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Contents

Articles

- Graeme FORD*, The Persian Translating College and Ming Tributary Communications with the Western Ocean 1
- Howard KAHM* und *LEE Simwoo*, A Capital Idea: Social and Economic Implications of Ritual Space in Kaegyöng during the Early Koryö Period 27
- Roderich PTAK*, A Note on Dazhoudao 大洲島 / Tinhosa (c. 1000–1550) 53
- CHEN Boyi* 陈博翼, The Hokkien in Hôi An, 1500s–1800s: Methods of Integration in the Chinese Diaspora 99
- UDAANJARGAL Chuluunbaatar* and *Leland LIU ROGERS*, Reconsidering the Degree of Oppression of Mongol Women under the Qing 137
- FANG Xuan* 方璇 and *Dorothee SCHAAB-HANKE*, Circulation that Had Its Price: Roussier and His Role as an Early Recipient and Disseminator of Amiot’s Knowledge about Chinese Music 159
- WANG Meimei* 王梅梅 and *Bas VAN LEEUWEN*, Mining for Money: A Micro Study on Government Intervention in the Operation of Lianhua Zinc Mine in Qing China 187
- YUAN Xing* 苑星, The Reinterpretation of Female Chastity by Revolutionists in Late Qing China 213
- Julia C. SCHNEIDER*, Non-Chinese Peoples in Chinese Republican Historiography: Beasts, Non-Historic Peoples, Homines Sacri 231

Review Articles

- Barend J. TER HAAR*, Harmful Ancestors or Friendly Ghosts: Looking at Our Early Evidence on the Chinese Notion of *Gui* 鬼 269
- LIN Hang* 林航, Negotiating Power and Identity: Eunuchs in Qing China (1644–1911) 307

Reviews of Books

Ian M. MILLER. <i>Fir and Empire: The Transformation of Forests in Early Modern China</i> (GUO Shuyu)	321
Adam PARR. <i>The Mandate of Heaven: Strategy, Revolution, and the First European Translation of Sunzi's Art of War</i> (1772) (Dorothee SCHAAAB-HANKE)	325
Michael WERT. <i>Samurai: A Concise History</i> (NEMINEMUS)	333
Henrietta HARRISON. <i>The Perils of Interpreting: The Extraordinary Lives of Two Translators Between Qing China and the British Empire</i> (Sebastian EICHER)	338
List of Books Received	343

Circulation that Had Its Price: Roussier and His Role as an Early Recipient and Disseminator of Amiot's Knowledge about Chinese Music

FANG Xuan 方璇 and Dorothee SCHAAB-HANKE*

Abstract

The Jesuit Joseph-Marie Amiot was the first to provide the European public with knowledge about Chinese music that surpassed by far all that had been known about Chinese music there before. However, a draft translation of a Chinese text on musical theory dating to the Qing dynasty that he had sent to Paris early in the 1750s seems to have gone through several hands without Amiot himself having received any feedback for many years. A book published by Pierre-Joseph Roussier in 1770, sent to him by the French king's librarian, alerted Amiot to the fact that information drawn from his manuscript had been circulated, partly in a distorted manner and without mentioning him as the translator, among members of European academia. Several years later, Roussier was entrusted with editing Amiot's *Mémoire de la musique des Chinois* as the sixth volume of the *Mémoires concernant l'histoire, les sciences, les art, les moeurs, les usages &c. des chinois*, a work Amiot had spent more than twenty years preparing. At the focus of this study is the question of what role Roussier had played in receiving and transmitting knowledge on Chinese music provided by Amiot and how this role was perceived by Amiot himself and other early recipients of Roussier's edition of Amiot's text.

Key words

Joseph-Marie Amiot, Pierre-Joseph Roussier, early Chinese music theory, triple progression, pentatonic scale, reception of Chinese music in Europe

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Introduction

Joseph-Marie Amiot (1718–1793) had been sent to China as a missionary and arrived in Peking in 1751 where he lived until his death in 1793. He was one of the Jesuits who were entrusted by Henri-Léonard Bertin (1720–1792), minister of state, with sending as much material as possible with information on China to Paris. Soon after his arrival in Peking, encouraged by Antoine Gaubil (1689–1759), Amiot translated a text on Chinese music, the *Gu Yuejing zhuan* 古樂經傳 (Commentary to the Old *Classic of Music*) by Li Guangdi 李光地 (1642–1718) which had been posthumously published by his grandson, Li Qingzhi 李清植 (1690–1744), in 1726. Amiot sent this manuscript together with various additional notes to the Jesuit Pater Simon de la Tour (1697–1766), the representative of the French mission in China, in Paris, asking him to forward the manuscript to Jean-Pierre de Bougainville (1722–1763), secretary of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-lettres, and to recommend his draft to him. Amiot's manuscript is said to have arrived in Paris in 1754 and addressed to de Bougainville by de la Tour in the very same year, but it seems to never have reached the latter; by 1763, de la Tour had broken off all contact with the Jesuits in China and then, in 1764, King Louis XV (r. 1715–1774) abolished per decree the Societas Jesu in France.¹ As Amiot later wrote in the preface to his memoir, not knowing what had become of his manuscript, he stopped thinking about it and decided to continue preparing various materials that might be of interest for the European scholarly community, among them a new manuscript on Chinese music that was much more comprehensive than the previous one.

In 1774, ten years after he had sent his draft translation and accompanying materials to Paris, Amiot received two books from Jérôme-Frédéric Bignon (1747–1787), the French king's librarian. One of these books was, as Amiot later wrote to Bertin, delivered to him on his own request, while the other one was additionally sent by Bignon, who thought its content would also be of interest to Amiot based on its topic and the materials used in it.² The book was written by Pierre-Joseph Roussier (1716–1792) and entitled *Mémoire sur la musique des anciens, où l'on expose le principe des proportions authentiques, dites de Pythagore, & de divers systèmes de musique chez les Grecs, les Chinois & les Egyptiens*, published in 1770. This book, in which Roussier discusses the form and age of the musical theory of the Greeks, Egyptians and also that of the Chinese, would later become the basis for a heated debate between musical specialists in Europe and also the point of departure for the contact between Roussier and Amiot that finally led to Roussier's role as editor and commentator of Amiot's memoir.

1 In 1773 the Society of Jesus was dissolved (by Pope Clement XIV), and the decision was promulgated in China in 1775. See Standaert 2001, 316-318.

2 See A-MCC6, 5f. For the acronyms A-MCC6 and R-MCC6, see the bibliography at the end of this article.

This study focuses on the question of what role Roussier had played in receiving and transmitting knowledge on Chinese music provided by Amiot and how this role was perceived by Amiot himself and other early recipients of Roussier's edition of Amiot's text.

While there are already some studies on various aspects of Amiot's works on music and their reception, both in Western and Chinese languages, this study is to our knowledge the first to place its focus on the difficult way in which the intellectuals in Europe received early knowledge about Chinese music and the various misunderstandings involved.³

1 The Treatment of Chinese Music in Roussier's Early Writings

In his *Mémoire sur la musique des anciens* (hereafter *MMA*), Roussier is mainly preoccupied with comparing the music of the ancient Greeks with that of the Egyptians. However, one of the altogether twelve articles in the main part of the book is devoted to Chinese music. The article is entitled "Sur le Système à Six Cordes des Chinois" (On the Six-String System of the Chinese) and discusses on three pages the early Chinese system of musical tones.⁴ Roussier argues there that the early Chinese musical scale must have essentially been the same as the Lyre de Mercure (Lyre of Mercury, a very old musical scale consisting of only three tones), but with two additional strings or tones. In his own words,

I remember having personally seen, at the beginning of 1763, in manuscripts translated from various Chinese authors, a kind of result of the triple progression, a series of numbers that started with the term 1, in this manner: 1, 9, 81, 729, etc. That is properly a progression [based on] 9, which gives the successive tones generated by the Chinese. In other words: these numbers together with the intermediaries 3, 27, 243, etc., which I have referred to in the text, build the following progression: 1, 3, 9, 27, 81, etc, etc.⁵

3 For an earlier study of Amiot's works on Chinese music, see Tchen 1974; Didier (1985) and Levy (1989) have dealt with the question of how Amiot's studies fit into the spectrum of discussions on non-European music in the 18th Century; Brix and Lenoir (1995 and 1997) have analysed hitherto unpublished material by Amiot related to Chinese music; Hermans (2005) has provided a comprehensive biography of Amiot; Nii (2012) gives a concise overview of Amiot's work and its reception in the 18th century; a monograph on Amiot's works on Chinese music, his sources and their early reception in Europe by Fang and Schaab-Hanke is presently in preparation.

4 *MMA*, 14-16.

5 „Je me rappelle d'avoir vu moi-même, au commencement de 1763, dans des Manuscrit traduits de divers Auteurs Chinois, une sorte de résultat de la progression triple, une série de nombres qui commençoit par le terme 1, en cette manière: 1, 9, 81, 729, &c. C'est-là proprement une progression de 9, laquelle donne les tons successifs qu'en tirent les Chinois. Or ces nombres, avec les intermédiaires, 3, 27, 243, &c, dont j'ai parlé dans le texte, composent ensemble la progression suivie, 1, 3, 9, 27, 81, &c, &c..." See *MMA*, 135 ("Les Chinois font usage, pour la Musique, de la Progression Triple"), relating to *MMA*, 33, § 81, fn. 18

It is worth noting in the context of this study that at that early stage of his encounter with Chinese music, Roussier wholly ignored the name of the translator through whom he was able to read the relevant texts from Chinese authors. However, probably the only source – apart from Amiot’s draft translation – that provided European scholars who could not read Chinese themselves with some information on Chinese music at that time was a short article on the subject in Jean-Baptiste Du Halde’s (1674–1743) *Description [...] de la Chine*,⁶ but no remark is made there about the calculation of fifths on the basis of the so-called “triple progression” that Roussier mentions here, which means that for his comparison he must have had direct access to Amiot’s draft translation of the *Gu Yuejing zhuan* that had arrived in Paris, as mentioned before, in 1754.

The series of numbers that Roussier quotes from his source is in fact part of a very early Chinese tradition. The method of generating a musical scale of twelve semitones on the basis of ascending perfect fifths by adding or subtracting a third of each preceding tone respectively is described in texts that may be dated at least to the second if not to the third century BC.⁷ The term *progression triple* (triple progression), or triple geometric progression, which Roussier mentions here for comparison, was widely used among music theorists in Europe during the 18th century. The term is derived from the method of multiplying a given number used as the base by 3, alternately adding a third to and subtracting a third from the preceding tone on ascending fifths and thus generating the so-called “circle of fifths”, which is commonly known as “Pythagorean tuning”.⁸

(“Art. V. Observations préliminaires pour le Système des Egyptiens, Troisième Observation”). For the calculation of these numbers up to the number 177147 for the twelfth term of fifths, which may already be found in the Chinese text *Huainanzi*, as well as in the *Gu Yuejing zhuan* and in the calculations of Roussier and Rameau, see the explanations given by Levy 1989, 67.

- 6 See Du Halde, 265 (“De leur Musique”), where he contrasts the great appreciation that the Chinese have for their early music and their claim to have even invented it with its purported degenerate and imperfect nature today.
- 7 This ancient method is called “subtracting and adding one third (*sansfen sunyi* 三分損益). It is found in early philosophical texts such as the *Guanzi* 管子, *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 and *Huainanzi* 淮南子. These are the texts quoted in the *Gu Yuejing zhuan*. For a study on the *Gu Yuejing zhuan*’s drift to the West, see Cha and Gao 2005.
- 8 On the origins of the Pythagorean tuning, see Levy 1989. According to Thomas Christensen, the triple progression, when recorded as C-F-C-G-C, could generate a pentatonic scale of G-A-C-D-E. See Christensen 1992, 295; 2018, 15, fn. 1. He writes that Rameau “concluded from this marvelous fact that both Chinese and Greek music have evolved from the same source.” See also the explanation given by Didier 1985, 79. The term “Triple Progression” is, by the way, also frequently used by Amiot in his memoir. See Christensen 1992, 2018, 15, fn. 1.

Apart from his direct use of Amiot's translations from the Chinese, Roussier also received information on Chinese music from a book entitled *Code du musique pratique [...]* by Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764), who in turn likewise relied on Amiot's draft as the source for his discussion of Chinese music. In the introduction of a supplement to his book entitled "Nouvelles Reflexions sur le Principe Sonore", Rameau notes:

A few days ago, I came across a translation of all that R. P. Amiot, [member] of the Company of Jesus who has been a Missionary in Peking for about sixteen years, has been able to assemble on Chinese music. The author from whom he has drawn most of his knowledge, lived, according to what he says, 2277 years before Jesus Christ, and this same author, who for his part did nothing but offer what he had been able to assemble from his father's record that had been spared from a fire, quotes at first, as had others before him, the triple progression until its 13th term, as the source of the Chinese musical systems, followed by those systems that I will refer to later; then, after having described the wonderful effects of this music, he gives a list of comparisons that one has made with all one could imagine in Nature. This translation happens to have been addressed, in 1754, to M. de Bougainville, from the Academy of Belles-Lettres.⁹

As Roussier also quoted these lines in his memoir, we can at least say that he thus indirectly also mentioned Amiot by name himself.¹⁰ While this passage shows Rameau had the honor to mention Amiot's name as the author of the translation that he had only recently "come across", his reading of the text must have been rather superficial since he did not even realize that the fire mentioned in Amiot's translation was not one of a remote age but instead, as Amiot in his *Mémoire* lets his readers know, a rather recent one. We will discuss the meaning and circumstances of this fire later, but let us first turn to Roussier's discussion of the Chinese tonal system in his book.

In his additional notes, Roussier describes the tonal system of the Chinese as "imperfect". More precisely, he writes:

9 "Il m'est tombé depuis quelques jours une traduction de tout ce qu'a pu ramasser sur la Musique chinoise le R. P. Amiot, de la Compagnie de Jésus, Missionnaire à Pékin, depuis environ seize ans. L'auteur dont il tire la plus grande partie de ses lumières, vivait, à ce qu'il dit, 2277 ans avant J. C. & cet Auteur, qui ne donne que ce qu'il a pu ramasser des débris des Recueils de son père, échappés d'un incendie, cite d'abord, conjointement avec d'autres, la progression triple jusqu'à son 13e terme, pour la source des systèmes de Musique chinoise, & ensuite ces systèmes, que je rapporterai bientôt; puis, après avoir raconté des effets merveilleux de cette Musique, il donne une énumération des comparaisons qu'on en a faites avec tout ce qu'on peut imaginer dans la Nature. Cette Traduction se trouve adressée, en 1754, à M. de Bougainville, de l'Académie des Belles-Lettres." See Rameau, *CMP* 1760, 189, fn. (a).

10 See Roussier, *MMA*, 135, fn. 18, relating to *MMA*, 33.

The defect of this last (-mentioned) system of the Chinese, and the imperfection of their scale, the gaps in which always seem to wait for other sounds, make it clear enough that these two singular systems are nothing particular, but merely fragments of a complete system, which I attribute to the Egyptians.¹¹

And on the same page Roussier gives a reason why in his view a scale system that in his eyes was defective or incomplete could not have been invented by the Chinese, namely

[...] because this people has never lost any of the arts that it has invented. We know to what extent man can be led astray by misunderstood customs, misinterpreted rules, laws taken literally, when the spirit is lost.¹²

While the reason Roussier puts forward for why in his eyes the Chinese cannot have been the inventors of the generation of fifths was probably an idea of his own, the conviction that the Chinese people would certainly have not been able to invent such a system on their own is already expressed in Rameau's book. In an appendix to his work, Rameau reflects on the *principe universel* (universal principle) of musical harmony, interpreting what he had learned about Chinese music from Amiot's translation as evidence for the laws governing the generation of fifths.¹³ Somewhat later, pointing to the special character of Chinese music as purely pentatonic, he writes:

The Chinese as well as Pythagoras derive their systems from the triple progression alone; they want only five tones in their *lii*, which apparently means system, scale, or mode.¹⁴

Somewhat later still, Rameau discusses the idea (which he must have misread in Amiot's translation)¹⁵ that the Chinese knew the principles of the triple progression as early as 2277 BC.¹⁶

11 „Le vice de ce dernier système des Chinois, & l'imperfection de leur gamme, dont les lacunes semblent toujours attendre d'autres sons, font assez voir que ces deux singuliers systèmes ne sont chacun en particulier, que comme des débris d'un système complet, que j'attribue aux Egyptiens [...]”. See *MMA*, 33.

12 “Car ce Peuple n'a jamais perdu aucun des Arts qu'il a inventés. On sait à quel point l'homme peut être égaré par des usages mal entendus, des règles mal interprétées, des lois prises à la letter, lorsque l'esprit en est perdu.” See *MMA*, 33.

13 See Rameau, *CMP* 1760, 189-191.

14 “Les Chinois, ainsi que Pythagore, tirent leurs systèmes de la seule progression triple; ils veulent qu'il n'y ait que cinq Tons dans leur *Li*, qui signifie apparemment système, échelle, gamme ou mode.” See *CMP* 1760, 191. As Didier explains, Rameau argues here that the Chinese pentatonic scale was generated by the triple geometric progression (e.g. the scale G-A-C-D-E could be generated by the geometric sequence 3,1,3,9,3). See Didier, 79.

15 Unfortunately, Amiot's translation has not been preserved as a whole, but only some references to it are preserved in other works. On his attempts at finding the manuscript somewhere in European libraries or other institutions, see Tchen 1974, 46-53. For a reconstruction of the draft on the basis of the extant fragments, see Fang and Schaab-Hanke (upcoming).

According to Rameau, as there are no hints at a very early connection between the Chinese and the Egyptians, it must have been the sons of Noah himself (supposed to have lived around the year 6300 BC) who had transmitted this knowledge after the great deluge to the Egyptians (from whom Pythagoras then would have received his knowledge of the triple progression) and to other peoples, among them the Chinese. Rameau ends his discussion with the words

We do not see, in fact, how the progression [...] can otherwise have come into the hands of peoples who do not give any knowledge by which we can suspect that they are the authors.¹⁷

Compared with Rameau's view, Roussier's idea that it must have been the Egyptians from whom the Chinese had derived their knowledge of the circle of fifths seems to be quite rational.

Let us now turn back to the fire that Rameau so drastically misunderstood as having been dated by the Chinese to the year 2277 BC, which he interpreted as the year by which the "triple progression" had allegedly been invented. Apparently, Roussier himself had already stumbled over Rameau's speculations relating to that fire, because after quoting Rameau's words literally, he adds his own speculations on the possible background of that fire. But his own attempts at an explanation, which he obviously made without checking Amiot's original translation, did not really make things better. By referring to a book on Chinese history by a certain "M. Freret",¹⁸ Roussier informs his readers that there was a grand burning of books under the first Qin em-

16 In his appendix, Rameau again refers to that number 2277 that he had misread as the year in which the fire burst out in the author's house. See Rameau, *CMP* 1760, 226. Nowhere in the passages from Amiot's draft translation that have been preserved, however, can this number be found. Since later in his *Mémoire*, Amiot refers to the year 2637 BC as the year to which some Chinese authors date the episode in which Ling Lun 伶倫, who is said to have been a grandee under Huangdi, the (mythic) Yellow Emperor, brought the twelve *lü* pipes to China from the West (*MCC6*, 77), he perhaps mentioned the same number in a note on his draft translation – which is, of course, no less questionable. The earliest account of the myth of Ling Lun in Chinese works is found in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, according to which the mythical Yellow Emperor commanded him to create standard pitches by going west and bringing back bamboo from Mount Kunlun to make tubes of different lengths and diameters. The *Gu Yuejing zhuan* also mentions the myth of Ling Lun (see the *Gu Yuejing zhuan tongshi*, chaps. 4 and 5).

17 "On ne voit pas en effet comment la progression [...] peuvent être parvenus autrement entre les mains de peuples, qui ne donnent aucunes connoissances par lesquelles on puisse soupçonner qu'ils en sont les auteurs." See *CMP* 1760, 227. On Rameau's idea that Noah's three sons spread knowledge of the triple progression to different corners of the world, including China and Greece, see also Christensen 2018, 16.

18 Here Roussier refers to a treatise on Chinese history by Nicolas Freret (1688–1749) entitled "De l'antiquité et de la certitude de la chronologie Chinoise", which was published in vol. 10 of the *Mémoires de littérature tirés des registres de l'Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres*. The reference to the destruction of books under "Tsine Tchi Hoamti" [Chin Shi Huangdi, the First Emperor of the Qin] is on p. 381.

peror (whose accession to the throne he almost correctly dates to the year 246 BC), and that it would be plausible to him that this is what the author of that text was referring to, since, as Roussier adds, there were certainly not that many fires at that time.¹⁹

Let us now take a look at one further example of how Roussier made use of knowledge he had taken directly from Amiot's draft translation, in order to enhance an argument he had made about Egyptian music. In a letter he sent to Aubert, the editor of the *Journal des beaux-arts et des sciences* (*JBAS*), he responded to a critical remark that Aubert had made in his review of Roussier's book in the November 1770 issue of his journal, where Aubert expressed his doubts on the provability of Roussier's theory that the Ancient Egyptians had, when they first divided the musical scale into the twelve semitones (of a chromatic scale) and calculated the generation of fifths, correlated the twelve semitones with the twelve months of the year and the zodiac.²⁰ In his response, Roussier admits that at the time he had written this section of his book, the idea was indeed still rather speculative, but now he would be able, thanks to the translations provided by Pater Amiot, to add evidence for the analogous phenomenon found in the earliest tradition of Chinese music in which the twelve semitones called "lu" (i.e. *lü* 律) were likewise correlated with the twelve months of the year. As evidence, he refers to two texts containing passages of Amiot's translations in which the correspondence of the twelve *lü* to the months of a year are mentioned. The first text is an extract from Amiot's draft translation, edited by François Arnaud (1721–1784);²¹ the second is an article containing Amiot's translation of a poem by the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735–1796) on the city of Mukden (modern-day Shenyang).²² On closer reflexion, of course, one may justly ask oneself why mentioning the Chinese theory of correspondences between months and musical notes, as well as colors, tastes etc., would be of any help as evidence corroborating an earlier idea regarding the music of Ancient Egypt.

Before returning to Roussier and how he later came to perceive Amiot's work, a short glimpse will also be taken at the aforementioned article published by Arnaud and how he dealt with Amiot's draft translation and his accompanying notes and comments, Arnaud

19 See *MMA*, 136.

20 For this formulation, see Aubert, *JBAS* 11(1770), 469, referring to Roussier's words in *MMA*, 79-83, Article XI: "Du Rapport des Sons Naturels & des Sons chromatique aux signes du zodiac, selon les Égyptiens" (From the Relation of Natural Sounds & Chromatic Sounds to the Signs of the Zodiac, according to the Egyptians).

21 The text was first published in *Journal étranger*, July 1761, 5-49, reproduced in *Variétés littéraires* 1768, 309-353, and republished in 1804, Vol. II, 273-311. Only the publication in *Variétés littéraires* of 1768 is, however, mentioned by Roussier. The respective passage Roussier refers to is in *Variétés littéraires*, 319.

22 *ÉVM*, 213, fn. 8. For both passages, see R-Letter 1770, 205. For an annotated edition of that *fu* by the Qianlong emperor in modern Chinese, along with Amiot's French translation of the text, see Cai Jianfeng 2015.

having been a member of the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, the same institution whose long-term secretary was de Bougainville, to whom Amiot had wished his manuscript be sent to.

Arnaud had published extracts from Amiot's translation under the title "Traduction manuscrite d'un livre sur l'ancienne Musique Chinoise, composé par Ly-koang-ty, Docteur & Membre du premier Tribunal des Lettrés de l'Empire, Ministre, &c"²³ which clearly signals that the author of the text of which parts were provided in translation in this article was given much importance. By contrast, Amiot, the author of the translation reproduced in the journal, is mentioned nowhere in the text. Arnaud himself as the editor guides the reader through the text, producing a bizarre mixture of passages taken from the translation and his own comments, and at times he apparently even mixes up the text that Amiot had translated from the Chinese with Amiot's own comments, which he had probably sent separately to Paris. What we thus find in Arnaud's article are sentences such as "the author of the translation before us, who is speaking to us from the past, thought he had found the reason for the lack of taste of the Chinese for European Music in the formation of their auditory organs. [...]"²⁴ Several times the editor explicitly refers to the author with wording such as "the author turns to talking about [...]"²⁵ or "the author finished with some reflexions on the method the Chinese applied in composing and performing their music."²⁶ Or, for example, to make sure that a reader does not mistake a passage for a comment by the moderating editor, he adds a note to the main text in brackets, saying, "It's still the author who's talking."²⁷

Remarkably, de Guignes, who had edited Amiot's translation of a hymn composed by the Qianlong Emperor in 1747 on the occasion of the sacrifices he conducted in Mukden, pointed as early as 1770 in his preface to the fact that Amiot's draft translation had "been greatly abridged and even rather distorted" in the version Arnaud had printed in the *Journal étranger*.²⁸

Already quite different from this first reaction to Amiot's draft translation is the manner in which Roussier treats it in a letter that was published in November 1770 in the *Journal des*

23 See Arnaud 1761, etc.

24 "L'Auteur de la traduction que nous avons sous les yeux, lequel va parler déformais, a cru trouver la raison du peu du gout que les Chinois ont pour la Musique Européenne dans la conformation de leurs organs auditifs [...]" See Arnaud 1761, 13. It is difficult to distinguish here between Amiot's and the editor Aubert's words, but in fact, elsewhere Amiot also made pejorative remarks about the ability of the Chinese to perceive European music as harmonic tones.

25 "L'auteur passe à la musique appelée du [...]" See idem, 29.

26 "L'auteur finit par quelques réflexions sur la méthode qu'observent les Chinois dans la composition & dans l'exécution de leur Musique." See idem, 31.

27 "c'est toujours l'Auteur qui parle." See idem, 37.

28 "Il a été très abrégé dans l'imprimé qu'on a fait et même assez défiguré." See "l'Éloge de la ville de Moukden", xxj. See also Tchen 1974, 55.

beaux-arts & des sciences, edited by Aubert.²⁹ In this letter, Roussier correctly refers to Amiot as the translator of the texts he discusses at least seven times. He writes:

I currently have in my hands these precious manuscripts on ancient Chinese music, which are mentioned, under the name of a treatise, in the preface that M. de Guignes put at the head of the “Praise of the City of Mukden” [...],³⁰ and of which Rameau in a note in his *Code de Musique* says that they had already been sent to France in 1754. I have reported this note on page [...] of my memoir. These manuscripts contain all that Pater Amiot, Missionary in Peking, was able to pick up both of the ancient music of the Chinese and their modern music.³¹

As one may grasp from these words, Roussier had already developed a certain sensibility towards the possible reproach of having usurped someone else’s intellectual property at that stage, which can be concluded from the following lines that precede his quotes from the two texts mentioned above:

Before telling you something about it, Sir, I will quote here two passages for you, which may be in everyone’s hands since they have been printed.³²

Importantly, here Roussier uses information drawn from Amiot’s translations in order to support his claim that the Egyptians already had twelve tones in their theory of music, which had been generated according to the triple progression. In his review of Roussier’s book, Aubert had challenged Roussier’s claim arguing that he had not presented any evidence for this idea. Now, in this letter, Roussier writes that the material Amiot had contributed on early Chinese musical theory had furnished him with evidence to support what had before only been speculation.³³

29 It should be noted that a second letter by Roussier to the same editor also exists, which was published in *Journal des Beaux-Arts* in August 1771, but in that letter Roussier merely rehashes some matters relating to his earlier letter that neither provided new material on Chinese music nor referred to Amiot.

30 Here Roussier refers to Joseph de Guignes’ preface (“avis”) to Amiot’s translation of the Qianlong Emperor’s Praise on Mukden of 1743, see de Guignes 1770, xx-xxj.

31 “J’ai actuellement entre les mains ces précieux manuscrits sur l’ancienne Musique Chinoise, dont il est parlé, sous le nom de Traité, dans l’Avis que M. de Guignes a mis à la tête de l’Éloge de la ville de Moukden [...], & que Rameau dans une note de son Code de Musique [...], dit avoir été envoyés en France dès 1754. J’ai rapport cette note à la page [...] de mon Mémoire. Ces manuscrits contiennent tout ce que le Pe. Amiot, Missionnaire à Péking, a pu ramasser, tant sur l’ancienne Musique des Chinois, que sur leur Musique moderne.” See “Lettre de M. l’Abbé Roussier...”, *Journal des Beaux-Arts*, Nov. 1770, 203.

32 “Avant de vous en rapporter quelque chose, Monsieur, je vous citerai ici deux passages qui peuvent être entre les mains de tout le monde, puisqu’ils sont imprimés. [...]” Ebenda, 204.

33 See Roussier’s letter from November 1770 in *Journal des Beaux-Arts*, 198, which relates to Aubert’s review that was published in idem, June 1770, 469, in which Aubert writes: “Nous ne voyons pas que l’auteur fournisse sur cela aucune preuve. C’est vraisemblable ici une conjecture, mais on peut le regarder comme assez heureuse.”

Summing up, we can say that in his first encounter with information on Chinese music, Roussier seems not to have lost any thought about the translator who had produced those materials that had interested him as a musician and musicologist. But over time he seems to have changed his mind and dealt with the materials that he had at his disposal thanks to Amiot's efforts as a translator of Chinese sources more cautiously. However, the question that still needs to be discussed is whether the increase in information about Chinese music available to him also led him to change his mind with regard to his initial conviction that the origin of the circle of fifths must be sought in Ancient Egypt.

2 Amiot's Reaction to Roussier's Early Remarks on Chinese Music

In 1776, Amiot sent a draft of his comprehensive *Mémoire sur la Musique des chinois tant anciens que modernes* (*Treatise on the Music of the Ancient as well as the Modern Chinese*, abbr. *Mémoire*) to Henri Bertin. In its "Discours préliminaire" ("Preliminary Discourse"), Amiot describes how he had received Roussier's work along with another book that Bignon had sent to him in Peking and what emotions reading this book had evoked in him. In what follows, we shall summarize these reflections, which at times even seem a bit at odds with each other, and shall also quote some of these passages. Amiot begins his discussion with a few words on what he thought about Roussier's book:

This work, one of the best and most solid, in my opinion, that can be written in this genre, has enlightened me regarding a host of topics, even Chinese ones, that I had only barely made out before, and that I only barely made out through the thickest fog. It seemed to me, while reading it, that I had become one of the disciples of the famous Pythagoras, or one of the initiates in the college of priests in Egypt.³⁴

As we shall see later, remarks such as "even Chinese ones", injected in the passage above, are also typical of Amiot's later attitude towards Roussier, which is characterized by attestations of Roussier's strong efforts to become so familiar with "things Chinese" that it would seem to a general reader that he himself had been able to read the Chinese originals. Amiot knew that all the wisdom that Roussier had acquired about the Chinese theory of music could only have been gained by reading what he, Amiot, himself had written, and this knowledge led Amiot to use a slightly ironic tone that often shines through when he writes about European scholars who discuss Chinese music without having any knowledge of the Chinese language themselves.

34 "Cet ouvrage, l'un des meilleurs & des plus solides, à mon avis, qu'on puisse faire en ce genre, m'a éclairé sur une foule d'objets, même chinois, que je ne faisais qu'entrevoir auparavant, & que je n'entrevois qu'à travers les plus épais nuages. Il me semblait, en le lisant, que j'étais devenu l'un des disciples du fameux Pythagore, ou l'un des initiés dans le collège des prêtres d'Égypte." Siehe A-MCC6, 6.

In much the same vein, Amiot continues, saying:

What a pity, I said to myself, that the Abbot Roussier was not able to roam in the antiquities of the Chinese, as he did in those of the Egyptians or the Greeks! By going back to the primitive source of a music system, known to China for more than four thousand years, by deepening the principles on which this system is based, by developing its relationship with other sciences, by tearing the thick veil that has hitherto hidden from us the majestic simplicity of its course, this scholar might perhaps have penetrated into the sanctuary of nature, to discover there that universal harmony which submits everything to its immutable laws. At the very least, he would have come to the end of that happy time when the first teachers of mankind made all kinds of discoveries, which from the eastern part of the globe that we inhabit, spreading gradually in the rest of the universe, have finally arrived, not without much difficulty, in our western climes.³⁵

Amiot's expression of regret that Roussier and the other European scholars are not able to draw on the original Chinese sources themselves for their discussions is then repeated, but now in combination with his anger about the distortions and misunderstandings caused by certain people who dealt carelessly with the draft translation he had sent to Paris. He writes:

Once again, what a pity that the Abbot Roussier and the other scholars of Europe cannot draw on the Chinese sources by themselves, as they draw on the Egyptian & Greek sources! What beautiful things they would discover! I made every effort in the past to make up for it in some way, through the translation of the work of Li Guangdi, of which I spoke above, and to which I had added all that which I myself had taken from various Chinese authors touching on the science of sounds. However, judging by the scattered shreds that have been produced of this translation, I have every reason to believe that my writings, having passed through several hands, have suffered a number of alterations which have disfigured them.³⁶

35 “Quel dommage, disais-je en moi-même, que M. l'abbé Roussier n'ait pas pu fouiller dans les antiquités des Chinois, comme il l'a fait dans celles des Égyptiens des Grecs! En remontant jusqu'à la source primitive d'un système de musique, connu à la Chine depuis plus de quatre mille ans; en approfondissant les principes sur lesquels ce système appuie; en développant ses rapports avec les autres sciences; en déchirant ce voile épais qui nous a caché jusqu'ici la majestueuse simplicité de sa marche, ce savant eût pénétré peut-être jusque dans le sanctuaire de la nature, pour y découvrir cette harmonie universelle qui soumet tout à ses immuables lois. Tout au moins, il fût parvenu jusqu'au terme de ce temps heureux, où les premiers instituteurs du genre humain ont fait en tout genre les découvertes, qui de la partie orientale du globe que nous habitons, se répandant de proche en proche dans le reste de l'univers, sont enfin arrivées, non sans beaucoup de peine, jusque dans nos climats occidentaux.” See *A-MCC6*, 6.

36 “Encore une fois, quel dommage que M. l'abbé Roussier & les autres savants d'Europe ne puissent pas puiser par eux-mêmes dans les sources chinoises, comme ils puisent dans les sources égyptiennes & grecques! Que de belles choses ils découvriraient! J'ai bien fait tous mes efforts autrefois pour y suppléer en quelque sorte, par

And Amiot does not confine himself to venting his anger in general but gives a concrete example of what he means when he speaks of “a number of alterations which have disfigured” the writings he sent to Paris. He continues:

Rameau himself, who should not have treated as his own that which concerns the Chinese system, makes me speak of a fire that had occurred, according to what he lets us know, 2277 years before Jesus Christ, whereas the fire of which I spoke, or put better, of which the editor of the work that I translated spoke, was a quite specific fire, a fire that destroyed the house of the author, whose writings fell prey to the flames; in a word, a fire that has happened, so to speak, in our days. It occurred in the year *yiyou*, 22nd in the cycle of the Chinese, and the 43rd of the reign of the Kangxi Emperor, which is, according to our way of counting, the year 1705.³⁷

It should first be noted here that Amiot explicitly reproaches Rameau for having appropriated ideas about Chinese music in his work that he must have taken from Amiot's translation. In addition, Amiot reproaches him for having wholly distorted the words of the editor of the work he had rendered in translation, by referring to him as “the author” who “had lived 2277 years before Jesus Christ”. He corrects Rameau's error by explaining that the fire that Li Qingzhi, the editor of the *Gu Yuejing zhuan*, had mentioned in the postface of that book was a fire that had destroyed the house and most of the work of Li Guangdi, his grandfather, and that he had mentioned it to explain why he and not his grandfather had published the text, and why it had ultimately taken a different form from that in which Li Guangdi had originally written it.³⁸

Another remarkable detail should not be left out here. In the context of pointing out Rameau's blatant misunderstanding of the fire, Amiot appeals to other scholars who might also hold his draft translations in their hands to deal very cautiously with its contents, because, as he

la traduction de l'ouvrage de Ly-koang-ty, dont j'ai parlé ci-dessus, & à laquelle j'avais joint tout ce que j'avais puisé moi-même dans divers auteurs chinois, touchant la science des sons. Mais à juger par les lambeaux épars qu'on a produits de cette traduction, j'ai tout lieu de croire que mes écrits ayant passé par plusieurs mains, ont souffert quantité d'altérations qui les ont défigurés.” See A-MCC6, 11.

37 “Rameau lui-même, qui n'aurait dû prendre pour lui que ce qui concerne le système chinois, me fait parler d'un incendie arrivé, à ce qu'il fait entendre, 2.277 ans avant Jésus-Christ, tandis que l'incendie dont je parle, ou pour mieux dire, dont parle l'éditeur de l'ouvrage que je traduisais, n'est qu'un incendie particulier, un incendie qui consuma la maison de l'auteur, dont les écrits devinrent la proie des flammes; en un mot, un incendie arrivé pour ainsi dire de nos jours. Sa date est de l'année *y-yeou*, vingt-deuxième du cycle des Chinois, & la quarante-troisième du règne de Kang-hy, c'est-à-dire, suivant notre manière de compter, l'an 1705.” See A-MCC6, 11f.

38 For the original text of this postface, see *Gu Yuejing zhuan tongshi*, 164. Unfortunately, the original of Amiot's draft translation has not been preserved as a whole, but in the version of the memoir he edited, Roussier often quotes from that manuscript, and he writes in a footnote attached to Amiot's preface that the passage in question from Amiot's translation was in fascicle A, p. 30, where the editor's preface begins. See R-MCC6, 12, fn. (n).

frankly admits, at the time he wrote that translation, he had not yet dealt with that topic for a long time and thus had made many mistakes. He writes:

I have another reason that urges me to ask them for this: it seems rather important to me, that's it. At the time I wrote about the ancient music of the Chinese, having neither the enlightenment that I may have today on this subject, nor the knowledge that I have since acquired on the mores, customs, and books of the country, nor the help of any kind that I have had occasion to procure, I can only have made an infinity of mistakes in my first writings, especially in those where I explained a subject that very few scholars have heard of, and on which they consequently were only able to give me faulty or inexact explanations. Thus, I repeat, one should not count on my manuscript, even if one should have it as it came from my hands without any alteration & such. This, however, should only be understood as relating directly to music; for regarding the ceremonies and the other topics mentioned therein, one can stick to what I have said. The Chinese scholars whose support I had then were in a good position to furnish me with information in this respect.³⁹

So now that his *Mémoire* was finalized, almost twenty years after he had sent the draft translation of the *Gu Yuejing zhuan* to Paris, Amiot's foremost hope was, as he explicitly writes in the preface to his *Mémoire*, that Roussier would, on reading his memoir more closely, come to the conclusion that the Egyptians, the Greeks and Pythagoras did nothing but apply to stringed instruments what the Chinese had said before them based on pitch pipes.⁴⁰ And somewhat later in his preface, he expresses his hope that Roussier or other members of the European Republic of Letters would make use of the material he had provided and would then act as intermediaries to enlighten European academia on the early origin and the special character of Chinese music. In Amiot's own words:

39 "J'ai une autre raison qui m'engage à leur faire cette prière: elle me paraît assez importante, la voici. Dans le temps que j'ai écrit sur l'ancienne musique des Chinois, n'ayant ni les lumières que je puis avoir aujourd'hui sur cet objet, ni les connaissances que j'ai acquises depuis sur les mœurs, les usages & les livres du pays, ni les secours en tout genre que j'ai eu occasion de me procurer, je ne puis qu'avoir fait une infinité de fautes dans mes premiers écrits, dans ceux surtout où je me suis expliqué sur un sujet que très peu de lettrés entendent, & dont par conséquent ils n'ont pu me donner alors que des explications fautives ou peu exactes. Ainsi, je le répète, l'on ne doit point compter sur mon manuscrit, l'eût-on sans aucune altération & tel qu'il est sorti de mes mains. Ceci néanmoins ne doit s'entendre que de ce qui regarde directement la musique; car pour ce qui est des cérémonies & des autres objets dont il y est fait mention, on peut s'en tenir à ce que j'en ai dit. Les lettrés chinois dont je me servais alors, étaient très en état de me fournir des lumières à cet égard." See *A-MCC6*, 13f.

40 "[...] il se serait aperçu que les Égyptiens, les Grecs, Pythagore lui-même n'avaient fait qu'appliquer aux cordes ce que les Chinois disaient avant eux, en parlant des tuyaux." See *A-MCC6*, 8.

It would make me happy and, as I believe, it would also be of some use for the Republic of Letters if I could furnish the Abbot Roussier, or some other scholar of his kind, with the means of establishing that the Chinese were the inventors of the music system that is still current to them, that this system goes back even to the beginnings of their monarchy, i.e., at least to the year 2637 BC. [...]⁴¹

While it would be better to leave the question of whether the Chinese or other peoples of the world first calculated what we today call Pythagorean tuning⁴² open for further discussion, what is important to add here is that both Amiot's early draft translation and his later memoir came just in time to become part of a debate being conducted by several European scholars who had begun to also direct their interest towards non-European music. The question at stake from about the middle of the 18th century on was whether the Greeks or the Egyptians had been the first to invent the system that we now call the Pythagorean circle. Due to Amiot's contribution, a third option had now entered the stage, namely the possibility of a Chinese origin of the system, and this fueled the ongoing debate further.

The importance that Amiot accorded to his theory that the Chinese were the first to invent the method now called Pythagorean tuning is clearly expressed by him in the preface to his *Mémoire*, where he writes that Roussier in his *MMA* had not, in his view, proved convincingly that the circle of fifths could not have originated in either Greece or China but must have come from Egypt. Amiot writes:

The Abbot Roussier has proved very well that these three systems differ from each other only as different parts, taken separately, differ from their whole; but he has not proved so well, it seems to me, that the trunk of the general system, of this great system, of which the particular systems of the Greeks and the Chinese are only the branches, had its roots elsewhere than in Greece or in China.⁴³

41 "Il serait heureux pour moi, &, je crois, de quelque utilité pour la république des lettres, si je pouvais fournir à M. l'Abbé Roussier, ou à quelqu'autre savant dans son genre, de quoi constater que les Chinois sont auteurs du système de musique qui a cours chez eux; que ce système date du commencement même de leur monarchie, c'est-à-dire au moins 2.637 ans avant l'ère chrétienne, & que s'il a été altéré ou tronqué dans des siècles postérieurs, c'est que les principes sur lesquels il est fondé, n'ont pas toujours été connus, ou que se trouvant mêlés avec des sciences vaines & absurdes, telles que la divination par les nombres, & l'astrologie judiciaire, les vrais savants les ont négligés." See *A-MCC6*, 15.

42 For an in-depth study on the Pythagorean tuning and how Roussier and Rameau have misunderstood Amiot's treatment of the Chinese sources, see especially Levy 1989.

43 "M. l'abbé Roussier a très bien prouvé que ces trois systèmes ne diffèrent entre eux que comme les différentes parties, prises séparément, diffèrent de leur tout; mais il n'a pas aussi bien prouvé, ce me semble, que le tronc du système général, de ce grand système, dont les systèmes particuliers des Grecs & des Chinois ne sont que les branches, eût sa racine autre part que dans la Grèce ou la Chine." See *A-MCC6*, 14.

And shortly hereafter, he explains Roussier's argumentation by saying that the latter did not know enough at the time when he wrote his book about Chinese music. This is why, Amiot concludes, Roussier's discussion comparing Chinese music with the music of the Greeks and Egyptians can be classified as mere speculation, which one might agree with or not:

As these sorts of facts cannot be guessed, and as he [Roussier] had no testimony in his hands that could have served him as a support for an assertion in form, he speaks of it only as something that seems very likely. By assuring, therefore, that the very extensive system from which all the particular systems are derived took its origin among the Egyptians or among such other people as one wishes, provided that they are older than the Greeks and the Chinese, he wishes only to give us his conjectures, or to present to us consequences deduced from the principles he establishes; he leaves us free to think or not to think like him.⁴⁴

And Amiot formulates even more clearly in his *Mémoire* what he hopes European scholars will learn and inform others about, namely that the Chinese were the first to generate the circle of fifths on the basis of a scale that consisted of twelve semitones, i.e., a chromatic scale. In the preface to his memoir, Amiot writes:

[...] I hope that our scholars will conclude with me that the Egyptians, having been unable to communicate to the Chinese a system of music several centuries prior to the Lyra of Mercury [...], & this system being linked with other knowledge, which gives a nation its moral and political existence, it necessarily follows that the Chinese are that ancient nation from which not only the Greeks but the Egyptian nation itself drew the elements of the sciences and the arts, which were then transmitted to the barbarian peoples of the West.⁴⁵

44 "Comme ces sortes de faits ne se devinent pas, & qu'il n'a eu entre les mains aucun monument qui pût lui servir d'appui pour une assertion dans les formes, il n'en parle que comme d'une chose qui lui paraît très probable. En assurant donc que le système très étendu d'où dérivent tous les systèmes particuliers, a pris son origine chez les Égyptiens ou chez tel autre peuple qu'on voudra, pourvu qu'il soit plus ancien que les Grecs & les Chinois, il ne veut nous donner que ses conjectures, ou nous présenter des conséquences déduites des principes qu'il établit; il nous laisse libres de penser ou de ne penser pas comme lui." See A-MCC6, 14f.

45 "[...] j'espère que nos savants le concluront avec moi, que les Égyptiens n'ayant pu communiquer aux Chinois un système de musique antérieur de plusieurs siècles à la Lyre de Mercure [...], & ce système étant lié avec les autres connaissances, qui donnent à une nation son existence morale & politique, il s'ensuit nécessairement que les Chinois sont cette nation ancienne chez laquelle non seulement les Grecs mais la nation égyptienne elle-même, ont puisé les éléments des sciences & des arts, qui ont été transmis ensuite aux peuples barbares de l'Occident." See A-MCC6, 16.

3 Roussier's Role as Editor of Amiot's *Mémoire*

Shortly after Amiot had sent his finalized memoir to Bertin, Roussier was entrusted – probably based on a decision made by Bertin himself – with editing Amiot's *Mémoire* on Chinese music as the sixth volume of the *Mémoires concernant l'histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, les usages, &c. des Chinois* (abbr. *MCC6*).⁴⁶

The question of whether he was the right person to do this job is not so easy to answer; however, at any rate, it cannot be denied that Roussier took his task rather seriously. He painstakingly went through the whole manuscript, adding his own footnotes to those already provided by Amiot, amongst many other details, which we will now examine more closely with the question in mind whether these notes, in combination with those made by Amiot himself, would actually have been useful to readers of the finalized *Mémoire* or whether they served first and foremost Roussier's own ambitions. The fact is that nowhere else in the comprehensive *MCC* is there anything comparable to this 6th volume, which reminds a reader trained in early Chinese texts strongly of the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* tradition, where a classic, the *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn), was transmitted exclusively with its earliest commentary, the *Zuozhuan*. But what may have motivated Roussier to do such toilsome editorial and commentarial work?

There is one important change in Roussier's way of thinking, which he has also documented in his edited version of the text, namely that after thinking more carefully about what he had read in Amiot's *Mémoire* about Chinese tonal theory, he became convinced that it must indeed have been the Chinese, rather than the Egyptians, to whom the invention of the “triple progression” should be attributed. In a note added to Amiot's preface, Roussier writes:

We will see by the notes and the observations that I have attached to this memoir not only that I think with Father Amiot that the true dimensions of each tone, their reciprocal generation, in a word, that the true musical proportions, those adopted by Pythagoras, are really due to the ancient Chinese [...].⁴⁷

And in other respects as well, Roussier used the opportunity to comment on Amiot's *Mémoire* as a medium through which to discuss criticism that Amiot himself had expressed with regard to his own early translation of the *Gu Yuejing zhuan*, apologizing for the shortcomings of that translation. For example, relating to a key passage in his *MMA* where Roussier

46 The title of the handwritten version of Amiot's text was “Mémoire sur la musique des chinois tants anciens que modernes”. The version edited by Roussier was published 1780 in Paris.

47 “On verra par les notes & les observations que j'ai jointes à ce mémoire, non seulement que je pense avec le père Amiot, que les vraies dimensions de chaque ton, leur génération réciproque, en un mot, que les vraies proportions musicales, celles qu'adoptait Pythagore, sont réellement dues aux anciens Chinois [...]” See *R-MCC6*, 9, fn. (i).

had described the Chinese music system as having been based on an “imperfect” chromatic scale (from which two tones were wholly missing), which Amiot criticizes in his memoir,⁴⁸ Roussier uses his privileged position as editor of Amiot’s work to make clear that the source of his earlier misunderstanding was the account of Rameau, who had based his knowledge on an apparently only cursory reading of Amiot’s draft translation based on which he made his wrong assumptions.⁴⁹

Of course, one should not forget that as editor of Amiot’s work, Roussier also used the opportunity to refer – mostly in the form of footnotes – also to his own works, namely first and foremost to his own memoir but also to his two letters to Aubert, and it doubtless added to his own good name to let others see how carefully and meticulously he had complemented almost every idea expressed by Amiot with his own comments and additional “observations”; thus he ultimately used this work as his own platform.

4 Voices that Evaluate Roussier’s Role in Editing Amiot’s Work

When Amiot learned of the decision that Roussier had been entrusted with editing his memoir as volume 6 of the *MCC*, he wrote to Minister Bertin in a letter dated July 26, 1780:

I am very glad that Father Roussier is the editor of what I sent on the music of the Chinese. He will be more capable than any scholar whom I know to give this work the degree of *qualité* it needs to get it accepted [among the members of the Republic of Letters]. I have no doubt that the reflections with which he proposes to complement it are very likely to bring to light what would [otherwise] seem obscure to most readers. I hope that what I sent last, in the form of a supplement, arrives early enough to be added when the manuscript is being printed.⁵⁰

In spite of his at least officially quite positive reaction, this letter makes clear that Amiot and Roussier had already entered into a dialogue with each other discussing some issues raised in Amiot’s memoir, and that Amiot had prepared some responses regarding topics that to him

48 See *A-MCC6*, 174f.

49 See *R-MCC6*, 174, fn. (o).

50 “Je suis bien aise que M. l’Abbé Roussier soit l’Éditeur de ce que j’ai envoyé sur la musique des chinois. Il est plus en état qu’aucun savant que je connoisse, de donner cet ouvrage le degré de bonté qu’il lui faut pour le faire accueillir. Je ne doute point que les réflexions don’t il se propose de l’accompagner, ne soient très propres à donner du jour à ce qui paraîtrait obscure à la plupart des Lecteurs. Je souhaite que ce que j’ai envoyé en dernier lieu, par forme de supplément, arrive assez tôt pour pouvoir être ajouté lors de l’impression.” See Brix and Lenoir 1997, 80. The letter is conserved at BNF, Fonds Bréquigny, 3.

appeared to have not yet been satisfyingly resolved by Roussier in the hope that his additional notes (and the accompanying illustrations) would also be included in the finalized volume.

Almost one year later, a letter addressed to Roussier on June 20, 1781, reveals that in the meantime Amiot had received Roussier's annotated version shortly before its publication, and it shows how he reacted to it:

Sir, I read, I say not only with pleasure, but with a pleasure mixed with admiration, the remarks, the observations, the clarifications and all that you had the goodness to add to my report on the system music of the ancient and modern Chinese. Judging you by what you say, and by the manner in which you say it, one would believe that you stayed in China for a very long time and that you studied at leisure both the language and those ancient monuments that the scythe of the time has not yet entirely reaped as it has those of the other portions of our globe that the first men inhabited. Not a Chinese word is misspelled, not a character whose true meaning you have not taken, not an amphibological expression that you have not explained as it should be: you are a real *han-lin*; and I think that, with the exception of the long nails which these gentlemen sport, you possess all that distinguishes the most skilful among them.⁵¹

Although the reader may sense a pinch of humor between these lines, especially when Amiot compares Roussier with a Chinese scholar, a member of the Hanlin Academy, whose concentration on intellectual activities was symbolized by their long fingernails, the primary impression is that Amiot was positively surprised at Roussier's ability to use his explanations so well, which, as Amiot has noted elsewhere, he intentionally held wholly in "the Chinese costume".⁵²

Interestingly, Brix and Lenoir, who have published this unedited handwritten letter by Amiot, have interpreted his words quite differently. In a footnote to this passage they write:

It is obvious that Pater Amiot, here and in what follows after in this letter, conceals his deep sentiments. Despite what he writes – and what he would write in other official letters, he had but little regard for the publications of Abbot Roussier. In fact,

51 "Monsieur, J'ai lû, je ne dis pas seulement avec plaisir, mais avec un plaisir mêlé d'admiration, les remarques, les observations, les éclaircissements et tout ce que vous avez eû la bonté d'ajouter à mon mémoire sur le système musical des Chinois anciens et modernes. À juger de vous par ce que vous dites, et par la manière dont vous le dites, on croiroit que vous avez fait un très long séjour en Chine et que vous y avez étudié à loisir et la langue et ces monuments antiques que la faux du temps n'a point encore entièrement moissonnés comme elle a fait ceux des autres portions de notre globe que les premiers hommes ont habités. Pas un mot chinois qui soit mal orthographié, pas un caractère dont vous n'ayiez pris le vrai sens, pas une expression amphibologique que vous n'ayiez expliquée comme elle doit l'être: vous êtes un vrai han-lin; et je pense qu'à l'exception des longs ongles que portent ces messieurs, vous possédez tout ce qui distingue d'ailleurs les plus habiles d'entre eux."

52 See A-MCC6, 17.

Roussier had, as had Rameau, distorted the meaning of Li Guangdi's *Gu Yuejing zhuan*, which Amiot had translated into French, and [Roussier] had, on the basis of this text, disseminated the most absurd ideas about Chinese music (see his *Mémoire sur la musique des Anciens* as well as his "Letter to the Author of the *Journal des Beaux-Arts*" [1770]). In his own memoir on Chinese music, Amiot had attacked Roussier's views and strove to refute his hazardous and unfounded assumptions. After his text had been published by Roussier, Amiot wrote a "Supplement", which sought to counteract the effect of his editor's unwelcome comments. We know finally that in 1787, the Jesuit had openly rejoiced at the fact that the abbot had not been able to edit this "Supplement" (see Amiot's letter to Bertin of January 1787).⁵³

It is true that, according to his letter, Amiot had expressed his hope that a supplement he had written after reading the notes and comments that Roussier had posed to him, might be published together with his soon to be finalized manuscript on the Chinese ceremonial dances. In the same letter we also find the lines:

If he [Roussier] deems that this supplement deserves to be printed, he can attach to it a memoir on the dances that I am currently busy with, and all this together can give a complete idea of the manner in which the art to which we give the name of music is understood here. I hope that all these dances will be dealt with before the ship leaves for Europe.⁵⁴

But one may ask oneself whether the negative interpretation of Amiot's words by Brix and Lenoir is not a bit exaggerated. In an earlier letter to Minister Bertin, dated August 17, 1781, Amiot wrote in a very similar tone, apparently after receiving a printed copy of the volume:

53 "Il est évident que le père Amiot dissimule, ici et dans la suite de la lettre, ses sentiments profonds. En dépit de ce qu'il écrit - et de ce qu'il écrira dans d'autres lettres officielles -, il n'avait que peu de considération pour les publications de l'abbé Roussier. Ainsi, Roussier avait, en compagnie de Rameau, dénaturé le sens du Kou-yo-king-tchouan de Ly Koang-ty traduit en français par Amiot et, à partir de ce texte, avait diffusé les idées les plus saugrenues sur la musique chinoise (voir son *Mémoire sur la musique des Anciens* ainsi que sa Lettre à l'auteur du 'Journal des Beaux-Arts' [1770]). Dans son propre mémoire sur la musique chinoise, Amiot attaquait en fait les vues de Roussier et s'employait à réfuter ses hypothèses hasardeuses et non fondées. Après la publication de son texte par Roussier, Amiot rédigea un 'Supplément' qui s'attachait à contrecarrer l'effet des commentaires malvenus de son éditeur. On sait enfin qu'en 1787, le jésuite se réjouit ouvertement que l'abbé n'ait pu éditer ce 'Supplément' (voir la lettre d'Amiot à Bertin de janvier 1787)." See Brix and Lenoir 1995, 69f, fn. 10.

54 "S'il [abbé Roussier] juge que ce Supplément mérite d'être imprimé, il pourra lui joindre un mémoires sur les danses que j'ai actuellement sur le métier, et tout cela ensemble pourra donner un idée complete de la manière don't on envisage ici l'art auquel nous donnons le nom de Musique. J'espère que toutes ces danses seront débrouillées avant que le bateau part pour l'Europe." See Tchen 1974, 183.

I cannot express to you with what satisfaction I read the printed matter of my *Memoir on the Music of the Chinese*. The exactitude, the application and the science of the Abbot Roussier show themselves there in all their light, and in such a way as to strike all eyes. What is even more surprising is that this learned theorist adopted the tone of the Chinese like someone who had spent his whole life among them could have.⁵⁵

It will be difficult to decide whether Amiot's words were sincere or merely an attempt to cope with the given situation in a civilized manner. In our view Amiot was indeed much less critical of Roussier since he had seen how much of an effort he had made to do the best job he could, editing Amiot's volume as well as possible given the obligations he had, e.g., to reduce the accompanying illustrations of the volume drastically in compliance with financial restrictions.

It may be of interest to add that in a letter to Bertin written on November 15, 1784, Amiot expressed his fear that Roussier might find only unintelligible formulations in his supplement to his work on the music of the Chinese, but that he hoped that Roussier's methodological and clear esprit would make him distinguish between what would be helpful among all that might be dispensable.⁵⁶ As a matter of fact, Roussier had already published the memoir without the supplementary notes sent by Amiot. But, as Tchen concludes, a letter that he had sent eight years after the publication of his *Mémoire* to Bertin, provides evidence that Amiot did not blame Roussier for that:

I am not angry that the Abbot Roussier has not also been able to devote himself to the revision of the "Supplement to the Memoir on the Music of the Chinese."⁵⁷

Let us now take a look at the earliest reactions of other readers of Amiot's *Mémoire*. Probably the earliest recipient of Amiot's text, still in the handwritten version that preceded the version edited by Roussier, was Jean-Benjamin François de la Borde (1734–1794). In his comparative study *Essay sur la Musique Ancienne et Moderne* (Essay on Ancient and Modern Music) of 1780, in which apart from the music of the Egyptians, Greeks, and Hungarians, that of China is also allotted a place, he praises both Amiot and Roussier, saying:

The truths that Father Amiot confirms will only appear to be paradoxes to the eyes of those who will not hear them and will not seek to deepen them. We can only owe him the greatest obligations for the pains he has taken to procure for us such scholarly

55 "Je ne saurais vous exprimer avec quelle satisfaction j'ai lu l'imprimé de mon *Mémoire sur la Musique des Chinois*. L'exactitude, l'application et la science de M. l'abbé Roussier s'y montrent dans tout leur jour, et de manière à frapper tous les yeux. Ce qu'il y a de plus surprenant encore, c'est que ce savant théoriste s'est mis au ton des Chinois comme aurait pu le faire un quelqu'un qui aurait passé toute sa vie parmi eux." See Tchen 1974, 174.

56 See the passage quoted in Tchen 1974, 178f.

57 "Je ne suis pas fâché que l'abbé Roussier n'ait pas pu se livrer encore à la révision du Supplément au *Mémoire sur la Musique des Chinois*." Quoted from Tchen 1974, 179.

research, [which he has] presented with as much clarity as judgment. We join him in urging the Abbot Roussier, so well known for these excellent works, to cast on the music of the Chinese all the clarity that he has been able to communicate in his writings on the music of the Greeks. No one understands the theory better than him, nor is more familiar than him with the art of making it understood by others.⁵⁸

And in a footnote to this sentence, he writes:

While this essay was being printed, we learned with the greatest pleasure that a minister known for his love of the arts had instructed the Abbot Roussier to direct the printing of the precious memoir of Father Amiot, and that it would soon appear in the sixth volume of the *Mémoires concernant les Chinois*, accompanied by some observations & a large quantity of notes that the Abbot Roussier has decided to add to it.⁵⁹

A positive attitude both towards Amiot's work on Chinese music and towards Roussier's achievements is also displayed by Jean-Baptiste Grosier (1743–1823) in his *Description générale de la Chine* (A General Description of China). He praises Roussier's memoir on the music of the ancients, then quotes the passage from Amiot's preface to his *Mémoire* in which he describes his first reaction upon reading Roussier's book,⁶⁰ and finally emphasizes how Amiot's book (in Roussier's reading) has convinced him of the argument that the Chinese were indeed the first to discover the Pythagorean circle. Here is how Grosier reports Rous-

58 “Les vérités que le P. Amiot affirme, ne paraîtront des paradoxes qu’aux yeux de ceux qui ne les entendent pas, & ne chercheront point à les approfondir. On ne peut que lui avoir les plus grandes obligations des peines qu’il s’est données pour nous procurer des recherches aussi savants, & présentées avec autant de netteté que de jugement. Nous nous joignons à lui pour exhorter M. l’abbé Roussier, si connu par ces excellens ouvrages, à jeter sur la Musique des Chinois, toute la clareté qu’il a bien su communiquer à ses écrits, sur la Musique des Grecs. Personne n’entend mieux que lui la théorie, ni n’a plus que lui, l’art de la faire entendre aux autres.” See de la Borde, 128.

59 “Pendant qu’on imprimait cet Essai, nous avons appris avec le plus grand Plaisir qu’un Ministre connu pur son amour pour les Arts, avait chargé M. l’Abbé Roussier de diriger l’impression du précieux Mémoire du Pere Amiot, & qu’il allait bientôt paraître dans le sixième volume des *Mémoires concernant les Chinois*, accompagné de quelques observations, & d’une grande quantité de Notes que M. l’Abbé Roussier a bien voulu y ajouter.” See de la Borde, 128, fn. (a).

60 A bit surprisingly, Grosier seems to have not understood the somewhat ironical tone of Amiot's words when he describes his first reaction on reading Roussier's remarks about Chinese music, saying that he had learned so much from him that he hadn't known about musical theory so far. According to Grosier, Amiot indeed meant to praise Roussier for all his insider knowledge that helped him to understand Chinese musical theory better. See Grosier, vol. II, chap. 8, 494. (“This excellent work afforded him new insight and gave him a distinct view of innumerable objects which he had before found shrowded in obscurity.”) Immediately preceding this, Grosier writes of Amiot's early draft translation that “after all his research and long labour, he could form only very faint notions respecting this primitive [Chinese musical] theory.”

sier's change of mind as presented in the English version of Grosier's book, which was published in London in 1788:

The Abbot Roussier, in a note upon this text says, that he not only agrees in opinion with F. Amiot, that "the just dimensions of each tone, their reciprocal generation, and, in a word, all the true musical proportions, such as they were adopted by Pythagoras, are really a discovery of the ancient Chinese; but the approximations, of which this learned missionary here speaks, are the work of the modern Chinese; that is to say, the consequence of those errors under which they seem to have been, ever since three centuries before the Christian era."⁶¹

Quite in contrast, in 1856, the Belgian Jesuit Augustin de Backer (1809–1873) showed a rather critical attitude toward the changes that Roussier had made in Amiot's work. He writes:

This scholar-abbot [Roussier] has made it undergo a few unimportant modifications, has appended to it notes which do not seem to us of great importance, and has made it be followed by observations on some points of the doctrine of the Chinese, the basis of which is borrowed from the preliminaries that accompany the translation of Ly-Koang-Ty's work.⁶²

Interestingly, De Backer's harsh judgement seems to have even influenced modern musicologists. For example, the brief critical comment written by Fredric Lieberman on Roussier in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* reads as if he had read de Backer's comment. Here is what he wrote:

Roussier added lengthy, pedantic notes of little value while deleting many plates, all Chinese characters, and significant portions of the text, thus obscuring the original and impairing its value for future scholars.⁶³

However, in order to do justice to Roussier, one should keep in mind the positive words that Amiot himself found for Roussier's comments on his memoir, which were quoted at the beginning of this section. Indeed, in order to be able to carry out the task with which Bertin had entrusted him in a competent way, Roussier must have even learned some Chinese, and this is, in spite of Amiot's somewhat ironic undertone in the letter in which he compares Roussier to a Chinese scholar of the Hanlin Academy, something which Amiot certainly would have appreciated.

61 See Grosier 1788, Vol. II, Chap. 8, 498f.

62 "Ce savant abbé [Roussier] lui a fait subir quelques modifications sans importance, y a joint des notes qui ne nous paraissent pas de grande importance, et l'a fait suivre d'observations sur quelques points de la doctrine des Chinois don't le fond est emprunté aux préliminaires qui acompagnent la traduction de l'ouvrage de Ly-Koang-Ty." See De Backer, *Bibliothèque des Écrivains* (1856), 39.

63 See Lieberman 1980, vol. 1, 326.

5 Circulation at the Price of Distortion and Appropriation: Roussier's Role as a Disseminator of Amiot's Knowledge on Chinese Music in Europe

Based on the material presented above, it should be clear that Roussier played a somewhat dubious role as a recipient and spreader of Amiot's knowledge on Chinese music in Europe. This is especially true for the early stage, in which Roussier had first gleaned some information about Chinese musical theory from what he had read in Rameau's *Code de Musique*, published in 1760, and, as he wrote in his memoir, from what he had seen "in translated manuscripts from various Chinese authors", which dealt with the generation of fifths in early music theory'. As shown above, in the beginning Roussier not only wholly ignored Amiot as the person without whose translations neither Rameau nor he himself would have been able to acquire any of the information on Chinese music that they discussed in their respective books, but both scholars used the materials that Amiot had provided primarily to serve their own ends. Rameau, who in an appendix to his work reflects on the *principe universel* (universal principle) of musical harmony, interprets what he had learned about Chinese music from Amiot's translation as a further piece of evidence for the laws that govern the generation of fifths, only with the difference that the Chinese, as he argues, allowed for only five tones.⁶⁴ Roussier for his part used the information he received on Chinese music for the argument that since the ancient Chinese musical system was not complete, the Chinese had not invented (or calculated) the generation of fifths themselves but must have received it from the Egyptians.

What Amiot had actually tried to convey in his memoir, very much in contrast, as has been mentioned before, was to persuade the European scholars of what he himself was convinced of, namely that the Chinese were the first to generate the circle of fifths on the basis of a scale that consisted of twelve semitones, i.e. a chromatic scale. So as has also been made clear above, in the second stage of his reception of knowledge about Chinese music, when he had been entrusted with editing and writing comments on Amiot's memoir for its publication as the 6th volume of the *MCC*, Roussier was very eager to do a good job both as an editor and as a commentator, perhaps out of a desire to make up for the shortcomings that Amiot had blamed him for in the first stage of Roussier's reception of the knowledge Amiot shared on Chinese music. Furthermore, in the course of his work on Amiot's text, Roussier seems to have become more and more convinced of Amiot's theory that it was not the Egyptians but rather the Chinese who had first calculated the circle of fifths.

64 See Rameau, *CMP* 1760, 189-191.

So even if Roussier was using his work on Amiot's memoir primarily to serve his own ends again, and even though he certainly produced further distortions of both the original Chinese text and Amiot's interpretations of it in the process of carrying out his task, what ultimately counts is how Amiot himself perceived Roussier's work on his text and his role as an intermediary and spreader of the ideas Amiot wanted to convey to European academia. So if someone could have asked Amiot what was more important to him – preserving the knowledge he had conveyed in an undistorted manner or making sure it circulated at all – he would probably have answered that it meant so much to him that the knowledge of things Chinese (including knowledge of Chinese music) that had been assembled and sent to Europe by him and other Jesuits living in China at that time would come to circulate within the European scholarly community that he would have accepted all the distortions, of which only some could be mentioned here, as well as the fact that Roussier and others initially wholly ignored his name as that of the translator of the Chinese texts that European authors used to discuss their own ideas if it meant seeing that goal be accomplished.⁶⁵ And as it happens, both Amiot's translations of Chinese texts and his later memoir arrived in Europe just in time to become part of European scholars' heated debates on the history of music in non-European cultures, especially those of the Ancient Greeks and Egyptians, but later also Indian, Jewish and other cultures.

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65 For a general overview on the role of Jesuits in the circulation of knowledge among the various academies in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, see Romano 2000, esp. 398f („Circulateurs“). Romano (399–402) even speaks of a “European academic movement”. See also Hermans 2005, 35 and fn. 119.

Amiot had provided two copies of this manuscript that were both sent to Paris, one addressed to Minister Bertin, the other to the King's librarian Bignon. The copy he had sent to Bertin has been preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and has the number btv1b9060852f. This copy, to which we had access during the preparation of this article, had also been used by Roussier, as can be seen from notes on the margin of several pages, at least one of them being signed with his name. (See, e.g., p. 69 of Amiot's handwritten *Mémoire*.) For the edited version, see Roussier 1780.]

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