

A Sort of European Hallucination: On Derrida’s “Chinese Prejudice”

Jin Suh Jirn (Yuhan University)

Abstract

Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of logocentrism—a central aspect of his anti-foundationalist reading of Western philosophy—relies on a false opposition between European and Chinese writing systems and, despite its aim to undo or “interrupt” the logic of ethnocentrism, reinforces the notion of China as *other* to Western civilization. This Derridean misreading may be placed within a larger context: that of poststructuralism’s liaison with all things China. By referring to the work of other theorists such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, I will show how Derrida’s “stereotyping” of China is in many ways indicative of a larger strain of Orientalist thought within Parisian intellectual circles throughout the late sixties and early seventies. This strain of thought manifests itself in a marked tendency to view China as a theoretical abstraction used to affirm or deny knowledge about the West and the Chinese language as ideographic “antitype” to the body of Western culture and tradition.

Keywords: China, Jacques Derrida, the East, ethnocentrism, idiographic myth, Leibnizian project, logocentrism, Paris, poststructuralism, the West, writing systems.

I think that the scholars who have almost let themselves be drawn into forgetting that Chinese is a spoken language have so exaggerated the influence of Chinese writing that they have, so to say, put writing in place of the language.

– Wilhelm von Humboldt¹

The concept of Chinese writing thus functioned as a sort of European hallucination. This implied nothing fortuitous: this functioning obeyed a rigorous necessity. And the hallucination translated less an ignorance than a misunderstanding. It was not disturbed by the knowledge of Chinese script, limited but real, which was then available.

– Jacques Derrida²

Near the end of her lengthy preface to Jacques Derrida's major work, *Of Grammatology* (*De la grammatologie*), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discloses in a casual aside "the shadow of a geographical pattern that falls upon the first part of this book." More specifically, she writes that

[t]he relationship between logocentrism and ethnocentrism is indirectly invoked in the very first sentence of the "Exergue." Yet, paradoxically, and almost by a reverse ethnocentrism, Derrida insists that logocentrism is a property of the *West*. He does this so frequently that a quotation would be superfluous. Although something of the Chinese prejudice of the West is discussed in Part I ["Writing Before the Letter"], the East is never seriously studied or deconstructed in the Derridean text. Why then must it remain, recalling Hegel and Nietzsche in their most cartological humors, as the name of the limits of the text's knowledge?³

Indeed, the concluding question that Spivak raises is a legitimate and compelling one since it calls to mind the often one-sided role that the East has played in the production of knowledge in the West. However, neither Spivak nor Derrida attempts to answer this query, although both playfully skirt around the issue of ethnocentrism at times. Therefore,

I will argue that Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism—a central aspect of his anti-foundationalist reading of Western philosophy—relies on a false opposition between European and Chinese writing systems and, despite its aim to undo or “interrupt” the logic of ethnocentrism, reinforces the notion of China as *other* to Western civilization. Furthermore, I will discuss poststructuralism's liaison with all things China in order to situate Derrida's misreading within a larger context. By referring to the work of other theorists such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, I will show how Derrida's “stereotyping” of China is in many ways indicative of a larger strain of Orientalist thought within Parisian intellectual circles throughout the late sixties and early seventies.

My starting point is Derrida's discussion of Chinese writing. In his analysis of hieroglyphs and pictorial writing systems, Derrida remarks that

we have known for a long time that *largely nonphonetic* scripts like Chinese or Japanese included *phonetic elements* very early. They remained *structurally dominated by the ideogram* or algebra and we thus have the testimony of a powerful movement of civilization developing *outside of all logocentrism*.⁴

Logocentrism, which can be defined as “a pervasive form of idealism in language philosophy” that presumes “some kind of ultimate authority guaranteeing the meaning of language,” is the *bête noire* of deconstruction.⁵ For Derrida, the “most pernicious symptom” of logocentrism is to be found in the “widespread privileging of speech over writing in philosophy, usually taking the form of the assumption that writing is secondary or parasitical to speech.”⁶ Because Chinese writing, in Derrida's view, lacks a distinct oral structure like Western “phonetic-alphabetic writing,” it is naturally immune to the problem of logocentrism that plagues Western metaphysics and is thus incapable of “determining the sense of being as presence” (i.e., the illusion that language is transparent and readily accessible to meaning).⁷

However, the problem with this statement is that its premise is

simply false. Contrary to what Leibniz, Hegel, Fenollosa and many others wrote and believed, Chinese writing does *not* lack a sound structure like Western “phonetic-alphabetic writing.” Although Chinese characters possess pictographic qualities absent in most alphabetic systems, their phonetic and phonological attributes involve more than simply the inclusion of some “phonetic elements” (which Derrida is vague about). Rather, sound plays a crucial role in the way that Chinese characters are constructed as well as parsed or read. In short, Chinese script is and has always been a phonetic/phonological system.

To demonstrate how and why Chinese script is phonetic, I will present a few examples in which sound (phonetics/phonology) supports or trumps image (ideography) and meaning (semantics). But before doing so, I would like to briefly outline the principles that determine the formation of Chinese characters in the first place.

In traditional Chinese, there are at least six morphological principles which apply to the creation of new words, including the one that intrigues most Westerners, the “pictographic principle”—when characters attempt to imitate the “natural” image of what is being signified, as in the case for tree (木) or mouth (口). Others principles apply to the use of indicative, compound words as well as expanding the range of meanings for a particular word.⁸ But the two rules which are central to our discussion (and arguably most important for Chinese writing) are the “phonetic loan principle” and the “semantic-phonetic principle.”⁹ The first is akin to a rebus device in which a symbol associated with a certain sound and meaning is substituted for another concept that shares the same sound (similar to using a picture of an “eye” to represent “I”). In modern Chinese, the character for the verb “to come,” for example, is derived from a character for a particular specimen of wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) which during the Shang Dynasty shared the same pronunciation. Since the pronunciation of the latter eventually dropped out of use, it is the former, a derivative form, that survives today.¹⁰

Likewise, the “semantic-phonetic principle” works on a similar rebus-like appropriation. In this case, “different homophonous words represented by the same character are differentiated by adding semantic elements to the common underlying phonetic element.”¹¹ As a result,

you wind up with phonetic “compounds” which are quite common in modern Chinese.¹² In fact, the vast majority (over 95%) of the words used in written Chinese today derive from this principle, which means that the pictographic principle, important during the early formation of written Chinese, is now more of a historical footnote than an active linguistic principle.¹³ Among classical Chinese scholars such as Chiang Yung (1681–1762), it was understood that by the seventeenth century the “phonetic element of each character was the decisive element in establishing its meaning.”¹⁴ Not surprisingly, such scholarship was ignored by many Western scholars who preferred to perpetuate what John DeFrancis calls the “ideographic myth,” namely the idea that Chinese characters are representative of ideas rather than sounds.¹⁵ (I will return to this point later on when I discuss the history of the Western debate surrounding Chinese writing.)

In written Chinese, one clear-cut illustration of the phonetic principle involves phonetic markers placed within characters which guide readers on pronunciation. These markers lack any semantic function and are expressly phonological in value. Moreover, there are certain words or morphemes which signify only when they are in the presence of other words or morphemes. Such is the case with borrowed or loan words which derive from other languages. Take, for instance, a common word in English that is found all over the world: “McDonald’s.” In Chinese, it is pronounced as *mai dang lau* or 麦当劳 which is written as three characters representing “wheat” + “paw” + “labor.” Now, there is no inherent reason in the written language that dictates why this particular combination of characters ought to signify a global fast-food restaurant. Rather, its derivation merely follows from the phonetic mimicry that modern Chinese has adopted (similarly, in Japanese, *mak ka do nal du* and in Korean, *maek do nal duh*). So when one reads *mai dang lau* in Chinese, one is essentially reading the characters for their sound and not for their meaning.¹⁶

A similar logic applies to onomatopoeia. If Chinese were not a phonetic script, then why would it have examples of onomatopoeia similar to those found in Western languages? Why would certain Chinese characters represent actual sounds? Take the case of words that

signify animal noises. Applying the “semantic-phonetic principle,” the Chinese word for “quack” (as in the sound a duck makes) combines the radical for “mouth” plus a character that signifies “melon,” hence 名. The obvious question here is why the character for melon? The answer is that in spoken Chinese the pronunciation for “melon” is similar or identical to that of “quack.” Therefore, the combination of these two characters and the way that they are written and read depend not just on a semantic or visual marker but more importantly a phonetic one.

The same might be said for the word that represents “river.” In traditional Chinese, there was no single word to describe this concept. So the Chinese took the radical for “water” and combined it with the functional character for “yes/OK” since the latter’s phonetic sound was similar to the spoken sound of “river.” Only when these two semantically unrelated characters are paired together do we get the Chinese equivalent for “river.”¹⁷

In addition, the ability to freely interchange Chinese characters for phonetic variants (and vice versa) is quite common in languages like Japanese and Korean.¹⁸ That is, the practice of switching from a native phonetic script (the Japanese syllabary *kana* or the Korean alphabet *hangeul*) to Chinese characters is not unusual and requires little or no differentiation in terms of cognitive processing. Derrida, for some unknown reason, includes Japanese in his discussion of Chinese, as if the two languages have similar writing systems. While it is true that Japanese employs a significant number of Chinese characters (*kanji*), Japanese also has two distinct phonetic syllabaries (*hirakana* and *katakana*), which represent simplified syllables (consonant + vowel) as opposed to individual consonants or vowels. Moreover, Derrida neglects to consider the issue of logocentrism with respect to these two languages and the question of how a “dual” system might complicate the operation of logocentrism (that is, are Korean and Japanese logocentric when they write phonetically and not so when they incorporate Chinese “pictographs”?).

Although most contemporary Sinologists regard the ideographic thesis as the equivalent of describing the earth as flat, we can still find traces of its “prejudice” lingering throughout the academy, most notably

in Derrida's book (which in its updated versions never acknowledged this fact or bothered to revise its text). Considering all the evidence that shows how written Chinese is phonetic, the question of why it was (mis)construed as "largely nonphonetic" (to quote Derrida) needs to be addressed before we tackle the more important question of Derrida's ethnocentrism.¹⁹ Therefore, a brief historical background is needed since Derrida's own mis-interpretation can be situated within a longstanding Western European intellectual debate.

The ideographic thesis largely stems from the sixteenth century when European missionaries traveled throughout China and wrote accounts about the "multitude of characters" they discovered, which were "similar to the hieroglyphic signs of the Egyptians."²⁰ Naturally, these traveling scholars were attracted to the foreign quality or otherness of these characters, which reminded them of pictures or drawings. As John DeFrancis points out, there was tremendous "appeal in the concept of written symbols conveying their message directly to our minds, thus bypassing the restrictive intermediary of speech."²¹ Similarly, David Porter points out the "almost compulsive desire" among Europeans to understand Chinese as "an impossibly pure form of signification and to systematize its notations in a relentless quest for an originary and transcendent order."²² At the same time, most (if not all) of the individuals who fell under the spell of this "Chinese prejudice" were unable to speak or write in the language, which meant that their accounts relied on what was merely observed firsthand.²³

Among the first major thinkers to embrace the Chinese system was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who regarded Chinese as an "ideal philosophical language"²⁴ since it was "liberated ... from the voice" and "thus removed from history."²⁵ While corresponding with Jesuit missionaries in China, Leibniz theorized that Chinese characters did not signify "words, letters or syllables, but things and ideas."²⁶

However, less than a century later, Leibniz's romantic idealization would come under fire by philosophers who in contrast shared a vitriolic loathing for Chinese language and culture. For example, in *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (1784), Johann Gottfried von Herder described imperial China as "an embalmed mummy, wrapped in silk,

and painted with hieroglyphics.”²⁷ Herder also condemned its “rude hieroglyphics” as the “product of what he thought to be a contemptible culture.”²⁸ Likewise, Hegel, whose “metaphysics of phonetic writing” was responsible for “the most original and powerful ethnocentrism,”²⁹ argued that because “speech” is the true objective of language, Chinese could never be an ideal language since it separates itself from “spoken language.”³⁰ Moreover, he concluded that the nonphonetic nature of Chinese writing was responsible for “the exegeticism of Chinese spiritual culture” and consequently its place outside the telos of history.³¹

Alas, both sides or viewpoints—the “hyperbolic admiration” of Leibniz and the ethnocentric dismissal by Herder and Hegel—would determine the parameters for debate about Chinese writing for many years to come, despite the work of various nineteenth-century linguists who questioned and argued against many of the assumptions about this “mysterious” language.³²

What writing itself, in its nonphonetic moment, betrays, is life....
it is the principle of death and of difference in the becoming of
being. It is to speech what China is to Europe....

—Jacques Derrida³³

In this section, I would like to consider Derrida’s claims about Chinese writing as a system that “interrupts” logocentrism. In describing his position, one critic aligns him with Leibniz who took a more favorable view of Chinese “hieroglyphs.”³⁴ Although he is dismissive of Hegel’s racial scorn and fury, Derrida is also critical of the “Leibnizian project” to seek “the simple absolute” that is “universal” and therefore outside of history.³⁵ Derrida insists that

in spite of all the seduction that it can legitimately exercise on our epoch, the Leibnizian project of a universal characteristic that is not essentially phonetic does not interrupt logocentrism in any way. On the contrary, universal logic confirms logocentrism, is

produced within it and with its help, exactly like the Hegelian critique to which it will be subjected.³⁶

By denying the “Leibnizian project” of its universality and equating it with logocentrism, Derrida also engages in a form of what Spivak describes as “reverse ethnocentrism” through the insistence that “logocentrism is a property of the *West*.”³⁷ In doing so, he must rely on the “Chinese model” to disrupt its Western counterpart while claiming that logocentrism is somehow “intrinsic to the totality of the history of the Occident.”³⁸

Yet, despite these differences, Derrida still shares with Leibniz and Hegel a view of the *word/world* that assumes a geographical divide between phonetic and nonphonetic writing systems. Or to borrow a line from Lévi-Strauss, “certain peoples write [*phonetically*] and others do not.”³⁹ In the case of China, Derrida assumes that “the Chinese written sign has a quality that sets it apart from phonetic systems of writing.”⁴⁰ After Leibniz, this notion was elaborated by Fenollosa and his later disciple Ezra Pound who claimed that Chinese writing has a “pictorial nature,” an assertion that was used to advance “their philosophical and aesthetic agendas.”⁴¹ In fact, one might argue that the work of Fenollosa and Pound, which viewed Chinese as “a superior medium of poetic representation,” also had a direct influence on the creation of deconstruction.⁴² As Derrida points out, the pictorial representation of Chinese writing favored by these writers led to an “irreducibly graphic poetics [which] was, [along] with that of Mallarmé, the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition” of logocentrism.⁴³ This so-called break was important in that it signaled, at least for Derrida, a way out of logocentrism that could only be found in a nonphonetic writing system like Chinese.

But unlike those who preceded him, Derrida is not quite confident enough to claim that written Chinese is fully “nonphonetic.” Therefore, he notes that

not only has phoneticization never been omnipotent but also that it has always already begun to undermine the mute signifier.

“Phonetic” and “nonphonetic” are therefore never pure qualities of certain systems of writing, they are the abstract characteristics of typical elements, more or less numerous and dominant within all systems of signification in general. Their importance owes less to their quantitative distribution than to their structural organization.⁴⁴

In other words, the complexity of any language system makes nonsense of any binary reduction such as phonetic/nonphonetic. If this is the case, then we might also wonder what it means for Derrida to describe Chinese writing as “largely nonphonetic” and to what extent does a language have to be nonphonetic in order to disrupt the operations of logocentrism?⁴⁵ Rather than addressing these questions, Derrida merely concludes that “each graphic form may have a double value—ideographic and phonetic. And its phonetic value can be simple or complex.”⁴⁶ In doing so, his qualification of Chinese as “largely phonetic” merely maintains the binary he sets out to disrupt and allows Chinese to become other to the West.

Let us return then to the question raised by Spivak at the beginning of this paper: Why must the East remain “as the name of the limits of the text’s knowledge?” In other words, why must Derrida bring up the comparison of Chinese writing when discussing Western ethnocentrism?

By doing away with the “transcendental signified”—that is, a standard criteria for meaning—and unleashing the forces of “play,” Derrida rejects the universal foundation on which the history of Western metaphysics has stood since its beginnings. But with the absence of universalism, Derrida must resort to a decentered comparative perspective. Hence, the need to compare and contrast the West (Europe) and the East (China). Since Derrida is reluctant to declare logocentrism as a universal phenomenon, China and its writing system have become by default the other and are as a result essentialized in terms of their difference.

Since Derrida’s target is the West and its preferential treatment of speech over writing, his incorrect view of Chinese writing can in many ways be considered as benign (compared to the racist views of Herder and Hegel), yet it remains problematic nonetheless. Like

Leibniz and Hegel, however, Derrida assumes that there is a certain incommensurability between Western languages (specifically French and German) and Chinese. Since language and thought are inseparable, a different form of language produces a different system of thought. Therefore, Europeans and Chinese do not and cannot think alike.⁴⁷

For a postcolonial critic like Rey Chow, Derrida's engagement with Chinese writing represents "a significant globalizing move" fraught with major problems, to put it mildly.⁴⁸ For Chow, exposing Derrida's ethnocentric "blindness" also calls into question the project of poststructuralism in its entirety. According to her, given the "centrality" of Derrida's early work to "poststructuralist studies in general" and recalling how such work "uses Chinese writing as a key metaphor for *contrast* and *difference* from Western phonocentrism," the "implications" for refuting the ideographic thesis can be quite "staggering."⁴⁹ For what disturbs Chow is not so much Derrida's "ignoring the actuality of the Chinese language" (after all, he is merely following a line of thought that dates back several centuries), but rather the issue of

how a kind of work that is radical, liberatory, antitraditional—an epochal intellectual intervention in every respect—is itself founded not only on an apparent lack of information about and indifference to the workings of a language that provides the pivot of its critical turn but also on a continual stigmatization of that language through the mechanical reproduction of it as graphicity, as predominantly ideographic writing.⁵⁰

In other words, how is it possible for a work that condemns the "violence of difference" (as in the case of Lévi-Strauss denying the existence of writing among "primitive" cultures like the Nambikwara) to commit another act of violence against Chinese culture by claiming that it is for the most part without phonetic writing?⁵¹ Perhaps, violence is too harsh a label. However, there are grounds to accuse Derrida of "stereotyping" or producing "a moment in which the other is transformed into a recycled cliché" while insisting that there is an inherent difference between the West and the East.⁵²

Yet, it is not enough to acknowledge the stereotype and demonstrate it to be false. Rather, we must scrutinize the “act of stereotyping” itself as “a fundamental signifying or representational process with real theoretical and political consequences” in a world of increasing “global, cross-cultural contacts.”⁵³ Chow makes her own counter-globalizing move here by insisting that the stereotype in question is that of the “inscrutable Chinese,” which assumes the inability of “outsiders” to read “Chinese (facial) expressions—themselves a kind of corporeal writing.”⁵⁴ Such a stereotype—a stereotype being a projection of otherness that is etymologically rooted in printing and typography—also provides a link between the corporeal and the textual. However, in the Chinese case, this is because his/her written language has a visual “face” but lacks a phonetic “voice.”

Although Derrida’s stereotyping can be read as “positive” since it is “offered as the highest of compliments,” Chow dismisses this line of thought by arguing that Chinese in Derrida’s text is allowed a “privileged status” because of its treatment as “an exterior that is emptied of its grammar, syntax, sound, history, and actual speakers.”⁵⁵ Rather than challenging the myth of inscrutability, Derrida merely

stops at its boundary, hails it as a familiar sight/site (“Ah, such inscrutable Chinese!”), and then redirects his gaze steadfastly at the West, in which things acquire a new significance as a result of this hailing of the other. Instead of working through the stereotype of Chinese as (sur)face, image, and ideographic writing and deconstructing it as he does European texts and languages, Derrida simply circumvents it, helping thus to perpetuate—to stereotype to a second degree—the cultural divide between East and West, even as the name “deconstruction” becomes henceforth associated with, among other things, the meticulous dismantling of stereotypes (known in deconstructive vocabulary as “presences”).⁵⁶

Rather than deconstructing the stereotype of otherness associated with Chinese writing, Derrida merely uses it as a foil for his critique of

Western logocentrism and in the process reifies what Chow describes as “the cultural divide between East and West.”

Oddly enough, this critique of Derrida is echoed in Spivak’s attack on Julia Kristeva’s *About Chinese Women (Des Chinoises)* which, like *Grammatology*, relies on the opposition between the East and the West and puts forth the “most stupendous generalizations about Chinese writing.”⁵⁷ According to Spivak, Kristeva’s account of Chinese culture not only overlooks “archival evidence” but transforms “speculation” into “historical fact”⁵⁸ while ignoring the “lived, material realities”⁵⁹ of her eponymous subjects.

In fact, Kristeva’s stereotyping of Chinese women is symptomatic of a much larger inclination among the French theorists associated with what is now known as poststructuralism. According to Haun Saussy, one of the “additional marker[s]” that distinguishes poststructuralism from its precursor, structuralism, is a preoccupation with the East or more specifically China.⁶⁰

Those writing about China during the late sixties and seventies, including Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Philippe Sollers, were guilty of reducing its language and culture into a “sign without actual content, humanity at degree zero.”⁶¹ Despite their differences, what these thinkers shared in common was an indifference to discussing China on its own terms. Rather, China became a theoretical abstraction used to affirm or deny knowledge about the West.

For Foucault, there was an imaginary China, a China of “our dreamworld” as he describes in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (Les mots et les choses)* in which

its writing does not reproduce the fugitive flight of the voice in horizontal lines; [rather] it erects the motionless and still-recognizable images of things themselves in vertical columns.⁶²

The language of this make-believe China does not so much “fashion sentences” as it arranges the “images of things themselves” into columns.⁶³ Interestingly, Foucault does not bother to delineate how this imaginary Chinese differs from the actual language itself. At the same

time, he attempts to preemptively absolve himself from any charges of ethnocentrism by claiming that he is describing an imaginary China as if parodying Derrida's famous line that "[t]he concept of Chinese writing ... functioned as a sort of European hallucination."⁶⁴ Yet, for Derrida, Kristeva and Sollers (who argued that the Chinese book "was not a 'book'" in the western sense but rather "a series of perspectives, a striation of fields, of cascades"⁶⁵), their hallucination was induced by a strong will or desire to imagine Chinese as an ideographic language and therefore as an "antitype" to the body of Western culture and tradition.⁶⁶ Indeed, this Orientalist fantasy provided Derrida and company a convenient way to reconceptualize the Western body of knowledge while creating a (geo)graphical border separating the West and the East from which—at least, in the purview of French theory—the twain have yet to meet.

Notes

¹ Quoted in John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1984), 35.

² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 80.

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*, lxxxii, italics in original.

⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 90, italics added.

⁵ Ian Buchanan, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 296.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 43.

⁸ DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language*, 79-80.

⁹ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 84.

¹⁴ Ibid., 85.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Moreover, neither Japanese nor Korean use these same Chinese characters to refer to McDonald's or any other foreign lexical terms since semantically they do not make any sense outside a Chinese cultural context.

¹⁷ Many thanks to my friend and colleague Chih-ming Wang who pointed out these examples while giving me a crash course on Chinese orthography.

¹⁸ One must not forget that China today uses a simplified writing system with fewer strokes for each character. This abbreviated form was instituted under Mao to promote mass literacy.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 90.

²⁰ DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language*, 133-34.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

²² Quoted in Christopher L. Connery, "Ideographica: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe," *China Review International* 9, no.1 (2002): 226.

²³ Han-Liang Chang, "Hallucinating the Other: Derridean Fantasies of Chinese Script," *Center for Twentieth Century Studies* 4 (1988): 2. It is worth mentioning Napoleon's conquest of Egypt, which led to Champollion's discovery and deciphering of the Rosetta Stone. This also led to Champollion coining the term *idéographique* which was later applied to the study of Chinese as well. It is important to note that the Egyptian writing on the Rosetta Stone could not have been interpreted without the realization that it "had a phonetic as well as semantic component." Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 140.

²⁴ Connery, "Ideographica," 227.

²⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 76.

²⁶ Yunte Huang, *Transpacific Displacement: Ethnography, Translation, and Intertextual Travel in Twentieth-Century American Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 13. Another common but false assumption about written Chinese is that its characters can be universally comprehended regardless of local language differences—that is, whether one speaks Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese or Korean. But as J. Marshall Unger shows, the ability to communicate through Chinese characters to a speaker of another language is at best limited and "highly constrained." See J. Marshall Unger, "The Very Idea. The Notion of Ideogram in China and Japan Author(s)," *Monumenta Nipponica* 45, no. 4 (1990), 394.

²⁷ Quoted in Huang, *Transpacific Displacement*, 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 3.

³⁰ Chang, "Hallucinating the Other," 4.

³¹ Quoted in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 25. Of course, Hegel never bothered to consider whether Western imperialism and the continual meddling by Britain and other nations may have played a key role in China's decline as a sovereign nation in the 19th century.

³² *Ibid.*, 80.

³³ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁴ Ming Dong Gu, "Reconceptualizing the Linguistic Divide: Chinese and Western Theories of the Written Sign," *Comparative Literature Studies* 37, no. 2 (2000): 106.

³⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 76-78.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

³⁷ Spivak, translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*, lxxxii.

³⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 72, 79. On page 79, he notes that "logocentrism is an ethnocentric metaphysics. It is related to the history of the West."

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁴⁰ Gu, "Reconceptualizing," 102.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 92.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁷ For a poststructuralist perspective on the relationship between thought and language, see Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 1988), 32-46.

⁴⁸ Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 61.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, italics in original.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 110.

⁵² Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic*, 63.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁵⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "French Feminism in an International Frame," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 160.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵⁹ Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 2003), 81.

⁶⁰ Haun Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 147. For various reasons, this interest in China coincides with the time of the Cultural Revolution.

⁶¹ Marie-Paule Ha, *Figuring the East: Segalen, Malraux, Duras, and Barthes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 108. Ironically, as Ha points, this is the same critique that Barthes launched against Voltaire and his portrait of the Orient.

⁶² Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse*, 148.

⁶³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xix.

⁶⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 80.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse*, 147. On page 149 of the same book, Saussy himself remarks that "for Sollers, the Chinese book is specifically and

determinately *what our books are not.*"

⁶⁶Ibid., 149.