In his much acclaimed novel *The Temptation of the West (La Tentation de l’Occident)*, André Malraux (1901-76) stages a fictitious correspondence between a young Frenchman travelling through China in the 1920’s, and his young Chinese friend who is visiting Europe at the same time. In one of the letters, the Chinese correspondent comments on the relationship between a painter and a cat that forms the object to be painted. He tells his European correspondent: “The idea of species is for you [Europeans] quite abstract; it allows you to classify; it is a means toward knowledge. In us [Chinese] it is closely connected with our sensibility.” In this lecture we will explore to what extent Malraux’s hypothesis could make sense by examining portrayals of the human-animal relationship in early Chinese texts.

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