

International symposium organised by the Unité de recherche EA 4249
HCTI/EIRIS

Université de Bretagne Occidentale (UBO), UFR Lettres et Sciences Humaines,

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Call for papers

**The perception of China in western caricature and
its influence on caricature in China**

By virtue of its geographical and cultural distance, China has long fascinated the West, as is attested by the numerous accounts of the Middle Kingdom since the end of the 13th century, and by the writings of Marco Polo. The Western imagination has literally fed on the fantasies of this empire that has inspired endless contradictory reactions between fascination and repulsion, love and hate, wonder and fear, Sinophilia and Sinophobia. At many key moments in the history of the Western world, China has incontrovertibly constituted a mirror for the projection of self-representations.

Past and present Western images of Chinese political, social and cultural events invariably find their way into caricature, a field often commanded by stereotypes, whether to be confirmed or denounced. The study of several centuries' worth of Western caricatures should make it possible to account for and to define the ambivalent relationships that Western nations, in their diversity and their unity, have maintained with China. Taking such analyses as a given, it becomes equally important to study the reception of such caricatures in China and their eventual influence on the way in which the Chinese look both at Westerners and their own nation. Does the representation of China in Chinese caricature give rise to monolithic or to diverse representations?

Papers are welcome that address any element(s) of the following two (broadly linked) areas of enquiry:

Historical

The stability and longevity of the Middle Empire have long shaped the often-idealized image, promoted by Jesuit and Protestant missionaries present in China, that prevailed in Western perceptions up to the 18th century. Can we find, in these old graphic satires, any elements of this frank sinophilia and thereby of an indirect critique of European régimes ?

Conversely, is it also possibly to identify in graphic satire an echo of the degradation of this image, itself a sign of the passage from 17th-18th century sinophilia to 19th century sinophilia, as we find especially in a France under the spell of the highly negative visions propagated in the narratives of merchants and travellers (Michel Cartier) ? Do cartoonists increasingly illustrate the expression of an “Immobile Empire” that appeared for the first time through the pen of Friedrich Hegel, himself a stern critic of Chinese civilization ? Or do older representations prevail ?

With the wars and rebellions of the mid-nineteenth century – and especially with the Opium Wars – and the disclosure of China’s military limitations, how was its image changed in a lasting way? Was China definitively discredited by cartoonists’ representations of military disasters, first through conflicts with France and Japan, and later through the Boxer Rebellion? Faced with the vivid remarks addressed by Kaiser Wilhelm II (*no pardon, no quarter*) to the German troops setting out for China on July 27, 1900, in order to avenge the massacre of missionaries, or with the representation of a cruel, duplicitous China at the hands of Paul Claudel (*Livre sur la Chine*), how did cartoonists respond and make these precepts their own? Or were they more nuanced in their graphic satire?

How were China’s internal conflicts in the early twentieth century and the fall of the Emperor interpreted? Were the great political and social changes underway in China taken into account? And what of the taking of power by the Communists in 1949 and the installation of a new régime? Did the Cultural Revolution give rise to positive or negative representations?

And finally, how have Western cartoonists responded to the extremely rapid

transformation of Chinese economy and society that has taken place in recent decades? Are we bearing witness to the fashioning of a new ‘yellow peril’? How do the most recent graphic satire connect to the self-representations disseminated by the Chinese press?

This range of questions calls for a retracing of the history of China as seen by Western cartoonists and for a new assessment of the very influence of these representations.

Semiological / linguistic line of enquiry

It will also be important to consider in detail graphic representations of China with respect to the reoccurrence (or not) of certain characters, of certain motifs, and of attributes that allow us to recognize, within a drawing, a person held to be Chinese. This entails thinking through the relative persistence of stereotypes and, eventually, the diversity of images that can be ascribed to different periods and cultures. The artistic motifs that cartoonists use to flesh out their discourse require close attention; the relationship between text and image can also be studied. How do those qualifiers that find their way into captions or speech bubbles accord with graphic traits?

Papers are welcome in both English and French. Proposals, keeping to a limit of 300 words and accompanied by a brief biographical presentation, should be sent before September 30 to the following addresses:

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Notification of accepted proposals will be made on November 15, 2018.

Selections committee:

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