese people claim to inherit a Chinese cultural identity over several thousand years of linguistic evolution,

shifts in intellectual development and social structure? Too often, the idea of tradition is employed in nationalist myths that serve to reinforce the power of a certain group or institution and refute criticism.^{xviii} Lastly, by discrediting Orientalism through his generalist approach to China, Quignard simultaneously discredits Occidentalism and prompts us to see how it can be a reverse self-Orientalisation rather than real resistance to Eurocentric imperialism. Quignard's radical cultural egalitarianism thus offers a playful disregard for Orientalist stereotypes and challenges indirectly the manipulative use of antiquity in discourses about culture. It also encourages people to engage more with foreign cultures rather than think that cultures are self-enclosed entities that are shut to cultural 'outsiders'. Here I return to my argument for Quignard's relevance to Chinese studies, to re-understanding China and Orientalist appropriation, as mentioned in the introduction. Quignard shows that the appropriation of the non-Western Other is not necessarily imperialist, nor should be considered insignificant by sweeping judgments about its 'superficiality' à la Etiemble because of its distorted reflection of the Other. There is much to assert about Quignard's sinophilia, most importantly the fact that being interested in a foreign language and culture, despite not engaging with it as an epistemological quest, is still better than myopically refusing to go beyond one's own linguistic and cultural bubble. This is because, firstly, nothing is really distinctly and essentially Other; and secondly, as Geoffrey Lloyd emphasises (2015), taking an interest in the Other is the first step towards discovering one's own cultural biases and expanding one's horizons of understanding. This willingness to learn from the Other rather than its fetishization is therefore one of its most important messages that Quignard's Chinese inspirations communicate.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ See Philippe Postel, 'Pascal Quignard et les littératures asiatiques', in *France-Asie: Un siècle d'échanges littéraires*, ed. Muriel Détrie (You-Feng, 2001); Blanckeman 2008.
- ^{iv} For this article focusing on Quignard's relation to Chinese antiquity and how difficult it is for contemporary people to access antiquity, there is not enough scope to discuss Quignard's early modern to modern Chinese references.
- ^v All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.
- ^{vi} Though Shonagon is one of Quignard's important Oriental influences, she will not be discussed here due to the scope of this essay. Quignard's evocation of Shonagon's *zuihitsu* also goes back to Li Shangyin's *zazuan*, which he acknowledges (in Li 1992) as the inspiration source for *zuihitsu*.
- ^{vii} See passage on spontaneous swimming in *Zhuangzi* 19.10; Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue* (Brill, 2004); Eske Møllgaard, *An Introduction to Daoist Thought* (Routledge, 2007); Kuang-ming Wu, *The Butterfly as Companion* (SUNY, 1990).
- ^{viii} Here it is necessary to note that besides Zhuangzian inspiration, Quignard's focus on *écriture* without the authority of the author also relates strongly to the context of post-war

French literature and thought, for example Barthes, where the figure of the author is put into question. This partly reflects Quignard's (post-)structuralist heritage.

- ^{ix} Quignard's claim of not 'speaking' Chinese still does not show the extent of his knowledge of classical Chinese, because reading and understanding classical Chinese (the language of Gongsun) does not require speaking it. In fact, nobody now speaks classical Chinese nor knows precisely how it sounded like. The *hitsudan* 'brush conversation' of pre-modern Japanese travellers in China who could not speak Chinese is an example of communicating in written Chinese only. The question of how much Chinese Quignard knows therefore remains uncertain.
- ^x See interpretations by Johnston 2004, Cheng and Swain 1970.
- ^{xi} See Johnston 2004 for *Zhiwulun's* translation.
- ^{xii} See Quignard's *Lycophron et Zétès* (2010).
- ^{xiii} On how Segalen and Michaux idealized China, see Elodie Laügt, *L'Orient du signe* (Peter Lang, 2008).
- ^{xiv} Collateral comparison with Quignard's fascination with Japan and India would be interesting, though that will need another essay. My view is that Quignard's japonisme is, like his sinophilia, a de-exoticised and universalist view. Nevertheless, Quignard's Chinese references are much more extensive than his Japanese references (usually Shonagon, Kenko, Tanizaki, and Mishima).
- ^{xv} For an enumeration of Chinese and Japanese references, see Postel in Détrie 2001.
- ^{xvi} See Léon Mazzella, 2014 [http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/leon-mazzella/mourir-et-penser-quignard_b_5919738.html], and Blanckeman 2008.
- ^{xvii} See Philippe Bonnefis et Dolorès Lyotard, eds., *Pascal Quignard: Figures d'un Lettré*, (Galilée, 2015).

^{xviii} For more criticism see Chen 1992 and Françoise Lionnet "'Logiques Métisses": Cultural Appropriation and Postcolonial Representations', *College Literature*, vol.19, No.3, 1992: p100-20.