[澳]马克林（Colin Mackerras）著

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WESTERN IMAGES OF
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Author's Preface

When historians of the future look back on the last decades of the twentieth century and the first of our own they will likely pick out the rise of China as one of the key trends of the period. They will notice the change in balance between the currently dominant civilization, the West, and others that are rising, among which China is preeminent. How China and the West interrelate, including how the dominant culture sees the rising one, is a topic of great significance. This is an entirely adequate reason for studying Western images of China. But I would like to add my personal perspective that adds to my motivation for writing about this topic.

I first became interested in China in the late 1950s through my late mother Catherine Mackerras. She was herself not interested in China but rather in Europe. At that time the fear of China dominated policy towards Asia in Australia, where both she and I were born and lived most of our lives. However, my mother could see that China would be important for Australia's future and, when the government announced scholarships to study Asia, she encouraged me to apply. In the late 1950s very few people in Australia were interested in studying Asia or its languages, let alone Chinese. I am eternally grateful to my mother for her perceptiveness and her encouragement. The fact that I was successful in my scholarship application literally transformed my life, for the better.

After studying Chinese in Australia I went to Cambridge, England. It was there that, as explained in Chapter 3, my wife and I got the chance to come and teach English in Beijing. Once again this opportunity transformed my life, for the better, because it made me intensely interested in China and its people and gave me the chance to see it and study it at first hand. The two years also gave me a profound respect and love for China, its culture and its people.

Since that time, I have researched several aspects of China, past, modern and contemporary, including its theatre and ethnic minorities. In particular, my interest in China has motivated me to study how my own culture in the West views China. It is a topic that I have found interests people in China as well, and as early as 1986 I was invited to teach a course entitled "Western Images of China" at the Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU). I have upgraded, revised and updated the course many times, teaching it both at the BFSU and Renmin University of China, as well as giving lectures in various universities around the country on some aspect of Western images of China. I have also written two earlier books on the topic, using a wide-ranging approach and covering Western images from the days of Ancient Rome.

This book does owe its origin to the courses I have taught. However, what makes it different is the rise of China, where I began this preface. This had barely begun when I published earlier books. But now it has firmly established itself as a dominant world trend, necessitating a fresh look at how the West views China. Although there is quite a bit of background history in this book, the main focus is on the period of the People's Republic of China and especially since China's rise began.

Not surprisingly, I have learned a great deal from teaching this course. I have learned from my students, above all Chinese ones. I have learned from colleagues, especially those from China. And of course I get insights from Westerners who look at China, whether from inside or outside, whether themselves specialists on China or not, since "images" are not always based on intimate knowledge.

I would like to offer my thanks to all those from whom I have learned and all those whose help and instruction have contributed to this book. And of course I would like to thank those who got me interested in China in the first place and have sustained my interest, respect and love over many decades.
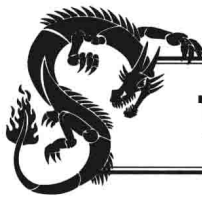
Colin Mackerras
23 May 2013

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Introduction

Marco Polo has become legendary both in China and the West. He came from one great civilization but attempted to understand another one and to interpret it to his own people. In particular, he is the first Westerner to leave a detailed account of China and consequently plays a major role in Western images of China. For those achievements he deserves great credit. He is the first in a long line of writers who have made China a part of the intellectual life of the West. At times this great East Asian country has been a model for the West, at others a negative example. At times it has loomed large in the imagination of the West, declining in importance at others.

This book focuses on Western images of the People's Republic of China, that is, of the country since 1949. It aims to relate and analyse some of the most important of these images, and to set them within an appropriate historical and intellectual context. It aims to explore who or which group has tended to create images and, to some extent, how they have done so. It adopts a chronological and topical approach, with consideration of political, economic and social images, as well as those relating to foreign affairs.

This is an important subject, because it concerns cross-cultural relations, and how peoples see each other. There has long been a tendency in the West to see China and other civilizations as 'exotic', which can signify a way of admiring something very strange but is more often a sign of criticism, even contempt. This trend may be weaker than it used to be, but it is far from dead. The policy one country adopts towards another can affect its perceptions but the converse is also true, in other words that images can influence policy. This adds to the importance of the subject of Western images of China, because how these two major civilizations see and relate to each other matters for the world as a whole.

The Great Wall and surrounding mountains, taken October 1964. This was the first time I went to the Great Wall. One of my companions on that occasion was the famous English teacher and scholar, Chen Lin, who still lives in Beijing very near the Renmin University of China.

So what precisely are the Western images of China that are the subject of this book? I define images as perceptions that are important enough to impinge on the consciousness of the observer. Usually, they are recorded in some way that makes them accessible. A chance conversation by a Westerner about China might be an image and I feel entitled to include such conversations I have had myself, or those that are accessible to me in another way. Images also include pictures and some of these are included in this book, most of them taken by me or a friend.

This is a large topic and it is not possible to deal with all kinds of images. Images included are almost all of people or relevant to them. Many types are completely irrelevant to this coverage and are left out, despite their importance or interest, such as those dealing with scenery, biology, or with the wild animals of China.

▮ The Sources of Images; Theoretical Framework

As suggested above, images of China are part of the intellectual tradition of the West. What this means is that how the West views China depends not only on the realities of China itself but also to a large extent on the intellectual or ideological climate in the West. This raises difficult questions about what exactly it is that leads any observer or group of them to reach images about China. One early study of the topic concluded that the reasons had something to do with individual personality: 'Our response to China (or any other civilization) is conditioned partly by the objective situation there and partly by the conscious interests and subconscious needs of our own personalities.'[1] To all observations, each person, no matter what their culture, brings experiences, ideological background, temperament and biases of various kinds. They may not be aware of what formulates their

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[1] Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*: *An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization* (Oxford University Press, London, 1967), p. 2.

views, but influences operate on them all the same.

Looking at a level deeper than individuals, such as professional groups, classes, whole communities or even nations, the range of influences on images may be much more complex. It is well beyond the scope of this book to enter into issues of individual or group psychology. However, there are some theories that go to questions of colonialism and power relations that appear to this writer to remain relevant to Western images of the People's Republic of China, even if they do not carry as much weight in the twenty-first century as they did in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth.

One writer to develop interesting ideas about the relationship between power and knowledge is the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926—1984), whose closely related notions of power/knowledge (*pouvoir/savoir*) and 'the regime of truth' have become famous. He has summed up as follows: '"Truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it.'[1]

There are several implications in this quite complex sentence. Truth rarely exists within a vacuum, but within societies. What is true depends to some extent on power systems, including those within the political, economic, social and cultural realms. Conversely, truth as produced by these power systems helps sustain the existing power relations. In particular, Foucault considers that society's 'regime of truth' determines 'the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true',[2] who in their turn contribute to maintaining power relations. Applied to Western images of China, it would mean that power relations within Western societies and between the West and China would have some impact on the ways in which Westerners perceive China.

Another theory that presupposes the link between power relations and truth is orientalism, developed by the well-known Palestinian-American scholar and literary theorist Edward Said (1935—2003), also famous for his contributions to postcolonial theory. Although Said was most concerned with Western scholarship on the Palestinian question and Islam, his ideas apply also to Western images of China. The essential core of 'orientalism' is that Westerners produce scholarship and notions of 'other' civilizations that show their own as more rational, more powerful, and more

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[1] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972—1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1980), p. 133.

[2] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 131.
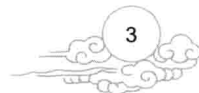
worthwhile, and that they do this as part of a political power relationship in which the West is superior and wishes to remain so. Western writing on Asia's past and present tends very strongly to take the West as the norm, with Asia deviating in some way, as 'exotic' or 'inscrutable'.[1]

I see a good deal of sense in these theories, arguing that it is extremely difficult, or even impossible, to avoid bias of one kind or another. In defending these theories I do not imply that the writers who contribute to images of China are not good at their job. I also believe that the great majority make an honest attempt to interpret or analyse what they see or read.

Sometimes political systems directly impose ideas. But I see most of the constraints imposed by the regime of truth that Foucault discusses or by Said's orientalism to be much less direct and much vaguer than outright imposition of ideas. In other words, there is much validity in the Western claims of freedom of thought and expression. But I believe that freedom operates in a continuum. It is rarely possible to say one person or society is absolutely free, while another is totally enslaved. What Foucault's and Said's ideas imply is that there are usually far more constrictions on freedom than appears at first sight, including those people that regard themselves as totally free.

So images are more or less never as straightforward as they seem. They involve reality of course, but many other factors as well. They come from the experience, ideology and biases of the observer, from power relations and power systems within societies and the international community, and from a range of other sources.

■ The Literature; Why Is This Book Different?

There is already a literature on images of China, most of it dealing much less with the People's Republic than with the history of China as a whole, including the present. One of the earlier studies is by Raymond Dawson, already quoted above. Entitled *The Chinese Chameleon*, it argued that China continually changed colour like a chameleon. Dawson was thus a proponent of the 'pendulum' idea that sees Western images of China swinging from one side to another, from positive to negative and back again. I have not included this in my theoretical framework, because it is an observation of images, not an explanation. It merely notes changes from one side to another, but makes no attempt to explain them or say why they should do so.

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[1] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Random House, Vintage Books, New York, 1978; 1979), pp. 38-41.

Among recent publications, probably the best known and influential is *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (1998). By the very distinguished British-American historian Jonathan Spence, it 'guides us from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries' emphasizing works of fiction on China. As one important reviewer has suggested, it takes up 'the gradual transition away from whether particular events have actually occurred to the narrower problem of how value judgments are associated with all experience or contemplation of China'.[①] In other words, it distinguishes realities in China from judgments or images made about the country. I also wrote a book entitled *Western Images of China*, which covered the whole range of images from the earliest times until just before publication. Its first edition came out with the Oxford University Press in 1989, with a second updated and revised edition in 1999.[②]

What makes the present book distinctive is that it focuses entirely on China since 1949. This means almost entirely the mainland of China, and does not include Taiwan, Hong Kong or Macau. I certainly do not deny that they are part of China. However, Western images of these three territories have tended very strongly to be different from those of the mainland, because of the different political systems that have characterized the mainland of China since 1949, Taiwan and the colonial situations that have predominated in Hong Kong and Macau for most of the period under discussion in this book.

Methodology

The methodology of this book is threefold. The main one is to choose representative and important illustrations of Western images of China since 1949. I have chosen them largely because of the influential position of the relevant author, book, article, newspaper or magazine. However, in some cases I have made choices according to judgements I have made over how representative an image may be. The same choices are made whether the images are through printed text, pictures or derived orally.

Another is to appeal to surveys that others have undertaken. I have not sought or had

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① Jamie Morgan, 'Distinguishing Truth, Knowledge, and Belief: A Philosophical Contribution to the Problem of Images of China', *Modern China: An International Quarterly of History and Social Science,* vol. 30, no. 3 (July 2004), p. 407.

② For a highly philosophical review of three books on this topic see Morgan, 'Distinguishing Truth', pp. 398-427, the three being T. Christopher Jespersen, *American Images of China, 1931—1949* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1996); Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (W.W. Norton, New York, 1998); and Mackerras, *Western Images of China*. In addition to the three books of focus, Morgan mentions numerous other works on and relating to Western images of China.
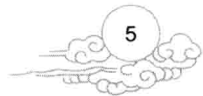
the opportunity to undertake such surveys myself. The reason for this is that I do not believe it either necessary or desirable to supplement the professional surveys that others have carried out, especially since my own skills in this area are inferior and not well developed.

However, one methodology adopted is to appeal to some extent to my own personal experience and impressions. I first visited China in 1964, teaching for two years at what was then the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute (*Beijing Waiguoyu Xueyuan*) and is now the Beijing Foreign Studies University (*Beijing Waiguoyu Daxue*). I have been witness to changes over some sixty visits to China ranging from that time until the present. Over that half-century or so I have talked to numerous Westerners on their images of China, both inside China and outside, and shall mention some of them in this book. However, one methodology *not* undertaken seriously is formal structured interviews, either with individuals or with groups.

The gate of the West Campus of the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute (*Beijing Waiguoyu Xueyuan*), now the Beijing Foreign Studies University (*Beijing Waiguoyu Daxue*). The gate has since been greatly modernized and upgraded. The building on the right was the English Department, and was where my wife and I worked from 1964 to 1966. It is now the German Department. Although much upgraded and modernized, the outside is still quite similar. Taken in 1965.

■ Development of the Media

In terms of the media that express and represent images, there has been change as well as continuity since 1949. Some media predate the People's Republic by a long

time, and a newspaper like *The New York Times* has been published continuously since 1851. *Time* magazine, the most important publication of the media empire founded by Henry Robinson Luce (1898—1967), dates from 1923 but has remained highly influential down to the present time, claiming a global readership of some 25 million people. It is certainly the West's most image-formulating and representative weekly. The published paper book is many centuries old as a medium and still a major form of communication, even though there is a school of thought that considers that in the long term the electronic book might replace it altogether. Radio is not nearly as old as the book, but it predates the People's Republic by a long time.

However, other types of media are somewhat newer. Television was still a very new medium in 1949 and did not yet reach a mass audience. By the time of the US President Richard Nixon's visit to China in February 1972, it had become profoundly influential in the process of shifting Western images from negative to positive.

In the twenty-first century, the most representative medium is the Internet, which did not become part of the mass media until the 1990s. The Internet has exerted the most profound effect on communications throughout the world, and contributed to globalization in a way the world has never seen before. It is possible to write to somebody on the other side of the world and get an immediate response. Of course that was already possible with telephone, but for images the Internet is far more significant. Newspaper articles and television programmes can be seen on the Internet, which means that other kinds of mass media can lose their exclusive impact. But there is another point that needs highlighting: the Internet is open to anybody who is literate. You do not need to be a professional journalist or published writer to put your view forward on the Internet. The comments from ordinary readers of newspaper articles or viewers of television programmes reflect opinion and images in a way that has hardly been possible until the twenty-first century.

■ Some General Points

A few general points are relevant regarding the formulators of Western images. Perhaps the main one is that by far the dominant country during the whole period since 1949 has been the United States. The Americans have the networks in terms of news, publishing, television, radio and the Internet that have made their influence by far the greatest of any Western country. There will, of course, be reference to other countries in this book. Not surprisingly, there are non-American Western images of China, and not all countries have the same images of China. It would be possible to study images

of China from a range of different countries. This has, in fact, been done, and can show considerable diversity of opinion.[①] However, the similarities outweigh the differences to the extent that it is indeed legitimate to talk of Western images of China, based largely on those of the United States, as well as of those of individual Western countries.

For all the topics and periods, I believe it is possible to single out dominant images. However, it needs to be emphasized that there are *always* alternative images as well. So even in times when images are at their most negative, there are those who have held and written of positive images. Individuals too hold and write of various images. Some observers are extremely positive, but still have critical images to put forward about China, and *vice versa*. In no time or place are images ever absolute. It is important to take a nuanced point of view on this topic, to analyse tendencies and trends, not absolutes.

Conclusions

My study over several decades concerning Western images of the People's Republic of China has led me to two main conclusions.

The first is that Western images of China do not represent 'the truth' or even reality about that country. Truth is an immensely difficult concept, which is beyond my scope here. There are perceivable realities in any concrete situation, but they are infinitely various, especially in a country as large and diverse as China, and nobody can pretend to grasp more than a few of them. Western images of China are shaped by


The Yellow River outside Ji'nan, taken in May 1965.

a whole range of complex factors, often telling us as much about the West as they do about China.

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① Just one instance concerns Australia. There are several books and articles on how Australia and Australians perceive China, for instance Lachlan Strahan's book *Australia's China: Changing Perceptions from the 1930s to the 1990s* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1996).

The second is that the overall situation in China has improved much more over the last half-century or so than have Western images. I recognize that this is a big generalization and that I have no better access to the realities of China than anybody else. However, during my numerous visits to China since 1964 I have witnessed enormous changes, large enough probably to be called earth-shaking. These changes have been in my opinion both good and bad, and I would not find difficulty in identifying areas where things have worsened either as a whole or in particular aspects. But my experiences over this long period have led me to the conclusion that *in the big picture* life for most Chinese is *much* more prosperous, freer, more confident and more varied than it was when I first started going to China. The *overall* situation is incomparably better than it was.

Western images have generally got better of course, but the improvement is much more limited than my perception of realities would warrant. There is still a feeling that being positive is equivalent to being naïve. Extremely negative observers and observations are as common as they ever were. Positive ones are much more frequent than formerly but they usually remain much more moderate in tone than their negative counterparts. It may be partly due to the nature of Western journalism and academia, which sees part of its function as criticism of authority and practices in all societies and thus tends to emphasize the negative against the positive. But there is still a problem for Western observers to see China and its society in terms of what the Chinese are trying to achieve themselves rather than what Westerners think they *ought to be* aiming to accomplish.
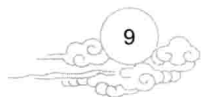
Historical Background

A brief summary background history of Western images of China is necessary to set those of the People's Republic in some kind of context. Because of previous treatments,[①] not much detail is necessary and I include only the period since the eighteenth century, with greater attention to the first half of the twentieth. In my opinion, this history does show strong swings from one side to another and can be described as oscillating. However, I am reluctant to use the pendulum metaphor because the swings are not equally high, nor are they the same length in terms of time.

■ The Eighteenth Century

The Jesuits, members of a Catholic order of priests, were responsible for the first great age of Western Sinology. It reached its height in the work of the French scholar Jean-Baptiste du Halde (1674—1743, Chinese name: Du Hede 杜赫德), the four-volumed *Description de l'empire de la Chine*, which was published in French in 1736 and in English translation as *General History of China* in 1741. Although du Halde never visited China, he had access to a large range of material through Jesuit contacts there and had seen and studied an enormous number of reports and letters from them.

Du Halde was very positive about China and comparisons with Europe usually show China as superior. For a start, he was full of praise for Chinese government. He believed the mandarins were benign, though powerful, and accepted their claim to be fathers of the people. He saw China as a very prosperous country, where the natural

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① See, for example, Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon* (Oxford University Press, London, 1967); Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, 1989); Jonathan D. Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (W.W. Norton, New York, 1998; Allen Lane, London, 1999); and Cao Qing, 'Perspectives on China—Western', in Linsun Cheng (general editor), *Berkshire Encyclopedia of China* (Berkshire Publishing Group, Great Barrington, MA, 2009), vol. 4, pp. 1749-1753.