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Anthony E. Clark

Whitworth University, aclark@whitworth.edu

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**WARMING THE PAST:
PAUL SERRUYS, STEPHEN DURRANT & THE VOICES OF ANCIENT CHINA
Anthony E. Clark
Associate Professor of Chinese History (Whitworth University) Feb. 2015**

Introduction

[SLIDE 1: Title Slide] “溫故(古)而知新，可以為師” (*Wēn gù ér zhī xīn, kěyǐ wéi shī*). Confucius defined a teacher as someone who, “Warms up the past in order to know the present.”¹ Today I would like to warm up a different kind of past, not a literary, linguistic, philosophical, cultural, or technical past, by which we discern whether one *is* a teacher, but I would like to warm up a historical past about *teachers* themselves, especially those previous Sinological masters who fashioned their students into a new generation of Sinologists. I know that Steve will blush when I refer to him as a “Sinological master,” but perhaps my remarks today will persuade everyone *else* here in the room that he is among those giants upon whose shoulders my generation of teachers and scholars stand.

Let me begin with a personal anecdote, which will, I hope, illustrate how we who profess to teach and write about China, should be mindful of the Chinese notion that we are not *sui generis* scholars who emerged, as Laozi used the term, “自然,” (*zìrán*) or “from ourselves.”² We derive from a long and remarkable legacy of teachers, into which we form part of a lineage. [SLIDE 2: Book Covers – Hall/Ames & Durrant/Shankman] In 1987, David Hall and Roger Ames published *Thinking Through Confucius*, and in 1998 Steve Durrant and Steve Shankman – inspired by this book – organized a symposium at the University of Oregon called, “Thinking Through Comparisons.”³ Their goal was to

invite an august retinue of scholars to convene and compare ancient China to ancient Greece. “Nothing exists in isolation,” they asserted, so they sought to consider how these two early societies can be reasonably compared.⁴ In any case, based upon the papers delivered at that symposium the two Steves edited a wonderful volume, *Early China/Ancient Greece: Thinking Through Comparisons*. You will recognize some of the names: David Hall, Haun Saussy, Michael Puett, Roger Ames, C. H. Wang, David Keightly, David Schaberg, Andrew Plaks, Lisa Raphals, Anthony Yu, Michael Nylan, Steve Shankman, and Steve Durrant.

I was then a younger and very intimidated undergraduate Chinese major at the University of Oregon, and I was in the audience for most of that symposium. I remember noticing that Steve Durrant was very quiet during the discussions, but after listening to everyone else he would finally offer *his* thoughts. Naturally, Steve conjured Sima Qian in his remarks, and it was at that symposium, listening to Steve’s comments, that I decided to apply to graduate school and study Han historical literature . . . under Steve. Since then I have always felt similar to the way Steve claims to feel: Everything I have done well as a teacher should rightly be credited to my teacher. “然而因成紀前。無胸中之造,”

(*Rán'ér yīn chéngjì qián. Wú xiōngzhōng zhī zào*) as Wang Chong said of Sima Qian – “Still, it was based on what was already completed that he made a record of the past, and he produced nothing that came from within himself.”⁵ So, while we are all here to honor Steve’s legacy, I would personally like also to acknowledge my debt to his teaching, for I can claim largely to have inherited from Steve what Steve has inherited from Confucius, Sima Qian, Father Paul Serruys, CICM, and all his teachers; I can honestly say that the best of my own work is to have, “述而不作” (*Shù ér bùzuò*) – “transmitted what I have

learned without novelty.”⁶ When I asked Steve to send me a biography in preparation for this presentation, he drafted and returned to me a beautifully crafted essay, not on *himself*, however, but of his *teachers*. He is the last person to acknowledge the significance of his legacy; so, I shall here channel the spirit of the 太史公, (*Tàishǐ gōng*) and point to some of his Sinological footprints.

The “Washington School”

[SLIDE 3: The “Washington School”] Steve Durrant is part of what I call the “Washington School,” or even the “Serruysian School” of ancient China studies. It is quite easy to discover how widely Serruys’ influence at Washington has reached. Not only was he one of Steve’s mentors, but many of the scholars I meet at conferences have connections to Serruys, and several priests I know were his personal friends. And I recently learned that the editor of my new book, Lorri Hagman, was also a student of Classical Chinese under Father Serruys. Hagman described her experience learning “Serruysian grammar”: “[A]ny word can be a noun, a verb, a modifier; a word’s placement and relationship to other words in a classical sentence are what counts, not the way it has been used in other sentences before or since or the way it is classified in a dictionary.”⁷ Despite Serruys’ reputation for a certain grammatical despotism, he was actually quite flexible in how classical Chinese grammar could be adjusted to express meanings beyond the more rigid confinements of classical Latin grammar. She also recalled Serruys’ sometimes hidden personal warmth. “One day in class, an older student announced that his daughter was taking him out to lunch to celebrate his birthday.” Father Serruys said he wished he had a daughter to take him out on his birthday, to which

several of the women in the class responded affectionately, “But we’re all your daughters.”⁸

[SLIDE 4: UW Graduate Faculty in 1972] In Steve’s “autobiography,” which is actually more about whom he calls his “five generous teachers,” he describes “always quaking a bit . . . as we took turns translating lines.” Serruys’ favorite word, Steve recalls, was a stentorian and simple “Wrong!” But he notes another side to Serruys’ personality:

He used much of his salary to employ needy graduate students in tasks that were not only supportive of his own research but stimulated our development as young scholars. Over the course of several years, I was paid thousands of dollars by this generous man for such tasks as reading and summarizing Shirakawa’s interminable studies on Chinese bronze inscriptions. . . . I came to see over the years, particularly years just after my graduation, that Father Serruys was a bit of a paper tiger, his external gruffness hiding a very kindly and sometimes highly vulnerable character.⁹

I recently consulted the institutional archives at the University of Washington, and discovered that while other professors in the Department of Asian languages & Literatures in the 1970s such as Vincent Shih and Turrell Wylie were earning annual salaries of \$17-18,000.00, Father Serruys was paid a mere \$6,732.00 per annum.¹⁰

[SLIDE 5: Blessed Sacrament – Serruys’ Residence] During his tenure at the University of Washington, Father Serruys lived with a community of Dominican priests, below their church near campus, Blessed Sacrament, and while his students and colleagues perhaps knew him best as a scholar and mentor, his fellow priests knew him more for his clerical life. Serruys offered a private Mass everyday and ate his meals in

community with the Dominicans, though Father Gus Hartman, OP, informed me that Serruys always preferred to cook his own breakfast: an egg fried in a slice of bread.¹¹

[SLIDE 6: Sheen, Chardin, Maison Chabanel] Father Serruys, Hartman continued, was a pragmatic and scholarly man, not at all interested in the histrionics of American Catholics such as the famous television personality, Bishop Fulton Sheen, who Serruys would sardonically emulate by walking across rooms pretending to swish his episcopal cape behind himself. While a man of deep faith, Father Serruys was nonetheless more sympathetic to the intellectual ideas of the Jesuit personality, Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, than the popular dramatics of Fulton Sheen.¹² Serruys, whose mission assignment took him to Shanxi Province, was arrested and interred by Japanese troops in 1943, when he was sent to Weixian in Shandong, and then transferred to confinement with the Jesuits in Beijing at their language school, Maison Chabanel.¹³ It was then that Serruys first met Chardin, who deeply influenced his future life as a priest and scholar. When criticized by his fellow priests for displaying too much interest in academic study, Father Serruys responded that, “Research is an act of worship,” for it enables us to better understand the “majesty and love of the Creator.”¹⁴

Still, not all of his confreres appreciated the kind of scholarship Serruys conducted, though his colleagues in the Academy still consult his published works. They remain today iconic examples of rigorous research, exacting interpretation, and careful writing, skills that appear to be waning in our current context of professionalized academics. In 1945, Paul Serruys published an exhaustive study of children’s riddles and ditties in the Shanxi dialect south of Datong, which established his reputation as an exceptional linguist.¹⁵ [SLIDE 7: Article from *China Missionary*] Less well known are his

works published in Catholic journals, such as the *China Missionary*, for which he wrote an illustrated study of how Christian wedding rites could be adapted to traditional ceremonies in use in Shanxi. In this little-known article, Serruys the missionary was quite ahead of his time in his argument that indigenous nuptial observances should be fundamentally retained in Catholic marriage services; it was decades before other missionaries began to share his opinion on this matter.¹⁶ “Everyone loves his own local customs,” Serruys argues, which is one’s “unalienable right.”¹⁷ This respect for an alternative cultural view was clearly passed to his students, for this view was also recommended in the classrooms of Steve Durrant.

The Sinologist from American Fork, Utah

Oscar Wilde once said that, “To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly modern intellect.”¹⁸ [SLIDE 8: American Fork, Utah] Who could have predicted that a young man from American Fork, Utah, first settled in 1850 by Mormon pioneers, would study classical Chinese in the classroom of the Belgian missionary priest, Paul Serruys? In Steve’s recollections on the “five generous teachers” who influenced his formation as a nascent scholar, was his high school English teacher and debate coach, Mr. J. N. Washburn. Other than his memory of when he and another 16-year old boy woke Mr. Washburn up at 11:00 pm to discuss debate strategies – Washburn patiently listening in his bathrobe – Steve remembers his teacher’s expressive reactions to what he read. “He was not afraid to react strongly to the texts he read,” Steve writes, “telling us we just weren’t human if we weren’t moved by a particular text, or even shedding a tear.”¹⁹ In fact, one of the aspects of learning classical Chinese from Steve was how effectively he discouraged apathetic readings of texts that deserve more than merely “getting through.”

Sima Qian’s occasional refrain, “*Wūhū!*” (嗚呼) was more than a grammatical emphatic to those of us who were taught why such exclamations were meaningful in light of his decision to “visit the silkworm chamber” (*Cán shì* 蠶室).

[SLIDE 9: Palmer, Alaska & Brigham Young University] At Brigham Young University, where he jointly majored in History and Chinese, Steve first perceived the benefits of serious intellectual openness in one of his professors, Dr. Gary Williams, who, as he puts it, was “a genuine intellectual with exceedingly wide-ranging interests and knowledge, not a type I had encountered much either in American Fork, Utah, or in the wilds of Palmer, Alaska, the two places where I had spent my youth.”²⁰ Perhaps this is why, when I visited the home of Steve and Françoise, an experience that I relished each time I was privileged to receive an invitation, I saw an eclectic mix of books, half-read, here and there, around their living room and office: a history of the Anabaptists of Muenster, Germany, a copy of the Lutheran Bible, a book called *The Tao of Spycraft*, and Edward Schafer’s great classic study of water goddesses in Tang poetry, *The Divine Woman: Dragon Ladies and Rain Maidens in T’ang Literature*. I am grateful that Professor Williams taught Steve how to read broadly, and that it is quite acceptable to indulge intellectual “distractions,” for as Chinese cosmology teaches us, there is nothing unrelated to all other things.

The next “generous teacher” Steve mentions in his “autobiography” is Father Serruys, who I have already discussed. [SLIDE 10: Fr. Serruys/Steve Durrant, Richard/Helmut Wilhelm, & Jerry Norman] I rather like one photograph of Father Serruys and Steve, two paragons of the “Washington School” of Sinology – Serruys

looking quite Belgian with his carefully manicured Van Dyke beard, and a young Steve as the humble acolyte in the background. But there were other Sinological voices at Washington when Steve undoubtedly climbed the stairs to the East Asian library to check out books in Chinese, Japanese, and Manchu. He notes two other “generous teachers” whose mentorship formed him at Washington: Professors Hellmut Wilhelm and Jerry Norman. Hellmut Wilhelm was the son of the legendary missionary Sinologist, Richard Wilhelm, who distinguished himself as both a scholar of the *Yijing* and a personal friend of the Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung. Like his father, Hellmut was impassioned by the Chinese classics, and finished his career at the University of Washington after teaching at Beijing University. Steve knew Wilhelm at the end of his career, and described him as, “one of the last of a dying breed – the Sinologist.”²¹

Wilhelm’s course on the history of Chinese literature covered three thousand years in three quarters, and Steve describes the series, “as much a history of Sinology as a history of Chinese literature.” Time and again, Steve’s lectures, too, wandered into exciting and worthwhile reminiscences over the unforgettable eccentricities of those in whose footsteps we now follow. Professor Wilhelm studied under Otto Franke, who made it clear to young Hellmut that he did not like his father, Richard. And, we learned how Paul Pelliot harbored a disdain for Erwin von Zack, who Pelliot finally banned from ever publishing in *T’oung Pao*. I remember Steve telling us, his graduate students, one morning in a coffee shop near campus, about Professor Wilhelm’s stories in his “heavy German accent”:

. . . one hand sweeping through his hair, the other holding a lit cigarette that he used so brilliantly as a prop: “My friend John Wu says that anyone who likes Li

Bai more than Du Fu is not worth his weight in salt.” Then a long drag on his cigarette, holding the smoke in for twenty or so seconds, finally exhaling a cloud above his head and adding, “So, my students, I confess to you that I am not worth my weight in salt.”²²

Not only was Steve trained in the proximity of such Washington greats as Serruys and Wilhelm, but he also studied under Jerry Norman, who Steve describes as, “a man of supreme linguistic talent.”²³

For two years Steve was Norman’s only student of Manchu, which he taught as a course overload. Among the texts that Norman and Steve read together in the early 1970s was a Manchu translation of *Jīnpíngmèi*, (金瓶梅) which was a bit ribald for Norman, who was a devout Russian Orthodox Christian. Steve notes that during their readings, he “always managed to steer me around *Jinpingmei*’s famous yellow passages.” “No, let’s skip the next two chapters,” Norman would say, “They’re not really necessary for the story.”²⁴ Any of us who studied under Steve will recall his generosity with his already overburdened time; he was very much like Norman in this regard, but Steve never shied away from any passages in what we were reading, yellow or not.

The “Cloudy Mirror”: The Scholarly Legacy of Steve Durrant

[SLIDE 11: Various Images of Steve] I have remarked much on Steve’s teachers because I know he would prefer that, but let me now turn to whom I would prefer to discuss – Steve. After nearly a decade as a professor myself, I can recall almost no one I would call more humble than Steve Durrant. Any Sinologist will know of the voluminous works of the likes of Burton Watson and Michael Loewe, but Steve is not one to advertise the impressive and protracted list of scholarly works that bear his mark. Steve’s

CV is easier procured from Worldcat than from Steve! [SLIDE 12: Sample of Book Covers] Most of us who have studied early China have read what became, perhaps, his most influential work, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian*, but his oeuvre spans far beyond this important monograph – far beyond Sima Qian, and even far beyond China. After defending his dissertation, “An Examination of Textual and Grammatical Problems in Mo Tzu,” he and Margaret Nowak co-published *The Tale of the Nišan Shamaness: A Manchu Folk Epic*, which helped scholars better understand and appreciate Manchu folk literature.²⁵

While at the University of Utah, where he served as the chair of the Department of Languages, Steve wrote an astute commentary largely on the sometimes-complicated dynamics between senior and junior faculty in academic departments, “The Myth of Mentoring.” In this article he almost mournfully considers the shifting landscape of university tenure and promotion expectations, and how those changes have affected the relationships between senior and junior colleagues who now operate under different assumptions and challenges. How can one mentor a junior colleague who lives in a very different academic panorama than the previous era? Much has changed from Helmut Wilhelm to us who still have decades before us, and Steve has managed to remain mindful of the genuinely human aspects of academic life, while managing also to exemplify what it means to be a genuine academic, despite the irregular terrain of university citizenship.

A few examples of Steve’s published legacy beyond what I have just noted are several gems of scholarly meticulousness and insight. To name only a few: in 1977, Steve published an article entitled, “The Taoist Apotheosis of Mo Ti,” which considers Mozi’s

appearance in the Daoist canon;²⁶ in 1979, he published remarks on the translation of Chinese historical romances into Manchu and Mongolian;²⁷ that year he also wrote on Manchu shaman literature;²⁸ and in 1986, Sima Qian had firmly entrenched in Steve's interests, and we see his article, "Self as the Intersection of Traditions: The Autobiographical Writings of Ssu-ma Ch'ien."²⁹ Many more articles followed, as well as a seemingly endless array of book reviews, and by the 1990s Steve was invited to contribute to several important edited volumes. In 1993, for example, Steve wrote the entry on the *Yànzi chūnqiū* (晏子春秋) for Michael Loewe's *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide*; in 1994, Steve's chapter on Sima Qian's portrayal of the first Qin emperor followed Jack Dull's chapter on China's early imperial notion of orthodoxy, in Frederick Brandauer and Huang Junjie's volume, *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*; in 2002, Steve Durrant and Steve Shankman co-edited *Early China/Ancient Greece: Thinking Through Comparisons*, which I have already mentioned; and two years earlier, in 2000, the two Steves had co-authored their wonderful study, *The Siren and the Sage: Knowledge and Wisdom in Ancient Greece and China*.³⁰ This is only a partial list of Steve's extensive record of published works, and does not include his long history of invited talks, academic papers, institutional service, and awards. I don't think that Steve has ever craved success in the way most people do, but rather has given himself to a vocation to contribute to and improve the world of ideas. His accomplishments remind me of a remark once given by Albert Einstein: "Try not to become a man of success, but rather try and become a man of value."³¹ Success is ephemeral, but Steve has given us a legacy of service and scholarship that will continue to contour the landscape of early China studies.

Conclusion

[SLIDE 13: Clark/Durrant, Wells/He, Steve Teaching] So, to conclude my remarks on the extraordinary life and works of an extraordinary man, I would like to say that for many of us here today, Steve is among those rare “generous teachers” who have left indelible marks on our personal and professional lives. Each of us has stories to tell about Steve, such as the day he told me that he had forgotten an appointment with the president of the university at a meeting he and I had scheduled to read through passages of Xunzi’s writing – I was then only an undergraduate in Chinese. Steve’s love of his topic, and his unselfish and perhaps distracted commitment to his students, taught me much about the genuine life of the mind. He once recited a long passage from Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Raven” in class. I can’t recall why he recited Poe in a class about early Chinese texts, but we were all inspired by his passion and ability to recite long poetry by memory. I could rehearse countless similar stories, but perhaps I’ll end here by returning to early China. I recall an old Chinese axiom that, “A good teacher for a day is like a father for a lifetime.” We who have learned from Steve Durrant are all his children; we are all “warming up the past” of China, from the Han to the Qing, that he has given us in both text and lectures.

Steve, Thank you for being so generous, for reminding us that what was said in China’s past was mostly intended to make us kinder and more sympathetic people today. You have echoed those voices of early China, not just because they are remarkable examples of history and literature, but precisely because those voices make us better people. Thank you for being our teacher: “溫故而知新，可以為師” (*Wēn gù ér zhī xīn, kěyǐ wéi shī*). [SLIDE 14: Closing Slide]

Notes [to be edited and expanded]:

¹ Confucius, *Analects*, 2,11.

² Laozi, 25.

³ See David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987).

⁴ Steven Shankman and Stephen W. Durrant, Eds., *Early China/Ancient Greece: Thinking Through Comparisons* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 6.

⁵ In Wang Ching, *Lunheng*, “Chaoqi.”

⁶ Confucius, *Analects*, 7.1. Also quoted by Sima Qian in his “史記, 太史公自序.”

⁷ Lorri Hagman, H-Asia Post, 9 September 1999.

⁸ Lorri Hagman, H-Asia Post, 9 September 1999.

⁹ Stephen W. Durrant, “Five Generous Teachers,” unpublished manuscript (October 2014), 3.

¹⁰ University of Washington Special Collections, Department of Asian languages & Literatures Files, SCSP 00664, Box 1, Faculty Salaries 1971-72.

¹¹ Interview with Fr. Augustine “Gus” Hartman, OP, at St. Albert’s Dominican Priory, Oakland, CA, 28 October 2014.

¹² Interview with Fr. Augustine “Gus” Hartman, OP, at St. Albert’s Dominican Priory, Oakland, CA, 28 October 2014.

¹³ W. South Coblin, “Paul L-M Serruys, CICM,” H-Asia Post, 29 September 1999.

¹⁴ Quoted in W. South Coblin, “Paul L-M Serruys, CICM,” H-Asia Post, 29 September 1999.

¹⁵ Paul Serruys, CICM, “Children’s Riddles and Ditties from the South of Tatung (Shansi),” *Folklore Studies*, vol. 4 (1945): 231-290.

¹⁶ Paul Serruys, CICM, “Christian Adaptation of Wedding Ceremonies: An Attempt at Christian Adaptation of Marriage Ceremonies Now in Use in the Region of Tatung, Shansi,” *China Missionary*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1948): 166-174.

¹⁷ Serruys, “Christian Adaptation of Wedding Ceremonies,” 174.

¹⁸ Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Writings of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Pearson, 1909), 145.

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- ¹⁹ Durrant, "Five Generous Teachers," 1.
- ²⁰ Durrant, "Five Generous Teachers," 2.
- ²¹ Durrant, "Five Generous Teachers," 3.
- ²² This account is also recorded in Durrant, "Five Generous Teachers," 4.
- ²³ Durrant, "Five Generous Teachers," 5.
- ²⁴ Durrant, "Five Generous Teachers," 5-6.
- ²⁵ See Stephen W. Durrant, "An Examination of Textual and Grammatical Problems in Mo Tzu" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1975); Magaret Nowak and Stephen W. Durrant, *The Tale of the Nišan Shamaness: A Manchu Folk Epic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977).
- ²⁶ Stephen W. Durrant, "The Taoist Apotheosis of Mo Ti," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 97, no. 4 (October-December 1977): 540-546.
- ²⁷ Stephen W. Durrant, "A Note on the Translation of Chinese Historical Romances into Manchu and Mongolian," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews*, vol. 1, no. 2 (July 1979): 273-274.
- ²⁸ Stephen W. Durrant, "The Nisšan Shaman Caught in Cultural Contradiction," *Signs*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Winter 1979): 338-347.
- ²⁹ Stephen W. Durrant, "Self as the Intersection of Traditions: The Autobiographical Writings of Ssu-ma Ch'ien," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 106, no. 1 (January-March 1986): 33-40.
- ³⁰ See Stephen W. Durrant, "Yen tzu ch'un ch'iu," in Michael Loewe, Ed. *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide* (Berkeley: The Society of the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, 1993); Stephen W. Durrant, "Ssu-ma Ch'ien's Portrayal of the First Ch'in Emperor," in Frederick P. Brandauer and Chün-chieh Huang, Eds., *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); Steven Shankman and Stephen W. Durrant, Eds., *Early China/Ancient Greece: Thinking Through Comparisons* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002); and Steven Shankman and Stephen W. Durrant, *The Siren and the Sage: Knowledge and Wisdom in Ancient Greece and China* (London: Cassell, 2000).
- ³¹ Quoted in, "Death of a Genius," *Life* (2 May 1955), 64.