

Daniel Leonhard Purdy. *Chinese Sympathies: Media, Missionaries, and World Literature from Marco Polo to Goethe*. Signale: Modern German Letters, Cultures, and Thought Series. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. Illustrations. 420 pp. \$125.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5017-5973-4.

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In his most recent book, *Chinese Sympathies: Media, Missionaries, and World Literature from Marco Polo to Goethe* (2021), Daniel Leonhard Purdy sets out to provide a genealogy of cosmopolitanism and world literature, tracing its formation from early European-Asian encounters onward. Claiming that “without the global Catholic Church world literature would never have emerged as it did,” Purdy debunks the Sinophobia/Sinophilia model that dominates the discourse on European perceptions of Asia in general and China in particular and rewrites the European-Asian encounter as a trajectory of expanding and deepening European “sympathies” toward China (p. 26). Purdy, a self-confessed Goethean, is a professor of German studies at Penn State University with a well-documented expertise in German literature and philosophy in the global context. *Chinese Sympathies* is the latest compilation of the author’s varied explorations of the historical interplay between the sacred and the secular, expertise and laymanship, the systematic and the arbitrary, the canonized and the everyday. Framing his work by affect theory, Purdy reads “sympathies” between cultures as an “epistemology of resemblances” as it brings the “visceral forces beneath, alongside, or

generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotions” to bear (p. 3).

Conceding that early “sympathetic Orientalism” circulated ideas that laid the foundations for a full-fledged “technical colonialism” to come, Purdy provides ten comprehensive chapters, tracing the nonlinear, shifting continuities of moral emotions emerging and reinforcing European perceptions of what makes China similar to Europe (p. 19). He argues that the evolving intellectual regimes of “Jesuit missionaries, baroque encyclopedists, Enlightenment moralists, world literature translators” by way of “textually mediated emotions” framed China as fundamentally no different to Europe (p. 2). Providing a close reading of Jesuit missionary reports, baroque martyr dramas, Adam Smith’s thought experiment, and Johan Wolfgang von Goethe’s engagement with Chinese literature, Purdy shows how these discourses facilitated emotional connections to unfamiliar, distant cultures and paved the way for notions of cosmopolitanism and world literature.

In the first three chapters, Purdy displays the various communication networks that both enabled and resulted from European encounters with China. Explaining how Marco Polo’s travel

memoirs set the model for the European perception of China, he concludes that “500 years after Marco Polo (1254-1324) first set out, China was still organized according to the tropes he introduced” (p. 59). From the sixteenth century until their suppression toward the end of the eighteenth century, Jesuit missionaries not only provided the most detailed descriptions of China, but their systematic communication network across time and space also fostered a spiritual circuit and union between Europe and China. Jesuits’ letters and reports circulated widely in scholarly, ecclesiastical, and lay formats and their correspondence formed, among other things, the basis for encyclopedic compilations, like Athanasius Kircher’s eminent *China Illustrata* (1667), which was vital to the Enlightenment’s understanding of China. The obvious necessity for Jesuit missionaries to integrate themselves into the administration of the emperor of China and to accommodate Christian teachings to Confucian writings set the stage for enabling Europeans to identify with China. Their textually mediated compassion for the unfamiliar made Europeans develop emotions reaching “from pity to sympathy as following a path from Christian compassion for the suffering of martyrs ... to a more general ability to feel identity with other humans” (p. 117). Against the foil of baroque tragic dramas, Purdy traces how early modern martyr dramas, staging the ruthless Asiatic despot and his suffering victims, not only fostered Europeans’ compassion for the suffering Asian converts at the time but also effected the “modern media spectacle of cosmopolitan appeals to rescue the Third World” (p. 137).

Purdy identifies the Manchu invasion and the subsequent collapse of the Chinese Empire in 1644 as a turning point for the Christian image of the martyr to expand. He outlines how Martino Martini’s *De Bello Tartarico Historia* (1655), an early forerunner of global history, ascribes the qualities of *the* baroque tragic figure to the last Ming emperor, who took his daughter’s and his own life (chapter 4). Dutch dramatist Joost van den Vondel

reiterated this image in his tragic drama *Zungchin* (1667) when he incorporated the Chinese emperor into the emotional economy of the European baroque tragic drama. The play indicates a shift in European perception: it is no longer the Christian martyr suffering at the hands of the pagan ruler who deserves compassion, but the martyr crown has been passed on to the Chinese ruler grieving the loss of his empire (chapter 5). This is to say that martyrdom no longer was limited to the canon of Christian values but intersected with Confucian principles. Pinpointing the Jesuits’ globalizing power and influence on the European emotional economy, Purdy highlights how “Jesuit pedagogy and theatrics shaped baroque literature” and showcases how martyr dramas were instrumental in directing the emotions of European spectators toward foreigners (p. 124).

In the next two chapters, Purdy credits the Enlightenment moralists with having replaced the missionary’s intellectual regime with sentimental identifications, thereby laying the immediate foundation for cosmopolitanism and world literature. In the context of their explicit rejection of the Jesuit project to Christianize the world, Enlightenment moralists basically secularized Europeans’ feeling of sympathy. Purdy calls on Christoph Martin Wieland and Adam Smith’s thought experiment to explicate how the European sense of affinity was extended by removing the figure of the martyr and developing secular forms of emotional cosmopolitanism. Wieland’s writings become discursive and psychological preconditions for ushering in “secular sympathies” that include interpersonal bonds among ordinary people (chapter 6). Wieland, the first “putting pen to paper to write the word *Weltliteratur*,” proposed a cosmopolitanism that embodies “a humanist and secular adaptation of Christian universalism” (pp. 199, 219). Smith, however, developed an ethical paradigm, arguing that feeling for hypothetical Chinese earthquake victims is a moral obligation. Sympathy at the sight of suffering victims for Smith was the very implication of moral sympathy.

Purdy reads his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) as a kind of handbook about how moral thinking needs to engage with overcoming mental and spatial limitations on fellow-feeling (chapter 7). He shows how in eighteenth-century martyr dramas, Smith's secularization of sympathy allowed for a turnover of the victim-arbitrator hierarchy as "encounters between Europeans and indigenous people ... allegorized the violent failure of intercultural relations. The martyr figure thus became an avenue for Europeans to identify with victims of colonialism" (p. 237).

In the remaining chapters, Purdy discusses how Goethe's concept of world literature was but a follow-up of Jesuits' ability to draw analogies in the face of differences. Goethe's reception of the first Chinese novels in translation was basically a continuation of this virtue, yet, as Purdy demonstrates, Goethe was less interested in similarities as a form of organized knowledge about the "Orient" but searched for inspiration for his own creative work. His interest in intercultural dialogue and the accommodation of world literature stood in clear contrast to the newly emerging nationalist literary cultures and was at odds with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's hierarchical understanding of cultures and the Hegelian world spirit moving from Asia to Europe. Purdy restates his overall critique, that Hegel's position usually serves as representation of racist colonialism as it makes a nice fit within the larger arc of a turn from fascination to fear and disdain, from Sinophilia to Sinophobia, whereas "Goethe's sympathetic approach to Chinese literature is too often overlooked" (p. 303). Assuming an "organic wholeness of human existence," Goethe clearly was interested in resemblances between different aesthetic forms, fascinated by how globally circulating texts overlapped and intersected (p. 301).

Chinese Sympathies is a thoughtful and gentle objection against the ideology-driven simplification of historical encounters between European and Asian cultures. It aptly resists temptations of

self-referential theories of cosmopolitanism and world literature by offering a thick description of the space and the formation of sympathetic affects in intercultural encounters, demonstrating how Christian and secular Enlightenment morality fostered contemporary cosmopolitanism and generated prerequisites for Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur*.

Each chapter consists of a stand-alone manuscript. The book as a whole, however, remains a meandering zigzag of literary close readings, philosophical elucidations, and historical contextualization, which de facto requires the perpetual repetitions in order to not lose track of the bigger picture. It is a pity that the author basically ignores the current state of research in the field of Sino-German studies or subsumes it under the one-sidedness of critical approaches to Orientalism. Leigh K. Jenco and Jonathan Chappell's "history from between" with a focus on space framed by both East Asia and Europe would have been worth consulting.[1] Also, despite the fact it mainly deals with the nineteenth century, Andrea Polaschegg's dissertation, *Der andere Orientalismus*, simply cannot be ignored in this context.[2] Nevertheless, Purdy offers an erudite, profound, and multilayered work, worth reading and warmly recommended to scholars of German and of Chinese studies with an interest in intercultural encounters, cosmopolitanism, and world literature.

Notes

[1]. Leigh K. Jenco and Jonathan Chappell, "Introduction: History from Between and the Global Circulations of the Past in Asia and Europe, 1600-1950," in special issue 1, "Uses of the Past between Europe and East Asia," *Historical Journal* 64 (2021): 1-16, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X19000633>.

[2]. Andrea Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus: Regeln deutsch-morgenländischer Imagination im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005).

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