How 19th century writings about the history of mathematics in China were shaped by comparison

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My presentation intends to examine various ways in which comparison structured the historical approach to mathematics in China that took shape in the 19th century. It will center on two scholars who worked in completely different contexts and whose views give pride of place to comparison in wholly different ways. The first scholar, Edouard Biot (1803-1850), Jean-Baptiste's son, was probably the first professional sinologist outside East Asia to devote several articles and memoirs to mathematics and astral sciences in ancient China. His publications, however, seem to have had much less influence on the historiography of mathematics than those of the second scholar considered, Protestant missionary Alexander Wylie (1815-1887), whose English publications on the topic had a significant impact in Europe. Whereas Biot had no opportunity to travel to China, Wylie was based in Shanghai, and he had close contacts with Chinese scholars actively involved in the historical analysis of Chinese mathematical documents from a past that had been recovered only a few decades earlier. Moreover, Biot had been trained as an engineer, while, as Chen Zhihui recently established, Wylie seems to have drawn primarily on mathematical and historical writings published by Augustus de Morgan. I will examine how, in these two social and intellectual contexts, the types of *comparanda* on which each of them focused differ quite dramatically, and how the conclusions they drew were structurally different.