



Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies

Bizais-Lillig, Marie. "Bestowers of Books and Knowledge: On the Collection Bequeathed by Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény to the National Academic Library of Strasbourg". *Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies*, vol. 6.1 (2025): 121-147.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25365/jecacs.2025.6.1.bizais-lillig>

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## SPOTLIGHT

# Bestowers of Books and Knowledge: On the Collection Bequeathed by Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény to the National Academic Library of Strasbourg

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In 2015, a collection of books on Asia, and China more specifically, was donated to the Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg in France. The donors were Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény. The collection is very large, it reflects some of the characteristics of the two sinologists' research, and it opens up new possibilities for education and research in the field of sinology.

2015年，法國史特拉斯堡國立學術圖書館獲贈一批關於亞洲，尤其是中國研究的重要書籍。這批藏書由桀溺（Jean-Pierre Diény）和科萊特·帕特（Colette Diény）夫婦捐贈，規模宏大，不僅體現了兩位漢學家在學術研究中的獨特視角，還為亞爾薩斯的漢學教育與研究開闢了新的領域。

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**Keywords:** China, Sinology, History, Literature, Science, France, Alsace, Library, Collection, Provenance

**關鍵詞：** 中國，漢學，歷史，文學，科學，法國，阿爾薩斯，圖書館，收藏，來源

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The Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies (JEACS) is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the EACS, [www.chinesestudies.eu](http://www.chinesestudies.eu). ISSN: 2709-9946

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## Introduction

On 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2005, Jean-Pierre Diény, then aged seventy-seven, wrote to the administrator of the Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg (BNUS):

I confirm the decision that my wife and I have taken to bequeath our sinological library to the BNUS, as evidenced by our will.

Je confirme la décision que nous avons prise, ma femme et moi, de léguer à la BNUS notre bibliothèque sinologique, comme en fait foi notre testament.

After the very close deaths of the couple – Colette Diény passed away in December 2013, Jean-Pierre Diény in May 2014, the library was transformed into a collection, which was first kept in the BNUS Fischart stacks. The donation has triggered a collaboration between the BNUS and the University of Strasbourg – its libraries in particular. The collection is currently being processed so as to make the books available to the public: basic scholarly resources are already displayed on the shelves of the new section of the Bibliothèque des langues at the University of Strasbourg, which is devoted to collections on the Eastern part of the world, less commonly used documents along with rare books are being catalogued before they are moved to the main stacks of the BNUS – with a very limited selection of books on literature, religion, and philosophy being added to the open shelves of the library. All the books of the collection are identifiable thanks to a stamp with the words ‘Fonds Jean-Pierre et Colette Diény’. This article presents the Diény collection in three parts. First, it traces the history of the bequest and outlines the characteristics of the collection. Then, it recalls how the work of the Diény family and, more generally, their contribution to the development of sinological studies are reflected in this collection of works. Finally, it considers some of the prospects that this rich collection opens up for the future.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the managers and librarians of the BNUS for the trust they placed in me when they came to handle this collection, contacted me, and asked for my opinion on a number of issues. My special thanks go to Catherine Soulé-Sandic, Dmitri Koudriashov, and Christophe Didier. This summary would not have been possible without the help of Elsa Cuillé, who knows the collection well and who, as an employee of the BNUS, went through the stacks and archives of the BNUS for me in a pandemic context, when I was stuck at home. I have relied on numerous publications, mentioned throughout this document, as well as on additional information from invaluable contacts. The children of Colette and Jean-Pierre Diény, Claire Diény in particular, answered my many questions and were kind enough to proofread the draft of this article in French. I am indebted to Pierre-Henri Durand, who knew Jean-Pierre Diény well and took part in sorting the papers kept in the library, Shum Wing-fong, who is a living encyclopaedia of the IHEC library and has catalogued and analysed the rare books in the collection, Catherine Jami, who, as a specialist on mathematics in China, is very familiar with the history of the science research group in which Colette Diény took part, as well as Jean-Pierre Drège, who was better able than anyone else to help me choose a suitable terminology to describe the books and their printing methods. I would like to thank them most sincerely. I would also like to thank Alison Hardie for her generous and patient help and support in rephrasing and copy-editing this paper. I am, of course, responsible for any errors that may appear in the article. A French version of the article is available in Bizais-Lillig 2025.

## From Collection to Bequest

As the above-mentioned letter from 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2005 makes clear, the donation proposed by Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény corresponds to the sinological part of the family library, the history of which I will outline below. In the appendix to this letter, Jean-Pierre Diény drew up an approximate inventory of the collection which corresponds more or less to that now held by the BNUS, and which I will further describe. At the end of this section, I will explain why a couple of sinologists living south of Paris chose the BNUS as a recipient.

### The Creation of the Diény Couple's Sinological Library

The Diény collection results from a selection among a larger collection, that of the library at the Diény family home in Orsay. Although Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény spent a great deal of time in libraries, particularly that of the Institut des hautes études chinoises (IHEC) in the fifth *arrondissement* of Paris, and did so until very late in life, they also relied heavily on works collected over the course of their lives.

Born in 1927, Jean-Pierre Diény initially trained in the Classics. Nonetheless, as early as during his studies at the highly selective *École normale supérieure* on the rue d'Ulm between 1948 and 1951, it was the Chinese language and culture that aroused his curiosity.<sup>2</sup> This interest led him to take up the study of Chinese at the Langues Orientales<sup>3</sup> from 1955 onwards. There he met a fellow student, Colette Patte, whom he married in 1958. Colette, who was also studying Chinese, was particularly interested in the history of science.

The couple soon left France for East Asia, where they stayed for many years. It is perhaps worth putting the situation in context. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the sinological landscape was being rearranged. To begin with, the great French figures of early twentieth-century sinology, Marcel Granet (1884–1940), Henri Maspero (1883–1945), and Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), had disappeared. Although they did not leave the field empty, succeeding them was a challenge made all the more difficult by the fact that Chinese studies was now required to open up to the world, to “abandon its Eurocentric prejudices and consider its object of study with greater humility and genuine sympathy”, as expressed by Jean-Pierre Diény himself (Diény 1985, 23). Yet the situation in China, far from stabilising, was marked by the division between the People's Republic of China (PRC), established on the mainland in 1949, and the Republic of China (ROC), which had taken refuge in Taiwan. And under Mao, particularly at the end of the 1950s with the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961), the PRC was difficult to access. The authoritarian state of the ROC led by General

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<sup>2</sup> Biographical information on Jean-Pierre Diény is mainly taken from two sources: Bastid-Brugnière 2016, pp. 174–179, and Martin 2016, pp. vi–viii. Additional information was supplemented by Claire Diény.

<sup>3</sup> Otherwise known as Langues O', it corresponds to today's Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Inalco) in Paris.

Chiang Kai-shek was not much more welcoming. So, from the 1950s to the 1970s, many apprentice sinologists turned to Hong Kong and Japan.

Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény were no exception. While focusing on the study of Chinese language and civilisation, they also learned Japanese in Paris. Then, from 1959 to 1962, Jean-Pierre Diény, accompanied by his wife, went to live at the *Maison franco-japonaise*, first in Kyoto and then, at the end of their stay, in Tokyo. They belonged to the small sinological circle of the time, as testified by a few book reviews they wrote for the *Revue bibliographique de sinologie*. In 1960, eventually, Jean-Pierre Diény published his first research work, a translation of the family letters of Zheng Banqiao 鄭板橋 (1693–1765) (Diény 1960, 15–67). They spent the following two years (1962–1964) in Paris, during which time *Les Dix-neuf poèmes anciens* appeared, a major contribution by Jean-Pierre Diény which still stands as a reference today.<sup>4</sup> They subsequently moved to Beijing, where Jean-Pierre Diény taught French at the Foreign Languages Institute (1964–1966). The context was not conducive to research: the authorities prevented both Chinese and foreign researchers from accessing and studying ancient texts. In December 1966, the PRC, shaken by the Great Cultural Revolution, expelled all foreigners. The Diény family, which then included three children, moved to Hong Kong, where their fourth and last child was born. A year later, in 1967, the family returned to France, where they remained for the rest of their lives. Jean-Pierre Diény was first appointed *chargé de recherche* (research fellow) at the CNRS and later, in 1969, *chargé de recherche* at the *École pratique des hautes études (EPHE)*, where he was finally elected *directeur d'études* (full researcher) in 1970. In order to devote more time to her family, Colette Diény continued her work although in a less formal context. She took part, for instance, in the ground-breaking work of the multidisciplinary research group on science and technology in China, Korea, and Japan, founded by Jacques Gernet at the CNRS in 1984.<sup>5</sup>

Although it is impossible to specify the place of acquisition of each of the works that now make up the Diény collection, the ensemble bears witness to an openness to Asia in general, and brings together editions of ancient Chinese texts from the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China, Hong Kong, Japan, the United States, and various European countries. This openness to the world, which Jean-Pierre Diény so admired in his teacher Paul Demiéville (1894–1979), was also one of his hallmarks. The family library covered a wide range of subjects. In addition to a sinological section, which is now in Strasbourg, it included a large number of works, some inherited from a scholarly family,<sup>6</sup> others relating to general culture and classical literature, and others collected around the world as Colette and Jean-

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<sup>4</sup> Diény 1963; the work will be discussed further below.

<sup>5</sup> The so-called *Recherche coopérative sur programme* (Cooperative Research Programme) RCP 798 became the *Groupe de Recherche* (Research Group) GDR 798 in 1986, and then the GDR 1950 from 1996 to 1998. Colette Diény collaborated in particular with Joël Brenier, Jean-Claude Martzloff, and Wladyslaw de Wieclawik. See Jami 2020. I would like to thank Catherine Jami for allowing me to read her text before its publication.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Pierre Diény's father, André Diény, was a highly qualified (*agrégé*) professor in history specialising in the history of Greco-Roman antiquity, which he taught at the prestigious high school *Lycée Henri IV* in Paris.

Pierre Diény grew curious. This vast collection of heterogeneous works on mountains, nature, art, and literature was distributed throughout the house where the Diény family lived in Orsay, from the basement to the bedrooms. Two offices, however, housed the bulk of the works that composed the sinological section.

### Distribution of the Diény collection

It was precisely this sinological part of the library that was bequeathed to the BNUS in their will. It was assembled, organised, and sorted by subject by Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény. This collection is considerable and remarkable in more ways than one. It is made up of several sub-sets, which Jean-Pierre Diény had already presented in the appendix to his letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2005, at a time when he and his wife were still using these works, which they kept in their offices for the most frequently consulted, and in the basement of the house for the others.

According to this inventory, the collection bequeathed to the BNUS by Colette and Jean-Pierre Diény occupies one hundred and fifty linear metres<sup>7</sup> and consists mainly of works relating to the Chinese language and civilisation of the pre-imperial and imperial periods. Modern and contemporary China was not part of Colette's or Jean-Pierre Diény's main scientific or personal interests.

Around fifteen per cent of this collection<sup>8</sup> consists of research tools that the couple shared. These include dictionaries, encyclopaedias, indexes, and thematic bibliographies. While the indexes are of less interest today because of the advent of digital texts and resources, the other tools are still relevant.<sup>9</sup> Although digital dictionaries have become more widespread, paper versions are still essential to sinological work. While the online version of the *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大辭典 (Great Dictionary of the Chinese Language) is imperfect, that of the *Great Ricci Dictionary* is not freely accessible for example. The presence of these editions on the shelves of libraries in Strasbourg is hence valuable for our field of study.

Sixty per cent of the collection brings together the great texts of classical Chinese culture. These include the Confucian Classics, texts by ancient masters, the Dynastic Histories, and collections and anthologies of reference texts from antiquity to the early twentieth century. This very large set of texts constitutes a necessary foundation for any study of ancient China. Colette and Jean-Pierre Diény undoubtedly shared this part of their library. In fact, these works, in all their variety, underpin the whole of Chinese textual production and therefore

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<sup>7</sup> Measurements taken by Claire Diény when the collection was assembled to move to Strasbourg suggest a total of one hundred and seventy-five linear metres.

<sup>8</sup> For the sake of clarity, I have converted the divisions and sub-divisions of Jean-Pierre Diény's inventory into percentages of the whole.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Pierre Diény showed this intuition in Diény 1978.

serve as a point of reference in many research projects, particularly of a philological nature. Within this part of the collection, anthologies and other collections of texts dominate. A large proportion of these are poems and, to a lesser extent, prose texts, all appreciated for their aesthetic qualities or for their role in the definition and criticism of poetry. It is here that the heart of Jean-Pierre Diény's work lies, as this article will detail below. However, this part of the collection also reflects the subjects studied by Colette Diény. It includes, for instance, works related to the history of the establishment of Christianity in China and to the exchanges with the Jesuits.

The penultimate part of the collection, which accounts for almost fifteen per cent of the whole, covers the fields of science and technology. In addition to the reference works in English edited by Joseph Needham and various studies on the history of science in Western languages, there are numerous original texts and studies on mathematics, metals, and pharmacopoeia, mainly in Chinese but also in Japanese. These texts were mainly for the use of Colette Diény in her work at the CNRS.

The last ten per cent of the collection is divided into two parts. On the one hand, there is a large collection of periodicals in Western and Chinese languages in the field of Chinese studies. On the other hand, there is a disparate collection of books on Asia in general, from all periods and disciplines, including works on painting, city maps, and tourist guides. The collection is completed by Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény's own works, in the form of books or offprints. In his letter of January 2005, Jean-Pierre Diény had planned to bequeath “the files relating to the lectures given at the E.P.H.E. from 1969 to 1997 [...] [which] could be used by young researchers”, but he subsequently decided not to do so, so that only the works published by the Diény couple appear in the collection held by the BNUS. As I will describe in more detail below, and although this is not emphasised in the 2005 inventory, the collection includes ancient editions of works that fall into the various categories described above and which contribute fully to the value of the collection as a whole.

### **The donation to the BNUS**

Jean-Pierre Diény took steps very early on to find a destination for the works on China that he had collected with his wife Colette Diény. His first move was to approach the political authorities, as evidenced by a letter from Catherine Trautmann, mayor of Strasbourg, dated 25<sup>th</sup> June 2001, which warmly acknowledged receipt of his proposal. In it, she noted the absence of a centre for Chinese studies in Strasbourg and undertook to discuss the bequest project with the President of Marc Bloch University,<sup>10</sup> at the time her friend, Daniel Payot. But it was a period of transition for both of them: Catherine Trautmann lost the municipal

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<sup>10</sup> The University of Strasbourg II, which became the ‘Université Marc Bloch’ in 1998, was merged into the University of Strasbourg in 2009.

elections in March 2001 and was from then on on the side of the opposition to the city government, while Daniel Payot (in office from 1998 to 2002) was due to step down as head of the university in the following year. He was succeeded by François-Xavier Cuche (in office from 2002 to 2007), who in all probability had to consider the proposal for a donation that Jean-Pierre Diény sent to the university on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2002, introducing it as follows:

On the advice of my friends Francis Rapp and René Kappler, two renowned Strasbourg academics, I take the liberty of presenting to you a project that I think might be of interest to Marc Bloch University.

As a former student at the École Normale Supérieure, highly qualified in Classical Studies, I taught the History and Philology of Classical China at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Section 4), as full researcher, from 1969 to 1997. I would like my sinological library, containing several thousand works, to be donated after my decease to an institution wishing to create and develop a new centre for Chinese studies.

Sur le conseil de mes amis Francis Rapp et René Kappler, deux universitaires strasbourgeois de renom, je me permets de vous exposer un projet qui me semble pouvoir intéresser l'Université Marc Bloch.

Ancien élève de l'École Normale Supérieure, agrégé de Lettres classiques, j'ai enseigné de 1969 à 1997 l'Histoire et la Philologie de la Chine classique à l'École pratique des Hautes Études (IVe Section), en qualité de directeur d'études. Je souhaiterais qu'après ma disparition ma bibliothèque sinologique, riche de plusieurs milliers d'ouvrages, soit offerte à une institution désireuse de créer et de développer un nouveau centre d'études chinoises.

So far, I could find no trace of the answer made to Jean-Pierre Diény's initial proposal. It would appear that the university did not accept Jean-Pierre Diény's offer, since later, in January 2004, Jean-Pierre Diény contacted the administrator of the BNUS, Bernard Falga at the time, to inform him of his plan to donate his library. Again, he explained that he had previously discussed the matter with Francis Rapp and Lucien Bronn (sic), who had encouraged him to do so. By referring to three intellectual figures from Strasbourg in his letters of 2002 and 2004, Jean-Pierre Diény was symbolically inscribing himself in the Alsatian university landscape. In 1955 Jean-Pierre Diény had left Strasbourg, where he was teaching the classics at the Lycée Fustel-de-Coulanges, to devote himself to the study of Chinese. This former researcher at the CNRS (1955–1959, 1962–1964 and 1966–1969), who was promoted *directeur des études* at the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE, 1970–1997), had settled

in the Paris region. He had not lived in Alsace for a long time, and not without reason: Chinese studies were slow to take root in Alsace.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout his correspondence with the BNUS,<sup>12</sup> Jean-Pierre Diény emphasised his family and emotional roots in his native homeland. For example, he wrote twice in his letters of October 2002 and January 2004:

My maternal grandparents came from Mulhouse and my paternal grandmother from Wissembourg. My paternal grandfather, whose name I bear, came from a line of pastors from the Montbéliard region. I myself was born in 1927 in Colmar, where my father taught history at the Lycée Bartholdi in the 1920s, before continuing his career in Strasbourg at the Lycée Fustel de Coulanges, and then in the Paris region. I myself taught literature at the Lycée Fustel from 1952 to 1955, before taking up the study of Chinese at the Fondation Thiers. For all these reasons, I am attached to my little homeland and I return there often.

Mes grands-parents maternels étaient originaires de Mulhouse et ma grand-mère paternelle de Wissembourg. Mon grand-père paternel, dont je porte le nom, était issu d'une lignée de pasteurs du pays de Montbéliard. Je suis né moi-même en 1927 à Colmar, où mon père a enseigné l'histoire au lycée Bartholdi dans les années 20, avant de poursuivre sa carrière à Strasbourg au lycée Fustel de Coulanges, puis dans la région parisienne. J'ai moi-même été professeur de lettres au lycée Fustel de 1952 à 1955, avant d'entreprendre à la Fondation Thiers l'étude du chinois. Pour toutes ces raisons je suis attaché à ma petite patrie et j'y retourne souvent.

His mention of close friends such as Francis Rapp (1927–2020) and René Kappler (1922–2008) is significant: it highlights the enduring ties, with both family and friends (intellectuals as well), which Jean-Pierre Diény had forged in Alsace. Jean-Pierre Diény met the first early on in his life. Francis Rapp was to become an important figure at the University of Strasbourg II as a historian of the medieval period, and more particularly of Christianity, the Germanic countries, and Alsace.<sup>13</sup> The two men met when, as young *agrégés*, they were teaching at the

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<sup>11</sup> It was not until 2009, twelve years after Jean-Pierre Diény's retirement, that a position in Chinese Studies was opened at the University of Strasbourg. The appointment of an associate professor specialising in sinology paved the way to the opening of a Bachelor's degree in 2013.

<sup>12</sup> I was given access to the letters sent by Jean-Pierre Diény to the successive administrators of the BNUS dated 21<sup>st</sup> January 2004, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2004, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2004, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2004, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2004, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2005, and 5<sup>th</sup> May 2006, as well as a note dated 20<sup>th</sup> September 2006. I also read the letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> October 2002, addressed to the President of Marc Bloch University, which Catherine Trautmann had mentioned to him in a letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> June 2001.

<sup>13</sup> He was a lecturer (1972–1974) and then a professor (1974–1991). About Francis Rapp, see Bischoff n.d. See also Rapp n.d. and Rapp 1997.



Lycée Fustel-de-Coulanges in 1952. They were both boarders at the Fondation Thiers, Francis Rapp in the 56<sup>th</sup> class (1953–1956) and Jean-Pierre Diény in the 58<sup>th</sup> (1955–1958). It was also at the Lycée Fustel-de-Coulanges that Jean-Pierre Diény met René Kappler, five years his senior, with whom he shared, in addition to a taste for walking and an attraction to unknown places, a “visceral love [...] for Alsace and the same attachment to the Protestant tradition of [their] families”.<sup>14</sup> While Jean-Pierre Diény had left Alsace to study China, his friend, who like him had studied the classics, became a lecturer at the Faculty of Arts at Marc Bloch University in Strasbourg. It was not until the end of the 1960s, when René Kappler began to explore the writings of thirteenth-century travellers who reported on their experiences in Central Asia, China, and the Near East, that their intellectual affinities became more clearly apparent. In a way, the reference to these firm and lasting friendships served to guarantee the authenticity and solidity of the project that Jean-Pierre Diény presented to his Alsatian interlocutors.<sup>15</sup>

The donation, proposed by Bernard Falga, was accepted by the BNUS Board of Directors on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2005, as the administrator Albert Poirot informed Jean-Pierre Diény in a letter dated 27<sup>th</sup> September 2006. In the minutes of this meeting, it is associated with a deposit agreement for the personal libraries of former teachers at the Lycée Fustel-de-Coulanges. Unfortunately, the minutes do not specify whether this donation was accepted for its importance to the emergence of Chinese studies in Alsace, or because of the claim that Jean-Pierre Diény, to some extent, had as a former teacher at the Lycée Fustel.

Once the fate of his library was confirmed, Jean-Pierre Diény was able, as agreed, to keep the entire collection at his home so that he and his wife could continue their work. In spring 2014, the library was still at Orsay. Before its transfer in October 2016, the IHEC made an inventory of the rare books. Claire Diény, informed by her father of his wishes and with the help of the will, brought together all the works that were to be sent to the BNUS. This set of books represents the entire sinological collection belonging to Colette and Jean-Pierre Diény. The only items excluded were the works of Jean-Pierre Diény's students, his exchanges with them and his preparatory notes for his lectures at the EPHE. Since then, the work of organising and preparing the collection for cataloguing has continued. The collection is

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<sup>14</sup> See Diény 2010. A note at the end of this publication states that the full version of the text is available in the A-Ulm.

<sup>15</sup> The mention of Lucien Bronn (misspelled) is more awkward. It certainly betrays an occasional and superficial link with the philosophy professor Lucien Braun (1923-2020), whom Jean-Pierre Diény may have known in Strasbourg in the 1950s (but the sources do not allow confirmation of this). It is likely that, either directly or through his friends, Jean-Pierre Diény consulted Lucien Braun about his project. Braun was heavily involved in the activities of Strasbourg institutions, including the Université des Sciences humaines, which he chaired from 1978 to 1983, the Association des Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, and the BNUS, on whose board he was sitting in 2004 when Jean-Pierre Diény was writing his letter. About Lucien Braun, see Braun n.d. I would like to thank Pauline Lemaire who worked at the Association des Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg and Christophe Didier at the BNUS for their help in finding relevant biographical information. If, like René Kappler, Lucien Braun found refuge in Clermont-Ferrand at the beginning of the Second World War, it would be interesting to know in which high school and at what period he taught before joining the teaching staff of the Faculté de lettres in Strasbourg in 1960.

progressively being made available to the public and is identifiable by a stamp at the beginning of each work. The question of its visibility as a collection remains, in the age of closed stacks and electronic catalogues.<sup>16</sup>

## From Afar, Still Close

The Diény collection naturally reflects the themes dear to Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény. It also highlights their work, both rigorous and meticulous, of academic research. I shall endeavour to highlight three major characteristics of Jean-Pierre Diény's contributions, with which I am more familiar, and which are embodied in the collection as preserved. The collection will probably provide an opportunity for future publications dealing more specifically with Colette Diény's contributions to the history of science in China, to the understanding of intellectual exchanges between China and the West through the Jesuits, or to the discovery of Japanese children's literature that was accompanied by her translations published between 1990 and 1995.<sup>17</sup> Since I am unable to cover the whole of this extensive collection, I will confine myself to highlighting three major characteristics of the approach taken by the sinologist Jean-Pierre Diény, as reflected in this collection. Firstly, a meticulous engagement with the texts; secondly, an anchoring in the pluridisciplinarity of Oriental studies; and thirdly, a regular effort to make sense of things in a wider context than just sinology.

## Concern for the Text

Jean-Pierre Diény's work reminds us that the initial vocation of sinology is to study, translate, and analyse Chinese texts. Primary sources hence constitute the heart of Jean-Pierre Diény's books; they do not merely serve as illustrations of theories or justifications of arguments. Moreover, they are presented in all their complexity. This choice, although not unique, stands as an essential characteristic of Jean-Pierre Diény's work throughout his career.<sup>18</sup> In

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<sup>16</sup> In his correspondence, Jean-Pierre Diény repeats his desire to preserve the unity of the collection he is donating. 'We would also like this collection to retain its integrity,' he wrote on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2005. And on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2006 he added: 'I would very much like to have the opportunity to meet you in order to review with you the conditions for carrying out this project and in particular to raise a question raised by Mr Falga concerning the possible dispersal of my library. As the inventory shows, the majority of my library consists of works in Chinese and Japanese, and there can be no question of dispersing them. But it would also be regrettable to separate from this collection works in Western languages relating to the same issues.' After long discussions with the family, librarians, and sinologists, it has been agreed that the collection will appear as one set by means of a note in the library catalogue, although the books are partly kept in closed stacks and dispersed between the Université de Strasbourg languages library and the BNUS. Book preservation and ease of access for students and advanced readers have been the key elements in this decision.

<sup>17</sup> I would like to thank Pierre-Henri Durand for sending me a list of Colette Diény's publications, which he has begun to collate.

<sup>18</sup> The two complementary studies by Yves Hervouet attest to this: Hervouet 1964a and 1964b. However, Jean-Pierre Diény

this connection, I will mention two major texts in his contribution to the study of classical Chinese poetry: the book *Les dix-neuf poèmes anciens* (The Nineteen Old Poems) and the paper “Contre Guo Maoqian” (Against Guo Maoqian).<sup>19</sup>

While the first might appear to be a translation of a series of nineteen poems considered to inaugurate the art of pentasyllabic poetry in China, it is in fact a close study of the text, its commentaries, and its palimpsests.<sup>20</sup> The book is divided into four parts. The first is a general introduction to this set of poems. It highlights the importance attached to these poems in early attempts at the history of Chinese poetry, in the *Shipin* 詩品 [Classification of Poets] by Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (ca. 468–518) in particular. It also presents some of the poems’ characteristics and tackles the thorny question of their dating. This introduction, although very precise and useful for sinologists, is perfectly accessible to readers who are not versed in Chinese language, literature, or culture. The second part is an annotated edition of the poems together with their full translation. This critical edition of the Chinese text is based on a comparison of the versions of the poems provided in various Chinese and Japanese editions. It is no coincidence that the work was reprinted by the Belles Lettres in 2010, in the collection entitled ‘Bibliothèque chinoise’, which Anne Cheng, as director, likes to call the ‘Budé chinois’.<sup>21</sup> What we have here is a book which, as a precursor, establishes a Chinese literary milestone in the manner of a text from Latin antiquity in the European tradition. It invites us to juxtapose the text and its traditional critical apparatus, which is displayed in a third part, the commentaries. This third part consists in a compilation of the main commentaries arranged line by line and supplemented by questions and additional insights for each poem. The interpretation of each poem is grounded by numerous references to the commentaries and interpretations to which these poems have given rise over time, from their inclusion in the great anthology of the *Wenxuan* 文選 (Selection of Refined Literature), compiled between 526 and 531, to the contemporary period with the work of sinologists in China and outside China. These very many references are listed in the last part of the volume, the bibliography, which is partially commented on. This invitation to the text is therefore based on a wide range of editions, studies, commentaries, and translations of the series of poems entitled *Gu shi shijiu shou* 古詩十九首 (Nineteen Old Poems). In the Diény family’s library, the sources compiled in this book would translate into metres of works whose analysis and

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would continue in this vein. The two examples cited in the following section (2.2) are a case in point.

<sup>19</sup> See Diény 1999. This long article is the development and amplification of two earlier studies. Cf. Diény 1968, and Diény 1979.

<sup>20</sup> I will deal with this aspect further on, but it is worth pointing out right away, immediately after the use of this term, which evokes Gérard Genette’s contributions to the thinking on literature, that Jean-Pierre Diény’s work seems to have very little to do with the theoretical reflections on text, literature, and literary history that marked the French intellectual space from the early 1950s to the late 1970s.

<sup>21</sup> The equivalent to the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics collection.

comparison has led to the creation of a new benchmark for the editing, translation, and analysis of the *Nineteen Old Poems*. While some might see this accumulation of editions referring to an identical text as redundancy, specialists will discern the signs of meticulous attention to sources.

However, as a philologist Jean-Pierre Diény went one step further when he published his article “Against Guo Maoqian”, in which he challenged the chronological classification of related poems established by the great 11<sup>th</sup>-century scholar Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (1041–1099). Here again, Jean-Pierre Diény cites the poems he wishes to compare, compares the different versions in different editions, and draws on the commentaries of Chinese scholars from the imperial period. He shows that Ming and Qing scholars questioned some of Guo Maoqian's assertions, but that no one doubted his chronology. He then uses clues to reveal the weakness of some of the arguments made by the compiler Guo Maoqian, and demonstrates that poems can be read differently, that plain style and heterometry are not necessarily the sign of a popular and ancient stratum in the rewriting of poems. Jean-Pierre Diény finally draws some of the consequences of this “small revolution” for the reading of the poems under scrutiny. The meticulous philologist's concern for the text was not without consequences for subsequent representations of the history of Chinese poetry. For instance, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* is a study with a markedly different style, in which Stephen Owen (2006) takes up some of the arguments and reflections developed by Jean-Pierre Diény. In a way, with his highly declarative gesture, Jean-Pierre Diény positioned himself in direct dialogue with Chinese literati. He continued the tradition of keeping textual heritage under constant, minute, and critical scrutiny, and embraced a lineage present in his work as well as in his library.

### **The Legacy of Oriental Studies: Multidisciplinarity**

For specialists in other disciplines, the place occupied by works of Chinese history and philosophy in the Diény couple's library may come as a surprise. In fact, it testifies to the erudition that, in contrast to a vulgar orientalism, underpins the scholarly sinology that dates back to the work of Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832). In other words, while sinophiles are enthusiastic about a certain exoticism they may find in China, the sinologists, in this case Colette or Jean-Pierre Diény, scrutinise one or other aspect of a distant culture and language that they endeavour to put into context.<sup>22</sup> Yet, because ancient Chinese texts can be characterised by the many allusions — by reference or quotation — to texts that formed the basis of

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<sup>22</sup> On the lasting influence of Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat on sinology as a discipline, consult the various contributions to the colloquium organised by Pierre-Étienne Will on 11th, 12th and 13th June 2014 at the Collège de France (Will 2014). A number of introductions to the history of Chinese studies in France can be found in Bergère and Pino 1995.

the culture of a literate community, ancient texts form a web from which no part can be radically dissociated, for fear of rendering it foreign to itself.

This aspect of the Chinese textual tradition should be kept in mind when analysing the Diény couple's sinological library, which was focused primarily on texts. There are several reasons for this choice, which might be worth mentioning here. First, access to Chinese space was highly controlled and difficult from the 1950s to the 1980s. Consequently, the choice of studying texts rather than paintings, calligraphy, or archaeological sites may have been guided as much by pragmatic reasons as by personal taste. Also, texts hold a prominent position in Chinese cultural transmission, if we agree with Pierre Ryckmans' (1935–2014), alias Simon Leys', subtle assertion while evoking a text by Ming dynasty (1368–1644) scholar, Liu Shilong 劉世龍 (fl. ca. 1603):<sup>23</sup>

In his essay, the author observed that many famous gardens of the past have entirely disappeared and survive only on paper in literary descriptions. Hence, he wondered why it should be necessary for a garden to have first existed in reality. Why not skip the preliminary stage of actual existence and jump directly into the final state of literary existence which, after all, is the common end of all gardens? What difference is there between a famous garden which exists no more, and this particular garden which never existed at all, since in the end both the former and the latter are known only through the same medium of the written word?

Both the library and the work of Jean-Pierre Diény bear witness to an acute awareness of the need to encompass the Chinese library with its four divisions, without arbitrarily dissociating sections of it. To achieve this, Jean-Pierre Diény has drawn on numerous catalogues and bibliographic guides. The latter have become a major part of philological learning in China.<sup>24</sup> The bequeathed Diény collection contains a large number of volumes of this kind, some of them very old.<sup>25</sup> These fundamental working tools complement and enrich more accessible compilations such as *Early Chinese Texts: A bibliographical guide* by Michael Loewe and Endymion Wilkinson's *Chinese History: A New Manual*, which are also included in the bequest.

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<sup>23</sup> See Leys 2011, p.251. A French version was published in Leys 1998, p. 753. In the same volume, the author describes the insurmountable obstacles he faced in the early 1970s, a few years after the Diény family's stay in Beijing, when he was looking for books and colleagues to talk to (see Leys 1974).

<sup>24</sup> Mulu xue 目錄學 [bibliography] is one among many other subject or speciality names, which end with the same suffix, as in dili xue 地理學 [geography] for example.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance the Shumu dawen buzhen 書目答問補正 [Enriched bibliographical guide], compiled by Fan Xiceng 范希曾 (1900–1930), based on the guide by Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909), in a 1931 edition. This information is taken from Shum Wing-fong's cataloguing table of early works in the Diény library.

This impressive mastery of the Chinese corpus is reflected in works of great erudition. In particular, I would like to mention *Le symbolisme du dragon dans la Chine antique*<sup>26</sup> and *Portrait anecdotique d'un gentilhomme chinois : Xie An (320–385) d'après le Shishuo xinyu* (Diény 1993).

In the first book, Jean-Pierre Diény explores representations of the dragon in all categories of texts, from antiquity to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, which marks the entry into the Middle Ages in Chinese historiography. His research is presented in two stages. He begins by listing in the form of a reasoned inventory the passages in which he has identified a symbolic dimension. This part is organised around various features (relating to the environment, behaviour, or relations with men and gods) under which quotations in the original language are grouped, with references and translations. Characteristic series gradually emerge, such as the one associating the dragon with clouds and rain. This first section is of particular interest to sinologists, who will discover many little-known texts. It also demonstrates the author's dexterity in handling concordances, encyclopaedias, collections, and anthologies, as well as in the art of translation. However, Jean-Pierre Diény's objective would not have been achieved without the second part, which he entitles 'tableau', and whose purpose is to identify, through analysis and selection of emblematic passages, the dynamics and articulation within the symbolic system built around the figure of the dragon.<sup>27</sup> Diény book is not solely based on primary sources, as it also draws on commentaries by scholars from the imperial period, as well as epigraphic data and iconography. Above all, this study sheds light on discussions related to certain characteristics associated with the dragon which were raised among scholars in China, Japan, Germany, the United States, and elsewhere. In a way, this work presents a research project in progress, collecting together its materials and its research questions, while offering suggestive avenues for response and reflection.

Jean-Pierre Diény excelled at compiling works of recension with a view to bringing new readings to light. His study of the collection of anecdotes entitled *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (which he translated "New Worldly Remarks")<sup>28</sup> and one of its most famous characters, Xie An 謝安 (320–385), illustrates his approach. The book opens with the following remark:

Our ignorance of the aims of the book has led to a long-running controversy, which has not yet been resolved. Is *Shishuo* history or fiction? Was its mission to inform its readers about real events or to entertain them with fictional tales? The vast majority of the six hundred or so characters in the book are historical, and many of them well-

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<sup>26</sup> Diény 1994. I place this element first, despite its later publication, because it seems to me to be the result of an approach already apparent in the article Diény 1981.

<sup>27</sup> In this respect, Diény's work differs from the simple anthology, which he criticises for its fragmented and tedious nature, which "prevents us from discovering, despite the cross-references, the concepts underlying the repetitive narratives". See Diény 1990, pp. 129-150, which relates more particularly to Mathieu 1989.

<sup>28</sup> Hereafter abbreviated to *Shishuo*.

known. This clearly indicates a concern for credibility, which seems inherent in the very genre of the anecdote. In China, it seems that it was not until the Tang dynasty that the imaginary anecdote was recognised as such and ceased to pretend to be true. Prior to that, the common ambition of collections of anecdotes was to be accepted as a ‘complement to history’.

Notre ignorance des objectifs poursuivis a ouvert une longue controverse, qui aujourd’hui encore n’est pas close. Le *Shishuo* relève-t-il de l’histoire ou du roman ? Avait-il pour mission d’informer ses lecteurs de faits réels ou de les distraire par des récits fictifs ? La grande majorité des quelque six cents personnages qui peuplent le livre sont historiques, et beaucoup d’entre eux, bien connus. Ce fait annonce à l’évidence un souci de crédibilité, qui semble d’ailleurs inhérent au genre même de l’anecdote. En Chine, il faut attendre, semble-t-il, la dynastie Tang, pour que l’anecdote imaginaire se reconnaisse comme telle et cesse de prétendre à la véracité. Auparavant, l’ambition commune des recueils d’anecdotes est de se faire admettre comme « complément de l’histoire ». (Diény 1993, 3-4)

To extricate himself from an insoluble problem and an all too simple and sterile dichotomy, Jean-Pierre Diény has chosen to study the character most present in the anecdotes, namely Xie An. He explains:

Xie An lived from 320 to 385. History knows him well, but most of his biography recounted in chapter 79 of the *Jin shu* is taken from the anecdotes of the *Shishuo* or their ancient commentaries. Apart from a few additional anecdotes, all that is added are dates and details of his political career, mainly the offices he held. But I do not undertake to rewrite the biography of the historical Xie An. I admit that the man I am interested in belongs to legend as much as or more than to history: the fame he enjoyed from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards explains why imaginary words and behaviour were attributed to him. The overall portrait that emerges reflects the upheavals of a class, the literate aristocracy, traditionally destined to serve the State, but whose vocation exposed them to the greatest dangers in a time of turmoil.

Xie An a vécu de 320 à 385. L’histoire le connaît bien, mais l’essentiel de la biographie que lui consacre le *Jin shu*, dans son chapitre 79, a été tiré des anecdotes du *Shishuo* ou de leurs commentaires anciens. Ne s’y ajoutent guère, à part quelques anecdotes supplémentaires, que des dates et des indications sur sa carrière politique, principalement sur les fonctions qu’il occupa. Mais je n’entreprends pas de récrire la biographique du Xie An historique. J’admets que l’homme qui m’intéresse appartient

à la légende autant ou plus qu'à l'histoire : la célébrité dont il a joui dès le IV<sup>e</sup> siècle explique qu'aient pu lui être attribués des propos et comportements imaginaires. Le portrait d'ensemble qui en résulte reflète les déchirements d'une classe, l'aristocratie lettrée, traditionnellement destinée au service de l'État, mais que cette vocation expose, en un temps de troubles, aux plus grands dangers. (Ibid., 8)

The demonstration that follows, which is thematically structured around the stages of Xie An's life, behaviour, attitude, qualities, and flaws as revealed in the anecdotes scattered throughout the book, highlights key values in 4<sup>th</sup>-century society. Jean-Pierre Diény builds on the hypothesis that the collection of anecdotes was intended to provide models for the art of conversation: the collection of anecdotes becomes a mirror for archetypes of expression, but also for behaviour, attitude, and character. In his reading of a very tedious text, Diény draws on editions, commentaries, and a manuscript presented in the introduction, as well as on modern studies, particularly Japanese. He is at once a philologist, a historian, and an expert on medieval literature, as well as a connoisseur of the currents of thought at the time. By breaking away from the question of the veracity of the anecdotes, he invites us to explore the world of representations, so crucial to cultural history.

These two examples paint the portrait of a researcher who anchors his work in the primary sources offered by the Chinese bibliography, concerned as much with the texts as with later research carried out around the world on the topics of interest to him. His approach is not only erudite but modern, as he sets out the materials on which he relies, showing the reader how he proceeds, without hiding the uncertainties or limitations he faces. The library stands as a reflection of the man himself, rich in elements from the past and the present, multidisciplinary and multilingual.

### **Comparison could be reason**

Jean-Pierre Diény has not only set out to discover a distant corpus, with the constant idea in mind of getting as close as possible to the original texts with the help of a wealth of critical material, he has also acted as an intermediary. As we have seen, all his analytical work is based on numerous original translations. By contrast with the previous examples, his lighter *Jeux de montagnes et d'eaux. quatrains et huitains de chine* (Diény 2001) are limited to the original poems without variants, and their translation without annotation or commentary. His work *Pastourelles et magnanarelles. Essai sur un thème littéraire chinois* (Diény 1977), which combines a thematic study with translations and an enlightened comparative approach, is certainly more original.

Comparative literature is a fairly recent discipline, subject to violent attacks from René Etiemble's *Comparaison n'est pas raison* (1963) to the recent heated exchanges on the subject of World Literature, particularly between Emily Apter and David Damrosch. If a reading of



Jean-Pierre Diény's work leaves no doubt that his general knowledge extends far beyond the literature and history of classical China, it does not place him within the framework of the intellectual theories and constructs generally associated with France in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As far as I know, there is no mention of structuralism, semiology, or deconstructivism in his writings. It is not possible to assert, solely on the basis of the sinological section of the Diény family library, that Roland Barthes or Gérard Genette were absent from it, but it seems unlikely, given the orientation of his studies, that Jean-Pierre Diény was particularly sensitive to the influence of the theoretical currents that these figures embodied. As a consequence, this work on so-called folk poetry from China and France in the early Middle Ages<sup>29</sup> should not be read with the disputes between different schools of comparative scholars set in the background. Nor does the book situate Jean-Pierre Diény as a successor or even a contradictor of a Chinese scholar like Guo Maoqian. Here, Jean-Pierre Diény fully assumes his position as an outsider in his approach to the Chinese heritage, inviting us to better place the works in their context by means of comparison:

A thousand years before the appearance of the French *pastourelle* (pastoral), Chinese poetry featured its two main actors. Although the setting is different, the roles are similar. An unscrupulous traveller, not a knight but a mandarin, meets a country girl, not a shepherdess but a mulberry-picker, and tries to seduce her. This is not to boldly locate in China the origins of the *pastourelle*, which has been sought in vain on all sides, even in the Arab world. Nor even to attempt a rigorous comparison, at such a distance in space and time, between the productions of two very different civilisations. But when it comes to literature, the fields of study of the medievalist and the sinologist have certain similarities. Since the most difficult art is to question one's subject judiciously, it would not be without profit for these specialists to initiate each other into the problems of their respective disciplines.

Mille ans avant l'apparition de la pastourelle française, la poésie chinoise met en scène ses deux acteurs principaux. Quoique le décor diffère, les rôles se ressemblent. Un voyageur sans scrupules, non pas chevalier mais mandarin, rencontre d'aventure une campagnarde, non pas bergère mais cueilleuse de mûrier, et il tente de la séduire. On n'aura pas ici le front de situer en Chine l'origine de la pastourelle, vainement cherchée de tous côtés jusque dans le monde arabe. Ni même de tenter une comparaison rigoureuse, à pareille distance dans l'espace et le temps, entre les productions de deux civilisations si différentes. Mais les champs d'étude du médiéviste et du sinologue présentent, en matière de littérature, certaines similitudes. L'art le plus difficile étant de

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<sup>29</sup> Despite a common label, the "Middle Ages" point to two very distinct periods from the perspective of chronology depending whether it is applied to China (approximately the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium) or to France (roughly from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century).

questionner judicieusement son objet, il ne serait pas sans profit pour ces spécialistes de s'initier mutuellement à la problématique de leurs disciplines. (Diény 1977, 1-2)

In this study, Jean-Pierre Diény suggests that researchers should open up to other disciplines, other linguistic and cultural areas, and other periods, in order to shed new light on their subject of study, to bring to light some of its characteristics and, as far as possible, to better understand how it fits into a given space and period. He illustrates this approach by studying the poem “Mo shang sang” 陌上桑 (In the Mulberry Trees) that was unique for its time, that some associate with a folkloric vein, although this idea is based more on intuition than on tangible elements, and whose reading, essentially moral or political, has shown its limits. Indeed, what do we learn about a poem when we either brandish it as a testimony to the resistance of the people to the dominant elite, or as a parody of righteousness? While a number of questions remain open, a closer look at the young woman in the mulberry field, inspired by Michel Zink's (1972) work on the *pastourelle* insofar as the genre is centred on the shepherdess and her sheep, allows us to identify the symbolic forces that make this emerging poetic model so powerful. In this way, the poetic piece is recontextualised, drawing on very ancient textual roots and references, at once heir to the imperatives of moral and political orthodoxy and reinvested with the primal temptations of freedom.

Although inspired by Western research on the *pastourelle*, this study is essentially based on material from sinology. Within the Diény library, this rich range of references can be found – it ranges from poetic anthologies with numerous historical commentaries, to studies written in Chinese, Japanese, French, and English between the 1930s and the 1970s.

## Resources for the future

Jean-Pierre Diény has opened up a number of avenues for sinological studies, particularly those relating to ancient and medieval Chinese poetry. Current and future research will build on this intellectual heritage, and will also be enriched by a more detailed analysis of the library gathered by Colette and Jean-Pierre Diény.

## Towards an intellectual and cultural history

The collection appears to be a source of information and a starting point for a better understanding of 20<sup>th</sup>-century history. This article is a sketch of this possibility in two respects. It reveals how Jean-Pierre Diény had a triple, perhaps quadruple, grounding. His childhood, then his first experience as a teacher of literature at the Lycée Fustel-de-Coulanges in Strasbourg, and finally his long negotiations with various Alsatian authorities – the Strasbourg

metropolitan authority, the Université Marc Bloch, and the BNUS — all remind us of the sinologist's identification with his homeland.<sup>30</sup> Naturally, his research work, like that of his wife, places him in the dual field of French sinology and, more broadly, Chinese intellectual history. Finally, a study of the biographies of Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény suggests that their stay in Japan played an important role, placing them, *de facto*, in almost closer contact with Japanese intellectuals and writers than they were with their peers during their stay in Beijing. There is undoubtedly much more work to be done to better understand how husband and wife evolved in each of these spaces, the people with whom they were closely connected, and the impact of these relationships on their own output.

Perhaps as an extension of this first line of enquiry, we could look at the traces left in the books — such as seals or autographs — by the relationships the Diény couple forged during their extended stays in Japan, China, and Hong Kong, of course, but more generally throughout their research activities. The numerous dedications found in many of the volumes bear witness to this. An analysis of these might help to sketch out the network of relations between sinologists in the second half of the twentieth century.

Also, one characteristic of Jean-Pierre Diény's contributions on ancient Chinese civilisation, and ancient and medieval poetry in particular, is that, however erudite they may be, they are largely written in such a way that they are accessible to non-specialists. At a time of general globalisation, one could find inspiration in Diény's work on mulberry field poems through the lens of *pastourelle* studies. One could just as easily, by including the materials and reflections made available to us by Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény in our intellectual and cultural space, make a detour to ancient China, and go there without any quest for exoticism, to perhaps better examine objects that are closer to us.

Finally, while the Diény collection focuses on material relating to textual studies of ancient China, it is far from being confined to this field. It embodies the openness to which it invites us. It is striking to see the large number of books on the history of Japan in this library, for example. The case of children's books is certainly an avenue worth exploring. There is, indeed, a very special segment in the Diény collection, that of children's literature, which provided food for thought for Jean-Pierre Diény's *Le Monde est à vous. La Chine et les livres pour enfants* (Diény 1971). This section of the collection will probably not provide reading material that is particularly well-suited to a young audience in Strasbourg, but it does constitute a particularly valuable and interesting collection of material relating to twentieth-century China. It is complemented by another unique collection, the translations of Japanese children's literature published by Colette Diény in the 1990s (Diény C. 1990; 1991a; 1991b; 1995a; 1995b; 1995c). This bridge between Asian studies and children's literature, which has gradually become a genre in its own right since the 1920s, is not insignificant and deserves a

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<sup>30</sup> In the future, enriched editions of the Dictionnaire de biographie alsacienne could include a presentation of Jean-Pierre Diény.

specific study. It certainly says a lot about the way in which the couple viewed culture, education, and childhood. And it is probably related to the commitment of Geneviève Patte (1936–), Colette Diény's sister, to promoting reading as a source of discovery and connection for children.

### Rare books in the collection

The documents that make up the Diény collection reflect intellectual activity and form a heritage in their own right. One hundred and fifty-eight *shanben* 善本 (rare books) are a particularly rich part of this heritage.<sup>31</sup>

These books cover a very broad thematic spectrum. They include editions and commentaries on the Confucian classics, historical works in the broadest sense,<sup>32</sup> anthologies and collections of texts that could be described as literary, encyclopaedias and other study books, calligraphic dictionaries, etc. The oldest of these works would be the *Lengzhai yehua* 冷齋夜話 (Night Sayings from the Freezing Studio) by the Song monk Huihong 惠洪 (1071–1128), in a Japanese edition of 1666. Among a large majority of works published after 1850, a few particularly rare and ancient works stand out.

A brief presentation of the variety of rare books included in the collection will precede a discussion on the research that the oldest items could inspire. The oldest works, whether printed in China or Japan, take the form of volumes sewn together using an accordion structure: the paper was too thin to allow printing on both sides, so each sheet was printed one after the other on a long strip of paper which is then folded in an accordion shape. Printing was based on the xylographic technique – movable type appeared not to be a practical option for a script with thousands of characters. Each engraved wooden plate could be used to print one sheet in series, and could be reused for several editions if the plates were well preserved, as we will see later. Lithography was introduced during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) by Westerners, who used it to distribute Christian tracts in particular, and it proved to be particularly well-suited to the production of illustrated books. This second method of reproduction, which coexisted with xylography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, became very important in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the Diény collection attests. It was also at the end of the Qing that another type of printing developed, that of metal movable type, which took older xylographic editions as its reference. There are many works of this type in the collection, most of which date from the 1920s and 1930s. They reflect the fact that this type of publishing was taking precedence over the previous two. These works sit alongside books printed using movable

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<sup>31</sup> I rely heavily on the article by Liu and Cen 2017, but also on the additional information prepared for the publication of this article that Ms Shum (Cen) kindly sent me. I would like to thank her for this. I would also like to thank Jean-Pierre Drège for the explanations he kindly provided.

<sup>32</sup> Which, in traditional Chinese bibliography, include geography, to which astronomy and technology could perhaps be added.

type, whether in wood, metal or ceramic, many of which originated in Japan. The last group of antique-bound books consists of reproductions, usually based on photographs. These anastatic reprints, which are identical reproductions of older works, have made it possible to pass on to posterity, in perfectly identical form, documents that were difficult to preserve. This collection, put together by Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény, is all the more valuable given that many of the works that were still available in the 1960s when the Diény family was living in Beijing disappeared in the different *yundong* 运动 movements with tragic consequences that were successively launched in the People's Republic of China. Even though recent copies of older editions included in the Diény collection may not qualify as rare books in themselves, nevertheless some of them maintain access to ancient editions that have otherwise disappeared.

The collection thus assembled provides material for a study of book history or transmission, and the analysis of particular editions of texts printed in imperial China from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This is demonstrated by the sample presented by Liu Rui and Shum Wing-fong, who have carried out the most detailed analysis of the edition of the *Shi ji* 詩紀 [Poetic Memoirs] preserved in the collection. The text itself corresponds to a double collection, as complete as possible, of poems composed in the past. The first part, the *Gushi ji* 古詩紀 [Memoirs of Ancient Poems], covers the earliest part up to and including the Sui dynasty (581–618) and was written by the Ming scholar Feng Weine 馮惟訥 (ca. 1512–1572). The second, the *Tang shi ji* 唐詩紀 [Memoirs of Tang Poems], an expansion produced under the impetus of the scholar Wu Guan 吳琯 (active ca. 1585) covers, as its name suggests, the Tang period (618–907), considered to be the heyday of poetry. This work in 156 *juan* is divided into 120 volumes arranged in two cases. A seal indicates that the work belonged to the Meiji era Japanese sinologist Uzan Nagao 長尾兩山 (1864–1942). As the two specialists show in their article, the work was composed from plates that do not belong to the same series.<sup>33</sup> By identifying the taboo characters,<sup>34</sup> it is possible to date the plates of ancient poems fairly precisely to the very early Qing dynasty, *i.e.* the period 1644–1662. The section devoted to Tang poems alternates sections with pages of nine columns of nineteen characters with older sections of twelve columns of twenty-one characters – not to go into more details of the page layout. A study of marginalia and taboo characters has led the researchers to date the entire edition to the period 1662–1735. This edition is one of the half-dozen or so that have survived and, in the case of this work, can be dated back to the first half of the eighteenth century. It highlights the complex publishing practices involved. Other parts of the collection would merit a similar study.

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<sup>33</sup> This edition thus results from the use of plates that were not all engraved at the same time: plates that had been preserved with a view to a possible republication were partly damaged.

<sup>34</sup> Because the emperor's personal name is sacred and therefore taboo, the characters that make it up are forbidden during his reign. This practice, which consists of replacing taboo characters with homophones, is particularly useful for dating editions.

### **Towards establishing sinology in Alsace**

The prospects for study opened up in this way can only be realised if the collection held at the BNUS is brought forward (catalogued and made available to the public) and if researchers work on it. In other words, the very presence of the collection in Alsace augurs well for the development of Chinese studies in the region. Jean-Pierre Diény was particularly attentive to this. As he continued his research work in retirement, he turned to his roots with a view to passing on the collection of works on Asia, and China in particular, that he and his wife had assembled over the years. His aim, repeated throughout his correspondence with the BNUS, was to “encourage the creation and development of a new centre for Chinese studies”.

<sup>35</sup> He said as much in his letter of 5<sup>th</sup> May 2006 to BNUS administrator Albert Poirot:

My strongest hope is that my library will be able to help set up a specific centre for Chinese studies in Strasbourg, for which it would be a prime support.

Mon plus ferme désir serait en effet que ma bibliothèque puisse favoriser la création à Strasbourg d'un centre spécifique d'études chinoises, dont elle constituerait un premier point d'appui.

In other words, the bequest from Colette and Jean-Pierre Diény was not simply a gift to Alsace of a valuable collection of works. Their aim was to give impetus to sinological teaching and research in the region. Moreover, Jean-Pierre Diény was very attentive to the slow and belated progress of Chinese language teaching at high school level in Alsace, which he did not fail to mention, as is the case in his letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2004 to BNUS administrator Bernard Falga:

I am enclosing two newspaper excerpts which describe the remarkable progress made in the teaching of Chinese in high schools. Strasbourg has begun to follow suit. It is clear that this spectacular growth will eventually lead to the emergence and development of sinology courses in faculties. It is not too early to start thinking about it, and the arrival in Strasbourg of a library like mine should help the Strasbourg university authorities to move in this direction.

Je me permets de joindre à cette lettre deux extraits de journaux qui exposent les progrès remarquables de l'enseignement du chinois dans les lycées et les collèges.

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<sup>35</sup> Letter dated 21st January 2004.

Strasbourg a commencé de suivre le mouvement. Il est évident que cet essor spectaculaire est appelé à déboucher un jour ou l'autre sur l'apparition et le développement de filières sinologiques dans les facultés. Il n'est pas trop tôt pour y penser, et la venue à Strasbourg d'une bibliothèque comme la mienne devrait aider les autorités universitaires strasbourgeoises à s'engager dans cette voie.

The many letters that Jean-Pierre Diény sent to Mr Falga over a year and a half reflected a twofold concern. The first was his need for a clear answer as to whether the BNUS would accept his offer, as he and his wife, who were still active, were concerned about the future of their collection and the burden it might place on their children after their deaths. The second, which was probably fuelled by the time taken by studies and consultations on the Strasbourg side, had more to do with the appreciation that this collection could arouse in an institution where Chinese studies were absent. However, his contacts were very sensitive to this argument, aware as they were of the paucity of collections in the field of Chinese studies in Eastern France. On 10<sup>th</sup> February 2005, for example, Bernard Falga thanked Jean-Pierre Diény for the inventory he had sent him a month earlier, explaining:

I have received your letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2005 enclosing the inventory of your sinological library, and I would like to thank you for it. This inventory clearly shows the wealth of this collection and the great interest it represents for the Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire, whose collections it will considerably enrich.

Votre lettre du 2 janvier 2005, à laquelle vous avez joint l'inventaire de votre bibliothèque sinologique, m'est bien parvenue, et je vous en remercie. Cet inventaire montre bien toute la richesse de ce fonds et le grand intérêt qu'il présente pour la Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire, dont il enrichira considérablement les collections.

In fact, the wide range of works in the collection meets the dual need for teaching and research in sinology. While all the research tools and major texts of classical Chinese culture are necessary references for studying sinology as well as for conducting research projects, more unique parts of the collection will underpin advanced research.

## Conclusion

Chinese studies began to take root in Alsace in the early 2000s.<sup>36</sup> It was only in 2013 that a Bachelor's degree in Chinese language, literature, and civilisation was established within the Faculty of Languages and Civilisations at the University of Strasbourg. To train its students, in addition to language teachers and readers, the institution now relies on three teacher-researchers and increasingly rich documentary resources in Strasbourg. The Chinese studies library, housed in the Library of Foreign Languages, has seen its holdings increase considerably over the last decade, thanks to two initiatives. The first is, of course, the massive acquisition of books to provide students with the resources they need to learn the language, discover the civilisation, and handle the fundamental tools of sinological research. These acquisitions were coordinated to complement the collections of the University of Strasbourg's Documentation Services and the BNUS, which are also constantly evolving. The second lever consisted of a donation, comparable in size to the Diény collection, which was made by the Library of the Institut des hautes études chinoises of the Collège de France in 2017. These collections complement the holdings of the BNUS. As a whole, they include fundamental resources as well as more specialised documents and valuable works, and form a foundation whose development will, hopefully in agreement with Colette and Jean-Pierre Diény's will, support the growth of more advanced studies and sinological research in Alsace.

The Jean-Pierre and Colette Diény collection, which is the fruit of a lifelong gathering of books by two major French sinologists, provides the academic community with all the resources associated with the best publications. The research it has already enabled is a model for young researchers, who, by engaging with the texts and editions, will also find inspiration for new explorations of a rich collection that can be approached as a witness to intellectual history, as a resource for material history, or for literary, historical, intellectual, and scientific approaches, to name but a few.

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<sup>36</sup> Luca Gabbiani was a lecturer at the Institut d'études politiques de Strasbourg from 2005 to 2007. He taught Chinese history. But the students he taught were not fluent in Chinese and therefore had no access to primary sources.



[https://arche.unistra.fr/actualites-agenda/fil-infos/actualite/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=11535&cHash=5cfb23a51f7e7647d6d21be42cd1a85](https://arche.unistra.fr/actualites-agenda/fil-infos/actualite/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=11535&cHash=5cfb23a51f7e7647d6d21be42cd1a85) (accessed on 17 June 2020).

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