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## **Chinese Sympathies: Media, Missionaries, and World Literature from Marco Polo to Goethe**

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When the American philosopher John Dewey visited China right after World War I, he foresaw the necessity of “transforming the mind of China,” a phrase he used as the title of an essay he published in *Asia: Journal of the American Asiatic Association* in 1919. Dewey claimed that “the old China was doomed, and that henceforth China must live its life in the presence of the forces of western life, forces intellectual, moral, economic, financial, political” (vol. XIX, no.11, p. 1103). This triumphalist attitude, pervasive in the West in the 20th century, as Daniel Purdy’s book shows, neglects the historical roots of entanglements between China and Europe since at least the 13th century. Dewey’s statement implies that China is completely different from the West and that it was coming under a Western dominance. Yet as Purdy explicates, China and the West have been connected to each other through trade, religion, politics, and mutual admiration for over 600 years. Dewey’s politically assumed opposition is undermined by Purdy’s historically based account of the mediation between China and Europe.

From a theoretical point of view, Purdy uses the concept of sympathy, a key notion of Enlightenment aesthetics and contemporary affect theory, to illustrate his argument about Chinese–European connections. While sympathy allows the distant observer to emotionally understand the positions and situations of others, a communication network is necessary for sympathy to germinate and develop. Moreover, Purdy delineates a genealogy of cosmopolitan thinking alongside the sympathy discourse and shows us the mutual fostering of philosophical cosmopolitanism and China–Europe relations in early modern Europe. From a historical perspective, Purdy’s book demonstrates that Jesuit missionaries played a crucial role in establishing and maintaining a network of mediation between China and Europe, primarily between 1582 and 1773,

with profound repercussions beyond 1800. Discussing famed individual writers and philosophers such as Christoph Martin Wieland, Adam Smith, and Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Purdy also foregrounds less studied figures and works such as Father Antonio Almeida or the Dutch writer Joost van den Vondel's drama *Zungchin* (1667) to enrich our historical knowledge and deepen our understanding of this subject matter.

Chapter 7, "Adam Smith and the Chinese Earthquake," is seminal in Purdy's explanation of the concept of sympathy. Purdy analyzes a passage in Smith's famous treatise *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), in which Smith asks his readers to imagine whether they could feel sorrow and pain for the Chinese if the myriad population of China were decimated by a dreadful earthquake. Purdy comments that Smith's choice of China was not random because China embodied a parallel great civilization to Europe in the 18th century and figured prominently in the Scottish Enlightenment. Purdy notes that Smith's information about China is not primarily informed by the Jesuits but rather by merchant reports. Smith's question about humanitarian sympathy "had immediate relevance to the emerging British Empire. While grounded in the suffering of others, sympathy could motivate colonial policies" (227). Purdy creatively compares Smith's point to Edmund Burke's plea for sympathy for India under the reign of British colonialism and places both issues within one context of philosophical discussion. Hence, Smith's cosmopolitan conscience is constituted by a moral obligation to restrain greed and feel sympathy for the earthquake victims in China. Purdy also points out that Smith was aware of the gendered characterization of emotional expression in his time and made clear that showing sympathy for others beyond one's own community is not unmanly but provides the foundation of masculinity and a noble humanity more generally. Breaking with Stoicism in moral education, Smith considers literature an important means in cultivating sympathetic ethics and cosmopolitan feeling.

Purdy presents the correlation between cosmopolitanism and the discourse of sympathy for China in Chapter 6, "Wieland's Secret History of Cosmopolitanism." While Wieland's postulation of a secret tradition of cosmopolitanism in Europe is not primarily concerned with China, Purdy aims to show that the Enlightenment writer's sentimental idea of a world citizenship that fosters equality and recognition, in contrast to the Jesuit mission in China, significantly influenced Goethe's sympathy with Chinese and Persian literature and contributed to the emergence of the idea of world literature. Purdy argues that Wieland should not be seen in the Stoic tradition of worldliness. Rather, the Weimar writer represented an Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, insisting "that cosmopolitans belong to a global network of like-minded spiritual beings who share intellectual and emotional enlightenment that set them apart from their surroundings" (198). Wieland's move to advance cosmopolitanism from a secret network to an open position prepared the groundwork for Goethe's literary affinity with China and a sympathetic approach toward world literature.

Supported by the arguments advanced in Chapters 6 and 7, Purdy shows in Chapters 8 through 10 how Goethe exemplarily practiced cosmopolitan sympathy for China. Numerous scholars have discussed Goethe and world literature. What sets

Purdy's discussion apart is how he puts Goethe's sympathy with Chinese Buddhism into the context of Enlightenment Spinozism. He makes clear that Goethe used an anecdote about a Jesuit dispute with a Buddhist monk to indirectly articulate his difference to Christian orthodox monotheism and his appreciation of pantheism. Through Goethe's literary engagement with China and Persia, he pronounced a poetic recognition of the fundamental similarities between Europe and China in the era of global modernity.

An erudite 18th-century scholar, Purdy's study moves beyond the long 18th century. In Chapters 1 through 5, he sets an example for other scholars by showing how media circulation in the 16th and 17th centuries set the stage for sympathetic cosmopolitanism in the European discourse of China. Letter writing by the Jesuit missionaries formed an information network channeled between Asia and Europe. Purdy argues that the images of Asia and China were still constantly being reimagined and reconstructed to serve new needs and projections. He thus disagrees with Jürgen Osterhammel's point that Europeans no longer viewed China as a mythical construct because the rise of modern sciences foreground rationality and fact-based reporting. Rather, European poetic fantasies about Asia have not ceased since Marco Polo. There were Jesuits fantasizing about "going native" in China. There was a global web of missionaries' letters that had a profound impact on 18th-century literary sentimentalism, in which epistolary novels became a prominent form for intimate confessions. In Chapters 4 and 5, news of the collapse of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in China transmitted by Jesuits inspired European dramatists to conceive of the last Ming emperor as a figure of sympathy, a ruler, and a martyr. Purdy insightfully points out that the 18th-century prejudice of China as a monolithic static empire was not supported by Baroque representations of China as an unstable regime experiencing revolutions and invasions. The Chinese instability was compared to that of Europe and thus evoked sympathy.

Indeed, while the Jesuit missionaries, similar to Dewey's position, originally set out to "transform the mind of China" through Catholicism, Purdy tells us stories in which Europe has digested and incorporated Chinese culture and history and become deeply entangled with China. Anyone who is interested in transcultural history, early modern German literary and philosophical thinking in the European context, and the discourse of world literature should find this rich book indispensable.