

**Bernhard Kitous**

École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris (EHESS)

e-mail: [bernard.kitous@sciencespo-rennes.fr](mailto:bernard.kitous@sciencespo-rennes.fr)

## **Alain Peyrefitte (1925–1999): Visions from the XX<sup>th</sup> Century's Last Moralist**

### **SUMMARY**

This article renders justice to Alain Peyrefitte, a French Gaullist minister who conducted, in parallel with official duties, a personal project of being an observer of his times as did his models Tocqueville (for the native USA) and Custine (for Imperial Russia) during the XIX<sup>th</sup> century.

In spite of his an apparent success as a minister who served several times, as well as by his election at the Academie Francaise, Peyrefitte was under attack on the breach throughout during his whole life, with enemies both from within the Gaullist camp (like Jacques Chirac), and outside (leftist intellectuals never acknowledged his works). As De Gaulle himself, Peyrefitte was the target of two assassination attempts, which in a way proves his capacity to disturb conventional mindframes. His works are quite varied and always bring new approach.

**Key words:** Constitution, 5<sup>th</sup> French Republic, De Gaulle, Chirac, Zhu-en-Lai, China, Macartney, Staunton, Tien-An-Men, Memorialist, Moralist, Algeria, Authority, Responsibility, Sovereignty, Parliamentary regime.

During the last decades of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, France enjoyed the privilege of having a Gaullist minister who was different from most other Gaullists and most other ministers: not interested in career, not involved in money trafficking noreither running after fame, his one and only motivation was to write on what he saw, had seen or could foresee. His main figures of inspiration were Tocqueville [1831, *On Democracy in America*] and Custine [1839, *On Russia*] who both benchmarked France against raising nations of their times, the Russian Empire and the American democracy. In 1971, Peyrefitte met China's Prime Minister Zhu-En-Lai, and there followed an inspiring analysis by Peyrefitte, with a series of publications on the Chinese culture and political mindset

as compared to Britain and France, which overwhelmed the current “Mao’s Marxist revolution” interpretations. As an instance of the latter, Charles Bettelheim’s analysis in the “Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organization in China” (1974) and “China since Mao” (1978), both published in the USA (Monthly Review Press), is based upon class struggle, proletariat dictatorship, and the leading role of the communist party. Quite different, Peyrefitte’s approach looks up into Chinese identity and mentalities, and deepens its political history as an Empire humiliated by Western nations, in order to connect the 1948’s new regime with the deep-seated traditions, reactions, beliefs and constructs of imperial China; this provides for an understanding of the past and future of the Chinese regime. Curiously enough, a Right-wing analyst becomes the advocate of the communist regime in Beijing.

Peyrefitte had an early and strong vision that France could not be considered in isolation by itself, but needed to be criticized from an external viewpoint. His own experiences as a 1950s French civil servant responsible of the French Krakow’s consulate and later the Brussels’ European representative convinced him of the stimulation which comparing political and cultural systems could bring. One could say that Peyrefitte, although not a direct contributor to the writing of the French Fifth Republic Constitution, had a direct impact on its implementation through his multiple institutional responsibilities. As a minister in charge of major issues and close to the Elysées palace, he would develop from 1961 to 1981 clear-cut policies on Education, on Justice and on Immigration, which gave him some clout both in the government of France and in the Gaullist party. Two signs of Peyrefitte’s powerful influence might be seen (1) in the “Program of Provins” which shaped 1973’s political agenda; and (2) in the Law “security and liberty” which he designed (1978) to connect the ideals of the 1958 Constitution, with the actual situations and the practicalities of security issues. On the whole, Peyrefitte’s rigor, seriousness and actual will to change the French establishment alienated him the support of both Parisian Leftist intellectuals and ambitious Right wing politicians such as Chirac. Suspected to be too harsh a minister and with his head put to price by anarchist groups, Peyrefitte was the target of two assassination attempts (1977, 1986), the last one an outburst of his car which killed an employee of Provins’ city-hall.

Till his death from a painful cancer at the very end of the XX<sup>th</sup> century (November 1999), Peyrefitte was able to reach the level of traditional French memorialists such as Geoffroy Villehardouin (1148–1213) on the 4<sup>th</sup> Crusade and sacking of Constantinople, Jean Froissard (1333–1404) on feudal times of peace and war in Champagne-Ardenne, Philippe Commines (1447–1511) upon the aftermaths of Joan of Arc, as well as Charles-Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) on the Jacobins versus Girondins fight of powers over the French revolution. All these memorialists were chroniclers to the extent they observed

and commented their times with a lively and critical spirit, including some distant wit, carefully taken notes and insiders' knowledge on how political decisions were made. Peyrefitte's essays belong to the same track as his works encompass a critical reflection on the French Constitution and on British, Chinese and Russian administrations; but as a diverging note, Peyrefitte being a minister and decision-maker acting in times of "Cold war", he involves himself much into "solutions" which – from 1946 to 1999 – raise the following question: *how should we develop a sense of trust, patience and confidence in young European generations so that the world (as a whole) gets in its future course more hopes than wars?*

This article is aimed at introducing the reader to Peyrefitte's way of working which is similar in research and precision to fashion designers' needle-works. To give but one example, let us consider how he outlines a portrait of De Gaulle in a 1990 conference given at the UNESCO in Paris. The thread of Peyrefitte's argument being that it took time for the military officer to extract himself from the army's discipline and become a resistant facing Marechal Petain and the collapse of France in 1940, where did De Gaulle find patience and inspiration to say "No"? Peyrefitte identifies and names four progressively emerging galleries in De Gaulle's inspiration:

- in 1913 being a young lieutenant, De Gaulle calls on the "three beginnings of a united France" (a) under Caesar's domination, the rebelling of tribes under Vercingetorix command; (b) five centuries later the Christian conversion of Clovis as a factor of unity; and around year 1,000 A.D how Hugues Capet re-unites a divided kingdom under Capetian kings till 1791. From a political perspective this gallery is marked by a political position on the right, close to Royalists;
- in 1920–1922 being a captain sent to Poland, De Gaulle incorporates in his personal inspiring gallery, the portraits of Polish heroes which Peyrefitte identifies as Casimir the Great, Jagellon, Copernic, Mickiewicz, Chopin, and Marie Sklodowska-Curie. Peyrefitte comments this change as a new conscience by De Gaulle that "passion" is a necessary ingredient for all inspired lives, be they in sciences and arts as well as politics; and he is no longer a Royalist, but a Republican;
- in 1941, trapped into the role of a traitor general condemned to martial court, De Gaulle in London evokes radical Left Clemenceau in a dramatic radio broadcast on November 11<sup>th</sup> (anniversary of the First World War Armistice): *"Clemenceau, in the depths of your tomb facing the Atlantic ocean, you do not sleep! From the ocean you, Dear Vendéen, Old Tiger, Victory Father, Call on us all to resist!"* ...
- in 1958, confronting the uprising conflict in Algeria between pro-France "Europeans" and anti-French "Algerians" De Gaulle was led to refer to Richelieu ("hand of steel in velvet glove") in order to draw a line of so-

lution between what he perceived as a shock between religions; by signing the Evian agreements, De Gaulle did not win anything but peace for France with the support of all moderate people, both from the Left and the Right.

By showing the progressive assumption of De Gaulle's call to political power, Peyrefitte is a moralist: he points out the manners, behaviors, customs, values and habits which would transform an ordinary officer into some sort of a hero who changes the earth's face. Therefore Peyrefitte's method is unusual because it stresses the human paradoxes which, from military discipline create political resistance, from febleness drive strength, from failure in battles get ultimate peace against wars, from uncertainty build stable solutions and from catastrophe reverse to balanced solutions. These tensions are presented here under major 'paradoxical tracks' which we call Peyrefitte's four enigmas:

- Is Peyrefitte a conservative curator on the right, or is he a progressive doctor of the political left?
- Is he praising Communist China for its successes, or is he sorry about its failures?
- Is Peyrefitte an advocate of the original 1958 French Constitution, or is he anticipating needed changes in light of the European Union's requirements?
- Is Alain Peyrefitte a flat moralist or is Peyrefitte a free-minded licentious libertine?

### **Enigma 1: PEYREFITTE as Mister France Classique or Mr French Disease?**

Alain Peyrefitte's trajectory offers a classical trail in higher civil servants in France: enter a Grande Ecole at 20, be a Minister at 40, become a Senator at 60. A former literature student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (Paris), on which he writes a book of souvenirs titled *Rue d'Ulm* (1946), Alain Peyrefitte enters the Ecole Nationale d'Administration and is appointed in 1947 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held by Robert Schuman: attaché to the French Embassy first in Bonn, then the capital of Western Germany (1949–1952), he witnesses the exchange of good will messages between Schuman and Adenauer; later Consul of France in Krakow (1954–1956), he observes the interplay between the Soviet Union and Poland, as well as the Budapest uprising. Back and forth between his European assignments and the Council of Europe (Strasbourg), Peyrefitte becomes akin to the issues of European construction, including the budgetary risks for France of not being able to meet the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1959 deadline. De Gaulle's comeback on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1958, gives him a chance to become a candidate

to deputation, which he succeeds in Provins, a rather small city not so far from Paris. Indeed, Peyrefitte will be re-elected a deputy from 1958 to 1995 (with a 2-years interruption from 1981–1983 due to the Socialist Mitterrand's national victory), later to become a Senator (1995–1999). On appearance, Peyrefitte offers the profile of a typical French Grand Notable, re-elected the Mayor of Provins from 1965 on, in a city of 15,000 inhabitants the name of which sounds like "Province", meaning this neglected but bourgeois part of France which never be "Parisian". Being at 32 in 1958 the youngest Gaullist deputy to Parliament, Alain Peyrefitte is spotted by Georges Pompidou (1911–1974) who, besides heading General De Gaulle's cabinet, is also an alumnus of Rue d'Ulm! The two form an alliance which will last until Pompidou's death in 1974, giving a chance to Peyrefitte to run eight posts as a Minister from 1962 (under Pompidou's first Prime Ministry) up to 1981:

- Secretary of State on Information: April–September 1962.
- Minister of Refugees from Algeria: September–November 1962.
- Minister of Information: 1962–1966.
- Minister of Scientific Research, Atom and Space: 1966–1967.
- Minister of Education: 1967–1968.
- Minister for Administrative Reforms: 1973–1974.
- Minister of Cultural Affairs and the Environment: March–May 1974.
- Minister of Justice, Seals' officer: 1977–1981.

Peyrefitte's professional life as a minister would not qualify as a success, but rather as a position of obedience to the State's priorities. As Secretary then Minister of Information, he showed a discipline to whatever president Charles de Gaulle asked him to do, including the daily surveillance of how TV information was prepared among journalists and disseminated in the public. Given he started his duty precisely at the end of the Algerian War, Peyrefitte had to manage both the crisis (more than one million refugees both French and Berbers turned away from Algeria to integrate France) and the information aftermaths of it. It seems that in the 1960s, keeping in line with France's supercilious President of the Republic, Peyrefitte would check by himself each daily 8 p.m News program on French State Television channels! To his defense, however, one must recognize that he was able to write a free mind essay "Should Algeria be partitioned?" at the very time he was supposed to exercise a form of censorship on TV information. Does not this indicate some capability to manage a double personality ingrained in Peyrefitte's character?

Later as a Minister of Education, Alain Peyrefitte had to face the May 1968 students riots in Paris which he did not actually foresee, a failure that led him to quit the government till 1972. Again here, as in the Information case, he adopted the low profile as an upper level officer obedient to the French State rather than being a vocal supporter or opponent to the government. When

one speaks of Peyrefitte today, there is still like a shadow over his name, as if the reproach of being more of a hard-liner gray eminence ('eminence grise') rather than a soft and clear 'man of action': prone to serve, Peyrefitte was qualified as being a subservient executive to Gaullist politics, which alienated him the respect from a large circle of professors and intellectuals in France. Thus, Peyrefitte being described as Grand Classique of the upper administration, one may neglect two of his best, albeit short, ministerial duties: as ministry of research (1966) and ministry of administrative reform (1973), he did quite an impressive political job of state-liberal reformation, including the electoral set of measures "program of Provins" (East of Paris town the mayor of which he was): Peyrefitte's program includes an economic blend between primacy of State and priority to market; this Provins program helped the Gaullist party win the 1973 elections by keeping in touch with real needs. However, once the elections passed, Peyrefitte was not in charge of a Ministry probably because his role as Secretary General of the Gaullists displeased emerging leader Jacques Chirac. When Pompidou died in 1974, Peyrefitte felt alone and resigned his Gaullist charge.

This gave Alain Peyrefitte leeway to think aloud on what he called the French disease, a theme to which he devoted half a dozen best-selling books among which: 'the French disease' (1976); 'Ladoga lake's horses' (1981); 'France in disarray' (1992). Here are a few traits of Peyrefitte's diagnosis for France.

(a) in "the French Disease", Peyrefitte elicits a political and social diagnosis on the bureaucratic autocracy of France:

– *Chapter 28 – Conjuring tricks or the substitution of powers by the French bureaucracy.*

"Under French monarchy, any mayor's secretary imitated the King's signature. Yet today most ministers cannot do without either letting their Cabinet's members counterfeit their own signing or sign by themselves texts and orders they are unable to check. When myself a minister, I had each evening to abide by the ceremony of a wheel barrow whereby hundreds of decisions were brought to my seal. But what could be the meaning of such a gesture? How could I verify that this professor whom I totally ignored would be a sound principal of a college? The responsibility to sign up was given to a blind person: me! While the actual decision-makers were hiding themselves within the folds of a gigantic administration: powers are truly exercised by civil servants who do not share the burden of responsibility, this is what I call substitution"

– *Chapter 29 – The invasion of the central State, or the omnipotent ignorance.*

"When the State talks nonsense: in France gradually the State takes a hold on functions which go well beyond its national mission. It substitutes itself to local powers, corporations, unions and families. It intervenes through a multitude of measures in areas such as agriculture, industry, trade, social

security, environment; it monopolizes the services of police, highway department, garbage collection, and health. To light up any streetlamp, France calls on the Sovereign's representative. So each service tends to give proof of its existence through arbitrary interdictions. Basically the French administration prefers NOTHING DONE rather than a decision which would differ from its own standards. When such perfectionism connects with ignorance, we get the saga of the sanatorium-college of Tampon on the overseas island of La Ré union. As minister of Education, we had sent the rehabilitation project, perfectly prepared, to the Ministry of Health, which was just supposed to sign it up in a week's time. After waiting one year, the project was returned unsigned. Why? Because, according to the French administration, any sanatorium must be oriented to the South while our project had it oriented towards the North. The civil servant who blocked our project for one year had forgotten one thing: the island of La Ré union is in the Southern hemisphere where North and South are reversed".

– *Chapter 31 – Partitioning: they all are directors of something!*

"When a mayor needs to build a school, he must go through 24 operations et authorizations, from 14 different public offices; but when the entrance door of the school is within 500 meters of a historical building, then things become twice as complicated... In France the decision belongs to a myriad of separated, hostile and partitioned State operators, deaf to any protest, fully sovereign and out of any reach. *Marshall Lyautey himself wrote 50 years ago that this system of French secluded and powerful mandarins plunges us into decadence*".

– *Chapter 32 – Parisian congestion, brain-drain and regional anemia.*

"Being concentrated on a few Parisian acres, central powers are sensitive to the pressure of a small number of lobbies. Paris is like a small stadium were, on crammed stands, a jet set of happy few decide through struggles of influence. Parisians are powerful and fragile exactly like a person would be threatened if her head has too much blood while her limbs are deprived. What we call the management of territory exhausts itself at going up against the tide. As long as Paris remains the capital of such a centralized State, we may lament."

- (b) in "Ladoga lake's horses", Peyrefitte points to qualities of leadership much lacking in France:

«Amidst outcry, thousands of horses in panic run to Lake Ladoga in order to escape the gigantic forest fire. Suddenly water which was supposed to protect them from the flames froze down and the horses were literally iced forever. While its leaders could have managed for them to escape by running along the shores, the compulsion to jump into water was seen as the only solution.

«When over-melting occurs, the sudden immersion of external bodies provokes crystallization of the liquid mass. The horses by themselves caused the lake's brutal icing. This fragile balance evokes today's situation of our complex society...»

«By refusing to adopt a spirit of transaction, we are left to a spirit of contradiction, we are unable to adapt to social fires and arson... The leader who makes decisions must elicit acts in timely fashion. But above all he must remain silent and quiet, for amidst outcry and panic, he must be the one who designates not the dangerous lake, but its shores – avoiding both the dangers of the blaze and of the freezing lake, and showing to people the third way...»

- (c) with “France in disarray”, Peyrefitte considers that actual powers to ‘decide and do’ are vested in the top administration. He writes: “In France, experts are always right: civil servants and state engineers consider their unique privilege to decide in the name of public administration what is best for the nation as a whole.. Even ministers have to stand being treated like hostages to the «public will» advertised by permanent top administrators. Any political project is planed down to what State administrators’ will consider suitable. The only thing actually left to the Minister is to shake hands and make discourses prepared by the top civil servants; nothing more.”

The above quotations show how deep Peyrefitte’s lucid analysis goes and how paradoxical was his position, being a minister and, at the same time, struggling against the French administration on the grounds of pertinence, efficiency and competence. One may see this as a contradiction with respect to France classic’s ministerial careers, but also as an intrinsic quality: being able to self-assess the deficiencies and to attempt somehow to remedy them.

## **Enigma 2: PEYREFITTE as Mister Wake-Up-China or Mr China-Tragedy?**

Consul of France in Krakow (1954–1956) when, according to W. Churchill, the iron-curtain had fallen, Peyrefitte developed a sense of reflection on the nature and evolution of political systems; and as he fetched books on political sciences with the help of Polish librarians, he writes: “In 1954, at an history bookstore in Krakow, I discovered the Travels’ Library of Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, among which were the two journals on Lord Marcartney’s embassy to China (1792–1793) written by Sir George Staunton and by John Barrow (author of Bounty’s rebels): these came like revelations to me” (The Still Empire, p. VII)

Indeed the volumes describing Lord McCartney’s mission to the Emperor of China were to be the source of a long and clear-sighted analysis of China, from the Chinese Mandshu Empire (1644–1911) to the Chinese Revolutions (1911, 1930s, 1947), through the Wars of Opium (1850–1900), the first Republic of China (1912), the Long March and the People’s Republic of China (PRC, 1948).

Thus from 1954 to his death in 1999, Alain Peyrefitte fell into a passion with China which took both intellectual and material traits: his actual inquiry on the field started in 1960, when he departed from Hong-Kong to enter China: *“my surprise was to see physically what Macartney had described in 1792, it is as if each Chinese individual had a genetic heritage of the Qianlong’s Empire. China had a very Chinese way to revolt against herself. While searching to break off her past, she was looking for its own invariance.. Thinking-Mao after Thinking-Confucius? Or the small red-book after the sacred edict by Emperor KangXi?”*.

Peyrefitte’s researches being conducted in parallel with his ministerial life, he visited China during the summer of 1971 as an official guest of Prime Minister Zhu-en-lai (it was then the 1<sup>st</sup> visit of a Western official, just before the U.S.A established diplomatic links with the PRC). Peyrefitte mentions that, by analogy with Emperors of China in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, President Mao-Zedung (1893–1976) did not receive foreign diplomats and he was thus not able to meet him. Later Alain Peyrefitte went on visiting China at least ten times at private and semi-official levels during the 1980s and 1990s, which enabled him to make historical researches on Chinese sites with Chinese scholars, and to be part of University Jurys for doctoral students. Already in 1971, he had deepened intellectual exchanges with the Chairman of the Chinese government, the historian and poet Kuo-Mojo, to whom he devotes time to understand how such an intellectual figure could accept being ‘re-educated’ in farm works...

The fascinating dimension of Alain Peyrefitte’s studies of China resides in his mastery of the several fold topic of political regimes and their transformations through upheavals, revolts and wars, as well as his analyses of the peoples of China, in particular the coexistence and differences between the Hans, the Manchus and the Tibetans. Seen from the stand point of the French Statesman, China is a reservoir for political thoughts on Empires and Republics, the more so when Peyrefitte digresses on Napoleon-Bonaparte’s own sayings such as: *“When China will awake, the whole world will shake”*. Indeed after the political exit of Liu-ShaoShi, the Cultural Revolution which started in 1966 is still alive in 1971 when Peyrefitte visits China, so that his first essay *“When China will awake..”* is full of candid observations on daily life at farms, industrial factories, hospitals, schools, with an insistence on how the *“Thinking-Mao-Zedung”* has been formed, articulated and spread all over China. It is striking to hear how scientific and technological research is placed under Thinking-Mao-Zedung’s principles such as the Hsia-Fang (hand works). The more so when Peyrefitte’s encounters a surgeon who has succeeded in a hand transplant; one of the patients, a young lady, explains what happened to her after an accident which cut her hand. Both the surgeon and the patient celebrate the courage they had to do the surgery, based on their faith in Thinking-Mao-Zedung. Then Peyrefitte’s comments pinpoint the frightening

monotony references at Mao's reverence, and he develops a reflection on the ambiguous nature of the Chinese regime, Chinese Communism or Chinese Empire revival? Most interestingly "When China will awake.." shows that the major success of the PPRC has been as early as 1970 to feed 800 millions Chinese people, beforehand an unaccomplished challenge. By observing so, Peyrefitte, a Gaullist, does not become a Marxist, he remains a steady observer of facts and he conveys the substance of the Chinese revolution.

The more so with his next essay on China titled the "Still Empire or the Shock between Worlds" (1989) which bears upon the 1780–1911 period and before; it is an inquiry into Chinese past with references to almost three millenniums of political construction and destruction, including a large perspective and cross-political comparison between China and Europe, especially the two powers of France and Great-Britain which, although conflicting in Europe and over Napoleon's fate, agreed to take a strong hold and to control tightly China. China was not conquered by Portugal, Great-Britain and France: it was stifled down, till it imploded: Peyrefitte's last chapter titles "The Implosion (1850–1911)" and it concludes a vision of Western imperialism facing the Chinese Empire which culminates in a note addressed by Victor Hugo, then exiled at Guernesey, to a British officer, Captain Butler, on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1861:

*"There was in a corner of the world, a marvel called the Palace of Summer, planted with trees and colored with flowers, ornamented with prodigious silk and jade, built by the most prestigious architects, semi-godly artworks inside and outside... This marvel no longer exists.*

*One day two robbers entered: one looted, the other set afire the Palace of Summer.*

*We, Europeans, are supposed to be the civilized ones and, for us, the Chinese are the barbarians, but when facing History one of the robbers will be called France, and the other England. And I protest!"*

128 years later, the Spring of Beijing (1989) gives Peyrefitte the opportunity to go again visit China and measure its progress as an Independent sovereign State and its regress in terms of Human Rights. In a third major book titled "Chinese tragedy", he delivers the nature of evolutions within the regime's top officials and establishment according to the following key dates:

- 1976: two major characters of the revolution disappear: first Mao, then Shu-Enlai;
- 1978: the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenum of the Communist party (CPC) launches the reform
- 1979: Wei Jinsheng asks for democracy; Deng put him into jail
- 1979–1983: first joint-ventures and authorizations to privatize lands
- 1983–1984: campaign against "spiritual pollution by capitalism" (30,000 death penalties)
- 1984–1986: second wave of liberalization; 100,000 students authorized to study in North-America (among which Robin Lee, now president Baidu, the Chinese equivalent of Google)

- 1986–1987: Hu Yaobang, secretary general of the CPC, a liberal, is sent to jail; students riots in China are addressed by police (1,000,000 arrests)
- 1987–1989: turmoil goes on, because LiPeng, a conservative hard-liner, is nominated Prime Minister; president Deng declares: “*we will fight anarchism and individualism; we will kill any attempt to establish a society without communist laws..*”; he had already said in 1985 “*among the 4 fundamental principles, the dictatorship of the Party is the most important; why? Because without it, one cannot ensure stability in front of harmful and injurious elements*”
- on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1989, several thousands students are killed by the Chinese police after months of demonstrations requiring freedom; Tien-An-men square becomes a symbol of liberty since a student has made a armored tank stop rather than crush him flat. Nine months later, on April 1990, Tien-An-men square is surrounded by troops by fear of the authorities that new demonstrations start up
- In-between, in August and September 1989, Alain Peyrefitte leads in China (with a special visa delivered by the Chinese Embassy in Paris) an inquiry into what happened to the Spring of Beijing and what is the meaning of Tien-An-men square for Chinese people...

It is not possible to enter the full documentary vision provided by Peyrefitte from his long-term passion for China, but his acute wit targets the heart of his analysis in *Chinese Tragedy: Are Communism and Open Society compatible?*

The same question might be raised from 2014 on: will the new chairman of the Communist Party of China (CPC, with 82 million members), Xi Jinping, coming after Hu Jintao as head of State, be prone to liberal policies or will he and his popular spouse Peng Liyuan, a singer, restrict liberties?

Peyrefitte, as a critical observer of great powers' behaviors during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is to be considered a multidisciplinary researcher, alas not in sanctity to academic researchers up to this date. Much criticism has covered his works, even if based upon political encounters with top leaders over a period of almost 40 years: “*I had the privilege to interview Hua Guofeng, who succeeded Mao as the Party leader, Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang Prime Minister in 1980, Peng Zhen, former Beijing mayor, Du Runsheng, chairman of the Central Committee, Ji Pengfei on Hongkong and Macao, Chen Xitong and Li Peng, Prime Minister in 1989, ..*” (*Chinese Tragedy*, p. 74). In spite of his actual researches on the site of Chinese Imperial Archives with the help of Chinese scholars, such as Xu Yipu (director of the Archives) and several PhD students, Peyrefitte is classified as an outsider by American-led scholars who, we may suspect, are jealous of his introductions and his intuitions. Among the fiercest critics is Simon Leys, who himself wrote *Essais sur le Chine* (1998), including “*President Mao's New Clothes*”), a critical chronicle of the “*Cultural Revolution*”. S. Leys deplores the fact that such a “*flat*” author as Peyrefitte would have accepted the fictional account of the death of Lin Biao and of Mao himself.

S. Leys asserts that Peyrefitte did not understand the realpolitik of Nixon and Kissinger with China, and he implies that Peyrefitte had a romantic vision of China both in history and in present days. Quite the reverse, Princeton University researcher Benjamin Elman asserted that Peyrefitte presented some “*dark picture of China*” and told scholars to look at other works to correct Peyrefitte’s bias.

James Kirkup, another scholar, mentions that “*Peyrefitte used his official connections to gain then unprecedented access to archives in Beijing and organized a team of researchers to explore them... Probably the most interesting twist in Peyrefitte’s approach to France is the cultural shock he had in 1971 when visiting the People’s Republic of China in company of Shou-en-Lai, then First Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party which was at odds with the USSR.*” The fact is that Peyrefitte’s reflections associate China and France, which is uncommon in scientific research, over a forty years drift which may be criticized as a fantasy from a French mind, not a “scientific fact”...

Finally Jane Kate Leonard writing in *American Historical Review* is very critical to Peyrefitte’s *Still Empire*, this essay being according to her “*a pretentious and undigested work of limited antiquarian interest*”, adding nothing to the scholarly studies by Cranmer-Byng and Earl Pritchard. Strangely enough, while Peyrefitte stresses the major role of rituals in Chinese Empire (and even in Mao’s thinking) J. K. Leonard and her colleague at Chicago J. L. Hevia argue that Peyrefitte overemphasized economic aspects and neglected political and ritualistic dimensions of the Manchu empire.

All those critics do not stand up when one carefully studies how Peyrefitte worked on Chinese questions, from his 1954 discovery of Macartney’s Embassy memoirs in Krakow, up to his death in 1999. Reasonably speaking, we have here a major approach to China, and for a long time.

### **Enigma 3: PEYREFITTE as Mister Constitution or Mr Absolute Critique?**

After his ‘French Disease’ best-seller’s success in 1976, Peyrefitte was called back for his longest Ministry assignment as the Minister of Justice (1977–1981); this was in coherence with the reform of the French judicial system. Two majors reforms where to be made during his tenure at Justice:

- (a) Connecting Security with Liberty was a master idea of Peyrefitte as Minister of Justice, which raised strong opposition from the Left who considered again what Peyrefitte did to insure the control of the public sphere as a breach into civil rights; the fight against the law “Security and Liberty” did only ceased with the Socialists meeting a similar challenge in 1983;

- Calling on a variety of advisers – from judges, lawyers and magistrates to medical doctors, trade-unionists, mayors and sociologists – Alain Peyrefitte had a leading role on justice and prisons from his 1970 report on Drugs co-written with professors Delay, Deniker, Lebovici and Olivenstein) to his 1976 presidency of the Parliament Commission on Violence and Crime. His 1977 report to the President titled “Answers to Violence” is structured along three lines:

I – Violence in France, whereby Peyrefitte singles out behaviors and feelings, as opposed to objective accounts and factors (types of crimes, types of criminals).

II – Worsening factors, among which Peyrefitte stresses collective pressures to adjust to a consumers’ society, economic crises and cycles, greediness, which places violence as “a set of answers to multiple frustrations”. This part ends up on qualifiers of population piled up, and segregated against in insane “banlieues” offering no escape to under-qualification.

III – Recommendations, essentially a list of 20 measures: managing mass-media impact; needs for family protection, how to apply punishment, what degree of police to exert on defendants, how to secure buildings, as well as reforms of a larger impact such as death penalty, creation of statistical apparatus, and international cooperation on crime tracking.

Besides being quite innovative in proposing to intervene against “de-culturation”, Peyrefitte’s Answers to Violence include thirty more specific appendices classified under:

- biological and psychological aspects of Violence
- urban life and modifiers of peoples’ culture
- the economical dimensions of violence
- protecting the youngsters
- penitentiary reform
- media and television, advertising and violence

In 2002, the World Health Organization (Geneva) published a “World report on Violence and Health” where the presentation adopted recalls Peyrefitte’s 1977 framework; it shows how serious was the work previously done in the French context, and how promising its recommendations.

Peyrefitte’s ministerial trajectory goes to a halt with the arrival of Mitterrand as president (1981) but it would never resume later because Jacques Chirac would block him down. Our analysis bears witness that the mutual Chirac-Peyrefitte antipathy is not so much of an opposition between characters nor personalities; both were ambitious young civil servants (“grand commis de l’Etat”) belonging to the same Gaullist Party and becoming Ministers early in their careers; both originated in Southern West France, a country of agriculture and deep-seated republican heritage; both had parents in the Education area (“institutors”) with a mix between a traditional Catholic background and Re-

publican laity. On the one hand, Peyrefitte had a close and personal experience with De Gaulle's own interpretation of the Fifth Republic Constitution, which, according to Marcel Morabito<sup>1</sup> was created in 1958 according to De Gaulle's original pillars of thought: authority and responsibility.

Since 1793 (The Revolution's First Constitution) there exists in France a doctrine according to which the sovereign people govern through the Law which, being proposed and voted by representatives in Parliament, is together the symbol, the essence and the ultimate form of "French Republic". In 1958, this Republican doctrine of Law and Parliament's supremacy has driven France to parliamentary regimes such as the Third Republic based upon the 1879's Grevy Constitution and the 1946's Fourth Republic Constitution – from the writing of which De Gaulle was excluded.

In 1954, the Algerian insurrection starts in the Algerian mountains (djebel) with the killing of both Europeans and Berbers, and a new political signature F.L.N (Front liberation national). Two years later the movement has taken a dramatic extension in spite of the presence of more than 100,000 French soldiers and the deployment of a social and economic policy. It is to be said that in spite of efforts for integration (Decret Cremieux giving the French citizenship to Jewish populations, and Blum-Viollette project aiming the same for local populations of Berbers and Arabs) nothing stable is in sight.

Black-feet (pieds-noirs) being the nick name given to European colons, the 1958 year starts with Black-feet riots against the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic Parliamentary system where no clear-cut policy emerges. Four years after the settling of the Indochine war (Vietnam, 1949–1954), the Republic is at stake with a military driven insurrection in Algiers the motive of which is "Algerie Francaise": after 130 years of French presence and more than two million French citizens (including Europeans and Berbers naturalized French), this population is frightened by the extension of the F.L.N's hold on Algerian grounds. People revolt against the insecurity they feel, and hope that De Gaulle will be able to solve the issues bringing the political personnel in Paris to fetch him out of his retired home. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1958, General De Gaulle is welcomed at the General Governorship for Algeria and declares to the demonstrating crowd that he is going to form a government in Paris which would resolve the Algerian problem.

The Constitution of the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic being born under such circumstances, De Gaulle has a direct influence on its essential contents which Marcel Morabito describes as such:

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<sup>1</sup> "On the Fifth Republic Constitution between Emancipation and Uncertainties", Marcel Morabito, Conference, 10<sup>th</sup> december 2012, Institute of political sciences, Rennes, author's personal notes.

- (a) the ending of the Parliament supremacy, through limits put both to law formulation (subject to the checking by the new Council Constitutional) and to the Parliament's capability to propose laws; not only the Government's proposals would have priority, but through Constitution's Article 49, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph, any government proposal associated with a question of trust is deemed instantaneously adopted if there is no censorship petition by Members of Parliament.
- (b) the reinforcing of the President's authority through both exceptional powers (of reform) and, with article 12, the right to dissolve the Parliament at will.
- (c) the direct appeal to the people through referendum creating a direct link between the President and the electoral corps.

Indeed this Constitution created both the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic and the needed power frame for De Gaulle to act and solve the Algerian war up to a negotiation with the F.L.N which led to its complete independence.

If we keep aside the strong opposition which De Gaulle met from the Nationalists to the Communists, and the three assassination attempts he underwent (like Peyrefitte), the most important values underneath the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic Constitution are:

- authority of the President considered as Head of State together with leader of Nation;
- and responsibility, meaning that the President must acknowledge his direct responsibility to the people as Sovereign; indeed we all saw De Gaulle resigning in 1969 from his Presidential function when the French people voted No to his referendum on "participation".

Alain Peyrefitte has written his own thoughts on the Algerian drama, precisely when the drama was not yet over; one recognizes again here his talent for being a top level civil servant and, in parallel, leading a career as a writer; in this respect he was comparable to Winston Churchill as an officer at war in South-Africa during his younger years, and at the same time being a press corresponding writer. These characters have a talent for being in parallel decision-makers on the battle field and thinkers taking a distance and informing others on how they perceive and observe history making its own course.

Quite the opposite, Jacques Chirac, younger than Peyrefitte by 10 years, is a bon vivant with not so much capacity to lead a parallel thinker's life. If he did see in the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic Constitution some Gaullist heritage, it was only for him a set of political opportunities to be seized and eventually adapted to satisfy his own will or to negotiate some truce with opponents. Marcel Morabito says that all the successors of De Gaulle missed the closely-knitted fundamentals of Authority and Responsibility.

"They all took the authority but forgot or abandoned the notion of responsibility". This process of delusion on the President's responsibility was

particularly evident with Chirac who broke down some aspects of the Constitution, for instance by reducing the length of the presidential mandate (down from 7 to 5 years), by controlling how Courts could eventually indict a president for his deeds during exercising his powers, and by convening several times the Parliament in Congress at Versailles in order to adapt the French Constitution to European standards. Not only did Chirac as a President contribute to change the balance of powers in favor of the Parliament (so doing, he was a weak president) but his unwillingness to work and act as De Gaulle would lead him to accept the rejection of the European Constitution by the French people (2005) with no consequence whatsoever for himself: he stayed president where De Gaulle would have sincerely banged the door and left.

Chirac's presidency benefited from two mandates (1995–2002 and 2002–2007) pretending to be a Gaullist, while Peyrefitte as early as 1995 had diagnosed the impoverishment of founding values.

This explains why the last books written by Peyrefitte were titled 'This was De Gaulle' the subtitle of which could have been 'and how Chirac dismantles it is a pity'... Bearing a vision over the long run, Peyrefitte possessed a 'pregnant brain' – always on the move to capture, raise and try answering new intellectual challenges. We may consider, from this viewpoint, that Peyrefitte's approach would have been less submissive and more active towards the European challenges than Chirac's skillful decomposition and irresponsibility as President.

Today, Peyrefitte's seemingly ambiguous position as both a partisan and a critique of the French Constitution makes full sense, if we consider he wanted essentially to preserve the values ingrained by De Gaulle (authority and responsibility) as the inseparable sources of the governance of a sovereign France. In fact it is interesting to observe that the politicians which were calling for a new Constitution for a hypothetical French 6<sup>th</sup> Republic are now silent: President Francois Hollande has lately suggested that, by comparison with Germany, France is still too much of a centralized State. Will the 1958 Constitution and its new 2015 avatar be able to meet the challenge which Peyrefitte called the French disease?

#### **Enigma 4: PEYREFITTE as Mister Flat or Mr Libertine?**

Nicknamed Mr Flat by his colleagues as a journalist at the newspaper Le Figaro, Alain Peyrefitte was able to present himself as a perfectly tempered gentleman with no asperity, 'entirely lenient' and somewhat insipid on the human side. But does the adjective 'flat' convey only a restriction in character? We already assessed the double life attitude of Alain Peyrefitte as both a man of action and an essayist; but when one considers his works, a third dimension

appears which he shares with his elder brother Roger, the author of sulfurous books on family life, colleges and teenagers' homosexuality.

Indeed, Alain, very early in his literary life, wrote novels on teenagers' affects, such as in "Crumpled Reeds" (1948), as well as on trust and confidence (Penelope's myth, 1949), both novels stressing the sense of life and love between man and woman.

His novels on teenagers and couples (for Ulysse and Penelope are a strong duet), were written when he was only 21 to 23 years old, settling his whole life under the banner of humans' relationships at large, including the sexual attraction and/or repulsion of genders towards each other.

Indeed we find in almost all his essays some humor and somewhat ironical notes on men and women's behaviors in Britain, China, France, which reveal a talent at observing the subtle accents which build how people interact.

From this viewpoint the 'flat' adjective given to Alain Peyrefitte within *Le Figaro's* offices would underline his aptitude at bringing, like in music, a particular note, Italians would say 'sotto voce', by which to moderate the absolute judgments which the zealots of all creeds stick on other peoples.

Clearly Alain Peyrefitte was tolerant to the many facets of human hood, and he would have been a moderate at all means when it comes to enact "strong" legislation on the veil or on the homosexuals' marriage. Being a moralist he would understand the roots of Libertines' attitudes as well as the necessities of social control on balanced man/woman relationships, provided both areas are today controversial.

When becoming a member of Academie Francaise, admitted to succeeding Paul Morand's seat (1977), Alain Peyrefitte had to make the eulogy of Paul Morand, both a great traveler and a skeptical observer of modern life; as such Peyrefitte was utterly brilliant, respecting the talents given to human people to be intelligent and to think with all their reason(s) on questions of personal as well as political choices.

This is why we call Alain Peyrefitte a moralist and a free mind, able to comment on any psychological issue with the same acute wit as on the political main actors of his times; To this extent Peyrefitte deserves to be given – bequeathed – onto the young generations today as witness to the spirit of a time by the mid-XX<sup>th</sup> century where strong orientations were given to Europe. Peyrefitte tells us "how it all happened from a gentleman's perspective".

## **Brief list of Peyrefitte's books arranged by theme and date**

(the English translation and comments are unofficial from this article's author)

### **Peyrefitte on China, the British Empire and East-West cultural shock**

*Quand la Chine s'éveillera* (1973); When will China awake...; *Publisher*: Fayard; 1973, 1980, Paris, 500 pages.

*Chine immuable et changeante*, album (1984); Immutable and Changing China..; *Publisher*: PLON, 1984, Paris, 92 pages.

*L'Empire immobile ou le choc des mondes* (1989); The still Empire and the shock between worlds. *Publisher*: Fayard, 1989, Paris, 485 pages.

*La Tragédie chinoise* (1990); Chinese Tragedy (on Tien-An-Men square events); *Publisher*: France-Loisirs, 1990, Paris, 360 pages.

*Images de l'Empire immobile*, album with photographs (1990); Images of the still Empire; *Publisher*: Fayard, 1990, Paris, 209 pages.

*Un choc de cultures*, tome I: *La Vision des Chinois* (1991); Cultural shock: viewpoint from the Chinese; *Publisher*: Fayard, 1991, Paris, 92 pages.

*La Chine s'est éveillée* (1996); ... China woke up!; *Publisher*: Fayard, 1996, Paris.

*Un choc de cultures*, tome II: *Le Regard des Anglais* (1998); Cultural shock: viewpoint from the English; *Publisher*: Fayard, 1998, Paris.

### **Peyrefitte on De Gaulle's character and epics**

*C'était de Gaulle*, tome I (1994) à tome III (2000); This was De Gaulle, *Publisher*: GALLIMARD, 2002, Paris, 1954 pages.

*De Gaulle et le Québec* (2000); De Gaulle and the Quebec province in Canada; *Publisher*: STANKE, 2000, Paris et Québec.

### **Peyrefitte on the French bureaucracy versus European Union liberal dynamics**

*Le Mal français* (1976); The French Disease; *Publisher*: France-Loisirs et PLON, 1976, Paris, 518 pages.

*Les Chevaux du lac Ladoga* (1981); Ladoga lake's horses; *Publisher*: PLON, 1981, Paris, 425 pages.

*Quand la rose se fanera* (1983); When (socialists) roses will fade away; *Publisher*: PLON, 1983, Paris.

*Encore un effort, Monsieur le Président* (1985); Still an effort, Mr President! (open letter to Mitterrand); *Publisher*: JC.Lattès, 1985, Paris, 425 pages.

*La France en désarroi* (1992); France in disarray; *Publisher*: Editions de Fallois, 1992, Paris.

*Du « Miracle en économie »* (1995); On Miracles in economy; *Publisher*: Odile Jacob, 1995, Paris, 313 pages.

*La Société de confiance* (1995); *The Trusting Society*; Editions Odile Jacob, 1995, Paris, 557 pages.

### **Peyrefitte on Colonialism, Algeria, France and Violence**

*Faut-il partager l'Algérie ?*, essay (1961); *Publisher*: Editions de Fallois/Fayard, new publication, 1994, Paris.

*La violence en France* (1976), report to the President of the Republic, Committee chaired by A. Peyrefitte, *Publisher*: Documentation française, 1976, Paris. (This report may be seen as anticipating the World Report on Violence and Health, W.H.O, United Nations, Geneva, 2002)

*L'Aventure du XXe siècle*, editorship for a collective book of readings (1986); *The XXth century's adventure*; *Publisher*: Le CHENE, 1987, Paris, 1146 pages.

### **Peyrefitte's Reflections on the values of trust, patience and confidence**

*Rue d'Ulm, chroniques de la vie normalienne* (1946); *Chronicles of the School of Higher Studies, Ecole Normale Supérieure*, *Publisher*: PLON, 1946, 1964, 1977, Paris.

*Les Roseaux froissés*, novel (1948); *Crumpled reeds* (a teenagers' love story pointing to confidence), Gallimard, NRF-Collection, Paris, New edition 1977, 210 pages.

*Le Mythe de Pénélope*, essay on trust and patience (1949); *Penelope's myth* (an answer to Albert Camus' hopeless 'Sisyphus' myth'), *Publisher*: Gallimard et Fayard, 1949, 1977, 1998, Paris.

*Eulogy of Paul Morand and Answer by Claude Lévi-Strauss*, Academie Francaise Reception Address, Gallimard, NRF-Collection, Paris, 1977, by PEYREFITTE (Alain) (1925–1999) and Claude LÉVI-STRAUSS (1908–2009).