

In Search of Love and Truth*

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At the outset I should explain my title which might suggest that I am too directly invading the territory of the philosopher or the theologian. My title is a deliberate antonym of a phrase which recurs over and over in Japanese and Chinese writings of the latter part of the nineteenth century and was neatly fixed by Professor Benjamin Schwartz as the title of his study of Yen Fu, translator of Adam Smith, Mill, Huxley, Spencer and Montesquieu, *In Search of Wealth and Power*. By the time of Yen Fu the process of the introduction of the West had proceeded well beyond the importation of material goods, guns, ships and all things mechanical, to the ideas and institutional forms which were thought to make the West wealthy and strong. Ideas spilled over into literature and art so that Japan and China through the twentieth century have produced “new poetry”, “new drama”, “new fiction” based on Western models and developed schools of Western painting beside continuing traditional forms. This process, which clearly cannot be seen as having materialistic aims, should have made the Chinese and Japanese pioneers in the pursuit of cultural understanding, which is surely one of the great unquestioned aims of contemporary man. This pursuit, then, I have called the search for love and truth, for these are the qualities which distinguish the work of the artist, using the word in its broadest sense, and these are the qualities which I believe to be essential for the interpreter of other cultures to strive after. I ought also to admit that I am talking mainly

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about literary and artistic culture, at any rate those forms of culture where language may form a barrier to be surmounted.



More than a quarter of a century ago when I was newly installed in the Chair of Oriental Studies in this University, I gave an inaugural address to the newly founded Oriental Society of Australia entitled “Orientalists and the Orient” in which, as I remember, I gave much of my time to the beginnings of Chinese and Japanese studies among the Jesuit fathers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the final paragraph alone did I venture on any local or contemporary reference with a gentle disclaimer of the “Australia is part of Asia” slogan, beginning to be current at that time, which struck me as a newcomer in a country with many survivals from an earlier England as a very strange point of view. A very young professor, I was at best only in search of one half of my title and believed the goal for myself and anything I might create in Australia was an enlargement of the scope of Chinese and Japanese studies with an improvement of their quality.

On account of my upbringing, which fell in an educational era which seemed at the time to be in no danger whatsoever, I had a clear model in my mind for an increasing professionalization of Chinese and Japanese studies, viz. the Classics, Greek and Latin, which for a century had engaged the concentrated efforts of countless scholars in universities and schools in Western Europe and further afield and had achieved such a high degree of development that even third-rate poets had received the attention of first-rate critical minds. One could not, of course, imagine that Chinese and Japanese would ever command the numbers who had devoted themselves to Greek and Latin but then in compensation in both China and Japan there was a long and living tradition of scholarship with which to ally oneself. In the early post-war period Asian studies, Chinese studies most of all but Japanese and other studies in their degree, were certainly expansionist and as such sometimes gave offence to those in older established disciplines who might feel threatened. The fuel of that expansion had been war and conflict, first the Pacific War and then the Communist victory in China. The Pacific War was also the prime cause of the diversion into the field of young scholars who might otherwise have never considered it. A few of these survive among the foremost names in

Chinese and Japanese studies. The immediate practical shortage of interpreters for waging the war against Japan in the Pacific encouraged governmental intervention in the long term in the educational field. One may note in passing that the pre-war studies of Chinese in England were in large part the result of the Boxer conflict of 1900. Also one would have to ascribe the impetus of the monumental *Science and Civilisation in China*, a work which has, I imagine, made a greater impact than any other upon the world of learning outside Asian studies, to Joseph Needham's appointment as a scientific adviser to the beleaguered Chinese government in Chungking. Yet undoubtedly the greatest quantitative expansion of our studies was due to the Chinese Communist victory in 1949 and the resulting antagonism and disappointment in the United States, for American missionary effort and other involvement had been very great so that there was a substantial consciousness of a personal defeat. The believed need to counter and also to understand the defeat brought major funding and also, I believe it will be seen in review, particular directions and particular colouring to American scholarship, especially historical scholarship upon China.

Governmental intervention in the field of education, as in the field of economics, probably generally secures very imprecisely the intended object to which it was originally advised by expert committees. Global consequences flowed from the United States finding China an enemy and thus soon thereafter having Japan, the erstwhile enemy, as a principal political, military and economic friend and against these major consequences the effects upon education and society of encouragement of studies of China and Japan must be regarded as minor. The major attitudes of government, of course, determine its minor acts as patron.

All I want to say here is that governmental attitudes favoured the enlargement of Chinese and Japanese studies and brought private support, no doubt, in their train. That much of the study which resulted from public patronage was quite academic and in almost no way served any utilitarian aim of understanding or managing the Chinese Communists is hardly to be wondered at. Even those studies of Chinese ideas and society of the Fairbank school which did half-consciously seek to make the past explain the present cannot, I think,

be seen as of much importance in bringing about the recognition of China in the Nixon “shock”.

Recognition came when China was still deep in what was for its own people one of the most unpleasant phases of the history of the People’s Republic so that it would presumably be difficult to claim any fortunate links with expanding studies of China. Relief for the people of China cannot be said to have come through this easing of the attitude of its major enemy but by the merciful death of Mao Tse-tung.

Throughout the years of the People’s Republic within and without academic circles there have been those politically sympathetic to the government of China with attitudes ranging from the extremely naïve to the very sophisticated but it has been rather general among them to refrain from all criticism of the People’s Government even when it has been engaged in actions clearly harmful to its people. There seems to be a difference between political sympathizers of the Soviet Union and of China. The former have not necessarily failed to oppose governmental excesses, whereas in the case of China it is only in the present years of recovery from excess that one may hear from those on the Left that “China is no longer interesting”. I do not wish to pursue this phenomenon here. Uncritical political sympathizers may finally be found ultimately to lack both the love and the truth for real understanding.

Since the essential belief on which I take my stand here is that understanding is finally only possible between countries which have faith in their own culture and respect for that of others, the return of China to a state where it is preserving and not destroying its heritage and is welcoming not denouncing foreign cultures should be a matter of rejoicing for everyone. The greater openness of China is resulting in much wider and more diverse contacts which may remove still further the political restriction which hung over intercourse with her during the previous years of the People’s Republic. For the doctrinaires of the Left China could become even less “interesting”.

I shall turn now to my other country, Japan. It is likely to seem hard for a contemporary Australian audience to believe that I was told by an Australian Vice-Chancellor in 1956 that my efforts to reintroduce Japanese as a subject of study in the University of Sydney were unlikely to meet with success. I would like to think that it was in

this case my own persistence rather than a violent swing of public opinion or the favourable trade balance with Japan that Australia came to enjoy which enabled me rapidly to disprove his view. Individuals do take tiny steps in the midst of vast historical forces. While China through the '50s and '60s was locked in conflict and even actual war with the United States, Japan's recovery from her devastation and then its economic advancement were advantaged by these events. Now in the '70s and '80s Japan's economic strength has grown to the point of provoking great trade frictions with the United States and Europe, and even the belief that Japan has been carrying on war "by other means" and that its "imperial conspiracy" of pre-war days has simply persisted. A recent and highly idiosyncratic expression of this view argues its case on the contention that Japanese linguists inculcate a false belief in the uniqueness of the Japanese language. Such a dangerous view may have led the Japanese nation into depriving the automobile workers of Detroit of their employment.

The more common response at the academic sociological level to Japan's economic success has been of admiration and the holding up of Japan as a model for the future. When one looks for the chief emphases of academic study of Japan in the post-war period, in contrast to the historical and political studies which have chiefly engaged the student of China, one finds literature which for most of the last thirty-five years or so has been foremost, being joined in the last decade by sociology. If I may be allowed to pair history and literature and politics and sociology, I would suggest that politics in the case of China matching sociology in the case of Japan tells something about the students as well as the subjects studied but not necessarily the same thing in the two cases. Politics have been the abiding concern of the Chinese people throughout their history so that it might seem simply natural that study and interest in China should tend strongly towards the political. But what if the victory in 1949 had been of the Right and not the Left? Would not perhaps China have been less interesting over the whole of the past thirty years as it seems to have become for leftist intellectuals of late? The love must be suspected of being subjective or even of being self-love. I am in part repeating myself but the composition is a little different.

The Japanese interest in the Japanese identity and social characteristics has certainly not the longevity of the Chinese

absorption in politics. It is a modern phenomenon which has intensified in the post-war period for probably quite obvious reasons. The interest of the student is not, however, I believe, in this case at all generally a reflection of an interest of the people he is studying but it is *their* actions which have seemed to demand attention to their character. Thus if there has been much subjectivity in the response to China, there has been conversely a more objective response to Japan. There is, in terms of the very large generalizations which I am attempting to pursue, very little possibility of the use of the word “love” in the case of Japan. As if to underline the failure a book has appeared within the last few months as a Pelican original (it claims to have been a best seller in an earlier Japanese version) entitled *Japan versus Europe: A History of Misunderstanding*. The author, Endymion Wilkinson, has during the last ten years exchanged what he describes as the “gentle life of a university lecturer” with little responsibility and low pay for membership of the European Community Commission’s permanent diplomatic delegation to Japan.

Dr Wilkinson presents a history of the imperfect images that Europeans (mainly the British—though Loti’s *Madame Chrysanthème*, Paris, 1887, gains a fair amount of attention—and of course Americans can hardly be left out in spite of the book’s title) and Japanese have formed of each other. While one could not disagree with the descriptions he offers as common and widespread stereotypes one might be tempted to add “but not everyone is so naïve”. Also for my own immediate ends I should like to remark on some examples of superficial presentation and possible interdisciplinary prejudice (Dr Wilkinson before his move to diplomacy was in Chinese history). Writing in the chapter “Japan as a Military and Colonial Power”, he says: “But nobody in Europe seriously believed that Japan would ever attack the European colonies in Asia—after all, the Japanese were a charming, if occasionally slightly unpredictable, people. During the years 1920–40 there was only one bestseller on a Japanese theme in Europe. This was Arthur Waley’s translation of the *Tale of Genji* which naturally reinforced the old image of Japan as a refined and exotic culture. About as far from the cockpit of a Zero fighter as Lady Murasaki from a typewriter”.¹

1 . Endymion Wilkinson, *Japan Versus Europe: A History of Misunderstanding* (Penguin, 1983), p. 64.

I am not sure of the definition of a bestseller in the pre-war period. I do know that the first volume of Waley's *Tale of Genji* (published in 1925) achieved an eighth impression by the time the sixth and last appeared in 1934. Also the same publisher, Allen & Unwin, in 1928 and 1938 respectively published the editor of the Kobe *Japan Chronicle* Morgan Young's *Japan under Taisho Tenno, 1912–1926* and *Imperial Japan, 1926–1938* which if Dr Wilkinson were to read them he would find that they by no means “reinforced the old image of Japan as a refined and exotic culture”.

A little consideration ought to have made him feel that he had written something quite silly (which he actually contradicts elsewhere). By the 1930s at least press reports and cinema newsreels of Japanese aggression against China might be guessed to have been having a greater and less favourable effect upon British public opinion than the elegant translation of Arthur Waley. But he does unfortunately seem to have some kind of prejudice against literature. For speaking of the post-war period, after commenting quite reasonably and quite favourably on the reception of Japanese films in Europe from *Rashomon* to *Kagemusha*, he adds: Japanese literature has been extensively translated but little read. For this bold statement he offers no source or statistical evidence.

Japanese films (with subtitles or even without) or should we really say some Japanese films and these generally with historical themes have certainly achieved success in the Western countries. Have they contributed to a mistaken image of Japan? I should doubt it. I would guess that the non-student audience for these Japanese films has largely been one which gave its appreciation mainly to the technical qualities of the films. The resultant image would be of Japanese artistry in a modern medium.

Films have required no scholarly intermediaries but literature certainly has.

And it is against these that in his final pages on “How to Improve Communications” Dr Wilkinson launches his most furious broadsides. So let me select his heaviest shots:

... amongst European Japanologists ... there seems to be an ability to focus their studies on matters of contemporary interest and having done so, to convey their findings in such a way as to have any hope of changing the world or influencing the way people perceive it.

There is over-specialization in the hands of language experts who tend to justify their own role as intermediaries by emphasizing the differences between Europe and Japan. There is also an over-emphasis on past culture at the expense of the present, perhaps because it is felt to be more esoteric and hence better suited to academic investigation ... Another academic bias is over-reliance on the written word. It seems almost as if the acquiring of a difficult foreign language ensures that the expert will forever afterwards lay most value on the past written record.

Academic experts on Japan have been slow to acquire new disciplines such as sociology, economics or comparative literature. When they have managed to do so they pursue their special field with hardly a glance at related disciplines. The “tunnel approach” is also found in both Europe and Japan in the fierce loyalty to one country or culture ... This single-country focus is particularly regrettable today when regional co-operation and integration in both Europe and East Asia make it virtually impossible to follow events in one country without understanding how they fit in with what is going on around it. Another disadvantage of the single-country approach is that it often leads to the uncritical acceptance of that country’s own self-image.²

There is nothing particularly novel about these charges and, except for the last which runs counter to the great modern emphasis on specialization, they are just as likely to be made within the gates of universities as by someone who has now fled them. In a climate where universities over most of the developed world are now under the axe of economy and have a strong temptation to polish their utilitarian image such criticisms are not likely to diminish. But are they correctly framed?

East Asian studies are very largely, as I have already stated, a post-World War II growth, in response to the tensions produced by the existence of a Communist government in China. They have thus generally the shortest tradition in Western universities while the countries of study are the farthest in geographical distance from Western Europe. China and Japan mainly escaped the colonialism of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western powers so that except in the case of France, which had occupied the closely China-related area of Indo-China, the colonialist stimulus to Asian studies did not operate. Pre-war East Asian studies came thus in great part from scholarly diplomats, missionaries, journalists, museum curators and

2. Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 258–9.

gifted amateurs, and the societies these formed were often more important than universities.

Their generally weak tradition and mainly late appearance upon the scene have exposed East Asia academic scholars to pressures to justify themselves and make contributions on a scale and manner not expected of others. Have scholars in English or History, in French or German ever had an expectation laid upon them of “changing the world or influencing the way people perceive it”? It is indeed surprising in the contemporary world where the individual’s significance has been more commonly diminished that so much should be expected of the East Asian scholar. Without wishing to deny the possibility of some one of us “changing the world”, I think it is very hard to put it forward as a general expectation. Translated into more concrete terms, it may be presumed to mean that the scholar might be so *au fait* with the purposes and psychology of another people that he could tender such advice to politicians that they are enabled to alter the intentions of the politicians of that other people. But this is no more than a modern fantasy of becoming a Grand Vizier or, if politicians themselves believed it and almost certainly they do not, a fantasy of finding a philosophical adviser who would aid them to gain the empire. Even in pre-Ch’in China it was, I believe, the philosophers who cast themselves in this flattering role rather than the kings. It seems to me open to doubt whether King Hui of Liang actually said to Mencius: “Since you have not thought a thousand *li* far to come, you must have something to profit my kingdom.” In terms of such expectation, the casting of scholars, East Asian or other, in super-advisory roles is doomed to failure, first and foremost because political and economic decisions are taken by politicians and businessmen according to perceived self-interest on the basis of information available to them. It is very unlikely that the best equipped and funded academic can compete with their sources of information, and when we speak of the East Asian academic we are generally speaking of the worst funded of all.

Though he cannot beat them he can of course join them and academics are often drawn away into governmental and business spheres. This certainly happens in East Asian studies and at present is increasingly likely to happen. They then cease to be academics and should be reclassified. Let me state very clearly that I of course

believe that East Asian studies have a very important role to play in training and providing those who engage in non-academic occupations. This hardly needs to be said. It is only the academic role that is so constantly eroded and in my view needs especial defence.

I turn now to another commonly assumed part-time function of academics at large.

With the enormous growth of the “media”, especially of radio and television, academics, along with journalists and commentators of all kinds, have gained hitherto undreamed of means of “influencing the way people perceive the world”. We ought to be the best-informed generation since the world began and in a literal sense in part we may be. But, even if we exclude all those who listen to nothing but pop music and watch nothing but soap operas and comedy series, can we say that those who listen to or watch only “serious” programmes are effectively educated by them? The diversity of fare provided is so wide that one would need to be a complete encyclopaedist to give a just answer. Yet if one judges by the offering in one’s own specialization one will not be encouraged to believe other than overall the presentation is trivial and governed by the criterion of entertainment. Music lovers are fortunate compared with the followers of the spoken word in that it is less usual to trivialize Beethoven.

Academics penetrating into the media must be good communicators by the standards of the producers and this seems so often to reduce them to saying little that is worthwhile. There are naturally notable exceptions; the late Kenneth Clark was a supremely notable exception. On the whole, however, it would not be very unfair or very original to say that radio and television have a long way to go to become effective means of general education. They demand somewhat less effort from their audience than general magazine journalism does of its readers and they labour under a similar disadvantage of being able to assume little if any preparation on the part of the audience. Of course, they ought to be excellent means for the academic to convey his achievements to a wider audience, but since they for the most part fail to be such, the academic needs to be wary that his virtue is not drained away by them. At the present stage, radio, television and journalism are more likely to corrupt the

academic than he is to improve them. Perhaps after all he should keep to his educational role and seek gradually to educate the producers.

If one looks through the wrong end of the telescope at the continual demand upon East Asian scholars to be useful beyond their educational sphere, one may discover the reverse picture of an unwillingness to allow the East Asianist a proper professionalism. As certain Mohists with whom Mencius argued thought government should be carried on in concert with agriculture, it would seem that the East Asianist is supposed to be part-time government adviser, part-time diplomat, part-time news commentator and journalist but never whole-time scholar. Behind this is, I suspect, an unwillingness to take the cultures of China and Japan wholly seriously. We (scholars of East Asia) are still, without realizing it, in the stage where Chinese and Japanese regarded interpreters of Western languages and Western things as dangerous rascals to be kept under strict control. Perhaps with the great economic success of Japan we might be about to move into the “search for wealth and power” stage where Western material things were avidly pursued and the reasons for Western achievement were earnestly sought. To progress to my further stage will depend on scholars.

I do not think the analogy I have drawn is utterly fantastic and I am certainly not suggesting that we are going in the future all to become Buddhists or to start to write *haiku* (a few in the West have done that already). My hope is that it may ultimately be possible to move on to a stage where the cultures of China and Japan are sufficiently accepted to permit the scholarly intermediaries of those cultures to be whole-time without having continually to endure chidings like those I have cited. This stage is certainly not yet in view and at present as well East Asian studies in American, British and Australian universities are generally suffering some contraction due to economic recession. There are a few bright spots amid the gloom, the Nissan gift to Oxford, the intention of this University to appoint a Professor of Japanese to the Department of Oriental Studies. And I would tend to fear that the hoped-for recovery secured by larger applications of high technology is likely to hold East Asian studies back in the utilitarian “search for wealth and power” stage.

I turn for a moment from tertiary to secondary education where there are bound to be more and more efforts to make the recipients

“fitted to the demands of a changing society” or some similar cant phrase. Strangely, these efforts are so often accompanied by complaints of increasing inadequacy of students for actual employment. My fear is rather that these efforts may make the recipients less and less able to adopt positions of independence, if you like, to be able to change society as well as conform to its changes. It has always been, I imagine, depressing for educators to discover that the most creative minds, since the onset of general universal education, have been those who have to a greater or lesser degree escaped its impact. Clearly, the only final education of value is self-education, but self-education needs an initial nurture which the increasing uniformity of society probably makes more difficult to secure. If we are to move beyond the “search for wealth and power” stage in our tertiary studies we have the greatest interest in ensuring that in the pre-tertiary process there is a nurturing of the love of learning by the actual practice of learning. What is frightening about contemporary secondary education is the same intrusion of trivialization that is observable in the media. Must we then seek a Platonic kind of solution not for the sake of producing governors but scholars? This is no doubt undemocratic but can it be justified on the grounds that the “academic” are becoming an under-privileged group?

We are living in an age when we are being told perhaps a little more stridently than ever before, because the babel voices have greater powers of amplification, that the world has changed and the past is dead. Yet apocalypses are seldom accurate in time and detail. Those who now reveal to us the end of the age of the printed word and the dawn of the age of instant gratification may not be wholly true prophets. We do often draw back from casting everything onto the scrapheap of history. This emboldens me as an ageing man who has not been wholly out of love with the spoken word or of the visual arts but who has at the same time gathered about him a great friendship of books to state, with tolerance of dissenters yet firm conviction, a humanist credo.

First, I would affirm the importance of language study in school and university in written and in spoken form *to the highest degree achievable*. The pondered and polished written work does surely possess some superiority over the impromptu spoken as is easily demonstrated by modern attempts to turn discussions directly into

books. A country of whose language one has no command can never have quite the same reality as one where one has this key to intimacy. It does not have to be made an end in itself, though some must be allowed to make it such. All others concerned need it as a tool, if they are to be effective diplomats, journalists or scholars of any sort. All kinds of new techniques and mechanical devices should improve the process of language learning and may substitute the actual practice of the simpler forms of translation. But if thinking computers are finally impossible great scope will remain for the human linguist.

Able linguists with whatever additional skills their particular profession requires can hope to find employment as “the search for wealth and power” stage advances. The evidence of technological society to date is that it is successful in filling its needs quite rapidly once those needs are clearly posited. A more difficult problem is to create or preserve the conditions in which the scholar who is to be the intermediary of the age of “love and truth” can exist. An over-emphasis on the utilitarian, a belief that cultural understanding is as easily achieved as it can be lightly spoken of, that it will follow in the train of other contacts, may also be seen as positive dangers. Even the spread of East Asian studies themselves is no necessary guarantee of the achievement of cultural understanding.

We have seen over these past thirty years a great increase in scholarly publication of East Asian topics, above all from university presses in the United States, where a relative flood has replaced a previous trickle. These many shelves of books have clearly done much more to spread knowledge among students of East Asia than they have to enlighten society at large for the reason that so many of them are not well enough written and lack the expression to be meaningful to a wider audience. They are thus at best intermediate works in the process of cultural understanding; to be primary they would have had to possess a larger excellence. This excellence is obviously easier to recognize than to define. Literary skill, as I have just said, has its part in it. There must be the charm to woo the common reader, the clarity to bring understanding of the unfamiliar, but also the knowledge. Whether knowledge is living or dead does not, I think, in any way depend on its chronological date. The seven o'clock news is already deader than the death of Julius Caesar. The

point is clear enough and we can presumably get by with persons less rare than Shakespeare in our task.

Yet to give life to other cultures surely presupposes a lively acquaintance and a faith in one's own. For there is little point in an atheist setting out to study another people's religion. The modern cultures of China and Japan are cultures in which substantial Western elements are now mixed so that even at a technical level we need to know about West as well as East. But this is perhaps only incidental and partial, at most concerning "truth" not "love". I would insist that there is an essential importance in knowing who "we" are before we can seriously approach the problem of who they are.

I have almost throughout a little deliberately held my discussion poised in a largely American-British academic realm to which it would not be very untrue to think that Australia still belongs. But cultural understanding relates not to academics alone but to peoples. When it comes to "we", where does Australia stand? For Australia believes it has a crisis of identity. Clearly over these thirty years there has come an admission of multiculturalism, but how has that affected the "we"? Would, for example, a Chinese who has lived a long time in Australia feel that there was any "they" involved for him in cultural understanding with China? I fear I must leave this as a hanging thread which I cannot tie into the pattern of this paper.

Over this more than a quarter of a century perhaps all I have gained is a greater awareness of the problem rather than any splendid answer. What I have tried to say here is that it can be a mistake to project one's own wishes onto other people's and I still think that "we are part of Asia", if meant culturally, may fall into that category. For myself I have realized that "truth" is not enough, though it remains very important to get the facts right, but "love" is very demanding.