

Francophonie in the East: at the Crossroads of Transculture

An apparently transcendental and inarguable idea conveyed within Francophone studies is the supposed equivalence between the Francophonie of the East and that of French Indochina or its variant, the former Vietnam. This position relates exclusively to the colonial past undergone by Indochina, which is neither a country nor a people. It is a name standardized for administrative reasons and based on where the states composing the colony are located. Consequently, several civilizations in Asia, including China, India, Japan and many others find themselves left out from potential inclusion in the Francophonie of the East. It is not that these countries have never been subjected to a French regime in the course of their history, but they have been spared classical colonization, which is considered to be a requirement for belonging to the Francophone world.ⁱ Although these countries are de facto excluded from the French-speaking world, they are not, in spite of linguistic and cultural realities attested to by their histories, generally included within the framework of Francophonie. Stemming from a narrow and reductive perspective, this equation between "colonization and Francophonie" dismisses out of hand any understanding of the Francophone reality in Asia before or after Indochina; in short, beyond the Indochinese borders.

Behind this self-evidently transcendental idea lies the stubborn conviction that colonization alone leads inevitably to Francophonie. This is because it guarantees the rise of French - the final step in the process - as one of the official languages of the country. Thus conceived, colonization is seen as a premise and a unique way to access the Francophone phenomenon outside of France. Moreover, several Francophone areas, such

as Sub-Saharan Africa or the Maghreb, where the Francophone element comes directly from colonization, would seem to support such an argument.ⁱⁱ Such is therefore also the case for the eastern Francophone world, where Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos remain the only proven protectorates or colonies in France. From this point of view, Indochina would undoubtedly be the only French-speaking cultural area in Asia. Does this thesis, which was largely held throughout the twentieth century, generating numerous essays in Francophone studies, still hold true? The question is all the more important if we consider the phenomenon of globalization and the generation of a transcultural world that broadens the horizons of the Francophone universe.

In the current state of thought on the French-speaking world in relation to Asia, the idea of a plural Asiatic Francophonie is not popular. Cultural phenomena or the realities arising from the French heritage in Asia, other than in Indochina, are still not seen from a Francophone studies perspective. These facts do not give rise to the following questions: a) Is there a Francophone reality outside Indochina in Asia? (b) Is classical colonization the only way for such a reality to be? c) Its variants or by-products, such as the "concession", the "trading post" or the "lease territory", do they contribute to the cultural francization of a specific place in the same way as the classic colonization of a country? In other words, should the Francophone realities of cultural spaces outside Indochina in Asia be included or excluded from Francophonie? These questions, as essential as they are for the understanding of the French-speaking world in Asia, remain unanswered and do not find any response in the present state of Francophone studies.

Taking account of Asia's own historiography, this article seeks to examine the phenomenon of Francophone presence in Asian countries classified as non-Francophone. It will try to shed light on the ways and means of acquiring Francophone characteristics other than through classical colonization, by highlighting the cohabitation that results from migration and the transfer of French culture to Asia. Thus, my study will attempt to pave a new path towards understanding Francophone Asian reality, whose heterogeneous nature is likely to provoke debates. Several arguments support my hypothesis. Firstly, confining the French-speaking world to the colonial bosom, is to erase the Francophone life of cultures that were formerly unofficially or partially in contact with the French. There are plenty of examples. Think of the French misadventures in India, the Westernization of the Meiji era, the French regime in the colonial concession in Shanghai, or the semi-colonial situation of the Qing. Thus, this Francophone phenomenon that interests me survives in a different way, is unconventional compared to established colonies, and requires a methodology of identification liberated from the a priori.

Some historical reminders

The relevance of this reconsideration of Francophone life in Asia is underscored by the continent's history. What is undeniable is that before the Indochinese Union, the numerous expeditions to the continent had created French connections and strongholds in several cultural spaces. The history of France in Asia does not therefore begin and end with the history of French Indochina. Indeed, since the fifteenth century, the developments in sailing ships on the high seas had enabled the European countries to

engage extensively in maritime voyages. As the famous Silk Road of Marco Polo became impracticable, it was by sea that was effected the multiple presence of Europeans, the first appearances of whom were made by the Portuguese, along the coasts of Macao in the sixteenth century. Chinese historiography records still Macau's trading posts as the first breach that announced the influx of "barbarian" sailboats, including those of the French, as they set their eyes on distant empires (Li Wenhai et al. vol I 481). Motivated by both Christian proselytism and trade missions, the number of expeditions increased in the sixteenth century and reached its peak in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As a result, the Indies and the Empire of Cathay are undoubtedly implicated.

Today, if certain Asian countries produce French-language literature without having undergone official colonization, it is because French presence and contact with French culture, which have been hidden, survive otherwise. This is founded on a truism. The following description maps the original distribution of the European and French presence in Asia:

[...] the cantonment of Europeans on the periphery of closed empires (China, Japan); a diffuse presence on the coast of the Indian continent [...]; the colonial settlements for the cultivation of spices (Indonesia), supplying ships on the Indian route (Cape Town, Mascareignes) or the Christianization of indigenous peoples (Philippines). (Favier 7-8)

These positions indicate the arrival of European countries (including France) in various cultural zones before Indochina, notably in China, India and Japan. The recognition of this first impression highlights my methodology of identification, which is based on

historiography. There is no denying that expeditions to Asia are in no way lesser than those to Africa or North America. The Francophonie of the countries of Asia must therefore reflect the historical presence of France in all those empires that embraced French civilization throughout history.

Would it be to put the cat among the pigeons to label as “Francophone” those sovereign countries whose cultures are historically autarchic and to apply the Francophone label to those cultures classified as non-Francophone? Are these cultures an integral component of a more broadly conceived Francophonie? My research on the French presence in several regions and zones in Asia should dispel any doubt, and support such a point of view. Far from being a circumstantial or random critical turn, the question of the relevance of Francophonie in these (non-French-speaking) countries is reinforced by the preservation of French language and culture within these host cultures. Historically obscured, this part of the Francophone world deserves to be brought to light by means of a methodological approach that first recognizes its existence. Reconsidering the Asian zone cannot be done by ignoring other established Francophone areas and, moreover, several guiding questions used to articulate the problematic are drawn from current developments in Francophone studies (Mackey 117).ⁱⁱⁱ Thus, as a prelude to my reflections, I will gauge the pulse of recent research on the dynamics of the French-speaking world by reviewing the current state of Francophone studies.

The Direction of Francophone Studies

Basing itself on the relations woven with France in the winding course of colonization, Francophone studies has been split into geographical areas, and flourished for half a

century. The twenty-first century will however upset these old definitions by emphasizing the fact that the French-speaking world is no longer a closed space, gathered around a colonial history with France, but rather a sphere of influence that is called into question by the present dynamics that characterize the contemporary world.^{iv} In other words, not only would Francophonie be open to multiple horizons, it would also reflect the concerns related to the transnational phenomena of cultures on the threshold of globalization. That said, the idea that colonization of the entire country is the only criterion for the Francophone label is inevitably questioned in the transcultural era.

This direction around which Francophone studies is converging reflects the new stakes that mark the post-postcolonial state of the discipline. For some researchers, the Francophone field refers to French-related facts and realities that are in constant movement and are no longer circumscribed in advance, for example by the stipulation of being a former French colony or having French as one of the national languages...^v These reflections highlight the need to reconfigure the idea of Francophonie to take account of the cultural zones formerly excluded from the classical Francophone areas; thus there have been many essays since the 1990s in various Francophone journals that question the notion of "modern Francophonie". These studies, which have been constantly remodeled and renewed over the decades, show for their part the elusive nature of a field that is reconstructing and renewing itself and thus renders obsolete the concept of colonization as the sole means of spreading French influence in the world.

The difficulty of a standard definition

Another impasse highlighted by recent research is the difficulty of setting a standard definition of Francophonie that can be uniformly applied to each French-speaking area. In reality, this rigid standardization creates a problem from the very start. Thus, even before the question of Asia's entry into the sphere of Francophonie is raised, attempts to redefine the latter have been permanent preoccupation of scholars.^{vi} After relentlessly questioning what constitutes Francophonie, Francois Torrel draws a conclusion:

It is impossible for us to define Francophonie in ideological terms, because the very diversity ... of the Francophone situation of the principal actors, founders or financial donors who do not share the same history and the same practices of Francophonie, does not allow the definition of a motive, a common reason for belonging that would justify the cohesion of the whole. (Torrel 10)

In addition to the inconceivability of a standard definition of Francophonie, encompassing Francophone cultural zones that are heterogeneous in origin and nature, there is another basic difficulty. This is that Francophonie does not refer to the same thing in the eyes of French people in metropolitan France as it does in the rest of the Francophone world. For the latter, Francophonie encompasses in itself the various linguistic, geographical, identitary and institutional dimensions (Violette 15-16), without being exclusively linked to the colonial past. And recent attempts at a "globalizing definition" (Torrel 15) of the French-speaking world only accentuate the complexity of its heterogeneous components, which cannot be reduced to those dimensions rooted in the colonial past. In this vein, others go even further, dividing the Francophone world

into the French-speaking aspect and French-language literature to relate the former to the ex-French colonies, and the second to a literary space where works are written in French.^{vii} This second subcategory leads inevitably to literatures that go beyond the framework of the former colonies. From this, the idea of the evolution of the Francophone corpus continues, in that there are literatures (considered non-Francophone) of French expression, for example, Chinese literature of French expression. To conclude, the difficulty of redefining Francophonie, if one arrives at such, must still take account of the Asian area (outside of Indochina) - a hidden player - integrating itself into a broader notion of Francophonie.

The transcultural as a methodology

But there is more. The impasse of the claim that "colonization made Francophonie" is accentuated all the more in the context of the twenty-first century, where the digital era and the age of globalization bring down geographical and linguistic boundaries, so much so that attributing the acquisition of French language or its continued use to the sole cause of colonization can no longer hold. From this other difficulties arise. If colonization in its classical sense is no longer the only way towards Francophonie, what would be the other means of accessing the Francophone sphere? In other words, what methodological approach would be suited to identifying the heterogeneity and multiple genesis of this form of Francophonie, as well as its corpus?

One thing is certain: the rethinking or the overthrow of the principles once considered to be foundational to the Francophone world opens up new horizons and leads us beyond the trilogy (colonialism / anticolonialism / postcolonialism). Whatever the

approach one favors, several ancient civilizations from which was born the Eastern world cannot be treated in a homogeneous way, if only given the vicissitudes of their contact with French civilization. Moreover, these cultural spaces have known, in terms of their French presence, other forms than colonization, hence the following reflection. Do the French concessions or territories granted to France contribute to the understanding of oriental Francophonie in the same way as the former Indochinese colony? Before answering this question hastily, let us delineate the subject of our research.

For the purposes of this article, I trace the history of oriental Francophonie to the commercial trading posts and exchanges in the Indies,^{viii} to the origin of the concessions in China, to the French penetration into Japan and Korea, but exclude the Indochinese Union,^{ix} whose Francophone realities are proven and widely discussed. Clearly, these territories or countries that have not undergone official colonization have a Francophone nature distinct from other Francophone areas, which makes the trilogy theory applied to other Francophone areas inapplicable. In these cases, it is not a question of a classical change of regime in a conquered country that could be regarded as Francophone, but there is instead cohabitation or linguistic / cultural crossing within a sovereign country. This dynamism calls for the full force of the notion of cultural / literary transfer as a methodology of approach to the phenomenon of Francophonie that interests me here.

It would be naive to believe that the notion of the transcultural remains unexplored in the field of Francophone studies, when in 2001 it was called into play by the impasse in which the trilogic approach found itself, creating a theoretical vacuum at the turn of the century. The phenomenon of Francophone literature at the time was envisaged in terms of the "transnational situation" (Bessière, Moura 8), thus connecting

already to transnationalism, which emphasizes the transgression of the "established delimitations" (2009 Kang 5), principally, national borders.^x However, this first attempt at a new post-trillogic theory applies only to established colonies by faithfully referring to the Francophone literature of the colonies. Thus, this first transliterary marker refers to the common Francophone attributes shared by this literature based on an invariant related to language and colonial background. It is important to note that French is used here as a sociolinguistic medium (as an official language). French-language literatures that had not gone through classical colonization (where French is not one of the official languages) are therefore excluded or left out. This is the case for India, China or Japan of the Meiji era, in short, all the sites referred to in this study.

The fundamental element of transnationalism, which refers to the migration of a literature from its culture of origin to one or several other cultures (Espagne; Werner presentation page), has not been elaborated in an overall methodology capable of grasping the heterogeneity of the corpuses that define the plurality of the French-speaking literatures of today.^{xi} The first theoretical model has thus failed, in that researchers have not been interested in pursuing and developing it by applying it to concrete literary situations. Five years later, in 2006, when the trillogic approach stirred again the theoretical vacuum, the transnational concept reappeared. Literary Francophonie is understood in terms of "transborder and transgeneric" (Chikhi, Quaghebeur 11), a direct consequence of the sphere of influence of the Francophone world, which denies endlessly the old colonial divisions as a paradigm in Francophone literature. This renewal of interest could have led to a new understanding of the plurality of French-speaking literatures in the world, and in its progress prepared the ground for a new conception of

oriental Francophonie; but this did not happen. It went unnoticed, generating neither debate nor substantive study within Francophone studies.

These notions stand as precursors to my hypothesis that Francophone phenomena, in the case of the identifying oriental Francophonie, originate in cultural / literary transfer and not in colonization. In other words, transnationalism serves as a vehicle and guarantor for the manifestation of Francophone life in Asia, since the old civilizations, such as China, Japan and India, are each nourished by a singular past with French culture whose Francophone effect demands to be treated with discernment. Already, Indochina does not embody the ultimate goal or the influence of France in Asia, far from it. In other words, this cause-and-effect relationship between upstream colonization and, downstream Francophonie, tends to overshadow Francophone elements in the countries / regions where the vestiges of the French empire come from the former French fief, indeed from an ephemeral form of colonization. The colonial concession in the case of Shanghai, and the leased territory ceded to France in that of Guangzhouwan remain examples of emblematic antithesis.

So far, reflections in the conventional Francophone world have had the advantage of shedding light on the distinct Francophone phenomena in Asia. In the first place, the identified Asian contribution to the fold of Francophonie brings with it unexpected challenges that call for the vitality of a modern idea of Francophonie (Torrel 334).^{xii} It follows that the trilogic postulate that has been used in the identification of classical Francophone areas within traditional notions of Francophonie does not apply to the eastern Francophonie. The latter calls for an unprecedented look, a dynamism hitherto unseen in the French-speaking world, hence the need to reconfigure the notion (of

Francophonie) itself, as well as its new delimitation. In this perspective, the sphere of Francophonie must be expanded, the notion renewed, its method of identification overturned. In French-speaking spheres or zones, whatever the dominant delimitations are, the standardization of a uniform French-speaking world sharing a common colonial linguistic background is definitively surpassed. There is every reason to believe that Indochina is not the only place where Francophonie lives in the East; it lives also in other cultural spheres in a dynamism that has hitherto been unexplored. The distinctive feature of eastern Francophonie is that these are sovereign countries in which France is not the dominant reference point in culture or in local literature; hence, cultural coexistence appears. In short, a form of Francophonie survives in a multilingual context within cultures where French is a language of culture.

Francophone by root vs. Francophone by culture

Just as the signifier "the Orient/East" has undergone transformations, the notion of the "Francophone" has also seen a revolution in the course of its history (Schmitt; Günter 687). The case of Chinese Francophone authors (such as Gao Xingjian, Dai Sijie, Ying Chen) is proof of this. Their works published in France or in Quebec are precedents as to the meaning of the notion of the "Francophone author". Indeed, the integration into Francophone literature of a growing number of works written (in French) by Asian authors outside Indochina is breaking down the classical delimitation of the French-speaking world and within it the designation of a Francophone person.^{xiii} Today French is no longer the prerogative of the French or the "colonized", but the language of the one who wants to use it. Within the Francophone milieu, the individual, personal character of the use of French as a vehicular language and not necessarily as a native or institutional

language is emphasized by several scholars (Torrel; Violette). In the digital era, with communications that nullify geographical distance, it would be conceivable to have impeccable French without having set foot in France or in any French-speaking country. Both the stakes and the premises of being Francophone already reflect the characteristics of the multilingual "citizen of the world", and thus negate the daily (or personal) employment of French as an exclusive marker of a Francophone person by birth.^{xiv}

It follows that French, for a Francophone person today, can be his or her mother tongue or one of their acquired languages. In the second case, the individual is no doubt bicultural, even tricultural, therefore Francophone and another and not exclusively Francophone, defying the old concept that refers only to Francophone by birth to designate a Francophone person.^{xv} From this point of view, it is only a small step to conceive that a Francophone person nowadays can be born and live in an English-speaking country, or be of allophone parents. This explains the distinctive character of French-speaking Asian writers in their a posteriori mastery of French, as well as in their contact with French culture. Born and living in a different cultural area, they are Francophone by choice and not by birth.^{xvi}

Whether it is the mutation of the French-speaking world or the transcultural approach that theorizes it, the evolution of ideas elucidates the problems specific to Asia. From now on, being designated as a "Francophone zone" or as a member of the French-speaking world no longer necessarily refers to a state in which one of the languages is French. The example of Asia will show that Francophonie includes regions / territories steeped in French culture at a specific moment in their history in sovereign non-Francophone countries. This is a Francophonie of different kind and degree, due to a

different form of French presence. What our research requires is not only to take into account the conditions of the Francophone genesis of the spaces in question, but also to discern the different forms of Francophone presences within these officially non-Francophone cultures.

Francophone literature vs. non-Francophone literature

In the wake of the classically conceived ideas, there remain the notions of Francophone literature vs. the so-called non-Francophone. Such cleavages based on colonization are equally fragile under the pressure of transculturalism. Many French fiefdoms are excluded from traditional Francophonie because they are grafted onto spaces that do not belong to the classical colonies. However, the French heritage plays in these cases a preparatory role upstream from the Asian Francophone life, which crystallizes more fully downstream from the Indochinese colony. This highlights several aspects. First, classical colonization, considered as a tangible sign of the French-speaking world, is clearly obsolete and eliminatory. Also, the entry into the corpus of French-language literature of works of French expression coming from literatures not designated as Francophone renders the a priori concepts inapplicable, since these works do not come from the fruits of colonization.

However, their growing presence calls for a reconfiguration of the French-language corpus that could integrate the emerging voices formerly excluded from the French-speaking zone. Who would have suspected, even a few years ago, that the idea of a form of Francophonie in China or in Japan could appear? And yet the recent expression of Chinese Francophonie (Symington, Bonhomme 141) points in full force to the

movement of the Francophone world and consequently the changing nature of its corpus. Already, to designate Francophonie in the East by referring exclusively to Vietnam is a concept that cannot stand, especially since the Francophone realities in other Asian cultural zones are indisputable. This is proven in the Chinese, Japanese and Korean literature written in French, which has never been recognized as an integrated French-speaking phenomenon of the East.^{xvii} Moreover, the movement in kind is reflected by that in form: the result is that French-language works no longer come only from the member countries of Francophonie, but from open and extended horizons. And Francophone literature no longer has its origins only in countries that are former colonies, but also in cultures that have not undergone French domination. The names of Gao Xingjian, Ying Chen and many others mentioned above, the stars of Chinese Francophonie, shatter the initial and conventional conditions designated a priori to be classified as a Francophone author.

Born in China, Gao Xingjian is a naturalized Frenchman who writes in both languages. He was, expectedly, identified as a Chinese writer until the day he obtained the Nobel Prize for Literature in Paris: a downside to this affiliation. Immediately, he became a French writer of Chinese origin and his works became part of the patrimony of French literature. This change of register will establish a precedent for other cases of Asian authors whose works follow a similar cross-cultural path, underscoring the mutation of the French-speaking world. Works whose cultural belonging was previously beyond question, are no longer immune to any ambiguity. Does the novel *Montagne de l'âme* (written by a Chinese citizen) belong to (after Gao's naturalization) French literature or Chinese literature?

As legitimate as it may seem, this question is in fact inoperative so long as the debate is based on faulty foundations. For the borders or cleavages that delimit a national literature entrenched in the territory or the language of a specific country cannot hold today. Such delimitations are absent in the transnational concept on which, I believe, today's French-speaking literature is based, privileging trans-literary relations and not colonial relations. A fortiori, the biographical / cultural journey of the writers mentioned above imperatively calls for a reinterpretation of the field of Francophonie and renders invalid the classic concept according to which the country of a former French colony is point of reference for defining Francophone literary production. The old school that plots the French-speaking world on a "Francophone map" by tracing geo-politico-linguistic delimitations as the only criteria for circumscribing the French-speaking world seems inevitably obsolete. The same applies to other artificial divisions such as socio-historical, identity, institutional (Violette 16-17) - delimitations that were once symbolic of belonging to the French-speaking world.

And there's more. These works of French expression (by authors originating from Asia) coming from the literatures designated non-Francophone must not be considered as marginal. They intersect the works (of traditional Francophone literatures) of the post-colonial generation in their liberation from the colonial yoke, in particular the binary subjugation between France and the Other. Once regarded as the founding theme and driving force of literary Francophonie, this binary relation collapses, bringing in its wake the fall of the understanding of "Francophone literature" based solely on colonization. As a result, French-speaking (classical) literature sees the emergence of previously excluded voices seeking to assert their right to be part of Francophone literature. These voices hope

thus to bring to the Francophone corpus its long duration, its evolution, and more particularly its capacity to traverse new and wider borders. So far obscured, do these voices that aim to establish new landmarks in the French-speaking world call for a shift towards Asia?

The general conclusion sets Francophonie in the East at the crossroads between France and Asia in order to underline the common modes of acquisition of French language and culture in these non-French-speaking countries. This refers to all the cultural spaces that have not been integrated into the classical Francophone sphere despite their sinuous encounters with French civilization. Consideration of Asia in an enlarged idea of Francophonie will signal strongly the need to redefine the French-speaking world today not through traditional colonization but by the transcultural element.

Indeed, since the beginning of the concessions / lease territories through which the French-speaking zones established a foothold in different parts of Asia, Francophonie in the East survived in ways other than by the colonization of the whole country, which raised French as "language of the country". In ways different than in North America or in Africa, the acquisition of French language / culture took place in these Asian sites in the form of cultural crossings. If the French-speaking Asian authors (outside of Indochina) of the first generation were able to pastiche French works, not one was subject to official colonization. They are Francophone by their choice of culture and language. Because of the way French is acquired, the French-speaking community in Asia is not equivalent to the classical Francophone world, and consequently Francophonie in the East differs from

other Francophone areas in its expression, manifestation and character. Finally, without studying all the Asian countries, nor claiming to be the final word on the question, my study hopes to set some preliminary markers on the origins of this form of Francophonie, its existence and its recognition.

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- i In the sense of having been during its history a colony of France.
 - ii Different cases produce different phenomena. If Francophonie in Switzerland or in Belgium has been able to benefit from a geographical proximity to the metropolis allowing them to share in a geocultural osmosis, Quebec is an exception. For it was subject to a classic colonization during the expeditions to America, but with the migration of the French during the construction of French-speaking cities in Canada, since the first Quebecers were French colonists.
 - iii To objectively understand Francophonie is to feel its evolution.
 - iv Since the origin of the word in 1539 by the ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts, the notion of Francophonie has undergone major changes in relation to the practice today of Francophonie in the world. At the time, it stood for the establishment of French as an official language in metropolitan France. For a history of the evolution of this notion and that of the French-speaking world, see also the study by William F. Mackey (107-122).
 - v I refer here to the section "Francophonie in Asia" of my bibliography and more particularly to the studies of William F. Mackey, Michel Beniamino and Isabelle Violette.
 - vi Is the trilogic approach that has been the starting point of Francophone studies still valid in the era of globalization? How can we grasp the heterogeneous and contradictory characteristics of a changing Francophonie? See particularly the study of Isabelle Violette (13-30).
 - vii For the difference between Francophonie and literary Francophonie, see Lise Gauvin et al (2005 Gauvin 82).
 - viii The team of researchers at the University of Liverpool are due the credit for having set the stage for a reflection on the subject, with their work on Francophonie in India. A few sporadic efforts also point to the tentative forays and interests that emerge in the United States, such as the seminar entitled "Francophonie & Orient" at Stony Brook University, and the one offered at Macalester College under the title "From the Far East to Antipodes: Francophone representation of Asia and the Pacific".
 - ix In 1887, with the pacification of Annam and Tonkin, France created the Indochinese Union, composed of Annam, Tonkin, Cochinchina and Cambodia. Six and twelve years later, Laos (1893) and the Chinese estuary, the Kwang-tcheou-wan (1899), were ceded to France for a 99-year lease.
 - x The expression belongs to Danielle Risterucci-Roudnicky, cited by Mathilde Kang (2009).
 - xi French-Canadian literature, such as that from Quebec or Acadia, is not equivalent to French-speaking Chinese literature because of its different Francophone nature. They are nevertheless part of the corpus of French-speaking literature today.

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- xii The expression is borrowed from François Torrel: "Francophonie in its modern peaceful and international version is a primarily African and Quebecois initiative". In the question that interests me, the modernity of today's Francophonie relates to a multi-dimensional form of Francophonie.
- xiii See, for example, François Cheng, *Le dit de Tianyi*, Paris (Albin Michel, 1998); Dai Sijie, *L'acrobatie aérienne de Confucius* (Paris, Flammarion, 2009); Ying Chen, *L'ingratitude* (Montréal, Leméac, 1995).
- xiv Who or what is a Francophone person? In the eyes of the French, it is someone who speaks French without being born in France. This perspective is different from that which exists outside France where the term Francophone refers to those whose mother tongue is French. See on this subject, William F. Mackey (116).
- xv Each person whose native language is French.
- xvi Anyone whose mother tongue is not French but who adopts that language as a language of culture, in other words, an acquired language.

Francophonie en Orient: aux croisements du transculturel

Une idée—apparemment transcendante et indubitable—communément véhiculée au sein des études francophones est l'équivalence entre la francophonie en Orient et l'Indochine française. Ce référent tient exclusivement au passé colonial qu'a subi l'Indochine, entité francophone qui serait unique en Asie. De sorte que plusieurs civilisations se voient exclues du concept de la francophonie orientale. Non pas que ces pays n'aient jamais subi de régime français au cours de l'histoire, mais ils ont échappé à la colonisation classique, considérée comme une finalité pouvant accéder à la francophonie. Bannis de fait du monde francophone, ces pays, en dépit des réalités linguistiques et culturelles attestées sur le plan historique, ne sont généralement pas pris en compte dans le cadre des études francophones. Découlant d'un prisme réducteur et étroit, cette équation implicite entre colonisation et francophonie balaie du revers de la main l'essentiel des faits francophones, au-delà des frontières indochinoises.

Derrière cette idée transcendante qui va de soi se cache l'opiniâtre conviction que la colonisation seule conduit inéluctablement à la francophonie, puisqu'elle garantit l'ascension du français comme une des langues officielles du pays. Ainsi conçue, la colonisation se présenterait alors comme prémisses et unique voie permettant d'accéder au phénomène francophone hors de France. Il en va donc ainsi pour la francophonie orientale où le Viêtnam, le Cambodge et le Laos demeurent les seuls véritables protectorats ou colonies de la France. Dans cette optique, l'Indochine représenterait hors de tout doute la seule aire culturelle francophone avérée en Asie. Appliquée aux études francophones, cette thèse, qui avait fait fortune tout au long du 20^{ème} siècle tient-elle toujours? La question s'impose inéluctablement si l'on mesure le phénomène de mondialisation, amenant en son

sein le transnationalisme qui dégage un horizon insoupçonné sous la poussée du transculturel.

Loin d'être un virage circonstanciel ou aléatoire, l'interrogation sur la pertinence d'une francophonie dans les pays d'Asie est soutenue par la manifestation et la conservation de la langue et de la culture françaises au sein de ces cultures d'accueil. Historiquement occultée, cette partie de manifestation francophone mérite d'être éclairée sous une approche méthodologique susceptible, tout d'abord, de reconnaître son existence.

Comme l'Asie dans son ensemble n'a jamais vraiment été intégrée à part entière dans la sphère francophone, les problèmes ne manquent pas. D'emblée, s'agit-il de la francophonie en Orient ou de la francophonie asiatique (au sens de francophonie africaine, maghrébine, antillaise)? Cette question aux accents logomachiques soulève une incohérence de départ. La francophonie en Orient signifie, dans le cadre de notre étude, le phénomène francophone au sein des civilisations en Extrême-Orient, excluant toutefois l'Indochine dont les effets francophones sont largement avérés et traités. Elle a pour synonyme la francophonie en Asie qui met en avant l'espace géographique dans lequel se situent ces civilisations. Ainsi le terme d'Asie renvoie à un continent géographique avec son référent géo-politico-historique comme arrière-fond, alors que celui de l'Orient ou de l'Extrême-Orient connote des entités civilisatrices et culturelles qui, dans leurs ramifications, renvoient au rituel, aux mœurs, au mythe et à l'imaginaire des pays peuplant l'Asie. Et dans l'optique de notre étude sur la culture francophone des pays d'Asie, l'expression de la francophonie en Orient doit l'emporter.

L'éclaircissement de ces notions de départ s'enchaîne avec la reconnaissance de leur évolution au cours de l'histoire. À preuve, le français n'est plus l'apanage des Français

ou des “colonisés”, mais la langue de celui qui veut bien la pratiquer. Le caractère individuel de son emploi au sein même du milieu francophone comme langue de véhicule et non exclusivement comme langue natale ou institutionnelle est souligné par plusieurs chercheurs. À l’ère numérique qui réduit à néant la distance géographique en se dotant des moyens de communication transcontinentale, disposer d’un français impeccable sans avoir vécu en France ou dans d’autres pays francophones devient chose concevable.

Ce qui ressort ici, c’est qu’être francophone aujourd’hui relève des attributs d’un ‘citoyen du monde’ et non exclusivement d’un francophone natal, défiant l’ancien concept qui ne renvoie qu’au francophone natif pour désigner un francophone. D’où les caractéristiques distinctes des auteurs francophones d’origine asiatique.

Rappels historiques

La conviction d’une francophonie propre en Asie, au-delà de l’Indochine, est réconfortée par des faits incontestables ancrés dans l’histoire du continent. Avant l’Union indochinoise, de nombreuses expéditions en Asie avaient noué des ancrages et des fiefs français indéniables avec plusieurs aires culturelles dispersées à travers le continent. Et l’itinéraire de Macao-Pondichéry-Canton-Shanghai-Guangzhouwan indique les jalons chronologiques établis par les premiers acteurs de l’Empire oriental français, sans oublier la présence française au Japon et en Corée.

Motivées à la fois par le prosélytisme chrétien et les visées commerciales, les expéditions françaises à travers l’Asie atteignent leur point culminant au cours des 16, 17 et 18 siècles, et par conséquent, les Indes et l’Empire de Cathay sont indubitablement dans la mire. De sorte que si certains pays en Asie jouissent d’une littérature d’expression

française, sans avoir subi le joug de la colonisation, c'est qu'historiquement la présence française et le contact avec la langue française, qui ont été occultés, y survivent autrement.

S'il est indéniable que les expéditions en Asie ne sont pas moindres par rapport à celles en Afrique ou en Amérique du Nord, la francophonie dans les pays d'Asie doit alors refléter la présence historique de la France dans toutes ces civilisations qui, au cours de l'histoire, sont entrées en contact avec la langue et la culture françaises. D'ores et déjà, renvoyer la problématique de la francophonie, dans le cas de l'Asie, à la seule entité indochinoise, c'est la tronquer.

Tant que cette francophonie se cantonne en Indochine, plusieurs faits francophones s'avèrent irrésolubles. Ainsi comment expliquer que l'*Anthologie mensuelle de l'Occident* un des plus anciens journaux français en Asie, ait été fondé et distribué à la ville de Guangzhou, s'il n'y avait pas eu une présence française qui sous-tendait un lectorat français/francophone potentiel? Comment mesurer les assertions des chercheurs qui affirment que l'Arsenal de Fuzhou, avec ses sous-traitants qui en découlent, fait cette ville "l'une des plus importantes colonies françaises à l'étranger"? Comment encore interpréter l'implantation et le succès soutenu un demi-siècle durant de la seule université française en Asie Aurore? Enfin, comment classer tout un corpus d'œuvres d'expression française provenant des littératures dites non francophones? Ces quelques faits à peine soulignés accusent un besoin évident d'une réévaluation de la notion de francophonie orientale, telle qu'elle fut classiquement conçue. Nous sommes au seuil d'un horizon qui débouche vers l'idée que l'Indochine n'est pas le seul lieu où vit une francophonie en Orient; elle vit également au sein d'autres sphères culturelles sous un dynamisme insoupçonné.

Avant de poursuivre le débat, il serait opportun de tâter le pouls des recherches récentes de la discipline.

Disposition des études francophones

Réparties en aires géographiques, les études francophones font florès un demi-siècle durant. Cependant, l'avènement du 21 siècle bouleversera les anciennes répartitions coloniales pour souligner que la francophonie n'est plus un monde à huis clos, assemblé autour d'un historique colonial avec la France, mais une mouvance qui reflète les préoccupations reliées aux phénomènes transnationaux des cultures au seuil de la mondialisation. Ainsi la colonisation comme seule voie d'acquisition du phénomène francophone est inéluctablement mise en cause dans l'ère de la transculture.

Cette disposition récente qu'adoptent les études francophones traduit l'état d'après: le postcolonial dans lequel aboutissent les recherches sur le monde francophone. De fait, certains chercheurs sont d'avis que le champ de la francophonie renvoie aux faits et réalités francophones en constant mouvement et non aux critères d'artifice circonscrits *a priori*, tels l'ancienne colonie française ou encore le français comme une des langues du pays... Et l'insaisissable de ce champ qui se reconstruit et se renouvelle par soi-même rend caduc le concept-souche de colonisation comme seul moyen de rayonnement français dans le monde. Ce qui ressort ici, c'est le besoin d'une reconfiguration du champ de la francophonie, incluant dans la foulée son mouvement dans les aires culturelles jadis exclues des zones francophones classiques.

Toujours est-il que dans l'état actuel des réflexions relatives à l'Asie, l'idée d'intégrer la Chine, l'Inde, le Japon, la Corée et d'autres civilisations dans la francophonie orientale soulève plus de questions que de réponses. Si la colonisation ne représente plus

l'unique étape pour une présence francophone, quelle serait une autre méthodologie d'approche dans l'identification d'une francophonie hors d'Indochine? À cette question-vecteur s'en ajoutent d'autres. Par exemple, comment concevoir les variantes de la colonisation? Les autres formes d'implantation et de domination—"concession", "comptoir", "territoire à bail"—concourent-elles à la francisation culturelle d'une région? Certes, l'examen du phénomène francophone en Asie dépendrait des études de fond sur chacun de ces pays. À ce stade de notre discussion, soulignons que les éléments de réponse susceptibles d'éclaircir ces questions sont d'ordres multiples.

D'emblée, circonscrire le monde francophone dans le giron colonial risque de gommer la vie francophone des cultures jadis officiellement ou partiellement au contact de la présence française. Les exemples ne manquent pas. Pensons aux mésaventures françaises en Inde, à l'ouverture de l'ère Meiji, au régime français dans la concession coloniale à Shanghai ou encore à la colonisation pendant 43 ans de l'estuaire Guangzhouwan. En d'autres termes, un tel rapport de cause à effet—en amont la colonisation et en aval la francophonie—tend à occulter les faits francophones en Asie dans les pays/régions où le vestige français provient de l'ancien fief français, voire de la colonisation éphémère.

À côté des réflexions découlant de l'histoire de la présence française en Asie, il y a les attributs relevant du monde actuel dont il faut aussi tenir compte. Et le postulat "colonisation fait francophonie" se bute contre une difficulté majeure dans le contexte du 21^e siècle où l'ère du numérique et de la mondialisation fait tomber les frontières géographiques et linguistiques. Ainsi, attribuer l'acquisition du français, ou son utilisation courante, à la seule voie de la colonisation ne saurait tenir. De là, les questions qui en

découlent ne manquent pas. Si la colonisation dans son sens classique ne représente plus la seule voie pour accéder à la francophonie, ses variantes, et d'autres formes de présence française, participent-elles à la francophonie orientale au même titre que l'ancienne colonie indochinoise?

Le transculturel comme méthodologie

Le bouleversement ou la mise en relief de ces principes jadis considérés comme fondateurs du monde francophone conduit à un questionnement fondamental: quelle serait la méthodologie d'approche à cette francophonie orientale hétérogène et de multi-genèse? Qui plus est, plusieurs anciennes civilisations, ayant chacune son contact propre avec la civilisation française, croisent la genèse du monde oriental, et ne sauraient être amalgamées de façon homogène. C'est dire que la Chine, le Japon ou l'Inde est chacun nourri d'un propre passé qui inclut des liens avec la présence française et dont l'effet francophone demande d'être traité de façon distincte. Cela sous-entend encore que ce phénomène de francophonie qui nous intéresse vit d'une vitalité autre, non conventionnelle par rapport aux colonies avérées, requérant une méthodologie d'identification affranchie des *a priori*.

Dans cette perspective, notre hypothèse est que la zone de la francophonie orientale se doit d'être élargie, entre autres, à l'espace colonial en Chine, aux comptoirs et traités de commerce aux Indes, aux échanges et pénétrations au Japon et en Corée. Manifestement, ces territoires ou pays qui n'ont pas subi de colonisation classique acquièrent une nature francophone distincte qui rend inapplicable la théorie trilogique coloniale/anticoloniale/postcoloniale exploitée dans d'autres aires francophones. Car il ne s'agit plus d'un simple rayonnement à saveur coloniale entre une civilisation dominante et l'autre dominée, mais une rencontre de diverses aires culturelles dans un élan transculturel.

La trilogie à laquelle on a eu recours dans l'identification des aires francophones conventionnelles au sein de la francophonie traditionnelle n'explique pas la nature de la francophonie orientale.

Parlons maintenant du transculturel. Comme clé méthodologique, ce n'est pas nouveau. Il a été mis à contribution dès 2001 devant l'impasse dans laquelle aboutit l'approche trilogique, créant un vide théorique au tournant du siècle. Le concept refait surface en 2006 pour appréhender l'émergence des francophonies en termes de "transfrontalière et transgénérique" conséquence directe de la mouvance du monde francophone qui dément sans détour les anciens découpages coloniaux comme paradigme au sein des littératures francophones.

Le bémol de ces premiers tâtonnements théoriques post-trilogiques est qu'ils ne s'appliquent qu'aux colonies avérées en se référant fidèlement à la littérature d'expression francophone des colonies. Autrement dit, cette tentative vers une explication à caractère translittéraire des faits francophones récents a comme prémisse la colonisation servant de médium sociolinguistique. Est donc exclu ou laissé de côté le phénomène de littérature d'expression française qui n'a pas pour antécédent le processus de conquête et de colonisation. C'est pourtant tout l'enjeu de la francophonie en Orient.

L'élément fondamental du transnational, qui désigne la migration d'une littérature de sa culture d'origine à une ou plusieurs cultures autres, n'a pas été élaboré en une méthodologie d'ensemble susceptible de saisir l'hétérogénéité des corpus marquant la pluralité de la littérature d'expression française d'aujourd'hui. Malgré le cadre colonial et le médium linguistique (le français comme une des langues du pays) dans lesquels sont conçues ces approches post-trilogiques, ces tâtonnements restent des éléments précurseurs

à notre hypothèse. Les phénomènes francophones, dans le cas de l'identification de la francophonie orientale, relèvent originellement du transfert culturel et littéraire et non nécessairement de la colonisation. Autrement dit, le transnational tient un rôle de véhicule et de garant dans la manifestation de la vie francophone en Asie.

Difficulté d'une définition standard

Rendu à cette étape-ci de notre réflexion et compte tenu des éléments examinés, coiffer les francophonie(s) en mouvance d'une définition standard serait inconcevable. L'apport asiatique envisagé dans le giron de la francophonie entraînera des enjeux imprévus qui feront appel à la vitalité d'une francophonie moderne. Ainsi, la francophonie se verra adaptée aux réalités francophones renouvelées des cultures, et ce, aux croisements du transculturel, ce qui va à l'encontre d'une définition standard et fermée.

De fait, avant même que ne se pose la question de l'intégration de l'Asie dans le giron de la francophonie, les tentatives de la redéfinir auront été une entreprise constante des chercheurs. Et les multiples tentatives d'une "définition globalisatrice" de la francophonie ne font qu'accuser la complexité que recèlent en soi ses composants hétérogènes, lesquels ne sauraient être réduits à des dimensions enracinées dans le passé. Finalement, devant les méandres de divisions et de définitions successives, et après d'inlassables élaborations sur ce qui compose la francophonie, l'inconcevabilité d'une définition standard de la francophonie, englobant des aires culturelles d'origine et de nature francophones hétérogènes, est confirmée par François Torrel.

Dans tous les cas, la redéfinition de la francophonie, si l'on y parvient, doit tenir compte de l'intégration de l'Asie—nouvel acteur potentiel—à une francophonie élargie,

engageant par ce fait un dynamisme autre au sein d'une francophonie classique. Ce qui requiert que le champ de la francophonie soit élargi, la notion renouvelée, sa méthode d'identification bouleversée.

La singularité de la francophonie orientale est qu'il s'agit de pays souverains où la langue française ne fait canon ni dans la culture ni dans les littératures locales. Autrement dit, la francophonie en Asie est une francophonie qui survit dans un contexte plurilinguistique au sein des cultures où le français n'est qu'une langue de culture parmi d'autres.

Littérature francophone vs. littérature non-francophone

Dans la foulée des idées classiquement conçues, il y a la littérature francophone par rapport à celle appelée non-francophone. De tels clivages reposant sur la colonisation se voient néanmoins fragilisés sous la poussée du transculturel. Plusieurs fiefs français du fait qu'ils sont greffés aux espaces qui n'appartiennent pas aux colonies classiques, sont exclus de la francophonie traditionnelle. Cependant, l'héritage français dans ces régions joue un rôle préparatif en amont de la vie francophone orientale qui connaît sa cristallisation en aval de la colonie indochinoise. Dès lors, plusieurs aspects sont mis en lumière. D'abord, la colonisation classique considérée comme signe exclusif du monde francophone s'avère manifestement désuète et éliminatoire. Puis, l'apparition des œuvres d'expression française provenant des littératures (de ces régions) dites non francophones rend inopérants les *a priori*, tels la trilogie, puisque ces œuvres ne relèvent pas d'un produit direct de la colonisation. Or, leur apparition croissante sollicite une reconfiguration du champ de francophonie capable d'intégrer les voix jadis exclues de la zone francophone.

À preuve, des œuvres dont l'appartenance d'hier était au-dessus de toute polémique ne l'est plus aujourd'hui. Le roman *La montagne de l'âme* (écrit par un citoyen chinois) relève-t-il (après la naturalisation de Gao Xingjian) de la littérature française ou chinoise?

Cette question, aussi légitime qu'elle soit, s'avère inopérante tant que le débat s'annonce fautif. Car les frontières ou clivages qui délimitent une littérature nationale retranchée dans le territoire ou la langue d'un pays spécifique ne sauraient tenir aujourd'hui. De telles délimitations font défaut devant le concept transnational sur lequel reposerait, croyons-nous, la littérature francophone d'aujourd'hui, privilégiant les relations translittéraires et non les relations coloniales. *A fortiori*, le parcours biographique de nombreux auteurs francophones d'origine asiatique appelle impérativement une réinterprétation du champ de la francophonie et envoie du même souffle dans l'impasse le concept classique de pays anciennement colonisés par la France comme cadre référent pour définir la production littéraire francophone.

Et il y a plus. Ces œuvres d'expression française des littératures dites non francophones ne doivent plus se voir reléguées à la marge. Elles recourent les œuvres de la génération postcoloniale dans leur affranchissement du joug colonial et leur rupture de rapport de subjugation binaire entre la France et l'Autre.

Ce qui est réaffirmé ici, c'est que jadis thématique fondatrice et moteur de la francophonie littéraire, cette relation binaire s'écroule, entraînant dans sa chute la désignation de la littérature francophone basée sur la colonisation. Par conséquent, appréhender la littérature d'expression francophone en Asie en renvoyant exclusivement aux œuvres d'auteurs d'origine indochinoise est un concept qui devrait être considéré

comme inapplicable et dépassé, d'autant plus que les faits littéraires francophones dans d'autres zones culturelles asiatiques sont incontestables.

Au terme de notre analyse succincte, nous avançons que le phénomène francophone n'a pas à passer exclusivement par le processus de colonisation, considéré jusqu'ici comme seule voie d'acquisition de langue et de culture françaises. D'autres formes de contact concourent aussi aux faits francophones, notamment des lieux-hôtes de la culture française avant et en dehors de l'Indochine. Il s'ensuit que la francophonie en Orient a ses ramifications en Chine, en Inde, au Japon et en tout territoire en Asie qui était entré en contact, de gré ou de force, avec la langue et la culture françaises au cours de l'histoire.

De telles assertions sous-entendent dans leur foulée une problématique inédite, notamment la nature protéiforme de la francophonie orientale. En clair, être désigné "zone francophone" ou membre de la francophonie ne renvoie plus forcément à un État dont une des langues est le français.

Ce qu'exigent nos recherches, c'est non seulement de tenir compte des conditions de genèse francophone des espaces examinés, mais aussi de discerner les différentes formes que revêtent les manifestations francophones au sein de ces cultures officiellement non francophones. Certes, la reconnaissance d'une francophonie orientale au-delà de l'Indochine française dépendra d'immenses recherches à venir qui recourent au transfert littéraire comme mode de transmission ou d'acquisition francophones sur l'ensemble des espaces culturels qui ont été imprégnés de présence française et qui n'ont pas été intégrés dans la sphère de la francophonie classique.

La prise en considération de l'Asie dans son ensemble, dans le cadre d'une francophonie élargie et surtout définie de façon moins restreinte, donne un signal fort à la

nécessité de reconfigurer le monde francophone d'aujourd'hui, non pas en prenant comme préalable la colonisation traditionnelle, mais en se fondant sur une approche transnationale.

Si les premières générations d'auteurs asiatiques (hors d'Indochine) ont su pasticher ou traduire les auteurs français, nul n'a subi de colonisation officielle. Ils sont francophones par choix de culture tout comme de langue. De par la nature de l'acquisition du français, le milieu francophone en Asie n'est pas équivalent au monde francophone classique d'ailleurs, et par conséquent, la francophonie en Orient se distingue d'autres aires francophones dans son expression, sa manifestation et son identification.