

Arcade Huang and French Sinology: From Missionary to the Formation of Anti-Confucian Thought

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Abstract:

As a Chinese Christian who settled in France, Arcade Huang brought his reflections and observations from the East to Europe, engaging in deep intellectual exchanges with Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu. During his time in France, he criticized the formalization of traditional Chinese rituals and the deification of Confucius, believing that these customs were marked by superstition and stood in opposition to Christian spiritual values. Huang's views offered early French Sinology a critical perspective that differed from the Sinophilic school, influencing French Enlightenment thinkers' perceptions of China, particularly reinforcing Montesquieu's critiques of China's autocratic state and ritual culture. Through his interactions with French scholars, Huang became a key figure in Sino-French cultural exchanges, leaving a lasting impact on the development of French Sinology.

Keywords:

Arcade Huang, anti-traditionalism, early French Sinology, perceptions of China, Montesquieu

I. Life and Thought Formation of Arcade Huang

French Sinologist Étienne Fourmont once remarked, “A Chinese man in Europe is something that everyone takes note of.”¹ This man was Arcade Huang, the first Chinese person to settle in France, a missionary, translator for King Louis XIV, and compiler of France’s first Chinese grammar and dictionary. By historical coincidence, Huang’s presence laid the foundation for early French Sinology and significantly influenced Montesquieu’s perception of China.

Arcade Huang (Arcadio) was born in 1679 into a Catholic family in Xinghua, Fujian (now Putian). His father, Paul Huang, was a devout Catholic, which deeply influenced Huang’s early religious upbringing. Although his father initially wished for him to take over the family’s business, this hope was not fulfilled due to his father’s early death. Under the guidance of French missionaries, Huang studied Christian doctrine and Latin, providing him with an important intellectual foundation for his later thought. During his teenage years, Huang’s rigorous religious education led him to question certain Confucian customs. At the age of 16, Huang briefly returned to his hometown to assist with family affairs but soon embarked on a years-long journey throughout China. These travels exposed him to the hardships of China’s lower classes and deepened his critical reflections on Confucianism, particularly the worship of Confucius and ancestral rites, which he viewed as excessively elaborate and superstitious.

With the eruption of the “Chinese Rites Controversy,” Huang decided to accompany French missionary Artus de Lionne to Rome. During his time in Rome, he was deeply impressed by Western religious ceremonies, describing them as “very beautiful” and contrasting them with what he perceived as the superstitious and cumbersome rituals of Chinese tradition. His exposure to Western religious practices further solidified his rejection of Confucianism and its associated rituals.

Upon settling in France, Huang took up residence in Paris and became a Chinese translator for Louis XIV, working on the compilation of Chinese grammar and dictionaries. He also married and started a family, thus distancing himself from his former role as a cleric and embracing the life of a layman. His exchanges with French scholars and thinkers, particularly Montesquieu, further shaped his critical view of Confucianism. Though Huang’s “anti-Confucian” thought stemmed from his religious beliefs and personal experiences in China, his critique significantly influenced the way French intellectuals perceived China, playing a pivotal role in the development of early French Sinology.

2. Arcade Huang’s Anti-Confucian Thought and Criticism of Confucius

Arcade Huang’s “anti-Confucian” thought is not explicitly articulated in a systematic work but is scattered across his various writings, such as the second part of *Essay de la*

1. FOURMONT M. (1731). Catalogue des ouvrages de Monsieur Fourmont l’Ainé[J]. Amsterdam, p. 47.

grammaire chinoise, titled “A Brief Description of the Chinese Empire,” the outline of *Relation universelle de l’Empire de la Chine*, his Roman diary, and the records of his dialogues with the French. His views, shaped by personal experience and his religious background, raised doubts about Confucian rituals and their role in society. In his assessments, Huang focused on the deification of Confucius and the formalization of traditional Chinese rituals. “During the height of the ‘China fever’ in the early 18th century, the French enthusiasm for understanding China is something that we can scarcely imagine today.”² Throughout his short life, Arcade Huang engaged in deep exchanges with several famous French scholars and thinkers. His ideas and attitudes toward Chinese culture, set against the backdrop of the “China fever,” influenced France’s perception of China to a certain extent at the time.

2.1 The deification of Confucius and the formalization of rituals

In his conversations with Montesquieu, Huang remarked, “China has three major sects, and the most widespread is Confucianism.” He believed that Chinese Confucian culture had gradually evolved into a religious form, with Confucius regarded as a figure similar to Jesus, universally worshipped and revered. He observed that in China, grand ceremonies honoring Confucius were held annually, Confucian temples were widespread, and the populace regularly worshipped. Confucius’s image permeated all levels of Chinese society: from state governance to scholars studying the classics to ordinary people’s daily veneration, Confucius had become the central symbol of the entire cultural system.

Here, we can draw on the insights of anthropologist Clifford Geertz to explain this phenomenon: “In religion, myth and philosophy complement each other, and religious belief represents the worship of a shared consensus.” This helps us better understand Confucius’s position in China: he is not merely a thinker but also a symbol of social order, reflecting the sanctification of collective consensus and state authority. Although Huang did not conduct an in-depth study of Confucian classics, his criticism did not target Confucius’s thought directly but questioned the deification of Confucius in Chinese society. He caustically remarked, “Confucius is nothing more than a hypocrite who plays with words,” reflecting his dissatisfaction with the idolization of Confucius. He pointed out that although Confucius clearly stated in his writings that he was not a saint, Chinese society still revered him as an infallible “sage,” which was, in fact, a means for Chinese literati to maintain power through the civil service examination system.

Huang further criticized China’s method of reinforcing Confucius’s image through the civil service examination system. He believed that the examination system made Confucian classics the only path to success, restricting intellectual diversity and confining thought to the memorization and veneration of these texts. Although Chinese society during the Kangxi Emperor’s reign appeared prosperous on the surface, Huang saw the formalization of Confucian rituals as a tool of political control. Due to the limitations of his time, Huang could not directly point out that the root of these problems lay with the feudal rulers, but he

2. XU M L. (2014). *Arcade Huang and Early French Sinology*[M]. Revised ed., Commercial Press, p. 204.

aimed his criticisms at the deification of Confucius and the idolization of Confucian thought.

The deification of Confucius began to develop during the Han dynasty and reached new heights during the Qing dynasty. In China, Confucius was not only revered as the “Supreme Sage and Teacher” but also became an important symbol of national ideology. The veneration of Confucius by successive emperors was reinforced through a series of rituals and institutions. Especially during the Qing dynasty, Confucian temples were spread throughout the country, and the rituals honoring Confucius became highly elaborate and sacralized. During the reigns of Emperor Kangxi and Emperor Qianlong, Confucius was revered as a symbol of the state, and the worship of Confucius became a significant national ceremony. Confucian teachings dominated the civil service examination, and scholars sought official positions by studying *The Four Books and Five Classics*. Therefore, Confucius’s image was no longer that of a mere thinker but that of a “Confucian sage,” and he became sanctified to the point that, on the annual Confucius worship days, grand ceremonies were held in major cities, attended not only by scholars but also by the emperor and officials.

The early Western missionaries who came to China, such as Matteo Ricci and Robert Morrison, offered different perspectives on the veneration of Confucius. Ricci pointed out in his writings that the worship of Confucius in China had surpassed mere respect for a thinker and had transformed into a religious ritual. To the missionaries, the deification of Confucius was seen as a form of idolatry incompatible with Christian doctrine. For instance, Morrison expressed doubts about the veneration of Confucius in Confucianism, arguing that this form of worship lacked a direct connection between the individual and God.³ They compared the status of Confucius in China to that of saints in Christianity, noting that both were supported by social and political systems. However, unlike Christian saints, the veneration of Confucius lacked a supernatural dimension and was more focused on secular moral reverence.

Huang’s dissatisfaction was not only due to his questioning of Confucius’s personal image but also closely related to his Christian faith. As a Christian intellectual, Huang believed strongly in the necessity of a direct spiritual connection between humans and God, rather than expressing faith through idol worship or complex ritual ceremonies. He criticized Confucian rites, especially the idolization of Confucius, arguing that these rituals represented not only excessive veneration of Confucius but also contradicted the core Christian doctrine that opposes idolatry. He believed that this form of worship was more about maintaining social order in the present world than seeking the elevation of the soul and spiritual liberation.

2.2 Confucianism and christianity: differences in ritual formalism and spiritual pursuits

In Arcade Huang's view, there are significant differences between Confucianism and Christianity in their approaches to rituals and the pursuit of the spiritual world. First, Confucian rituals, especially those related to the worship of Confucius and the veneration

3. MORRISON R. (1817). *A View of China for Philological Purposes*[M]. East India Company, p. 25.

of ancestors, are overly formalized, emphasizing external ceremonies without inner spiritual pursuit. These complex rituals not only express the veneration of Confucius but also serve as tools to consolidate the social hierarchy and the authority of rulers. Huang criticized this ritual formalism, believing that it weakened people's intellectual vitality. In contrast, Christian rituals are much simpler and emphasize direct communication between humans and God. Christianity's core is the sanctity of faith, focusing on the salvation of the soul and the transcendence of the spiritual world. Huang believed that this characteristic made Christianity spiritually deeper than Confucianism, which focused more on the ethics and social order of the present world, neglecting concerns about the afterlife and the soul.

In addition, Huang also criticized the phenomenon of idol worship within Confucianism. Although Confucianism does not have clear religious deities, the worship of Confucius and ancestors has effectively transformed into a form of idol worship. This form of worship is widely accepted in Chinese society, becoming a part of maintaining social order. However, Huang pointed out that Christianity emphasizes faith in one God and opposes all forms of idol worship, making Christianity more pure and reasonable from a religious perspective.

Through such comparisons, Huang found the fundamental difference between Confucianism and Christianity in East-West cultures: one focuses on worldly order, and the other on the salvation of the soul. This comparison not only reflected his recognition of Christian faith but also revealed his critique of the ritual and worship forms in Confucian culture.

Huang particularly pointed out the different understandings of “saints” between the East and the West in his comparison:

“Generally, those who are good, virtuous, and wise are set to become saints, declared so by the Pope in St. Peter’s Basilica; and before being officially recognized as saints, they are called ‘Blessed’ and, once canonized, they are called ‘Saint So-and-So.’ For instance, the fifth Pope Bia was dedicated to serving God during his lifetime, practicing virtue, and performing great deeds. After his death, many miracles appeared, demonstrating his sanctity. Because of his virtuous life, he was canonized as a saint, and more than a hundred years have passed since. Oh! The saints of the Holy Catholic Church were so virtuous, humble, and loving toward others in their lifetimes, recognizing the Lord of Heaven and Earth and guiding people toward the Kingdom of Heaven. They were wise about the eternal reward and punishment after death, urging people to lightly regard worldly affairs and to trample underfoot all worldly honor and pleasure, focusing instead on the eternal rewards and endeavors of the Kingdom of Heaven. How could they be compared to the so-called saints of China? These saints neither know the true origin of all things in Heaven and Earth, nor do they recognize the eternal retribution after death. They do not understand the source of goodness or the true power that enables one to do good. They only pursue worldly vanity and temporary pleasures, worshipping parents and ancestors as if they were the great lords of Heaven and Earth. How could they possibly understand the proper Christian order, which first calls for the veneration of God, then the filial love for parents?”⁴

Huang pointed out that saints in Western Christianity, such as those canonized by the

4. XU M L. (2014). *Arcade Huang and Early French Sinology*[M]. Revised ed., Commercial Press, p. 327.

Pope, were recognized for their personal devotion, virtuous deeds, and the miraculous signs revealed after their deaths. These saints not only exhibited high levels of virtue and humility during their lives, but their sanctity was further proven by the miracles that occurred after their deaths. Their pursuit was a transcendental spiritual quest and the eternal bliss of the afterlife. This emphasis on the salvation of the soul and the eternity of the spirit reflects the importance of transcendence and the afterlife in Western religious thought. In contrast, Huang criticized the so-called “saints” in China—particularly Confucius—arguing that they lacked an understanding of the true nature of Heaven and Earth, nor did they recognize eternal retribution in the afterlife. He believed that Chinese saints were more focused on worldly vanity and temporary pleasures, expressed especially through the veneration of parents and ancestors. This focus on the present world stood in stark contrast to Christianity’s focus on the eternal rewards of the Kingdom of Heaven.

While analyzing the differences between Eastern and Western saints, he pointed out the realistic characteristics of saint worship in China. He compared Chinese saints with Western Christian saints, believing that Western saints (such as those canonized by the Pope) were recognized through a life of virtue and great deeds, and the miracles that followed their deaths. These saints not only demonstrated personal piety but also validated their sanctity through posthumous miracles. In contrast, Chinese saints, especially Confucius, emphasized worldly achievements and ethical teachings, rather than the pursuit of transcendence and the afterlife.

Huang further pointed out that the differences between Eastern and Western thought stem from their respective understandings of the world. Chinese Confucianism is a philosophy of realism, valuing the ethical order and social stability of the present world, whereas Christianity focuses on metaphysical spiritual pursuits. Huang cited Plato’s allegory of the cave to explain that Western philosophy considers the physical world as merely a shadow of the ideal world, and that the real world of truth transcends sensory experience, contrasting this with Confucianism’s realist philosophy. This difference is not only reflected in religious beliefs but also in philosophical thinking. Huang tended to believe that Christian thought was deeper, as it focused on the eternity of the soul and the rewards of the Kingdom of Heaven, while Confucian thought was more concerned with ethics and order in the present world.

Through his comparison of Eastern and Western saints, Huang demonstrated his defense of Christianity and critique of Confucian culture. He believed that Chinese culture’s focus on the “this-worldly” perspective lacked exploration of transcendence and the world of truth, focusing more on worldly vanity and temporary pleasures. Although he admitted that there was no absolute superiority or inferiority between Eastern and Western thought, his subjective description clearly carried a critical tone toward Confucian culture. Huang’s critical description not only reflected his personal views but also influenced how Western Enlightenment thinkers viewed Chinese culture. In Paris at the time, such critiques and comparative descriptions of Chinese thought to some extent contributed to his standing in the European academic world.

2.3 Idol worship and superstition

In his works, notes, and dialogues, Arcade Huang frequently criticized the superstitions prevalent in Chinese society. As previously mentioned, grand ceremonies were held across China on Confucius worship days, with various temples and Daoist temples conducting significant rituals. Huang pointed out that, in essence, these were all forms of “idol worship.” He noted, “There are fewer than 100,000 Christians in China, and most of them are idol worshippers. They’ve simply replaced the idols of Buddha and Laozi with those of St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis, and the Virgin Mary.” Huang saw through the core of religious beliefs, which at the time was quite an advanced perspective: “In their eyes, Jesus is no different from Guanyin, the Supreme Lord Lao, or any other object of worship—they are merely idols upon whom they pin their hopes for curing diseases, avoiding disasters, seeking blessings, or even gaining promotion and wealth.” He believed that widely practiced superstitions such as Feng Shui, fortune-telling, and reliance on the lunar calendar reflected the Chinese society’s fear of the unknown and fate. He pointed out that this superstitious behavior was essentially a coping strategy for the uncertainties of reality; it was less about religious belief and more about seeking protection and blessings in everyday life. For example, Huang noted the superstitious belief in Feng Shui in Fujian, where people thought that the alignment of a house’s main door must comply with Feng Shui principles, or else it would “drain the fortune of the entire street.” Huang argued that such beliefs in Feng Shui and reliance on auspicious days in the lunar calendar revealed the underlying spiritual insecurity of the Chinese people. To Huang, this was not just a sign of ignorance but also demonstrated the spiritual poverty in Chinese society. These practices were primarily aimed at warding off illness, avoiding bad luck, and seeking good fortune, lacking the spiritual depth and sanctity found in genuine religious faith. Huang believed that this superstition not only restricted the development of individual thought but also provided fertile ground for idol worship.

Huang's critical thoughts were inseparable from his background and the context of his time. Born into a Catholic family in Fujian, he was educated by French missionaries in his early years. This Christian teaching, with its emphasis on opposing idol worship, profoundly shaped his religious views. He lived during the Kangxi and Qianlong reigns of the Qing dynasty, a period when Confucian thought was elevated by the government to the level of a state religion, and the worship of Confucius and the associated ceremonies became part of the official ritual system. This phenomenon led Huang to critically reflect on Chinese ritual culture.

Idol worship typically refers to the veneration of specific individuals, statues, objects, or concepts, where the reverence surpasses their symbolic meaning and develops into formal worship and pursuit. In religious contexts, idol worship is often seen as a misunderstanding of sacred objects and a materialization of transcendent spiritual power. Christian faith clearly opposes idol worship, emphasizing a direct connection with the one true God (the Lord), and regards idol worship as a deviation from genuine faith.

In Huang’s criticism, “idols” referred not only to physical objects such as statues, ancestral tablets, or Confucius statues, but also to the excessive worship of Confucius,

ancestors, and various deities. He argued that Chinese ritual culture, through a series of ceremonies and rites, had deified these figures and objects, turning them into objects of worship. This included the worship of Confucius, ancestral worship, and practices such as Feng Shui and fortune-telling. Huang pointed out that such worship practices were overly formalized, driven by fear of the unknown and uncertainty, and lacked a deep understanding of the spiritual world and the essence of faith. He criticized that even among Chinese Christians, this phenomenon of idol worship persisted. Many Chinese Christians had merely replaced Buddhist and Daoist deities with the Virgin Mary or Christian saints, without truly breaking free from the essence of idol worship. Huang noted that Christianity emphasizes a direct relationship between humans and God, rather than seeking blessings through the worship of idols.

Christian faith opposes idol worship, emphasizing a direct relationship with the one true God. Christianity holds that any form of idol worship is a desecration of the sacred because it diverts human attention from God to worldly objects. Christianity emphasizes the spiritual nature of faith, where believers should establish a direct connection with God through prayer, worship, and inner piety, rather than expressing faith through rituals or idol worship.

Huang's criticism of idol worship in Chinese rituals stemmed from his Christian beliefs. He believed that the rituals and worship practices in Chinese society were material manifestations of Confucius, ancestors, and deities, lacking recognition of the sacred and transcendent. Whether it was the worship of Confucius, ancestral rites, or practices like Feng Shui and fortune-telling, Huang viewed these behaviors as rooted in fear of the unknown, rather than a deeper spiritual pursuit of faith.

Through these critiques, Huang argued that the phenomena of idol worship and superstition in Chinese society reflected a spiritual predicament. He believed that this worship of idols prevented Chinese society from breaking free from the constraints of ritualistic customs, repressing individual spiritual freedom and independent thought. In contrast, Christianity provided a purer spiritual pursuit, emphasizing a direct and unadulterated connection between humans and God, transcending formalized rituals and idol worship.

3. The Relationship Between Arcade Huang's Anti-Confucian Thought and French Enlightenment Thought

3.1 Views of China by 18th-century French enlightenment thinkers: voltaire, Montesquieu, and diderot

During the 18th-century Enlightenment, Chinese culture and Confucianism sparked great interest among French Enlightenment thinkers. Scholars like Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Diderot each had their unique perspectives on China. Understanding their views and exploring the reasons for their formation can help us further analyze how Arcade Huang's ideas influenced French Sinology.

Voltaire had a positive attitude toward Chinese culture, praising its traditional philosophy and moral values. He believed that China's political system and Confucian ethics provided Europe with a model to learn from, especially in his portrayal of the Chinese emperor as a wise and benevolent "philosopher-king."⁵ Voltaire's admiration for Confucianism reflected his pursuit of reason, morality, and secularized politics. Therefore, Voltaire often used Confucian values to reflect on Europe's social flaws, particularly regarding religious intolerance and political despotism, making him a representative of the "Sinophilic" school.

In stark contrast to Voltaire were Montesquieu and Diderot. Their views of China were more critical, each focusing on different aspects. Montesquieu criticized China's ritual system, considering China a typical "despotic state" where social ethics and Confucian rituals were used to maintain the hierarchical order and the authority of rulers. Diderot, on the other hand, focused on the religious views of the Chinese, pointing out the idol worship and superstitions in Chinese society. In Diderot's view, China's religious practices were far from the reason and scientific spirit pursued by the Enlightenment. Thus, he maintained a cautious and critical attitude toward Chinese culture.

The views of these thinkers were not formed in a vacuum but were influenced by various factors. On one hand, 18th-century France was at the height of the Enlightenment, and thinkers were committed to reflecting on their own society and political system through the study of foreign cultures. China, as an ancient civilization that differed vastly from Europe, provided them with a rich source of material for reflection and comparison. On the other hand, their perceptions of China were also influenced by their interactions with Chinese scholars and missionaries, with Arcade Huang being a key figure who profoundly impacted Montesquieu's views on China.

3.2 Interaction between arcade Huang and Montesquieu

As the first Chinese person to settle in France, Arcade Huang not only laid the foundation for the development of early French Sinology but also deeply influenced Montesquieu's view of China. Huang was born into a Catholic family in Fujian, China, and was immersed in Christian teachings from an early age, which laid the groundwork for his later intellectual formation. Due to his religious beliefs and personal experiences, Huang developed critical views of Confucian rituals and their social functions, which played a key role in his interactions with Montesquieu.

After settling in France, Huang worked as a Chinese translator at the court of Louis XIV, where he had extensive contact with the French intellectual community. He criticized the formalized worship of Confucian rituals in Chinese society and the deification of Confucius, pointing out that these phenomena resembled superstitious behaviors in Western societies. Huang believed that Confucian culture had gradually been transformed into a form of religion, with Confucius being deified as a symbol akin to Christian saints, becoming the center of belief across all levels of Chinese society. Huang's views were closely tied to the "Chinese Rites Controversy" of the time. He argued that Confucian rituals were excessively

5. VOLTAIRE. (1963). *Essay on Customs*[M]. Garnier-Flammarion, p. 123.

complex and superstitious, contrary to the Christian emphasis on simple and pure spiritual pursuit.

In his conversations with Montesquieu, Huang noted, “China has three major sects, and the most widespread is Confucianism.”⁶ He observed that the widespread practice of Confucian rituals in Chinese society had led to the deification of Confucius, who had become a figure similar to Jesus in Christianity. This deification was reflected in the numerous Confucian temples across the country, with grand ceremonies held annually to honor Confucius. The worship of Confucius permeated all aspects of life, from state governance to everyday activities. Huang believed that this deification of Confucius was essentially a form of idol worship, using Confucian rituals to maintain social order and political authority.

Huang’s criticisms piqued Montesquieu’s interest and, to a certain extent, reinforced Montesquieu’s critical views of China. In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu mentioned China, describing its social structure as a typical “despotic system,” emphasizing the role of rituals in maintaining social hierarchy. Huang’s critique of Confucian rituals provided Montesquieu with a new perspective on understanding Chinese society, leading him to view Confucian rituals and thought as tools of a despotic regime, rather than the moral system Voltaire had praised.

3.3 Montesquieu’s view of China: a reconstruction influenced by arcade Huang

In Montesquieu’s notes and writings, one can see clear traces of Huang’s views. Montesquieu provided detailed records and critiques of Chinese rituals, religion, superstitions, customs, and institutions, evaluating Chinese society in a critical tone. He argued that China’s ritual system was overly complex, focused on form rather than genuine moral values. This formalized ritual system not only restricted personal freedom but also became a tool for rulers to maintain despotic control.

Through his interactions with Huang, Montesquieu compared China’s ritual and moral system with the Enlightenment ideas of Europe. He pointed out that China’s view of the relationship between Heaven and humans (Tianren) was fundamentally different from Europe’s relationship with God. In China, Confucian thought emphasized the ethical order and social stability of the present world, neglecting the pursuit of transcendence and the spiritual world. Montesquieu criticized the intermingling of atheism and theism in China. On the one hand, China’s literati, in defending Confucian orthodoxy, emphasized material and moral order in daily life. On the other hand, the spread of Buddhism and Daoism, along with the popular worship of multiple deities, resulted in a society filled with superstition and mysticism.

Montesquieu argued that the coexistence of rituals and superstition reflected contradictions in Chinese society. He pointed out that China’s ritual system was essentially a tool for maintaining political authority, rather than the embodiment of morality and

6. XU M L. (2014). *Arcade Huang and Early French Sinology*[M]. Revised ed., Commercial Press, p. 337.

reason that Voltaire had claimed. Huang's critique of the deification of Confucius and the formalization of Confucian rituals deepened Montesquieu's understanding, allowing him to see the close relationship between rituals and China's despotic political system. Through his critique of Chinese society, Montesquieu sought to provide the European Enlightenment with an alternative perspective, reflecting on Europe's own social and political issues.

Montesquieu's critiques contrasted with the Sinophilic trend in China studies at the time. In 18th-century Europe, "China fever" was at its height, and many were filled with admiration and curiosity about Chinese culture. However, Huang's personal experiences and religious background provided Montesquieu with a critical stance toward China. This critique not only reflected Huang's dissatisfaction with the formalization of Confucian culture and idol worship but also sparked deep discussions among Enlightenment thinkers about the relationship between Confucian rituals, social structure, and despotic rule in China.

3.4 Conclusion

Arcade Huang's thoughts and his exchanges with Montesquieu had a significant impact on French Enlightenment thought. Based on his religious beliefs and direct observations of Chinese society, he criticized the formalization of Confucian culture and the deification of Confucius. This critique not only reinforced Montesquieu's negative views of China but also introduced a critical perspective into French Sinology. Through Huang, Montesquieu saw the connection between rituals in Chinese culture and its despotic political system, and he used this understanding to critique Chinese society, thereby providing the Enlightenment with a framework for self-reflection.

Academically, Huang's views provided early French Sinology with an alternative perspective to the Sinophilic admiration of China. His critical descriptions reflected his personal thoughts and influenced Enlightenment thinkers' views on China, promoting intellectual exchange between China and France. This cross-cultural dialogue not only deepened Europe's understanding of China but also left the imprint of Huang's ideas on the works of Enlightenment thinkers, becoming an important part of the history of French Sinology.

4. Final Thoughts: Arcade Huang's Influence on French Sinology

As the first Chinese person to settle in France, Arcade Huang (Arcade Huang) held a unique and important position in French Sinology. Serving as a Chinese translator at the court of Louis XIV, he was not only one of the earliest compilers of Chinese grammar and dictionaries but also became a window through which French intellectuals could understand Chinese culture and society.

First, Huang's influence in France stemmed from his unique background and experiences. As a Christian who had traveled from China to France, he brought with him a firsthand understanding of different aspects of Chinese society and Confucian culture.

His experiences and insights provided French scholars with a perspective distinct from the dominant views of the missionaries of the time. In writing *Essay de la grammaire chinoise* and a Chinese dictionary, Huang not only demonstrated his mastery of the Chinese language but also played a crucial role in cultural exchanges between China and France. Despite some shortcomings in his linguistic works, it was precisely his pioneering efforts that allowed French scholars to gain a more systematic understanding of the Chinese language, thus advancing early French Sinology.

Second, Huang's influence was further enhanced by his interactions with various scholars and intellectuals in the French academic world. He engaged in deep exchanges with Enlightenment thinkers and Sinologists such as Montesquieu, Nicholas Fréret, and Étienne Fourmont. In these interactions, he not only shared his insights on Chinese culture but also spurred French intellectuals to reconsider Chinese society through his critiques of Chinese rituals, social structures, and Confucian thought. His views provided the French Enlightenment thinkers with a critical stance toward China's rituals and social structure, thereby influencing France's view of China at the time.

The French scholars' evaluation of Huang also reflects his influence in the field of Sinology. Nicholas Fréret praised Huang as being "always gentle and humble, with a calmness of spirit that surpasses that of an ascetic." Étienne Fourmont noted that in front of friends, his "melancholy vanished without a trace" and praised him for his habit of carefully documenting his observations. Although some of Huang's scholarly manuscripts were not fully preserved after his death, his efforts and contributions laid the foundation for the development of French Sinology and provided invaluable material for French scholars' study of China.

It was precisely due to Huang's influence in French Sinology that his interactions with Enlightenment thinkers and the spread of his ideas became possible. This also provided a significant background for his later exchanges with Montesquieu and his impact on French Enlightenment thought.