

## Two Imagined Chinas in *Tel Quel*

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**Abstract:** From the mid-1960s, the literary review *Tel Quel* shifted its anti-traditional and avant-garde stance in arts and literature toward politics within the radical political context in France. Its editor Philippe Sollers initiated a "political turn," marked by its transformation from its "structuralist period" to its "China period." Its "China period" inadvertently created a "textual spectacle" of two imagined Chinas: first, a poetic, static "ancient China" represented by Daoism (Taoism), Chinese ideograms, and classical Chinese art and poetry; and second, a revolutionary, subversive "modern China" represented by Maoism along with Lu Xun and other left-wing writers. Taking appropriation, rather than misreading, as a prism to view these imagined Chinas, a strategy of deconstruction emerges from the Telquelians. On the one hand, they attack Western logocentrism through Daoist philosophy, and Chinese ideograms become a crucial Other to assault Western linguistic self-enclosure and phonocentrism, and a way to disperse and diffuse meaning. On the other hand, the Chinese revolutionary spirit probably provided ammunition to reinstate the shattered subject in French theory. For the Telquelians, two imagined Chinas seem like a Chinese wisdom in the movement from structuralism to poststructuralism in French literary theories.

**WANG Yichen**

## **Two Imagined Chinas in *Tel Quel***

### **Introduction**

The *Tel Quel* group's fascination with China during the 1960s and 1970s was a major part of the "China Fad" then prevalent in France, or a newer version of the *Chinoiserie* – it is, however, now viewed in China as a *westward movement of Chinese learning* (中学西传). The *Telquelians* themselves or critics afterwards realized that there were two strands in imagining China: the old and the new. In his interview with Philippe Sollers in 1980, Shuhsi Kao pointed out that Sollers seemed to be more enthusiastic about "la Chine taoïste" (the Taoist China), or the old strand, rather than "la Chine marxiste-léniniste" (China of Marxism and Leninism), the new strand (Translation mine. Sollers, *Improvisations* 99). Julia Kristeva also recalled, "Two years after the establishment of diplomatic relations with China, I read Joseph Needham's encyclopedic work *Science and Civilization in China* in Paris and began to learn Chinese. However, unlike many of my contemporaries, I am more fascinated by China's mysterious civilization rather than 'The Cultural Revolution' launched by Chairman Mao" ("Changing History" 56). How could these two imagined Chinas, the Daoist (Taoist) old China and the Maoist new China, appear in a mixed bag in *Tel Quel*?

The "Telquelians" mainly refers to a literary school based around the literary review *Tel Quel*, which included its editor Philippe Sollers and other French intellectuals such as Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Michelle Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. The school's positions of "anti-tradition" and "avant-garde" had a mixed reception of praise and disparagement in academic circles. As Richard Wolin puts it, "During the 1960s *Tel Quel*, led by consummate literary entrepreneur Philippe Sollers, rode to notoriety on the crest of nearly every passing intellectual trend: the nouveau roman, structuralism, and poststructuralism" (Wolin 233). However, the significant role it plays is undeniable in contemporary French theories. Jonathan Culler devotes a whole chapter to the *Telquelians* entitled "Beyond Structuralism" (Culler 81). Patrick Ffrench argues that "the history of *Tel Quel* can be seen as the adventure of theory and its subsequent undoing by the literary text, a pattern historically mapped out over the twenty-year period... Its conception, meanwhile, is locatable in the turn to linguistics, generally in the human sciences and specifically within literature" (Ffrench 18). China figured prominently in *Tel Quel*, deserving a good deal more scrutiny than what is available now. An examination of *Tel Quel's* two imagined Chinas may shed some light on its transformation from structuralism to poststructuralism in French theories.

### **1. *Tel Quel*: From its "Structuralist Period" to its "China Period"**

There is now an academic consensus that there was a "China period" in *Tel Quel*, although its exact timeframe remains undefined. Mireille Calle-Gruber, an expert in the history of contemporary French literature, defined the years from 1971 to 1976 as the "period of Chinese thought" of *Tel Quel* in his monograph *Histoire de la littérature française du XXe siècle: les repentirs de la littérature* (Calle-Gruber 130). His claim is reasonable to some extent. The declaration "Position du Mouvement de juin 71" published by *Tel Quel* in 1971 is a significant sign that the *Telquelians* had broken off its relationship with the French Communist Party (PCF) and taken a clear-cut stand in support of Maoism during the Sino-Soviet Debate. The year 1976, when the Cultural Revolution came to an end, also marks the end of the *Telquelians'* imagination of China. In the English-speaking world, although Ffrench also saw 1976 as the end of "China period," he did not clearly point out the initial time when the *Telquelians* encountered China. This process is described by Ffrench as a series of events. Among them, the most critical one is the publication of Sollers's translations of Mao Zedong's poems in France in 1970. "Sollers's interest in China and Maoism is ambiguous because it ran parallel to his dialogue with the PCF. The publication of translations of poems by Mao in 1970, by Sollers, was a crucial gesture not only in threatening and pushing the *Tel Quel*-PCF relation, but also promoting Maoism in France in general" (Ffrench 123). In Chinese academia, Liu Mingjiu 柳鸣九, a famous scholar on French literature, believed that the "China period" of *Tel Quel* should be 1968-1974 as, since 1968, Sollers started to learn Chinese and Marxism and paid attention to China's Cultural Revolution. This was until 1974, when a delegation from *Tel Quel* visited China and found that there was a huge gap between "real China" and "imagined China," leading to their gradual loss of interest in China (Liu, "Memories" 52-55). Liu's view represents the mainstream stance of Chinese academia. Although these views differ

from each other, they generally point to the late 1960s and early 1970s. From a temporal perspective, this period coincided with French theory's shift from structuralism to poststructuralism. Therefore, to discuss the influence of China on *Tel Quel* from the perspective of discourse transformation, it is necessary to give a brief background of the "structuralist period" of *Tel Quel*.

In the 1960s, French intellectual circles were undergoing a critical transformation from existentialism to structuralism. In his works *Anthropologie Structurale* and *The Savage Mind*, Levi-Strauss introduced structuralist linguistics into anthropological studies, greatly impacting the existentialist philosophy that had dominated French intellectual circles after World War II. Levi-Strauss severely criticized existentialism as represented by Sartre: "Sartre, who claims to find an anthropology, separates his own society from others. A Cogito – which strives to be pure – retreats into individualism and empiricism and is lost in the blind alleys of social psychology" (Levi-Strauss 250). The scientism attitude of formalist linguistics was a breath of fresh air for French intellectuals long immersed in desolation and loss of existentialism. A new fashion of theory started to permeate French intellectual circles. Scientific ideology, emphasizing objective truth, dismantled the humanism fort constructed by existentialism. Structuralism, spanning anthropology, philosophy, and literary studies, rapidly entered all French humanities as a research method in the 1960s, opening the "Theory era" of France.

*Tel Quel* came into being against this background and later became a pioneering venue for the dissemination of structuralism in the literary field in the 1960s. In March 1960, the quarterly literary review *Tel Quel* came into existence in Paris, in cooperation with left-wing writers Sollers, Jean-Edern Hallier, and others, supported by the publishing house of Éditions du Seuil. The review was divided into four issues each year by season, and each issue contained four sections: literature, philosophy, science, and politics. The magazine did not cease publication until its 94th issue, at the end of 1982. The most important part of *Tel Quel* was the literature section. However, the review's division into these four subject areas illustrates its tendency to be theoretically dominated by the humanities, which, to a certain extent, reflects the potential influence of structuralism. In 1963, Sollers met Roland Barthes, and they became collaborators in their careers. With Barthes as the intermediary, some structuralist researchers from the prestigious higher education institute École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, among them Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov, became important allies with *Tel Quel*. A romantic aside is that Kristeva, who attended Barthes's seminar as a student, came to know Sollers through her classmate Genette and married Sollers in 1967. These scholars undoubtedly promoted the development of structuralism in *Tel Quel*. Taking the series *Collection Tel Quel* published during this period as an example, many monographs have become classics of structuralist semiotics, for instance, Roland Barthes' *Essais critiques* (1964) and *Critique et Vérité* (1966), Todorov's compilation *Théorie de la littérature: textes des Formalistes russes* (1966), and Genette's *Figures 1* (1966) and *Figures 2* (1969).

However, the radical political situation in France in the mid-to-late 1960s urged the Telquelians, represented by Sollers, who had posited "anti-tradition" and "avant-garde," to seek what exists beyond the text and embark on a "political turn" in their theories. In May 1968, student riots broke out in France, spilling over into a general strike. At the end of that year, *Théorie d'ensemble* compiled by Sollers was published. The book, containing 26 articles by 14 scholars such as Foucault, Barthes, and Derrida, conveys the Telquelians' major theoretical claims in this period. On its back cover, a paragraph succinctly explains the theoretical orientation of *Tel Quel*:

Le passage de idéologie 'littéraire' à la science de cette idéologie, à la science des rapports entre la production "lpoétique" ou "Romanesque" et les mutations toujours plus coupantes du savoir.

The transition from "literary ideology" to the science of this ideology, to the science of the relationship between "poetic" or "novelistic" production and the increasingly sharp mutations of knowledge. (Translation mine)

In his article "Écriture et Révolution," collected in *Théorie d'ensemble*, Philippe Sollers made a more assertive claim that "L'écriture et la révolution font cause commune l'une donnant à l'autre sa recharge signifiante et élaborant, comme arme, un mythe nouveau (writing and revolution share a common cause where one gives the other significant support, serving as a weapon and expounding a new myth)" (Translation mine. Sollers, *Théorie* 79). It can be seen that, although semiotics still affects the positioning of *Tel Quel*, the radical view on the text in this book profoundly shows the political turn of *Tel Quel* during this period: it emerges from the closed text and connects with reality; armed with

literature, it pursues subversion, revolution, and politics, that is, "the science of this ideology." It was in this process that the Telquelians discovered China, guiding *Tel Quel* to enter its "China period."

The most important intermediaries for *Tel Quel*'s "China period" were texts related to China. These available text resources, which generally fall into three groups, directly shaped the Telquelians' cognition of China. The first text is *De la Chine* by the Italian journalist Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi. It was the Telquelians' affirmation and the PCF's prohibition of this book that finally led to the broken relationship between the two in 1971. More importantly, the romantic descriptions of "the Cultural Revolution" in this book inspired the Telquelians' imagination of "revolutionary China" to a large extent. The second group of texts includes the French versions of Mao Zedong's philosophy. Based on a detailed quantitative investigation, Julian Bourg pointed out that,

Maoism arrived in France at a fortuitous time, its international promotion by China in the 1960s coinciding with openness in France toward alternative radicalisms. The efforts of the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing, yielding the Little Red Book and, perhaps more importantly, the multi-volume *Selected Works*, coincided with domestic circumstances in such a way as to allow the seeds of *la pensée* Mao to fall in particularly fertile soil. (226)

These translations and publications provided basic textual support for the rise of "Maoism" in France, which affected the Telquelians to a certain extent. For example, in Derrida's paper "Dissemination" in 1971, he commented on Sollers's novella *Nombres* (Numbers) by quoting Mao Zedong's metaphor of "opening a traditional Chinese medicine shop(开中药铺)" mentioned in *Opposing Stereotyped Party Writing*(反对党八股) (Derrida 23). His citation indicates that the text Derrida read was the French version of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* translated and published by Foreign Languages Press in 1967. The third category of texts relates to sinologists' China studies. For example, Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilization in China* and Marcel Granet's *La Pensée Chinoise* played a crucial role in the Telquelians' cognition of China during this period. In addition to Needham and Granet, there were many other sinologists, such as François Cheng and Viviane Alleton, whose papers were published in the two special issues on China *Tel Quel* that appeared in 1972, which will be discussed later. If we say the discussions on *De la Chine* and *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* were mainly about "revolutionary China," then the sinologists' discussions were more focused on "ancient China." Therefore, in the analysis of these text types, the two imagined "Chinas" become clear in the Telquelians' presentation.

## **2. The Specific Representations of "Two Imagined Chinas" in *Tel Quel***

Before we judge the value of the "two imagined Chinas," it is necessary to analyze the specific representations of how the Telquelians weaved the abstract concept of "two imagined Chinas." The discussion here is mainly around the articles about China in *Tel Quel*, especially the three special issues on China published in joint issue no. 48-49 (1972) and issues no. 50 (1972) and 59 (1974). In addition, relevant Telquelian works that mentioned China, but were not published in *Tel Quel* during this period, are also under examination in this paper.

### **2.1 *Tel Quel*'s imagination of ancient China**

In terms of quantity, the number of texts about ancient China published by *Tel Quel* is far less than those about modern China in the same period. This partially reflects that the Telquelians, led by Sollers, were focusing on modern China, or "revolutionary China," at that time. However, we should note that when the Telquelians' passion for "revolutionary China" subdued after 1980, it was ancient China that left them a more lasting and profound influence. On June 17, 1988, Liu Mingjiu interviewed Sollers in a cafe near Éditions Gallimard, a publishing house in Paris. Sollers said in this interview:

In another ten years, people may be able to see that the enthusiasm of our young generation in France for China in those years was not a waste of time. Our feelings for China were later summed up and implemented as an interest in, and love for, Chinese culture, poetry, painting, and Chinese language. Especially because we took the wrong detour, our understanding has become more profound. For my part, I have studied Chinese for two years, and I aim to translate *Tao Te Ching* (《道德经》) into French. (Liu, "Memories" 54)

In general, *Tel Quel*'s ancient China was mainly constructed through three cultural elements: Taoist culture, Chinese characters, and classical art as represented by *shi* (poetry) and *ci* (lyrics).

The Telquelians attached great importance to the appropriation of Chinese Taoist culture. In 1969, the first article related to China was published in issue no. 38 of *Tel Quel*, titled "La Logique Chinoise,"

by Chang Tung-Sun 张东荪. This article takes the lead in setting up the image of China as "the Other" of the West. It argues that the West, especially since Aristotle, has followed the logic of identity, while China follows the logic of correlative duality. China's classics Lao Zi 老子, Zhuang Zi 庄子, and *The Book of Changes* 《易经》 all typically reflect this mode of thinking (the importance of this article will be analyzed later). Sollers also recalled: "In 1965, I published a small book *Drame* (Drama), through which I tried to find the most suitable expression for 'emptiness.'.....It was through a mental and physical experience that I became interested in Chinese philosophy, Chinese poetry, and the disposition of the Chinese body in relation to language and writing" (Translation mine. *Improvisations* 75). Obviously, Taoist culture had become a starting point for Sollers to engage with China, driven by the pursuit of "emptiness." His pursuit of "emptiness" in *Drama* only reflects one aspect of the Taoist influence. The 64 chapters of this small book correspond to the 64 hexagrams in *The Book of Changes*. Liu Yuning 刘宇宁, an expert on Telquelians in China, pointed out that the first person (*je*) and the third person (*il*) in *Drama* alternately narrate, thus constantly promoting the generation of the text. The core philosophical basis behind this is "Tao that alternates between Yin and Yang" (Liu, "The Revolution" 83).

Chinese characters and classical art, such as poetry and lyrics, also aroused a strong interest among the Telquelians. The Chinese characters quoted by the Telquelians are traditional Chinese characters, rather than simplified Chinese characters, which are highly symbolized. In 1965, another Sollers novel, *Nombres* (Numbers), was published. Regardless of its weak plot, the novel features a large number of Chinese characters in the narrative, thus forming a very avant-garde symbolic ideographic system. The intertextuality between "writing" and text production attracted the attention of the Telquelians. Sollers' unconventional expression was largely influenced by Ezra Pound. In 1965, Pound's poem "Les cantos pisans (The Pisan Cantos)" was translated into French and published by Denis Roche, an important collaborator of *Tel Quel* in the period. Sollers highly praised Pound's practice of inserting Chinese into English poems and believed that the attempt to put these two completely heterogeneous languages together had formed the wonderful effect of "a stop, a mirror and an electrode that comes to connect to something else" (Translation mine. *Improvisations* 78). Kristeva was also concerned with the uniqueness of Chinese characters. While she was studying Chinese at Paris Diderot University, also known as Paris 7, during 1966-1970, Kristeva introduced Chinese in her linguistics monograph *Language, the Unknown* (1969). In the section "China: Characters as Knowledge," she explained the relationship between the ideographic and phonological aspects of Chinese characters, "six word-formation methods (六书)" of Chinese characters, and European academic discussions on Chinese characters. The art of poetry and lyrics, with Chinese characters as the carrier, is also an important focus for Telquelians (Kristeva, *Language* 72-81). The joint issue no. 49-50 of *Tel Quel* published François Cheng's "An Analysis of the Poetic Language of Ancient Chinese Poetry," in which poems and lyrics written by Li Bai 李白, Du Fu 杜甫, Zhang Ruoxu 张若虚, Li Qingzhao 李清照, and other poets were selected, and rhetorical devices such as ellipsis, orthography, and antithesis in Chinese classical poetry and lyrics were analyzed in a structuralist way. François Cheng's paper was followed by Viviane Alleton's article "Chinese Writing."

## 2.2 *Tel Quel's* imagination of modern China

Modern China is a key focus for the Telquelians. The articles on modern China in *Tel Quel* vary in theme, including philosophy, literature, education, diplomacy, medical treatment, political movements, and gender issues. From the perspective of literary theory, Mao Zedong's philosophical thought and the left-wing literature represented by Lu Xun 鲁迅 are two significant cultural symbols in the Telquelians' imagination of modern China.

The first symbol pertains to Mao Zedong's charisma and his philosophy. "In the autumn of 1968, *Tel Quel* published a collective declaration of the common theory seeking 'total subversion,' and regarded writing and revolution as a common cause, which marked that the Telquelians had entered its period of Mao Zedong aesthetics" (Zeng, "Maoist Aesthetics" 14-20). The "China period" of *Tel Quel* is directly referred to as the "period of Mao Zedong aesthetics" in this quote, showing the Telquelians' strong pursuit of Mao Zedong and his philosophical thought. This strong pursuit stemmed to a large extent from Sollers' own utopian imagination of the Cultural Revolution in China. Sollers' romantic imagination of China soon spread to other Telquelians, as big character posters (大字报) began to appear in the offices of *Tel Quel*, and the "Mao suit" (that is, the Chinese tunic suit) became the fashionable dress of the Telquelians. They even wore Chairman Mao's portrait badge on their chests during their field trips in China. In addition, "Mao Zedong Quotes" and "Mao Zedong Poems" also began to appear in the magazine. In 1971, issue no. 40 of *Tel Quel* published Sollers' translations

of ten poems by Mao Zedong. The back covers of the two special issues of *Tel Quel* on China in 1972 stated: "Literature and art are subordinate to politics, but in their turn exert a great influence on politics," a famous remark from Mao in "The Speech at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" (Mao, "Talks at the Yan'an" 866).

The Telquelians did not simply translate Mao Zedong's philosophical thought. They were fascinated by dialectics and contradiction theory, as these views strongly supported practical acts such as struggle and revolution. Mao's thought even became an important theoretical resource for the Telquelians to criticize revisionism (such as exhibited in the French Communist Party and the Soviet Communist Party). The most important article is *La lutte philosophique dans la Chine révolutionnaire*, written by Sollers in the joint issue no. 48-49 in 1972. In this article, Sollers expressed support for Mao Zedong's concept of "splitting one into two" in Mao's work *On Contradiction* (矛盾论), because the "splitting" advocated by Mao showed a strong sense of uncompromising struggle and revolution.

The second of the cultural symbols in the Telquelians' imagination of China is the left-wing revolutionary literature and art represented by Lu Xun. The opening part of issue no. 48-49 of *Tel Quel* cited from Lu Xun's "Wild Grass" 野草 in the dedication, with the corresponding Chinese after the French text: "地火在地下运行, 突奔。熔岩一旦喷出, 将烧尽一切野草以及乔木, 于是并无可朽腐。但我坦然, 我将大笑, 我将歌唱(The fire runs underground and rushes. Once the lava erupts, it will burn all the wild grass and trees, so there is no decay. But I hold unruffled calm. I will laugh. I will sing)"(Translation mine). One Telquilian, Michelle Loi, played a very important role in interpreting Lu Xun's thought and Chinese left-wing revolutionary literature and art during this period. Michelle Loi, a student of René Étiemble, who was a great scholar of comparative literature at Sorbonne University, published her monograph *Reeds on the Wall: Chinese Western Poets, 1919 – 1949* (Roseaux sur le mur: les poètes occidentalistes chinois, 1919-1949) in 1971, based on her doctoral thesis. In the section "Luxun, le poème en prose. Naissance du réalisme socialiste" (Lu Xun, the prose poem: The birth of socialist realism), Loi specifically analyzes Lu Xun's *Wild Grass*. Loi points out that the idea of Chinese literature serving politics in Lu Xun's works had a profound impact on Yan'an literature and art, and she also praises Lu Xun as "the most original and typical Chinese writer" (102). Loi not only translated Lu Xun's works "Remembrance for the Sake of Forgetting" and "Opinions on the Left-wing Writers' Alliance" (*Tel Quel* no.48-49), but also demonstrated her own interpretations of Lu Xun such as "Reading Lu Xun" (*Tel Quel* no.53), and her macro understanding of Chinese left-wing literature and art such as "Commemorating Yan'an" (*Tel Quel* no.50). If the article "Lu Xun, the Prose Poem: The Birth of Socialist Realism" is more about interpreting Lu Xun from the perspective of comparative literature, an "influence-acceptance" dynamic of Chinese and French literature, then in the platform of *Tel Quel*, Michelle Loi has constructed the image of Lu Xun as a "revolutionary writer," that is, Lu Xun is not only a writer, but more importantly, he is a revolutionary writer who takes literature as the main tool to intervene in social revolution. Viewing Lu Xun as a "revolutionary writer" simplifies Lu Xun's image, as his thought is more complex, but this image indeed conforms to the radical attitude of *Tel Quel* at that time. Profoundly speaking, it also echoes Mao Zedong's literary and artistic thought to some degree, as the generation of Lu Xun's image as a "revolutionary writer" is closely related to Mao's classic arguments:

Lu Xun is the main general of China's Cultural Revolution. He is not only a great writer, but also a great thinker and a great revolutionist... Lu Xun is the most correct, the bravest, most determined, most loyal, and most enthusiastic national hero who fights against the enemy and represents the majority of the whole nation on the cultural front. ("On New Democracy" 698)

### 3. The Shared Strategy of "Two Imagined Chinas": Deconstruction

Is the text spectacle of "two imagined China" exhibited by the Telquelians a "misreading" of China? If so, what is "correct reading"? George Steiner said that human communication is essentially an interlingual translation: "in the records of translation, a fortunate misreading is the source of new life" (295). Therefore, cross-cultural studies under a perspective of mutual learning should go beyond "misreading," since the key to the problem is "appropriation," during which the Telquelians have endowed Chinese culture with new functions. In this way, we can not only understand the significance of Chinese culture to the Telquelians, but also be inspired to explore more of Chinese culture through the lens of the Telquelians ("the Other" to China). Based on the idea of "appropriation," both ancient China and modern China played a significant role in French theory, namely deconstruction, which has infused unique Eastern wisdom into the discourse transformation from structuralism to poststructuralism (or "post-structuralism").

First of all, the Taoist thought of "the transformation and mutual generation of *yin* and *yang*" (阴阳转化) became the most important tool for the Telquelians to deconstruct the Logocentrism in Western philosophy. For a long time, the core concept of Chinese Taoist philosophy has been regarded as "non-action" (无为), and a series of core concepts formed from this concept are "purifying the heart to be clear like a mirror," (涤除玄览) "learning from nature," (师法自然) and "fasting the mind, sitting in oblivion," (心斋坐忘) revealing disinterestedness that transcends the secular world. However, in the Telquelians' appropriation, the thought of "the transformation of *yin* and *yang*" in Taoist philosophy showed revolutionary significance in deconstructing the Western logocentrism carried down from ancient Greece. It was pointed out above that in 1969, *Tel Quel* published Chang Tung-Sun's article "La Logique Chinoise," which is not accidental but can be traced back to Kristeva. In Kristeva's paper "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in which she introduces Bakhtin to France, she already makes note of Chang Tung-Sun. "It is no accident that the shortcomings of Aristotelian logic when applied to language were pointed out by, on the one hand, twentieth-century Chinese philosopher Chang Tung-Sun (the product of a different linguistic heritage – ideograms – where, in place of God, there extends the Yin-Yang 'dialogue') and, on the other, Bakhtin..." (Kristeva, *Desire* 70). Here Kristeva not only saw the ideographic features of Chinese characters, but also resonated with the thinking logic of "Yin-Yang dialogue" behind the ideograms. This Taoist logic, the "Other" or "supplement" to Aristotle's philosophy, was also internalized in Kristeva's theoretical construction of intertextuality. In Joseph Needham's article "Le temps et l'homme oriental," he highlights Taoist "cyclical thought" by quoting "Return is the characteristic movement of the Tao (the order of Nature)" from *Tao Te Ching* and Marcel Granet's interpretation "the proper virtue of time is to proceed by revolution" (14). "Return is the characteristic movement of the Tao" originally refers to the laws of Tao's movement, but it suggests a revolutionary force in Granet's interpretation. However, in Joseph Needham's article, Taoism is only one of the philosophical schools he listed. It is Sollers that gives more significance to Taoism.

When Sollers talked about "Taoist China," he pointed out that Tao is profoundly different from Western culture: "it was something that was not just knowledge but a kind of personal experience that made a very strong break for me with Western culture with its way of focusing on a kind of completeness, of substantial unity" (Translation mine. *Improvisations* 99). Sollers then gave a more specific explanation: "...to find a void that is not a disguised full, a real void, and that is very difficult. What is usually taken for emptiness, especially in materialist theories, is only a kind of disguised substantialism" (Translation mine. 100). The dialectical interpretation of "void and full" shows Sollers' penetrating insight into Taoist philosophy, which also demonstrates that the "void" of Taoism is not emptiness in the sense of ethics, but a spiritual realm in the sense of philosophy. The "void" is the opposite to "being" that Western logocentrism has long sought to define, or "substantialism" in Sollers's words. Sollers relinquished the long-term quest for "being" since ancient Greek philosophy. In particular, the text view reflected by his series of novels shows a sense of generation based on "the transformation of *yin* and *yang*," and the spirit behind it is "Yi (易)." To attack "being" with "becoming" shows the greatest influence of "Chinese logic" on the Telquelians, as it inspired their revolutionary behaviors while impacting the static, eternal, and orderly "scientific discourse" constructed by structuralism.

Secondly, Chinese characters also helped promote French literary theory to get rid of structuralism from many aspects. Ancient Chinese characters also functioned as a tool of deconstruction for the Telquelians although they had different perspectives in discussing Chinese characters. For Sollers, Chinese characters became a crucial methodology in presenting intertextuality, which shows the deconstruction of the structuralist closed-text view. For a long time, scholars of intertextuality theory have paid more attention to the theoretical contributions of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, while ignoring the exploration of specific literary practices of Philippe Sollers. The novella *Nombres* is a key practical text, in which Sollers incorporated Chinese characters, forming a unique meaning-generation mechanism. In Sollers' article "Écriture et révolution," the interviewer Jacques Henric also notes the above-mentioned phenomenon, and goes on to discuss the issue of Chinese "citation." Sollers further explains:

....[L]es idéogrammes font partie de la narration; ils jouent comme force graphique de base sur laquelle vient se briser l'écriture phonétique, ils la traduisent dans ses effets terminaux (de telle façon qu'un membre de phrase saute ainsi du français au chinois)... L'écriture du texte essaie d'atteindre ce champ dans son rendement propre (rythmes, rimes). Les traces chinoises, même si on en reçoit seulement le choc inconscient, sont là pour marquer en somme le *retour du refoulé*, un fonctionnement qui frappe à la fois



de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur(*avant* la représentation ou *après* elle) notre système linguistique et commence à le repenser, à le dépasser.

... [I]deograms are an integral part of the narrative; they serve as a fundamental visual element upon which phonetic writing is based, ultimately translating it into its final effects, such that an element of a sentence transitions from French to Chinese... The text's composition seeks to engage with this aspect in its own performance, encompassing rhythm and rhyme. The Chinese traces, even if we only perceive their unconscious impact, also signify the 'return of the repressed,' a process that simultaneously affects our linguistic system from within and without, both prior to and following its representation, prompting a reevaluation and expansion of our understanding. (Translation mine. *Théorie* 77-78)

Sollers' reflection on intertextuality goes beyond "intertextuality." His use of Chinese characters made him think about "inter-civilization," which might ultimately impact Western civilization. For Kristeva, Chinese characters are "the other" that not only impinges on the synchronic system of structuralist linguistics, but also deconstructs the phonocentrism of alphabetic characters with their special ideographic nature. Kristeva's 1969 monograph, *Le Langage, cet inconnu* (Language, the Unknown), shows the dialogues within Kristeva's thought in the late 1960s: the linguistic monograph responds to the then vigorous structuralism movement; however, the historical sorting of Chinese and other languages in the book transcends structuralism in the historical dimension. Kristeva attached great importance to the particularity of Chinese as an ideograph, especially under the influence of Sollers' *Nombres*. Kristeva also endowed Chinese with the significance of deconstruction: "ideograms or of Chinese poetry...come to tear us away from what an entire 'logocentric' science (the one we have followed during the course of the preceding analysis) wanted to make us accept as the image of our language" (*Language* 294).

Jacques Derrida explored more than the Chinese character itself. As a heterogeneous symbol, the Chinese character helped construct his concept of "dissemination," thus achieving his deconstruction of the view on static meaning of the text. The essay "Dissemination" included in the essay collection *Dissemination* is Derrida's comment on Sollers' *Nombres*. The heterogeneity and discontinuity brought by the embedding of a large number of Chinese characters in *Nombres* attracted Derrida's attention, which prompted him to specially discuss the "use of Chinese graphic forms." He believed that the use of these forms, "according to the worst hypothesis," had the aim of "the ornamentation of the text or the decoration of the page through a supplementary effect of fascination, which would haunt it by freeing the poetic from the constraints of a certain system of linguistic representation; according to the best hypothesis, it was intended to allow the forces of the designs themselves to play directly before the eyes of those who are not familiar with the rules of their functioning" (Derrida 356). This static reception effect is unsatisfactory to Derrida. Therefore, Derrida points out that the use of the Chinese characters embedded in Sollers' text is different from the above two assumptions, as *Nombres* "draws a different kind of strength from that graphy that invades it, framing it in a regular, obsessive manner, which becomes more and more massive and inescapable" (356). This is a dynamic reading process, during which the thickness of the text is opened, and the meaning of the text is incomplete, open, and tends to be infinite – the process is namely "dissemination."

Thirdly, the strong subjectivity of "revolutionary China" made it possible for French theory to reconstruct the subject shattered in structuralism. It is easier to understand the deconstruction function of modern China to the Telquelians because revolution means subversion and resistance. As Lisa Lowe states, "China was constructed as an object of desire within particular veins of the counter-ideological discourses of feminism, psychoanalysis, and French Maoism, whose project was the criticism of French culture and whose key theoretical strategies depended on an assertion not of national homogeneity but of difference and the self-determination of a variety of peoples" (138). What needs to be pointed out here is that Lisa Lowe's "China" only relates to modern China, and she ignores that ancient China also has critical meaning in the Telquelians' narrative. However, was the Telquelians' appropriation of Mao Zedong Thought and their trip to China in 1974 merely driven by revolutionary passion? Maybe not. From the perspective of theoretical discourse transformation, the subjectivity advocated by the revolutionary spirit of modern China was also, to a certain extent, internalized in theory after structuralism.

Here one person in particular has to be mentioned: Kristeva. While Sollers paid close attention to the philosophy of struggle in Mao Zedong's *On Contradiction*, Kristeva creatively appropriated *On Practice*: "People need to transform themselves and the environment, which is a dual transformation both at the subjective and objective level. This is the theoretical characteristic of *On Practice* that attracted Kristeva most" (Zhang 67). It should be mentioned that in the discourse transformation from structuralism to poststructuralism, Kristeva's subjectivity theory mainly benefits from Bakhtin and Freud. However, the influence of the Chinese element cannot be ignored. In the book *La révolution du*

*langage poétique* (Revolution in Poetic Language), she historically reviews Marx's concept of practice, forming a theoretical system from Hegel to Mao Zedong. It is clear that Mao Zedong's *On Practice* (实践论) triggered more theoretical enthusiasm in Kristeva. In particular, she summarized the cognitive process in *On Practice* in three steps: "practice, truth, practice," a dynamic process that shows the tense relationship between the subject and the external objective world: practice is the main way for the subject to break through the cage of self-consciousness. Changing the subject's self-consciousness also changes external things and at the same time brings the contradiction of external things back into the subjective consciousness. It is this dynamic process that keeps the subject constantly breaking through its consciousness, until "the reconstituting of the knowing unity (the subject)" is realized (Kristeva, *Revolution* 205). After her trip to China in 1974, Kristeva saw the power of Chinese women as the subject: "I saw that women play an important role in Chinese society... Motivated by this, I wrote a book called *About Chinese Women* after returning to France" (*Subject* 86-87). Considering the academic development of Kristeva in the 1970s, it can be said that *About Chinese Women* plays a mediating role in Kristeva's research focus' transition from semiotics to feminism.

### Conclusion

The Telquelians' appropriation of Chinese culture echoed the translation and introduction of French literary theories in Chinese academic circles in the 1950s and 1960s (Zeng and Wang, "Western Marxism"). From the perspective of misreading, whether it is the romantic imagination of China by the Telquelians or China's critical acceptance of French Marxist literary theories propounded by such representatives as Lefebvre, Garaudy, Althusser, and Sartre under the guidance of Mao Zedong Thought on Literature and Art, both sides have shown malpositioning in understanding. However, the key to the problem is how these theories of "the Other" attack and influence and are internalized by the local culture. From this point of view, the Telquelians' appropriation of Chinese culture provided deconstruction resources for French theory to discard structuralism, while the Chinese scholarly translation and introduction of French literary theories injected a humanistic aesthetic discourse into China's literary theory in the Mao Zedong era which was completely different from the previously prevailing Soviet literary theory. History is history, but the dialogue spirit of those cross-cultural explorers in those years is immortal. The direct connection established by the Telquelians between "Revolutionary China" and "Taoist China" has the potential to stimulate further contemplation among contemporary Chinese scholars. Does the deconstructive function, as elucidated in the Taoist philosophical concept of "non-action," imply the possibility of revolution? Moreover, does this imply an intrinsic connection between traditional Chinese philosophy and Marxism? These questions warrant ongoing and in-depth academic exploration.

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