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Edward Said: Orientalism and Occidentalism

DIANA LARY

Abstract

Twenty-five years after the appearance of Orientalism, Edward Said's ideas still have great importance, both in relations between the West and the Middle East, and in settings that Said did not address directly. This paper looks at orientalism between Asian states, between Asia and the West, and within China.

Résumé

Vingt-cinq ans après la publication du livre L'Orientalisme, les propos qu'y tient Edward Said s'avèrent toujours d'une grande actualité pour comprendre les relations entre l'Occident et le Moyen-Orient, mais aussi pour expliquer des situations que l'auteur n'avait pas alors directement étudiées. L'article de Diana Lary analyse l'orientalisme tel qu'il s'observe entre les États asiatiques, entre l'Asie et l'Occident, et à l'intérieur même de la Chine.

The essays in this electronic edition of *The Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* are designed to examine the status of some of the major theoretical approaches to the study of history. One approach that has had a great deal of influence derives from Edward Said's attacks on orientalism.

Said's work on orientalism first appeared almost three decades ago. Its main contention was that the "Orient" was a racist construction. Said saw Western scholarship on the Orient (a term that encompassed the Middle East in particular and Asia in general) as disparaging and demeaning, treating non-Western peoples as childlike and uncivilized, belonging to backward cultures that were in need of enlightenment — from the West.

Said attached to this disparaging scholarly view a prurient strain in Western views of the Orient, that is, though it might be seen as backward, it was seen at the same time as suffused with exotic and titillating elements, many of them explicitly sexual. The book cover of *Orientalism* was Jean-Leon Gerome's *The Snake Charmer*, the rear view of a naked young boy, his torso wrapped in a snake. The picture, painted in the 1860s, was the *pièce de resistance* of the *orientalisme* movement in France that mixed admiration with the Orient with erotic suggestiveness.

One of the major themes running through Said's work is the distortion that power relations between the West and the Orient brings to scholarship; scholars of the powerful nations instinctively treat the history, and the present, of less powerful peoples as inferior, childish, at a lower stage of development. These peoples are the Other. Orientalist views derive from a sense of superiority over the Other; they then reinforce that sense of superiority by providing "evidence" of the inferiority of the Other. This theme transforms Said's work from the theoretical and academic to the political.

Said's ideas were immediately welcomed after the publication of *Orientalism* by people who recognized what he was saying, and felt it to be valid, in fields far beyond those in which Said was interested in. The welcome came in women's studies, subaltern studies, gay studies, and in fact any field in which the protagonists felt that they or their subjects were at the wrong end of the power ladder, that they too were the Other. To these people, Said became almost a prophet, the hero of the down-trodden.

Said's views were also attacked. His arguments that the Orient had been diminished and distorted by Western specialists in the study of the Middle East, and by other scholars working from positions that could be called established, were angrily rejected by people who were affronted by claims that their scholarship was less than objective.

Another strand of attack on Said was based on the assumption that since Said championed Palestinians, he must be anti-Israel. This second strand grew in virulence with Said's increasing involvement in the Palestinian cause. The attacks continued after his death in 2003, notably in what must be one of the most mean-spirited obituaries ever written, the one published in the *New York Times*.[1]

Said pulled no punches, and the extension of his ideas into the political realm, in support — often lonely, in New York, where he lived and taught at Columbia — of the Palestinians, brought him into constant conflict. He was damning in his statements about those he considered to be concerned with imposing their own values on other cultures. He wrote the following passage shortly before his death:

> What our leaders and their intellectual lackeys seem incapable of understanding is that history cannot be swept clean like a blackboard, clean so that "we" might inscribe our own future there and impose our own forms of life for these lesser people to follow.[2]

The term orientalism is an ironic commentary on the term used in the West from the late nineteenth century on to describe the study of the regions east of the Mediterranean. The use of the term was self-confident, unquestioning:

1 *New York Times*, (25 September 2003).

2 Edward Said, "Orientalism 25 years later", *Counterpunch* (4 August 2003): 3.

"Orientalism is that branch of scholarship which uses Western methods to elucidate problems pertaining to lands lying east of the European ecumene."[3]

This orientalism covered the study of everything not Western in tradition, i.e., it went beyond Asia. Its practitioners were learned Western men, often steeped in the cultures they studied, but also steeped in the unquestioning acceptance of the superiority of the West. In other words, they belonged to a world of colonialism and imperialism in which they were on the dominant side. For them, orientalism was a positive thing; for Said it was an object of attack.[4]

The old notion of the Orient no longer exists. In geography and politics the current term is Asia, subdivided into East, Southeast, South and Central; the region that might be called West Asia is normally known as the Middle East. The examples that Said used in *Orientalism* were mainly drawn from the Middle East, the Arab, Islamic world (Said himself was a Christian Arab). His approach has major ramifications for the study of my own field, China and East Asia. What I want to do here is show some of the ways in which orientalism has worked out in this field, both from the outside looking in (Western sinologists) and from within China and Japan.

Orientalism in the China field

The study of China, or Sinology, evolved over a long period in Europe. The early work of the seventeenth century Jesuit scholars was dominated by masterly research, almost always in multiple languages including Chinese. This research and the scholarship that came from it showed respect bordering on reverence for Chinese culture. The introduction of bureaucratic government and of competitive examinations in Europe can be traced back to the knowledge of Chinese culture and institutions transmitted by the Jesuit scholars. The tradition of respect continued well into the twentieth century. The work of European and North American scholars was erudite, and deeply involved in Chinese culture. Many of the sinologists lived in China for long periods of their lives.[5] They made major contributions, especially in the study of the remote past, where the new science of archaeology revealed riches that had not been covered in the Chinese historical record, but had only appeared as myths. There was less of the orientalism, which Said attacked, in the China field than in other fields.

3 Dennis Sinor, *Orientalism and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), xiv.

4 The term survives in various academic circles, for example, my own alma mater, the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

5 Almost all the distinguished German sinologists lived in China during the Nazi period, most because as Jews they had to escape from Germany. Their departure was fortuitous in an indirect way for the integrity of their own work. Some of the specialists on Asia who stayed in Germany during the war ended up working on a strange fantasy of the Nazis, the *Anhnenerbe* (Ancestral inheritance), under which the Nazis searched for their distant ancestors (and therefore contemporary cousins) in parts of Asia, including Tibet.

The advent to power of the Chinese Communists in 1949 almost did away with this long-running tradition of Western scholarly respect for China. From the 1950s to the 1980s, China was studied at long distance. China was almost closed to the outside world, and foreign scholars could not work there. At the same time, China, as part of the then "evil empire" and thus a threat to the "free world" (on a scale that makes the current war on terror look like child's play) had to be studied for strategic reasons, to understand the enemy and to work out how China had become Communist, how China had been "lost".

Even though some scholars continued to do fine work on Chinese history and culture, the field as a whole was marked by an outsider/insider feeling, where Western scholars, especially in the social sciences, saw themselves working on a strange and alien culture. The field was coloured by a rather toxic combination of orientalism and anti-communism. The tradition of language and cultural knowledge came under strain. Enormous sums of money were poured into the field in the United States, and scholars who had no direct knowledge of China came into the field.

Some of these scholars relied on native Chinese "assistants" for their basic research. These "assistants", most of them highly-educated refugees from China, were used as language and culture specialists; they produced the raw materials from which more important scholars derived analysis and theoretical insights. Their contributions were seldom recognized in the final product.[6]

This form of orientalism was based on an implicit assumption that only Westerners had the intellectual abilities to make useful analyses, or to derive theory. It assumed that the repository of real knowledge was in the West, and that China could only be explained by Westerners. This attitude caused a great deal of silent anguish amongst the "assistants", who saw how little they meant in the "real" world of scholarship, many of them men of distinction who were almost never appointed to senior positions in the field. Their anguish was not recognized in the United States, or in China, then in the grips of Marxist analysis, where there was no reaction to scholarly works that were unknown since they were never distributed in China. On Taiwan, where traditional Chinese scholarship continued, and where young American scholars went to do language training and research, the superior attitudes of Western scholars were resented; but since the Republic of China was a client state of the US, little could be said openly.

Behind the assumption that China could only be understood by Westerners was an even deeper assumption that Communist China had gone off on the wrong track, that at bottom China *really* wanted to be like the West, to adopt

6 A major exception to the rule of unacknowledged assistance was Joseph Needham, author of *Science and Civilisation in China*. Most of the volumes of this mammoth work are listed under dual authorship, giving full credit to a series of collaborators.

Western values of democracy, capitalism, and Christianity. This assumption rested on the conviction that China was at a lower stage of development than the West, an immature, backward society longing to be liberated from itself. The fact that China *had* adopted a Western theory as its leading ideology, Marxism-Leninism, was considered an aberration, largely induced by the influence of the Soviet Union.

Nearly thirty years after China abandoned Maoism, these old orientalist attitudes are so out-moded that they are effectively dead in the academic world. Very few of the books published between about 1950 and 1980 are still read, or considered seriously in the China field, either in China, where the Marxist analysis that dominated those decades has been abandoned, or in the West, where treating China as the "Other" is no longer acceptable. Now Chinese and Western scholars are in close touch. Most of us have the good fortune to go to China, Hong Kong or Taiwan several times a year. No Western scholar would dream now of working on China without a full knowledge of the language or without a level of real personal involvement in the culture and society. Most scholars now search in their writing for a Chinese view of China; they try to understand the culture on its own terms. In other words, what Said advocated, in the positive message that he attached to his theory, has come to pass in this field: "The knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes."[7]

This level of understanding has not yet emerged in the political and economic worlds, where orientalism is still alive, stoked by confusion and misunderstandings in the West over what China really wants. The confusion has some real basis. China now seems to have embraced capitalism without going for democracy. China is still a totalitarian state, with a very poor record of human rights (rights that are guaranteed in the Chinese constitution). These contradictions have created a conundrum that has put the deep-seated Western belief that capitalism and democracy go hand in hand in jeopardy. Historians of China note, however, that the combination fits very well with the old Chinese view of *tiyong*, a belief that Western technological and scientific means could be used to enhance the essential elements of Chinese culture. Said might have smiled wryly: "We simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple, agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find like Easter eggs in the living room."[8] The confusion has led to a resurgence of what I call lived orientalism, where Westerners living in China and working in the business world practice (often unconsciously) orientalism in their own lives.

7 Said, 4.
8 Ibid.

Lived orientalism

If the language and cultural standards of the academic world have improved out of all recognition, there is still a long way to go in some parts of Western relations with China. Lived orientalism, the way of life of many Westerners in the treaty ports of the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, is back. Many Westerners living and working in China now speak Chinese, but far more get by with no language knowledge, always expecting "the Chinese" to understand English, and criticising them when they do not. A small example describes this mindset. One of my colleagues when I worked in China in the 1980s complained bitterly that it was impossible to drive in Beijing because there were no street signs. I told him that there were signs, in Chinese. "There, you see what I mean, there are no signs," was his response; no signs in English meant no signs.

Lack of language knowledge, and a concomitant lack of cultural sympathy, has helped the re-emergence of a pattern of living in China, and in other parts of Asia known as the expat (expatriate) life. In the treaty port era Westerners lived all their lives in Shanghai without learning Chinese; they lived in enclaves of Western-style houses, spoke to their servants in China Coast Pidgin, and led their social life in clubs where much of the talk was about how strange/difficult/dirty the Chinese were — with occasional comments on their cuteness, and a discreet penchant for enjoying the pleasures of "Sin City". This pattern was repeated in most of the great new cities in Asia.

These attitudes have reappeared. Young Western business people in China often live in foreign enclaves. In the Maoist Era foreigners were forced to live apart from the Chinese population; now they do so of their own choosing. They go out to western-style bars in the evenings and are delighted every time a new Starbucks opens. At a more elevated level, there is a nostalgia for Shanghai in the good old days of the 1920s and 1930s, seen in publications on Western architecture in China and research on Shanghailanders, as the inhabitants of the Western enclaves were known then.[9]

Latter-day Shanghailanders live in a vacuum of their own creation. Orientalism is their life-style, a limiting and constricting one that means that they get little real value from their time of living in a world they have decided is alien — and inferior. The same self-limitation appears in parts of the Chinese world, where a reverse form of orientalism, sometimes called occidentalism, is flourishing.

9 See, for example, Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

Occidentalism

One of the West's most insightful commentators on contemporary Asia, the journalist Ian Buruma, has identified a form of nationalist essentialism in Asia that he calls Occidentalism (an homage to Said).[10] The term describes Asians who look down on the West, assuming anything Asian is bound to be better. Occidentalism is founded on the nationalism that grew in Asia in reaction to Western imperialism and colonialism.

The major form occidentalism assumes is that only Japanese can understand Japan, only Chinese can understand China; no foreigner, however well versed in language and culture, can ever understand a culture that they were not born into. One example is research on Peking Man, who may or may not have been the ancestor of the present-day Chinese. The fossil remains of Peking Man were discovered in the late 1920s by an extraordinary team of scholars that included Chinese (Pei Wenzhong) and foreigners (the Swede J.G.Anderrson, the French Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and the Canadian Davidson Black). A young Chinese archaeologist who discussed the discovery with me in 2005 would only accept the role of Pei; the Western scholars were dismissed as having done next to nothing. In this view he was following a fairly common convention in Chinese scholarship that Westerners have made little impact on the study of China. There is a similar unwillingness to give any credit for the discovery a little earlier of the Oracle Bones, the first form of Chinese script, to the Canadian missionary James Menzies.

This scholarly bias is not terribly serious, since the people who hold it are often willing to be convinced that *individual* Western scholars are quite capable. These people are given the honorary title *Zhongguo tong*, an opaque term that means that a foreigner has embraced Chinese language and culture.

Occidentalism mirrors concerns in other fields about representation and appropriation: can men write about women, can white people write about blacks? These are concerns that are deeply felt, and that can never be easily resolved, since they are based on perceptions of long-running discrimination and misrepresentation.

Occidentalism at its worst is damaging, even virulent, and would probably dismay Said as much as any other closed, prejudiced view of the world would. It shows itself in the militant, angry rhetoric against the West, the most prominent contemporary proponent of whom is Osama Bin Laden. It contains a hatred of the secular, materialist West, especially America, and a passion for the soulful, rooted, native culture, usually based on religion.

Virulent occidentalism is rare in East Asia, where the prime form of occidentalism is a desire not to be indebted to the West, not to have to credit the

10 Ian Buruma and Arisha Margalit, *Occidentalism: a short history of anti-Westernism* (London: Atlantic, 2002).

West for anything besides technological innovation — and Christianity, now the leading religion in several East Asian countries. In China in the post-Mao era, the concern of government has been to replace Marxist values with a home-grown alternative. There has been a serious attempt, promoted at the top of the government, to revive traditional values, to promote respect for tradition and for "Chinese values". The West has rule of law (*fazhi*); China has rule of man (*renzhi*). This means that China can never become democratic, but must always rely on the rule of autocrats, ideally benevolent ones.

The West is portrayed as corrupt, degenerate, uncaring and hypocritical. Beijing and Washington practice a tit-for-tat battle over human rights. Every time Washington cites violations in China, Beijing comes back with examples of inhumane treatment of disadvantaged people in the United States. China is particularly critical of the West's supposed lack of social responsibility. One of the Chinese values most strongly promoted is respect for the elderly. Old peoples' care homes are considered an anathema, a way of disposing of the elderly, not giving them the respect they deserve at the end of a long life. There is a hint of government self-serving in the promotion of this idea in a society where men, until the past few years, continued in leading positions into their eighties or nineties.

Another strongly promoted Chinese value is obedience to one's superiors, again a self-serving idea in a society run by a monolithic political party, the Communist Party. Western values may be referred to as the carriers of "spiritual pollution", or as contributing to "disharmony" and "chaos". The students who in the demonstrations of 1989 put up a replica of the Statue of Liberty, called the Goddess of Democracy, in Tiananmen Square, were denounced as traitors to China. The statue was very publicly smashed as the student demonstrations were crushed.

One might be more concerned about the manifestations of occidentalism were it not for a powerful counter-current, what I call reverse occidentalism. Signs of an unqualified admiration for the West are everywhere in China, from clothing, to fast food, to the English language, to Western music. Western theorists are very popular — not Karl Marx, now in disgrace, but a more mundane level of thinker: the men who wrote about success and how to achieve it. The new field of Success Studies (*chengongxue*) heaps admiration on the two Carnegies, the early Andrew and the later Dale, both of whom preached a similar message, that success is born of hard work and application. The West is now associated for many Chinese, especially young ones, with economic growth, comfortable, even lavish life-styles for those who succeed, the spurn-

ing of universal social services, and the clear assumption that those who do not do well have only themselves to blame. The marketization of education and health care has served the newly affluent well, at the same time that it leaves many more lagging behind, a problem that the state itself is beginning to recognize.

Occidentalism in all its forms is, like orientalism, the enemy of understanding, of the mutual enrichment of cultural exchange.

Internal Orientalism in China

Orientalism is usually used to describe relations between states and large cultures, but it shows itself at more intimate levels as well. A serious form of orientalism is China's internal orientalism. This operates on the assumption that there is natural hierarchy of peoples within China, with Han Chinese at the top and the "minorities" at the bottom. The Han make up over 90 percent of China's population, and there are gradations within them, descending from the people of Beijing and Shanghai through those from prosperous coastal provinces down to the poor interior, but all are superior to the non-Han.

This sense of Han superiority has long historical roots. In the past, the non-Han were described as barbarians, the names of specific peoples were written with the dog radical, and they were considered as "raw" people, whose only hope of salvation was to be "cooked", to accept Chinese culture and become civilized. Han Chinese were settled in the remote west, usually as a form of punishment, their task to bring the residents to a higher form of life.

Some of the externals of this conception have changed with time. The dog radical has been abandoned and the non-Han are no longer considered to be barbarians, but rather "national minorities". The changes came to China from the outside. In the early 1950s China borrowed the Soviet Union's system of designating non-Russians as people who were to be allowed to retain their culture, at the same time that they accepted their subordination to Moscow. In the Chinese case this means that the "national minorities" must accept control from Beijing. The regions in which some of them live are officially designated as autonomous regions (Tibet Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region), but this designation seems to be a contradiction in terms since the reality for the autonomous regions is tight political and economic control, enforced by the military whose presence is justified by the need to guard the borderlands, where many of the non-Han live, and to maintain public order.

The subordination of the non-Han in western China is becoming more acute as Beijing promotes the policy "Develop the West", one plank of which

is settling increasing numbers of Han in the west, especially in Xinjiang and Tibet. No expense is spared for this huge task; the most recent manifestation is the opening of the Beijing-Lhasa Railway, the most ambitious railway construction in recent times anywhere in the world.

All Chinese governments, from the Qing rulers who first brought the western areas firmly under Chinese control, to the Nationalist (Guomindang) Government in the Republic of China (1911-1949, still continuing in Taiwan), believe vehemently that the non-Han are subjects of China, and should be grateful to be so. This view reinforces the traditional, innate sense of superiority of the Han to all the "primitive" peoples of the western areas, and to an almost complete segregation between these peoples and their Han "civilizers". At one level this sense of superiority appears in the insistence on the use of the Chinese language in education, especially at higher levels, and the requirement that all senior positions in government are held by Chinese. By contrast, no Han ever learns the local languages. At another level it leads to self-imposed apartheid, with indigenous people and Han living in separate areas of cities and towns. In Xinjiang, the differences are accentuated by cuisine: Uighurs eat a diet based on lamb; Chinese one based on pork, a meat that is banned in Islam. Han drink alcohol; Uighurs do not. Uighurs are forced to accept many Chinese customs, while Han tend to treat Uighur customs with contempt. In Kashgar in 2005, I watched as a group of Chinese tourists strolled in the main mosque in the city centre. Islamic custom requires that one take off one's shoes at the entrance to a mosque; these tourists did not, though one or two put plastic bags over their shoes to show a small (but completely inadequate) form of respect.

In some ways this internal orientalism looks like the policies once followed in Canada towards First Nations, when the intent was to strip native peoples of their own culture and make them "civilized". We have seen in recent years how deep is the damage caused by these attitudes; the reversal of the policies has not erased the damage. In other ways the situation in China is more serious, and, especially since 2001 and 9/11, it threatens any hope that the non-Han have of ever achieving some self-determination. The perpetrators of 9/11 were Muslim. Many of the non-Han peoples of the western regions are Muslim. A few Uighurs were captured by American forces in Afghanistan and are now in Guantanamo Bay. Since the campaign against terror started, spear-headed by the United States, China has used the campaign as a pretext to "strike hard" against any signs of restiveness, and to designate as "terrorism" any attempts to campaign for real autonomy. Internal orientalism has become the basis and the pretext for a very real tool for repression.

In practice, Edward Said's discussions of orientalism focussed on the treatment of Palestinians. But his categories of analysis, of the demeaning way in which "lesser" peoples are treated by those who see themselves as superior, the failure to respect their cultures or their history, are valid in many other sad con-

texts, not least in the ways that indigenous people are regarded, and treated, in China.

Japan as the victim of orientalism

Orientalism is practiced in China in fact but not in name. In Japan the concept has been explicitly named by some scholars of the Second World War to explain what happened after the war was over, and in particular with reference to the Tokyo War Crimes Trails. According to Ushimura Kei's recent work, *Beyond the Judgement of "Civilization"*, the trials were a case of the rewriting of history by the victors. Japan was held to foreign standards of behaviour, and by the legal representatives of countries that had just subjected Japan to the most barbarous of punishments, the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagaski. Japan was thus judged by hypocrites.

Ushimura relies on the judgment of the Indian judge at the trials, Radhabinod Pal, who believed all the defendants to be innocent, on the grounds that Japan's motives for making war had been above board: "Japan had fought in order to liberate Asia from Western colonialism, and not only the defeated countries but all nations involved in the war had committed conventional war crimes."[11] This may be an accurate characterization of the then Japanese government's view of the war, but it was not what other Asian countries felt, when far from being liberated they were subjected to a new colonialism (Japanese), exchanging Western colonialism for Japanese.

Ushimura focuses on the indictments for war crimes against citizens of the Western allies; he makes almost no mention of the Asian victims of Japanese military behaviour, nor does he have much to say about appalling atrocities, notably the Rape of Nanjing (1937-8).[12] Given that eleven of the twenty-eight Japanese indicted at the trials, and four of the seven executed, were accused of crimes against other Asians, this oversight seems in itself a form of orientalism, this time within Asia, in which the Asian victims of the war are given much shorter shrift than the Western ones. This cannot have been Ushimura's intention, given that he was not trying to establish a hierarchy of victims, but rather to establish that Japan was the *true* victim. Japan was unquestionably the first victim of nuclear war, but the terrible impact of the two atom bombs does not wipe out Japan's own behaviour in Asia.

Unintentional though it may be, the view that Japan was the victim of the war, punished just for losing the war rather than for any real crimes, is still

11 Ushimura Kei (translated Stephen Ericson), *Beyond the Judgment of "Civilization"* (Tokyo: International House, 2003), 67.

12 In the now vast literature on the Rape of Nanjing, the coverage ranges from the strongly nationalist Chinese, which sees the massacre as one of the worst events in modern history, to the stridently Japanese nationalist, which tries to deny that there was a massacre, or to downplay the scale of the killings in Nanjing.

widespread in Japan, and still continues to produce bad relations between Japan and her Asian neighbours. The idea of Japanese victimhood makes it almost impossible for Japan to go beyond the formal processes that ended the war, and to fully recognize the scale of wartime suffering in much of Asia. The accusation of orientalism in this approach, the West treating Japan unjustly, serves Japan very badly in Asia, because it ignores the overwhelming fact that Japan's neighbours are convinced that their peoples were the true victims.

What Said wanted

The different forms of orientalism and occidentalism discussed above all tend in one direction, towards self-serving ways of excluding and denigrating others. This type of thinking is what Edward Said protested against. His message was that we have to go beyond orientalism, not replicate it, that in looking at cultures other than our own, or at subcultures within our own, we should strive for a positive knowledge of language and history; he held that "the interpreter's mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign Other".[13] He called for critical thinking as we try to wrestle with the problems of the modern world, and an avoidance of false unifying rubrics such as "America", "Islam", and "the West".[14]

Said's message has a particular importance for people working in the humanities. He believed deeply in the role of the humanities in creating a better world. The humanities have gone far beyond the social sciences in the emphasis on language and cultural knowledge. Political Science, for example, with the recent stress on rational choice theories, almost ignores specific language and cultural knowledge in favour of a universal theory.

The study of the humanities was for Said the basis of humanism, "the final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history".[15] He said this not to be pious, or moralistic, but to enrich our world and to enrich others.

Orientalism and occidentalism are both dead ends. They allow for no creative thinking, no growth, no mutual influence. They are both essentially negative, carping, and snide. Said wanted to show, by using negative examples of biased and culture-bound work on the Orient, how to deepen and enrich peoples' understandings of each other. In the summer of 2006 this hope, for Said's own people, seems further away than ever. But his theory and his ideal are noble ones, and valuable ones to follow in the pursuit of objective, exciting scholarship.

13 Said, 9.
14 Ibid., 11, 12.
15 Ibid., 13.

Without direct recognition of Said, recent work on China reflects this process of deepening mutual understanding. Most of the eighty or ninety books I have read in the last two years for the China field's main book prize, the Levenson Prize, were written by scholars with a detailed and intimate knowledge of China. All but a few used sources in Chinese. Most of them explicitly tried to give a Chinese view of China, however much they also relied on western theoretical constructs — post-modernism, feminism, the ideas of Bourdieu, Wallenstein, Derrida, Foucault. Their work covers a range of topics, from peasant life to linguistic analysis, from hygiene to literature. Almost all of them have implicitly learnt from Said, that orientalism is not acceptable, that looking at China from above is completely passé.

Afterword

It would be easy to overdo opposition to orientalism, to refrain from any criticism for fear of being orientalist. This was not what Said had in mind. Embracing his ideas does not mean giving up the right to informed criticism, or abandoning fundamental convictions of one's own that are at odds with the society on which one works. Most of us who work on China deplore the country's human rights record, and we hope for political change. We do not accept contentions such as the "rule of man", the continuation of autocracy, and we point to the successful democracy practised in Taiwan. There were strong reactions from people working on China to Google's market decision to accept censorship on the Chinese version of Google, to cut out references to sites that discuss human rights and democracy. We hope for greater freedoms for China not as a sign of the West's victory, but as freedoms that are in the interests of the Chinese themselves.

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