



SERGE GRUZINSKI

The Eagle & the Dragon

Globalization and European Dreams of Conquest in
China and America in the Sixteenth Century



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For Agnès Fontaine

The Eagle and the Dragon

Globalization and European Dreams
of Conquest in China and America
in the Sixteenth Century

Serge Gruzinski

Translated by Jean Birrell

polity

First published in French as *L'Aigle et le Dragon* © Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2012

This English edition © Polity Press, 2014

This work, published as part of a program providing publication assistance, received financial support from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States and FACE (French American Cultural Exchange).

Polity Press

65 Bridge Street

Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press

350 Main Street

Malden, MA 02148, USA

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ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-6711-9

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-6712-6 (pb)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-8134-4 (epub)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-8133-7 (mobi)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gruzinski, Serge.

[Aigle et le dragon. English]

The eagle and the dragon : European expansion and globalization in the 16th century / Serge Gruzinski.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-7456-6711-9 (hardcover) - ISBN 978-0-7456-6712-6 (papercover)

1. History, Modern-16th century. 2. Civilization-History-16th century. 3. Discoveries in geography-History-16th century. I. Title.

D228.G7813 2012

909'.5-dc23

2014016825

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Acknowledgements

The members of my history seminar at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales know how much I owe to their questions, comments and criticisms. No historical research can be done in isolation, and global history, even more than other forms of history, demands an interchange of ideas, a bringing together of skills and encounters between researchers from the four quarters of the globe. Carmen Bernand, Louise Bénat Tachot, Alessandra Russo, Alfonso Alfaro, Décio Guzman, Boris Jeanne, Pedro Gomes, Maria Matilde Benzoni, Oreste Ventrone and Giuseppe Marcocci, all budding researchers, whatever their age, have supplied the energy, the horizons and the confrontations that are essential to global history. Nevertheless, though never a solitary enterprise, a work of history remains above all an individual adventure. The Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales continues to be a special place, where one can depart from well-trodden paths, run risks and imagine the future of a discipline which might resume its place at the head of the social sciences by showing that it has learnt to break through the barrier of times and civilizations.

Foreword

Serge Gruzinski is one of the leading French historians of his generation (he was born in 1949). He began as a historian of early modern Mexico, but has gradually widened his scope to encompass the history of Latin America (including Brazil), and more recently the history of early modern globalization (globalization, whether economic or cultural, may have accelerated in the last few decades but the trend goes back much further). In his latest book, Gruzinski focuses on two parts of the early modern world, Mexico and China.

Most of us, even historians, do not think of sixteenth-century China and Latin America as having much to do with each other (apart from the goods sent from China to Manila and then taken to Acapulco by the so-called 'Manila galleons'). It is the achievement of Serge Gruzinski to show us that we were wrong. *The Eagle and the Dragon* is a fine example of what the French call *histoire croisée*, sometimes translated as 'connected history' or 'transnational history', an approach to the past that focuses on economic, political or cultural links between different parts of the world.

Histoire croisée is sometimes presented as the successor to an older 'comparative history' that examines both the similarities and the differences between societies but has little to say about possible connections. In my view, however, these two approaches are complementary rather than contradictory. Serge Gruzinski obviously agrees. He is interested in connections between the two empires of Spain and China, the eagle and the dragon, but builds this study around comparisons and contrasts, notably between Spain's conquest of Mexico and Portugal's failure to

conquer China. Offering a fascinating example of 'virtual' or 'counter-factual' history, Gruzinski imagines what might have happened if it had been Portugal that succeeded and Spain that failed. After all, the conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortés with a force of only a few hundred Spaniards was far from inevitable.

In short, the great merit of this relatively short book, besides bringing little-known details of the relations between the two empires to our notice, is to stimulate reflection about what makes empires vulnerable and, more generally still, about such questions as how different paths might have been taken at certain points in history and why things actually happened in the way that they did.

Peter Burke

Introduction

Andromache: 'The Trojan War will not take place,
Cassandra!'

Jean Giraudoux, *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*, I, 1

Some writers of the first half of the twentieth century came across the paths that led me from Mexico to China. It was from Jean Giraudoux that I got the idea for a title, long ago – *The Chinese War will not take place* – but I had to abandon it. Paul Claudel vividly depicted worlds we are now perhaps better placed to understand. In the 'Days' of his play of 1929, *The Satin Slipper*, people from all four quarters of the globe converse one with the other. 'The Scene of this play is the world, and more especially Spain at the close of the Sixteenth Century', Claudel explained. In what he described as 'compendiating countries and periods',¹ he made no claim to be a historian, but he plunged his readers into all the turmoil of a globalization. It was not the first globalization, nor would it be the last; Claudel's was the globalization that came rapidly in the sixteenth century, in the aftermath of the Portuguese and Spanish expeditions. Both the Aztec Eagle and the Chinese Dragon then experienced the first consequences of a European immoderation.

This globalization was not the same as European expansion. The latter mobilized huge quantities of technical, financial, spiritual and human resources. It was a consequence of political choices, economic calculation and religious aspirations which combined, for better or worse, to despatch soldiers, sailors, priests and merchants thousands of kilometres away from the Iberian Peninsula, into every part of the globe. This Iberian expansion sparked

chain reactions, even caused shocks so seismic they destabilized whole societies. This was the case in America. In Asia Iberian expansion came up against forces stronger than itself, when it had not got bogged down in the marshes and forests of Africa. The image of an inexorable European advance – whether its heroic and civilizing virtues are celebrated or it is held up to contempt – is an illusion that has proved difficult to dispel. It derives from a linear and teleological vision of history which continues to mislead both historians and their readers.

What is incorrect in the case of Iberian expansion is even more so in that of globalization, which may be defined as the proliferation of links of every type between parts of the world previously unaware of each other or in only the most distant contact. The globalization of the sixteenth century affected Europe, Africa, Asia and the New World, as interactions of unprecedented intensity began to take place between them. A web was being spun around the planet, still fragile, full of huge holes, always liable to tear at the least pressure, but indifferent to political and cultural frontiers. The protagonists in this globalization included the African, Asian and Amerindian populations, who all played a part, willy-nilly. However, it was the Portuguese, the Spanish and the Italians who supplied most of the religious, commercial and imperialist energy, at least at this period and for more than 150 years. As the Chinese servant in *The Satin Slipper* says to Don Rodrigo, Viceroy of the Indies: 'We have captured each other, and there is no way of getting unstuck'.²

How much of this was perceived by contemporaries? Their gaze was often more penetrating than that of the historians who have studied them since. Many people in the sixteenth century, and not only Europeans, grasped the magnitude of the developments taking place around them. For the most part they conceived them in religious terms, on the basis of

the perspectives opened up by mission. But globalization also impacted on the minds of many who were conscious of the speeding up of communications between the different parts of the world, the discovery of the infinite diversity of landscapes and peoples, the extraordinary opportunities for profit opened up by investments on the other side of the world and the limitless expansion of known spaces – and the attendant risks. Nothing seemed to be beyond the curiosity of the travellers, though they were frequently unable to go anywhere without the assistance of their indigenous guides.

The discovery of America and the conquest of Mexico can be attributed to historical figures like Hernán Cortés and Columbus. This is questionable, but convenient. The distance of centuries and our increasingly galling ignorance encourages us to accept such shortcuts. But globalization had no author. It was a response, on a global scale, to the shocks set off by the Iberian initiatives. It caused many histories suddenly to become intertwined, with unexpected and previously unimaginable consequences. It was in no way an inexorable and irreversible process, mechanically accomplishing a preconceived plan leading to the standardization of the world.

It is thus mistaken to believe that our own globalization was born with the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is equally illusory to see it as a gigantic tree sprouted from a seed sown by Iberian hands in the sixteenth century. Yet our own age is indebted to this distant period, and in a variety of ways, if we accept that the absence of direct links or linearity does not turn the course of history into a series of chance events and happenings lacking in significance. It was in the sixteenth century that human history began to be played out on a world stage. It was then that connections between the different parts of the world began

to accelerate: between Europe and the Caribbean from 1492, between Lisbon and Canton from 1513, between Seville and Mexico from 1517, and so on. There is another reason, which is central to my book: it was with Iberian globalization that Europe, the New World and China became world partners. China and America play a major role in the globalization of today. But why and how did they come to stand face to face on the world chessboard? And why does America today show signs of exhaustion, while China seems poised to deprive it of its first place?

In an earlier book, *What Time is it There?*, I discussed the nature of the links formed in the sixteenth century between the New World and the Muslim world. These regions were then confronted with the first consequences of European expansion throughout the globe. Columbus believed that his discovery would provide the gold which would enable Christians to recapture Jerusalem and vanquish Islam. The Ottoman Empire, for its part, was made uneasy by the sight of a continent unknown to the Koran and Islamic scholars and succumbing both to the faith and to the greed of Christians. It is impossible to discuss the globalization that has gradually given the world a common history without considering what has happened since the sixteenth century between the Islamic lands, Europe and America. But is this enough? If the addition of a fourth part of the world was the founding act of Iberian globalization, the irruption of China onto European and American horizons was another major upheaval. The fact that it was roughly contemporary with the discovery of Mexico ought to have attracted attention before now, but, long focused on Mesoamerica, we had forgotten that it was not the end of the world, but rather, as the ancient Mexicans claimed, the centre.

The Iberians hoped to conquer China on two occasions in the sixteenth century, but their aims were never achieved. 'The Chinese war will not take place', to paraphrase the

title of Giraudoux's famous play. Some, belatedly, will regret this. Others, like me, will reflect on what we can learn from these dreams of conquest, contemporary with the colonization of the Americas and the exploration of the Pacific Ocean. China, the Pacific, the New World and Iberian Europe were the major players in a history that was created by their encounters and their confrontations. It can be summed up in a few words: in the same century the Iberians failed in China and succeeded in America. This is what is revealed by a global history of the sixteenth century, conceived as another way of reading the Renaissance, less stubbornly Eurocentric but probably more in tune with our age.

Notes

- [1.](#) Paul Claudel, *Le Soulier de satin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 15; trans. Fr. John O'Connor as *The Satin Slipper or The Worst is Not the Surest* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932; repr. 1945), p. xxvi. The play was made into a film in 1985 by the Portuguese director Manoel de Oliveira, and performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 2004 and in New York in 2010.
- [2.](#) Claudel, *Satin Slipper*, p. 30.

1

Two Tranquil Worlds

What frightens me in Asia is the vision of our own future which it is already experiencing. In the America of the Indians, I cherish the reflection...of an era when the human species was in proportion to the world it occupied.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*

(trans. J. and D. Weightman, p. 150)

In 1520 Charles V, Francis I and Henry VIII were the three rising stars of Latin Christendom: regent of Castile since 1517, crowned king of Germany in 1520, Charles the Great had been born with the new century; Francis I had been king of France since 1515, Henry VIII king of England since 1509.¹ Meanwhile, in Portugal the ageing Manuel the Fortunate was still vigorous enough to marry the sister of the Tudor king. Faced with their French and English rivals, Charles the Great and Manuel of Portugal nurtured oceanic ambitions which would project their kingdoms towards other worlds. In November 1519 a Spanish adventurer called Hernán Cortés, at the head of a small troop of foot soldiers and cavalrymen, made his entry into Mexico. In May 1520 a Portuguese ambassador, with even fewer men, entered Nanking. It was here that the ambassador Tomé Pires was received by the emperor of China, Zhengde. Korean sources reveal the presence of some Portuguese in the imperial entourage, where they would have enjoyed the services of a guide and interpreter, the Muslim merchant Khôjja Asan.² In Mexico, and at this same period, Cortés met Moctezuma, leader of the Triple Alliance, or, if preferred, the 'Emperor of the Aztecs'.

The Two Emperors

Let us look first at Zhengde. It was in Peking, in June 1505, that Zhu Houzhao succeeded his father, the Emperor Hongzhi, under the imperial name of Zhengde. The tenth Ming emperor had acceded to the throne at the age of fourteen and he died in 1521.³ His reign was much criticized by the chroniclers. According to them, Zhengde neglected affairs of state in favour of a life of pleasure. He liked to travel outside the Forbidden City, leaving his predatory eunuchs to amass fortunes.

In reality Zhengde was also a warrior who tried to escape the tutelage of the senior civil servants in order to revive the tradition of openness, even cosmopolitanism, of the preceding Mongol dynasty, the Yuan. He spent most of his time away from the imperial palace and he liked to surround himself with Tibetan monks, Muslim clerics, artists from central Asia, and Jurchen and Mongol bodyguards; when, that is, he was not meeting foreign ambassadors who had travelled to Peking. He even prohibited the slaughter of pigs so as to improve relations with the Muslim powers of central Asia. In 1518 and 1519 he personally led military campaigns in the north against the Mongols and in the south in Jiangxi. In 1521 he decided to crush a rebellious prince and had him executed in Tongzhou. This did nothing to improve his image; or that at least is the impression left by the official chronicles and gazetteers that appeared after his death, all of which present his reign as a time of disorder and decay (*moshi*). An exodus of peasants to the mines and the towns, the rise of parvenus, the abandonment of traditions, 'local customs' made to undergo 'a sea change',⁴ harsh exactions by officials, unease and unrest among the people, the growth of illegal trade with the Japanese – the verdict of the official histories is hardly complimentary. Added to which were

natural catastrophes, a flood and a famine in 1511, which they were quick to blame on the crisis then afflicting society. But not the whole of society; it was also an age when new fortunes were too many to count, when production everywhere increased and when international trade was more prosperous than ever before.⁵

In 1520 the ruler of China, in a drunken stupor, fell from the imperial boat into the waters of the Grand Canal, the principal artery connecting the north and south of the country. The fever or pneumonia he caught as a result of this enforced immersion killed him the following year, on 20 April, aged only thirty. It was icy water that had led to his death, and as this was the element of the dragon, some chroniclers believed that dragons had been responsible for his untimely end.⁶ Only a few months earlier, mysterious creatures had disturbed the calm of the streets of Peking, attacking passers-by and wounding them with their claws. They were called 'Dark Afflictions'.⁷ The Minister of War restored order and the rumours died down. Zhengde, who had always been curious about strange phenomena, had met the Portuguese embassy not long before his death. To his contemporaries and their successors, however, this episode counted for little. It did not earn him the posthumous and tragic fame that would be attached to the person of the *tlatoani* of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, Moctezuma Xoyocotzin. A film of 1959, *The Kingdom and the Beauty*, made at the height of the Communist era, was not enough to immortalize the adventures of a sovereign who had disguised himself as a man of the people the better to indulge his pleasures.

We know a great deal, but at the same time very little, about Moctezuma Xoyocotzin. The Aztec world is even less familiar to us than the Chinese world and it has acquired an enduring tragic aura. Indians, Spanish and mestizos

have all left biased and contradictory pictures of Moctezuma Xoyocotzin: either reasons had to be found for the collapse of the indigenous kingdoms, or the prowess of the Spanish conquest had to be glorified.⁸ Grandson and successor of Ahuitzotl (1486–1502), Moctezuma was born around 1467. He was a mature and experienced ruler in his fifties at the time of the arrival of Hernán Cortés. The ninth *tlatoani*, he reigned from 1502 to 1520 over the Mexicas of Mexico-Tenochtitlan; he also dominated Texcoco and Tlacopan, his partners in the Triple Alliance – the ‘three heads’. Western tradition has made him emperor of the Aztecs.

The chroniclers invest him with warlike virtues he had apparently demonstrated at the beginning of his reign, but he seems to have made little use of them against the conquistadors. He strengthened his control over the noble elites and reorganized the upper echelons of the administration, dismissing some of those who had served under his predecessor; he altered the calendar – the full significance of this will emerge later; and he led numerous campaigns against the enemies of the Triple Alliance, but with only modest success. The defeat he suffered at the hands of Tlaxcala (1515) shows that it was not necessary to be Spanish or to have horses and firearms to get the better of him. Like his Chinese fellow ruler the Emperor Zhengde, he kept a menagerie full of exotic animals. He resembled him, too, in his liking for women; the chronicler Díaz del Castillo confirms that he was ‘free of sodomy’, a matter on which the Spanish needed constant reassurance.

Moctezuma met his death at the hands either of the Indians or of the Spanish. According to the histories written after his death, his reign was punctuated by evil omens, which the ‘priests of the idols’ were unable to decipher and which were later associated with the Spanish conquest. His wretched death has inspired films and operas.⁹ Unlike the

Emperor Zhengde, he has an imperishable place in Western history and in the European *imaginaire*.

These two emperors had nothing in common except the fact of being caught up in the same history. In November 1519 Moctezuma encountered the Spanish in Mexico; a few months later Zhengde met the Portuguese in Nanking. I will return to this coincidence, but after a brief introduction to what China and Mexico represented at the dawn of the sixteenth century.

The China of Zhengde and the Mexico of Moctezuma

In 1511 the Portuguese took Malacca and the Spanish seized Cuba. The Iberian fleets were then only a short distance from, as it were, two huge icebergs, whose visible tips they were preparing to explore. For a few years yet, Mexico and China would escape the expansionist fever then consuming the Iberian Crowns and their subjects.

The two countries had little in common, other than being next on the list of Hispano-Portuguese discoveries...or conquests; and other than the strange – to European eyes – fact of having experienced millennia of history which had unfolded quite apart from the Euro-Mediterranean world. China and Mexico had followed trajectories alien both to Judeo-Christian monotheism and to the political, juridical and philosophical heritage of Greece and Rome, though without ever having been exclusively inward-looking. It is true that, while the Amerindian societies had developed without any sort of relationship with the outside world, contacts had long existed between the Chinese world and the Mediterranean (by way of the famous Silk Road). We should not forget that China had always been in communication with a part of Eurasia, if only by welcoming

Indian Buddhism, allowing centuries of Islamic penetration or sharing immune resistances; these last, when the crisis struck, were cruelly absent in the case of the Amerindian populations.

What were China and Mexico like in the second decade of the sixteenth century? China was an empire (although some prefer to talk of 'the Chinese world'),¹⁰ whereas ancient Mexico was far from a politically unified whole. Archaeologists prefer the much broader concept of Mesoamerica, given that 'Mexico' evokes a national reality that emerged in the nineteenth century and is wholly anachronistic for the period under discussion here. In any case, it is not my intention here to compare China and Mexico. I aim rather to provide a brief sketch of each on the eve of the Iberian arrivals, with the emphasis on the crucial features which help to explain the way they each reacted to European intervention, particularly in the areas that are pivotal whenever there is a clash of civilizations: the ability to move rapidly on land and sea, the art of collecting and circulating information, familiarity with operating at a continental and intercontinental level, the capability to mobilize material, human and military resources at short notice and unexpectedly, a propensity to think on a world scale. These strengths – part technical, part psychological and intellectual – would all play a part in Iberian expansion: without capital, ships, horses, firearms and writing, no far-flung expansion was conceivable, with all it involved in the spheres of the movement of men and material, logistical support, fact-finding and spying campaigns, methods of extracting and transporting wealth and, what is too often forgotten, the creation of a world consciousness.

A brief appraisal is inevitably unsatisfactory, and even more so in the case of Mesoamerica because, in our communal memory, China and ancient Mexico do not loom equally

large. The sudden influx of Spaniards into their new conquest inspired a plethora of accounts and descriptions, but the pre-Columbian period remains largely obscure, remarkable advances in archaeology notwithstanding. The ancient Mexicans had no writing, the Chinese had been writing for at least 3,000 years. Chinese sources are consequently abundant, whereas the historian of America has to make do with European testimonies and a handful of indigenous and mestizo accounts which are inevitably distorted by the trauma of conquest and the constraints of colonization. The indigenous worlds of the fifteenth century will probably always be obscure to us. The Chinese world speaks to us still, and will probably speak to us more and more.

Zhongguo

Zhongguo, the 'Middle Kingdom'...Compared with the New World and the rest of the globe, Imperial China beat all records for antiquity. The Chinese Empire dated back to the third millennium before the Christian era, with the dynasty of the Xia. By contrast, the Mexica and Inca empires, the giants of the American continent, had accumulated between them barely a century of existence by the time of the Spanish conquest. The continuity and antiquity of China, its sheer size, its human resources – more than 100,000,000, perhaps even 130,000,000 inhabitants^{[11](#)} – and its incalculable wealth would all be discovered by the Iberians with amazement; they would take pleasure in describing them to each other, before repeating them to the rest of Europe.

Above all, the Chinese empire was a huge administrative and judicial machine, perfected over the centuries, which controlled the country through a host of mandarins, eunuchs, magistrates, inspectors, auditors, judges and

military leaders; except on the northern frontiers and the coasts, the army played only a subsidiary role. This machine was replenished by way of competitive entrance examinations, which assured continuity of rule between the court of Peking, the provincial capitals and the lowest levels of the empire. There was no nobility, nor any great lords, but a generally educated gentry. Many of them, thanks to examination success and familial or regional support, were able to embark on an upward path which took a handful of the most talented and best supported to the imperial capital. The 20,000 employees of the Confucian bureaucracy and the 100,000 eunuchs can give the impression, seen from Europe or from Mexico, of a vastly overstaffed administration.

In reality sixteenth-century China was a notoriously under-administered monster.¹² As in every administration, corruption oiled the wheels where imperial control, too distant, too slow or too sporadic, proved ineffective. Corruption was at its worst on the southern coasts, where prosperity was largely based on overseas trade. The Portuguese were to be lucky beneficiaries of this. Nothing is perfect; mismanagement, revolts and banditry mean we cannot idealize the Celestial bureaucracy, but we should recognize that it was unique in the world in having the capacity to administer such large populations and spaces. It was with this bureaucracy that the emperor clashed: the liberties he took with court rituals and practices, his military ventures, his curiosity about external worlds and his universal ambitions were all repugnant to the educated members of the administration, whose values were different.

But China was also a world of great merchants. They traded in corn, silks, salt, tea and porcelains. The increasing congestion of the Grand Canal, crucial axis of north-south traffic, testifies to the scale of this trade.¹³ In

the early sixteenth century the merchants gained in power vis-à-vis the gentry, who looked down on them as parvenus. Their dynamism was contrary to the principles of Confucian morality, as they preferred the uncertainties and expedients of the market to the stable, ordered and sane world of the countryside. However, the old model was still so powerful that it imposed itself on the new classes. The merchants of Huizhou, great exporters of corn and tea and fortunate beneficiaries of a salt monopoly, tried to improve their image by attaching themselves to the world of the educated and the high civil service.¹⁴ The gentry, meanwhile, found it difficult to resist the luxury goods – ancient porcelains, exotic fruits and plants – these prosperous merchants imported, often from distant locations. The temptation was all the stronger in that the collection or consumption of rare and precious goods has always been a ‘must’ among members of the gentry. It is hardly surprising that the curiosity aroused by the strange objects introduced by the Iberians encouraged the opening of links with the Europeans, and hence contact between the two worlds.

Trade, postal services and the army all had the benefit of a road network, a relay system and a series of canals and bridges of a density and efficiency remarkable for the period, when they are compared with anything contemporary Europe had to offer. Horses, sedan chairs and flat-bottomed boats crisscrossed the country. The state of the roads and the number of bridges – of dressed stone or pontoons – fascinated European visitors, who could hardly believe their eyes.¹⁵ The development of agriculture was equally astonishing: fields as far as the eye could see, not a square centimetre of land left uncultivated, armies of peasants toiling in the rice fields.

The growth of agriculture and technology benefited from the diffusion of the printed book, particularly visible in the

late fifteenth century. Publishing had become a highly profitable enterprise and ventures such as the Shendu publishing house, in Fujian, projected the image of a dynamic country, in many spheres more 'advanced' than Christian Europe. It was the boom in publishing which made possible the printing and reprinting of standard works, the Confucian canon, normative texts like the Ming code and the ordinances of the same name and imperial histories. This success was also due to the spread of reading. One is inevitably reminded of the irruption of printing into fifteenth-century Europe; with the difference that in China printed texts, 'which make it possible to embrace the world from the room one is in',¹⁶ were neither a new nor a recent development, and had for centuries existed alongside an orality that was still predominant. This revolution was long in the past for the Chinese of the sixteenth century. Writing was the spearhead of an administration that was impressive for its time; it encouraged deep philosophical reflection, but it was also useful to the – often rebellious – free spirits who, from deep in the provinces, expressed opinions and reactions to the things of this world. Gazetteers flourished everywhere, spreading news, divulging techniques and knowledge, forging contacts between the different parts of the empire and keeping count of the flights of dragons that portended catastrophes.

To speak of 'Chinese thought' leads inevitably to generalities that fail to convey the diversity of its ideas or the originality of its innovations. From the beginning of the fifteenth century examination candidates had access to compilations of neo-Confucian texts with which they were expected to be thoroughly familiar. These writings, like the *Great Collection of the Four Books*, nurtured an orthodox thought inherited from the Song and found throughout the empire, which would influence the thinking of the

bureaucracy until the beginning of the twentieth century. It would be a mistake, however, to imagine an intellectual sphere exclusively devoted to the world of the classics. Confucian orthodoxy was also open to Buddhist influences, it assimilated quietist tendencies which prioritized the internal experience of the mind above the external life, and it tolerated deviations encouraged by the social transformations of the age. Scholarly culture and popular culture intermingled, here as elsewhere, while syncretist strands combined Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in the idea that these three teachings were all one.¹⁷ It was the primacy accorded to the spiritual experience over the doctrinal corpus which explains these phenomena of convergence and this fluidity of the religious traditions.

Some fascinating figures stand out on this intellectual horizon. Wang Yangming (1472–1529) was one of the most remarkable and his thought dominated the Chinese sixteenth century. Wang emphasized individual intuition and insisted on the predominance of the mind, because the mind was first in what was a unity:¹⁸ ‘the mind of the saint conceives Heaven-and-Earth and the myriad beings as one body. In its eyes, all the men in the world – whether they are strangers or family, distant or close, as long as they have blood and breath – are his brothers, his children’. Thus one must ‘make one body with the myriad beings’. Convinced that ‘knowledge and action are one and the same’, Wang Yangming also preached the necessity of engaged thinking. Other thinkers reacted against Confucian orthodoxy by seeking unity on the side of the *qi* and by maintaining that there was nothing else in this world than energy (Wang Tinxiang, who died in 1547). Even more radical tendencies appeared around a man such as Wang Gen (1483–1541), founder of the school of Taizhou, famous for its free interpretation of the Confucian texts.