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TRANSLATING IDENTITY:
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAVEL DISCOURSE ON
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Jian Wu

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TRANSLATING IDENTITY:
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAVEL DISCOURSE ON CHINA, 1976-PRESENT

By

Jian Wu

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ABSTRACT

TRANSLATING IDENTITY: ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TRAVEL DISCOURSE ON CHINA, 1976-PRESENT

By

Jian Wu

This project consists of a comparative study of the English-language travel discourse on China after 1976, when both Western society and Chinese society have undergone major changes. With China opening up to the world in the late 1970s, an increasing number of foreign visitors have visited China. Among them were diplomats, tourists, teachers, students, businessmen, journalists, or filmmakers. It is the purpose of this project to explore how identity, both personal and collective, Western and Chinese, has been translated, interpreted, and transformed in the travel writings and films on China after 1976 and how these translations of identity have served as a yardstick of social changes in both societies.

In this project travel is defined in its broadest sense, including the movement from one place to another, both physically and imaginatively. The distinction has been traditionally a thin one. Travel discourse is the recording of these experiences in its all possible forms: words, pictures, and movies. Travel discourse, in recent cultural studies, is treated more as a theoretical site than as a genre. It is a “contact zone”, “space of transculturation” (Pratt), “a space in-between” (Bhabha), and a translation term for comparative cultural studies (Clifford). In this project, travel discourse is seen as a site for translating identity. We construct identity by defining ourselves in relation to an array of people and objects not part of ourselves. Travel is a site for encountering difference and travel discourse is critical in developing a sense of identity and representing identities of other cultures. To travel is to encounter

difference through familiarity, and experience an inner journey by way of the outer journey. In this sense, travel is an act of translation, a major trope in this study that refers to the traveler's rendering and representation of a culture and a people other than his/her own.

There are four layers of translations taking place simultaneously in cross-cultural travel discourse: translation of foreign landscapes and communities by travelers, translation of travelers' self identities in terms of their interpretations of a foreign culture, translation of travelers' identities by the locals, and translation of self identities by locals themselves. These four translations are always interrelated, interactive, and mutually defining. The first layer of translating is to bridge the different with the familiar, second the inner with the outer, third the global with the local, last contemporary with the traditional or vice versa.

Embedded in contemporary sensibilities, translating a culture is not only poetic and aesthetic but also geopolitical and socio-economic. It is in this process that individual and national identities are questioned, negotiated, constructed, and reconstructed in relation to modernity. It is a "contact zone" that complicates binary opposites such as self/other, individual/collective, difference/sameness, and time/space.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

1976, year of dragon. Chinese folklore has it that grave misfortune strikes every twelve years in the year of dragon. True or not, 1976 turned out to be the year of the fallen dragon. Mao Zedong, emperor of modern China since 1949, died in September that year, which marked the end of a ten-year-long Cultural Revolution and thus began a new era in Chinese history. Since then, China has undergone dramatic changes in almost every aspect of its culture. After a series of political struggles within the political system, Deng Xiaoping came into power in 1978. The new leadership steered China into an uncharted domain, “socialism with Chinese characteristics” as the Chinese government terms it. Namely, it involves the marriage of market economy and communist ideology en route to modernity. The new economic policy saw immediate high performance both in rural and urban areas from the late seventies to the early eighties. The late eighties saw a continuing increase in both agricultural and industrial production along with soaring inflation. In the nineties China secured its position as one of the largest economies in the world. Now it is the beacon of growth in a global economic downturn.

In addition to economic reform, China also adopted new foreign policy and began to step out of the isolation of an earlier era. The number of countries that established diplomatic relations with China rose from 57 in 1970 to 139 in 1989 (Schoppa 365), the greatest number since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Among the most decisive international relations is that with the United States. Despite a long-standing dispute over the issue of Taiwan, China and United States established diplomatic relations in 1978. To nurture the newborn and delicate Sino-U.S. bond, Deng

Xiaoping visited the United States in 1979. With China opening up to the world, the decades from late seventies on have witnessed an increasing number of foreign visitors to China. Among them were diplomats, tourists, teachers, students, businessmen, journalists, filmmakers, and others with varied interests, who recorded their journeys in newspaper articles, travelogues, novels, correspondence, and films. It is the purpose of this project to examine how China, as a nation and as a people, has been represented in these travel discourse and how these representations are, to some extent, the West's self-representations.

Definitions of Key Concepts

Travel discourse is the recording of these experiences in its all possible forms: words, pictures, movies, to name a few. It is treated more as a theoretical site than as a genre in recent cultural studies. It is a "contact zone", "space of transculturation" (Pratt 22), "a space in-between" (Bhabha 13), and a translation term for comparative cultural studies (Clifford). In this project, it is seen as a site for translating identity. One constructs identity by defining oneself in relation to an array of people who are different from oneself. As a site for encountering the difference, travel discourse is critical for developing self identity. To travel is to encounter difference through familiarity and travel discourse is a major process of decoding a culture and recording it to the audience back home. In this sense, travel is an act of translation referring to a traveler's rendering and representation of a culture and a people other than his/her own.

There are four layers of translations taking place simultaneously in cross-cultural travel discourse: translation of foreign landscapes and communities by travelers, translation of travelers' self identities in terms of their interpretations of a foreign culture,

translation of travelers' identities by the locals, and translation of self identities by locals themselves. These four layers of translations are always interrelated, interactive, and mutually defining. The act of translating is to bridge the different with the familiar, the inner with the outer, the global with the local, contemporary with the traditional or vice versa.

Embedded in contemporary sensibilities, translating a culture is not only poetic and aesthetic but also geopolitical and socio-economical. It is in this process that individual and national identities are often questioned, negotiated, constructed, and reconstructed in relation to modernity. It is a "contact zone" that complicates binary opposites such as self/other, individual/collective, difference/sameness, and time/space.

In this project, travel is defined in its broadest sense -- movement from one place to another physically and imaginatively. The distinction has traditionally been a thin one. Franz Kafka is known as a "textual traveler," whose knowledge of other cultures was not derived from real physical experience but from other writings and his own imaginations. Basing his short story "The Great Wall of China" on some stereotypes of China's stagnant history and authoritarian emperors in western literature, he parodically appropriated them to refute colonialist ideas of progress. Even for travelers in the strictest sense, intertextuality and imagination play an important role in their accounts as well. In this sense, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, who had never been to China when they wrote The Woman Warrior and The Joy Luck Club respectively, are such imaginary travelers and thus included in this study.

Historical Overview of Western Travel and Travel Discourse

The history of early Western travel discourse is primarily one of the West trying to define itself in terms of the “other.” The earliest may be traced back to the Greco-Roman mythological tradition. Travel took the form of wild imagination of strange looks of other people, especially people of color. Greek and Roman mythology populated the Orient with a host of strange looking creatures.¹ In the Greek mythology, Arimaspians is a tribe of one-eyed men who dwell somewhere in Asia and combat griffins. The Hemicunes is an African tribe of a dog-headed race. Others include single-footed Sciapodes, the African “Umbrella Foots,” and the “Chest-Eyes.” Imagination took wings in the process of the early Greek experience with foreigners and foreign lands (Romm 65-67).

Despite some borrowings from Greek mythology, Herodotus’ History² added greatly to the body of knowledge of foreign land. Besides presenting a wealthy Orient, he made one of the earliest comparisons of collective identity by noticing that, unlike Greeks, Persians do not value individuals or individual feelings and relations since they never care about their women when attacked. Another difference in identity lies in the way they treat others. Tzvetan Todorov, in his study of Herodotus, detects the earliest

¹ The Arimaspi were described by Aristeas of Proconnesus in his lost archaic poem Arimaspea. Proconnesus is a small island in the Sea of Marmora near the mouth of the Black Sea, well situated for hearing travellers’ tales of regions far north of the Black Sea. Hemikunes is a tribe of dog-headed African men. Monopods (also sciapods, skiapodes, Monocoli) are dwarfs or dwarf-like creatures with a single, large foot extending from one thick leg centered in the middle of their body.

² Herodotus was a Greek historian in the fifth century B.C.E. His birth was around B.C.E. References to certain events in his narratives suggest that he did not die until at least 431 B.C.E, which was the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. In his later years, Herodotus traveled extensively throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. There, he visited the Black Sea, Babylon, Phoenicia, and Egypt. He is best known for his work entitled Histories. Because of this, Cicero claimed him to be the Father of History. Histories is the story of the rise of Persian power and the friction between Persia and Greece. The battles that are described are the ones fought at Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis. His story is the historical record of events that happened in his own lifetime.

trace of defining similarities and differences on a scale of geographical proximity in Herodotus' portrayal of Persians, who "honor most of all those all dwell nearest them, next those who are next farthest removed, and so going ever onwards they assign honor by this rule" (Todorov 173).

Similarly, Aristotle also treats the characteristics of Asia, especially in contrast with Europe, in his often-quoted passage:

Those who live in a cold climate and in Europe are full of spirit, but wanting in intelligence and skill; and therefore they retain comparative freedom, but have no political organization, and are incapable of ruling others. Whereas the natives of Asia are intelligent and inventive, they are wanting in spirit, and therefore they are always in a state of subjection and slavery.(291)

Here, Aristotle may have used "Asia" to mean "Persian" and "Europe" to mean "Greece", quite different from today's usage. Despite differences in geographical reference, Asians are idealized in terms of brainpower and creativity as opposed to Europeans who are in need of them. At the same time, Europeans are regarded as superior in vitality and independence to Asians. Aristotle attributes the differences among Asians and Europeans to a combination of geographical environment and climate and goes further to suggest that these differences lead to different patterns of social institutions. Along the same line, In Guns, Germs, and Steel (1999), Jared Diamond argues that the gaps in power and technology between human societies do not reflect cultural or racial differences. Instead, they originate in environmental differences. Although this conclusion is rather essentialist, it is repeated in various Western travel discourses to come.

The experience with the “other” in the Middle Ages is a continuation of classical themes yet with a Christian and Biblical overtone. Pilgrimage was the most characteristic form of travel during the early Middle Ages (from around the 3rd century to 1000 A.D.). Among early European pilgrims visiting the Holy Land were Egeria in the fifth century and Arculf in the late seventh century. For them, the East is geographically restricted to “the Near East” or the modern notion of “Middle East,” which covers Palestine and Jerusalem. Later this geographical notion was extended to include “the Far East.” During the High Middle Ages (from around 1000 A.D. to 1300 A.D.), especially in the 13th century, missionary accounts of the Far East indicated a strong belief that all human beings came from the same origin (Adam and Eve) and the pagans could be converted to Christianity.³ The audience of their narratives was the members of the religious community to which they belonged (Campbell 8).

With the rise of trade and class of merchants rich enough to launch ventures to Asia, a more pagan trend of travel discourse began to take shape in the 14th century. The Orient became a land of untold wealth and fabulous cities, as represented in writings by Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville. The divorce of travel narrative from religion led to an unprecedented boom in secular topic such as human customs and culture as opposed to religion and beliefs, and material wealth in contrast to spiritual gain (Campbell 9-10). Travel narratives at the time were driven by a growing readership who was more interested in traveling tales about discoveries of material goods, wealth and power and demanded authenticity of the narratives as well. To meet the mass’s seemingly

³ During the Age of Discovery, the Roman Catholic Church established a number of Missions in the Americas and other colonies through the Augustinians, Franciscans and Dominicans in order to spread Christianity in the New World and to convert the Native Americans and other indigenous people. At the same time, missionaries such as Francis Xavier as well as other Jesuits, Augustinians, Franciscans and Dominicans were moving into Asia and the far East.

contradictory demand for both adventure and factuality, Polo and Mandeville dealt with secular subjects and adopted a “realist” approach such as the use of the 'eye-witness' account. This is ironic in itself since contemporary scholarship has proved that neither Marco Polo nor Mandeville made the journeys they proclaimed to be “real” and “authentic.”

Inspired by the mesmerizing descriptions of the East by Polo and Mandeville, especially the wealth, commercial explorers of the Renaissance opened a new chapter in the history of travel: an age of discovery. When Columbus set off to find “the end of the east” in the 15th century, it was Marco Polo’s Cathay that he was searching for. He recorded his exploration in The Letters and The Journal, the forefathers of modern travel narratives in the form of memoir. Columbus introduced in his Journal literary elements to travel discourse, namely, character and plot that are essentials in modern genre. Mary Campbell believes that Columbus’ narratives ushered in a new age of travel writing in which romantic imagery of “new heaven and new earth” was created to idealize the exotic territories. In this case, the Indies and the egocentric hero made their debut (209).

In the spirit of the age of Reason, there was a scientifically oriented curiosity about the outside world. In the centuries after Renaissance, more voyages of discovery were charged -- circumnavigating the globe, mapping coastal shorelines, and providing more accurate routes to support commercial trade across the oceans. For instance, Captain James Cook, a well-known modern scientific explorer, voyaged to the South Seas in search of the accumulation of scientific knowledge.⁴ The knowledge of the other

⁴ James Cook was born on October 27, 1728 in Marton, (near modern Middlesborough), Yorkshire, Britain. He commanded three voyages of discovery for Great Britain, and sailed around the world twice. Captain Cook's voyages lead to the establishment of colonies throughout the Pacific by several European countries. He is considered one of the world's greatest explorers.

during the age of discovery is mingled with speculation on the potential commercial uses of the other where exploration is synonymous with exploitation. In this vein, the Royal Society in England sponsored many scientific expeditions and many of these travel narratives are implicitly imperialist.

Following exploration came the modern travel era. In Paul Fussell's view, it is a time to pay visits to the places that have already been discovered by earlier explorations (Fussell 39). Travel in the modern sense is a token of technological progress and an exposure to objective knowledge about the unknown and the little known. During this era, modernity has historicized geographical locations: difference in space translated into difference in time. Other cultures were viewed as more "backward" than Western culture in a different range of scales. It is the Western men's mission to introduce to them the blessings of "advanced" technology. Against the backdrop of industrialization and colonization, this idea was always coupled with desires to convert the natives to Christians and the blatant objective of profit-oriented trade and commerce. Edward Said provides the most influential reading of representations of the other in this vein.⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, on the other hand, classifies modern travelers by "the form of interaction in which they engage with others" into the assimilator, the profiteer, the tourist, the impressionist, the assimilated, the exote, the exile, the allegorist, the disenchanted, and the philosopher.

⁵ Edward Said's evaluation and critique of the set of beliefs known as Orientalism forms an important background for postcolonial studies. His work highlights the inaccuracies of a wide variety of assumptions as it questions various paradigms of thought which are accepted on individual, academic, and political levels. To him, the Orient signifies a system of representations framed by political forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and Western empire. The Orient exists for the West, and is constructed by and in relation to the West. It is a mirror image of what is inferior and alien ("Other") to the West.

Travel was soon replaced with tourism and poses more problems and questions than ever. With the boundary breaking between subjective/ objective, real/ imaginative, in the postmodern era, travel takes on a “constructed” turn, which is evident in two aspects. First, travel itself is commercialized into tourism, which, in Paul Fussell’s term, lacks originality and seeks what has already been discovered by entrepreneurship. Instead of real places, tourists flock to pseudo-places such as Disneyland, which are constructed for them by the arts of mass publicity. This evokes the old problem of authenticity of travel experience in a new context. Second, critical attention has been drawn to the constructedness of representation of the “other” in previous travel discourse. Post-colonial theory is the reversion of the “imperial gaze”, in Mary Louise Pratt’s term, that is, non-European countries are looking back at the former cosmopolitan travelers.

Overview of Western Travelers to China

Western knowledge of China can be traced back at least to Roman times. After a thorough research on the history of Western image of China, Sir Henry Yule listed all the limited and vague ideas of China in antique time. As part of the Orient, China, located at the east end of Asia, was a country of large population and vast land, producing high-quality silk. Chinese people were said to be civilized and mild in nature (Yule 16).

It was not until Medieval times that knowledge of China began to increase significantly. Franciscan missionaries were among the first group of contributors to this body of knowledge. They were dispatched by Pope Innocent IV in 1245 to try to convert Mongolians to Christianity. It was considered a strategy to check the increasingly menacing power of both Islam and the Mongolian Empire. Among these missionaries, the most famous one was John of Plano Carpini, whose experience was recorded in

Speculum Mundi, one of the most renowned books of the Middle Ages. Though he did not actually go to China, his comments on Chinese people (then Cathayans) in his work might be the most valuable before Marco Polo's extensive account of China. China, according to John of Plano Carpini, was a nation of heathens, who believed in one God but also paid respect to Jesus Christ and needed to be baptized. Chinese people (Cathayans) were gentle and the best craftsmen in the world. He also took notice of the richness in various materials in China. It was quite understandable that, as a Christian in the Middle Ages, John of Plano Carpini focused so much on the religious perspective of a society different from his own, but his optimistic view had been proven to be little more than wishful thinking.

John of Plano Carpini was not alone in his idealization of China. Following him, William of Rubruquis, among other Franciscan friars, visited the Mongol territory in Europe and spent eight months at the Mongol capital of Karakorum during 1253-1254 and met many Chinese. Like John of Plano Carpini, he was also impressed by the marvelous craftsmanship of the Chinese and the abundance in silk. He also mentioned the use of the brush in writing and paper money.

The most famous Medieval traveler (or self-claimed traveler) to China was Marco Polo, who distinguished himself in at least three ways: first, he was reputed to be the first European who actually lived in China and then returned to Europe to tell his experiences. Second, his journey to China was more commercially motivated than religion-related. Third, he was the first Westerner who described and commented on China extensively and in great detail.

Marco Polo's father Nicolo and uncle Maffeo were Italian merchants who conducted business all over Europe and sometimes even in the Mongol territory. Later

they agreed to join a diplomatic mission to the Great Khan in 1260 and returned to Venice in 1269 with a letter from the Mongol ruler requesting a Christian mission. They finally set out in 1271, this time with the company of Marco Polo, then at the age of 17, with two missionaries. Their journey took five years before they finally arrived in China in 1276. Marco Polo lived in China for 17 years before the Polos were given permission to leave and return to Italy. Marco Polo's experiences in China were later recorded in The Travels of Marco Polo. Generally speaking, Marco Polo applauded almost every aspect of Cathay, economic, social and political. Above all, in his eyes, China was an extremely prosperous country full of commercial opportunities, which echoed the imagination of China and the Orient that had long captured the Greco-Roman minds. Marco Polo was also impressed by the magnificent cities he visited during his stay, such as Kinsai (now Hangzhou) and Khan-balik (now Beijing). Like the Franciscan missionaries, Marco Polo projected his own sense of religious identity onto the society under observation. He shared his abhorrence toward Islam with most of his contemporary fellow Europeans but was quite tolerant of Buddhism.

After Marco Polo, more Franciscan missionaries arrived in China. Among them was Odoric of Pordenone, who stayed in China for about three years in the 1320s and recorded his experiences in great detail. His description of China was a continuation and reaffirmation of Marco Polo's Chinese splendor.

With the decline of Mongol power and the arrival of misfortunes in Europe, including the Black Death (1348 -1351),⁶ contact between China and Europe dwindled until the Age of Discovery in the 16th century. With curiosity and desire kindled by

⁶ A disease that killed nearly half the people of western Europe in the fourteenth century. It was a form of the bubonic plague, characterized by high fever and glandular swelling in the groin and the armpits.

medieval travelers, Portuguese and Spanish explorers sailed their way to China. Among them were Galeote Pereira, Gaspar da Cruz, Martin de Rada, and Juan Gonzalez. Their views of China were predominantly positive, adding to the “wealthy and splendid” image established by their predecessors.

The 17th century and the first half of the 18th century saw two major groups of travelers to China: Jesuits and Enlightenment thinkers. Founded in 1534 at the University of Paris, the Society of Jesus, among other Roman Catholic organizations, aimed to revive missionary efforts to all parts of the world. Among the earliest Jesuit missionaries to China was Matteo Ricci, who lived in Beijing from 1583 until his death in 1610. After having studied Chinese mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, literature, arts, and society, Ricci and his followers painted a mixed picture of China. They were not only laudatory about China’s prosperity and rich resources but also repelled by some dark aspects of Chinese society, such as slavery and female infanticide.

Besides Ricci’s account of China, Du Halde wrote The General History of China, which was the most important work on China and an indispensable source of Western images of China in its day. Primarily informed and heavily influenced by the reports of Jesuits, Voltaire, among other Enlightenment philosophers, thought favorably of China and its civilization. In his Philosophical Dictionary, Voltaire views the Chinese political system as “the best that human spirit can ever imagine” (46). This trend was echoed in the vogue for Chinoiserie in artistic tastes, ranging from home décor, architecture to literature and the theater.

Following the heights of admiration for China in the 18th century, a new landscape of European travelers came into sight with revolutionary struggles going on in Europe

toward the end of the century. Against the backdrop of the industrial revolution, Britain's need to expand its overseas markets became obvious. China became one of the targets because of its fabled prosperity and richness in natural resources. Under these circumstances, travelers to China, ranging from Protestant missionaries, diplomats, scholars and adventurers, primarily from Britain, France, and the United States, formed a much less flattering image of China.

The Boxer Rebellion in 1900 marked the beginning of the 20th century in China and a new period for Western Travelers as well. The Chinese, represented by the Boxers, were cruel and xenophobic to the Westerners. The first half of the 20th century was also punctuated with some other important events: the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the reign of Chiang Kai-shek, the War of Resistance against Japan's Invasion during WWII, the civil war between the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party, and the final victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. With the rise of the United States as a world power and its more active involvement in the international realm, American travelers were the primary China image promoters. Pearl Buck (1892-1973) recorded the Chinese peasant life during this period of time.⁷ American left-wing journalists, Edgar Snow (1905-1972) and Agnes Smedley (1892-1950) were the major eye-witnesses and reporters of the early Chinese Communist Party activities during anti-Japanese war and

⁷ Pearl Buck was born on June 26, 1892, in Hillsboro, West Virginia. Her parents, Absalom and Caroline Sydenstricker, were Southern Presbyterian missionaries, stationed in China. Pearl was the fourth of seven children (and one of only three who would survive to adulthood). She was born when her parents were near the end of a furlough in the United States; when she was three months old, she was taken back to China, where she spent most of the first forty years of her life. Pearl had begun to publish stories and essays in the 1920s, in magazines such as Nation, The Chinese Recorder, Asia, and Atlantic Monthly. Her first novel, East Wind, West Wind, was published by the John Day Company in 1930. In 1931, John Day published Pearl's second novel, The Good Earth. This became the best-selling book of both 1931 and 1932, won the Pulitzer Prize and the Howells Medal in 1935, and would be adapted as a major MGM film in 1937. Other novels and books of non-fiction quickly followed. In 1938, less than a decade after her first book had appeared, Pearl won the Nobel Prize in literature, the first American woman to do so. By the time of her death in 1973, Pearl would publish over seventy books: novels, collections of stories, biography and autobiography, poetry, drama, children's literature, and translations from the Chinese.

the civil war, others might also include Arch Steele, Tillman Durdin, Harold Isaacs, Snow's wife Nym Wales, and William Hinton.

With the birth of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China entered yet another era. Western response toward the newly founded China was anything but uniform. Travelers to China were thus divided into two major camps. Some viewed it as an ally of Russia and thus a potential danger to the West. Others saw in it an alternative model for Western society. The splitting of ideas culminated during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).⁸ John K. Fairbank saw in the red guards a resemblance in violence with the 1900 Boxers. Along the same line, Robert Elegant wrote Dynasty, a novel portraying China during the Cultural Revolution. On the other side of the divide, Edgar Snow, William Hinton, and Han Suyin applauded the revolutionary acts during the same period.

The death of Mao in 1976 marked the end of the Cultural Revolution and commenced a new era in the history of modern China. This project focuses on the travelers to China after 1976, which is also loosely referred to as post-Mao China.

Theoretical Framework

Travel discourse, as a focus in literary and cultural studies, has been a comparatively recent intellectual enterprise. In the pre-modern era, travel discourse was studied with a combination of interests: religious, aesthetic, political, historical, and scientific. It is not until the second half of the 19th century, with the

⁸ Cultural Revolution (1966–76) is a mass mobilization of urban Chinese youth inaugurated by Mao Zedong in an attempt to prevent the development of a bureaucratized Soviet style of Communism. Mao closed schools and encouraged students to join Red Guard units, which denounced and persecuted Chinese teachers and intellectuals, engaged in widespread book burnings, facilitated mass relocations, and enforced Mao's cult of personality. The movement for criticism of party officials, intellectuals, and "bourgeois values"

compartmentalization of knowledge into separate disciplines that different aspects in travel discourse began to appeal to different intellectual groups. Biologists, botanists, and geologists saw in travel discourse scientific information it provided. Sociologists and anthropologists analyzed cultural patterns in travelers' observations of a foreign society (Liebersohn 618-619).

By the early 20th century, travel discourse had come to occupy a place in literary studies, fitting awkwardly between fiction and autobiography because of its long-standing ambivalence pertaining to authenticity. Since the second half of the 20th century, especially after the 1960s, post-structuralism and postmodernism have informed the studies on travel discourse with new perspectives, especially in the study of western travel discourse on the non-West. Viewing travel discourse on China since 1976 as part and parcel of modern/postmodern sentiment, this project draws on the theoretical strength from multiple perspectives, namely, literary, aesthetic, geopolitical and socio-economical. For western travelers, who are living in a postmodern world, travel embodies their conflicting postmodernist sentiments toward both the triumph and fallout of modernity. For Chinese, who are striving for Western modern technology, the presence of western travelers foregrounds their mixed yearnings toward approaching modernity.

Following on Edward Said, post-colonialists examine stereotypes generated by travelers in relation to Western Imperial power. Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) commenced a surge of studies of the relationships between former colonized discourse and colonizer discourse in contemporary context, which are now loosely gathered under the rubric of Post-colonialism. The term, Orientalism, according to Said, has three

turned violent, and the Red Guard split into factions. Torture became common, and it is estimated that a million died in the ensuing purges and related incidents.

meanings. It refers to 1) relations between Europe and Asia; 2) the 19th century specialists and teachers in Oriental languages and cultures; and 3) the myths and stereotypes produced by generations of writers, artists, and administrators in the West (Said 211). As a master text of Orientalism, Madame Butterfly (1993) first portrays Asian women as being the “ideal woman” due to their supposed submissiveness and passivity and then subverts these patterns.

Edward Said deals with the first and the third meaning of the term in his work. The third meaning is of particular relevance to this project. Orientalism, in its third sense, is the translation of the Orient by the Westerner, which is far from a satisfactory one. The force of Said’s argument is to show that Orientalism essentializes Islamic experiences for its own purpose. Nevertheless, it ends on a pessimistic note, asserting that no representation of the East has been free of this ideological construction of the Orient as the Other to the West’s own self-image.

Thus, Edward Said leaves one question unanswered: “is there any real representation of the Other at all?” This question naturally leads us to examine the origin of the representation. If we compare the whole process to translation, the question will be, “is there such an ‘priori’ as the Orient out there to be translated to begin with?” James Clifford has observed Said’s ambiguity towards the existence of such an origin. On one hand, it is regarded as a construct by the Europeans. For instance, Said opens his argument with a provocative assertion that “[t]he Orient was almost a European invention” (Said 1). In this definition, “almost” is loaded in at least two ways: it implies, first of all, that Orient is an assemblage by westerners, a juxtaposition of constituents from different sources; it also presupposes that the construct of the Orient is not a

European monopoly since the Orient has its own share of the construct. A similar view of the Orient is implicit in his second definition of Orientalism, which is based on “an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the ‘Orient’ and the Occident” (Said 2). On the other hand, the Orient is sometimes regarded as a “p^riori”, a concrete and physical presence, something out there to be translated from. Said admits, “[t]here were- and are- cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West” (5).

Edward Said’s ambiguity is both productive and obstructive. It is productive because it helps to break down the hierarchical dichotomy of East/West and Orient/Occident. It is also obstructive because Said has to evade the issue of authenticity, namely, the fidelity to the origin in translation. He claims that it is not his concern to examine “the correctness of the representation or its fidelity to some great original” (21). Without acknowledgement of an origin, on what basis does Said conclude that “...as this book has tried to demonstrate, Islam has been fundamentally *misrepresented* in the West” [my emphasis]? (272). As a result of this lack of correspondence between the “translated-from” and the “translated-to”, “Orient A” and “Orient B,” it will easily lead to a favoring of postmodernist free play of signifiers.

In order to avoid this dilemma, we have to be more attentive to the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of this origin. It is not a homogenous object frozen in time and space for one to capture its “essence”; rather, it is internally contradictory, unstable, and ever-changing. In this view, energy in the debate over authenticity should be redirected to contextualize the origin by examining specific cultural, social, and historical situations to see how it is produced and articulated in native cultures.

Edward Said detects a pattern oscillating between favorable and unfavorable translations in Orientalism. It is not that a flattering translation is a good one and an unflattering one is bad. It is not about good or bad, as Said has rightly pointed out. A few works on travel discourse to China adopt this method. The most noteworthy one is Colin Mackerras' highly systematic and informative monograph, Western Images of China (1989). In his book, Mackerras traces the images of China held by the West starting with ancient Romans up to 1989. With the double influence of Foucault and Said, Mackerras deftly sorts out the seemingly chaotic images in an alternating pattern between positive and negative without losing sight of socio-political contexts. Though illuminating, Mackerras' approach is not adopted in this project for two reasons. It excludes more nuanced representations of China and the two attitudes are two sides of the same coin. Both of them are projections of the translator's own psyche: We demonize, because we fear; we idealize, because we lack. Freud's theory of fetish and disavowal best substantiates the mentality underlying this translation mode.

Though powerful in deconstructing stereotypes in Orientalist discourse, Edward Said's study has been criticized for being a meta-narrative. Orientalism itself does not and cannot avoid the method Said himself attacks. While acknowledging the multiplicity of Palestinian experience, Said ignores the fact that the same thing is present in the translation of the Orient. The price Said paid for this essentialization is the heterogeneity within the discourse of Orientalism. Lisa Lowe has rightly pointed out, the cultural exchanges and encounters that existed in different contexts, both spatially and temporally, were internally complex, unstable and contradictory (Lowe 5).

Some researchers criticize Edward Said for the vagueness of the terms of his own position as critic of the constructed ideology. If no western scholar is exempt from

misrepresenting the Orient as “Other”, then how is Said himself an exception? Said’s own success in demystifying the Western ideology bears witness to the possibility of a better way to represent than Orientalism. Here, the positioning of the representer, either the traveler or the critic, plays an important role. I find Tzvetan Todorov’s study of French exotic writing quite helpful in illustrating this point.

In his study of exoticism in French literary tradition, Tzvetan Todorov categorizes travelers into ten kinds: the assimilator, the profiteer, the *exote*, the tourist, the impressionist, the assimilated, the exile, the allegorist, the disenchanted and the philosopher. Todorov’s classification of travelers is based on the “forms of interaction in which they engage with others” (340). A major parameter employed here is the traveler’s sense of self-identity rather than how the Other is perceived. For example, the assimilator is the one who wants to impose self-identity upon others and modify others to resemble him, including the Crusaders and Christian missionaries

The tourist is a visitor who privileges objects over subjects in a foreign culture by virtue of the short duration of a visit. The tourist spends the majority of time visiting everything that is “typical” to that culture: from natural scenery, such as mountain peaks and deserts, to human artifacts including monuments and museums. The encounters with objects rather than subjects result in an unchallenged self-identity on the tourist’s part. Nonetheless, the subjects native to that culture, driven by monetary profit, are eager to change their own cultural identities by catering to varied and changing needs of the tourist. This change of native’s identity, in turn, leads to the paradoxical frustration of the tourist who finds out that the “original” and “typical” in a foreign land are replaced with souvenirs and ritual shows produced solely for them.

Unlike the tourist, the impressionist has much more time, long enough to not only visit the featured physical tourist attractions but also interact with local people. However, he is satisfied with the impressions that the local culture has left on him instead of further understanding the local culture and people. By not claiming he has acquired ultimate knowledge of the Other, the tourist cannot be blamed for bringing home his collections of impressions, either visual or verbal, since it is natural to the process of human perception. But there are still two potential flip sides of the impressionist approach: one being casualness and shallowness of these impressions, if not inaccurate, the other absence of communicative benefit for the native, that is, the Other is used as a tool for one's own purpose. For the tourist and the impressionist, self-identity is never put to question.

The opposite to the assimilator, the assimilated is the one who wants to replace one's identity with that of the other and to be one of them, such as immigrants, who are, willingly or unwillingly, "absorbed" into an established community by losing all or many of their characteristics. Socially pressured to adapt, immigrants generally take steps to integrate into a new environment: learning the language of the country or region, making new friends or contacts, and finding a job or going to school. Adaptation for them is made more difficult if they do not speak the language of their new homes.

The allegorist is the traveler who comments on other cultures and people with the purpose to establish an argument about himself, his home country, or his own culture. In essence, the allegorist knows exactly what he is looking for in the Other even before he sets foot on alien soil. In other words, his conclusion is not a result of his observation or research; instead, it is a flipped picture of his own society, what his own is NOT. The other is used in his project to challenge his own cultural identity.

The philosopher is the one who makes observation of a culture and discusses it metaphysically. He is content to pass judgment and leave others to engage in change (Todorov 352). The philosopher, like the allegorist, analyzes and comments on other cultures, yet without any intention to change either his home culture or the foreign culture. Since his motive and interest are purely philosophical and metaphysical, the philosopher has no intention to bring any cultural or political changes through his contact with the foreign culture.

Among all these types of travelers, the most interesting and promising one is the *exote*, a term coined by Segalen, a French philosopher who wrote extensively about exotic experience in the early twentieth century. He coined the term *exote* to define travelers who enjoy the full flavor of differences without overlooking the sameness. *Exote*, according to Segalen, experiences a harmony of identification and difference, but in a temporal order. It involves two phases: the *exote* first seeks the common denominator or the sameness with the subject and then enjoys the differences based on the sameness. However, Segalen also warns about this model's elusiveness and delicacy, "[i]f he does not know the others well enough, he does not yet understand them; if he knows them too well, he no longer sees them" (Todorov 347). Here, Segalen is sensitive to the evolution of the role of *exote*, who is an utter outsider at the beginning without any understanding of the foreign culture, and an increasingly insider as the contact proceeds along up to the point where he is too familiar with the culture to take note of the "foreignness." The dynamic evolution of the role of *extote*, from an outsider to an insider makes him stand out among all the other travelers that have been mentioned.

It is a view shared by Edward Said, who sees in Auerbach what Tzvetan Todorov sees in Segalen. In order to seek a way out of the ideological restraints of Orientalism, Said

seems to endorse the aesthetic positioning exemplified by Auerbach's humanism. In "On Palestinian Identity", he summarizes it as such:

The more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the easier is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance. (259)

To Said, a better perspective from which to perceive a culture, both one's own and a foreign one, is that of the combination of an outsider and an insider. The positionality of double distancing seems to be more ethical than an aesthetic one, given the rapid increase in cross-cultural interactions. It is a moral obligation for anyone who is involved in the representation of the Other. It demands the acknowledgement of the other as an equal existence of diversity and dynamics as one's own culture in the first place. Orientalism is the result of subjective projection and objectifying other cultures as the foil to its own. It also requires an openness of mind in face of difference. Rather than doing violence to the alterity by explaining it within the limits of one's own cultural framework, one should keep the framework open and let the difference challenge it, revise it, and expand it to what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls "the fusion of horizon." He explains:

We started by saying that a hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us. They constitute, then, the horizon of a particular present, for they represent that beyond which it is impossible to see. But now it is important to avoid the error of thinking that the horizon of the present consists of a fixed set of opinions and valuations, and that

the otherness of the past can be foregrounded from it as from a fixed ground. In fact, the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. ... In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly being foregrounded from the other. (306)

Gadamer has claimed that, as finite human being, one has always been shaped by certain prejudgments and prejudices handed down to him. They constitute his "being-in-the world." Furthermore, it is clear that Gadamer wants to distinguish those prejudgments that are legitimate and enabling -- that make understanding possible -- from those that turn out to be blind and limiting prejudices. It is precisely here that Gadamer sets forth his primary proposal -- the dialogue, which engages one in the process of listening to others and modifies the preconceptions that are not valid.

Although Hans-Georg Gadamer focuses on the interaction temporally, it can also be applied spatially between a traveler and the foreign culture he visits. Cross-cultural understanding may begin with prejudices and stereotypes due to a lack of knowledge of the other and ethnocentric patterns of thinking, but as dialogues go on, prejudices and stereotypes can be revised and wear out eventually. Yet it is worth noting that this process may not be smooth and ideal as it sounds, since dialogues can contribute to understanding as well misunderstanding and fresh stereotypes.

The Gadamerian model tackles the dilemma of representation by appealing to shared humanity and trying to uphold the Enlightenment ideal of civil society. On the contrary, Homi Bhabha assumes that the cross-cultural conflict cannot be avoided

because it is endemic to a world that is a fluctuating, contestable mix of groups with “different sorts of interests, different kinds of cultural histories, different postcolonial lineages, different sexual orientations” (Bhabha 208). Perhaps one does not have to and cannot choose between the dialogue vs. conflict models since epistemological, moral, and political categories are separate and yet at the same time inseparable. It is through arguments and dialogues that we move on. The cross-cultural encounters occur in a dialectic fashion -- thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. A thesis can be seen as a single conception, which contains a form of incompleteness that gives rise to the antithesis, a conflicting conception. A third point of view, a synthesis, arises from this conflict. It overcomes the conflict by reconciling the truths contained in the thesis and antithesis at a higher level. The synthesis is a new thesis. It generates a new antithesis and the process continues until truth is arrived at, if there is any.

Through the history of travel literature, one sees a continuity of presentation, representation and misrepresentation of other cultures. By translating other culture, one explores the epistemological parameters of knowledge in order to make sense of his own positioning of the world and what positionings force him to negotiate. Translation between cultures involves the negotiation of power: who does the translations for whom? Without realizing one's own positioning, one's translation is bound for failure. It is only by acknowledging different or multifaceted positionings that can one achieve a serious understanding of oneself and other cultures.

CHAPTER ONE: TRAVELING FILMMAKERS

From the silent movie era in the 1920s to the global marketing of Hollywood movies at the end of twentieth century, Hollywood's portrayals of China and Chinese people resulted in stereotypes ranging from Suzie Wong (dragon lady) to Ming, the ruthless, Fu Manchu, and Charlie Chan. These images are seen through the prism of fears, desires, and fancies toward China onto silver screen, portraying China as ancient, exotic, and mysterious on one hand, cruel and authoritarian on the other.

The seventies saw yet another image of China generated through popular *kung fu* movies: an ancient China of wisdom and strength, a positive stereotype nonetheless projected by the West's inner lack and having nothing to do with the reality of contemporary China, which was still mired in the Cultural Revolution. Given the eventful era of the Civil Rights Movements, the Vietnam War, and the rising economic power of Southeastern Asia, the popular mentality of the seventies turned its gaze to the east to look for a deep, ancient, penetrating wisdom that would rid the west of the evils of industrialization -- materialism and deconstruction of religion.

With China's opening-up from the late seventies on, filmmakers were granted access to shoot films in Mainland China for the first time since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The opening-up revived a new surge of interest in a forbidden land that had been closed for several decades. The eighties saw China exposed on silver screen more than any of the previous decades and the subject matters also vary from those of the previous era. Among the feature films, there are High Road to China (1984) by Brian Hutton, Tai-pan (1986) by Daryl Duke, The Last Emperor (1987) by Bernardo Bertolucci, and Empire of The Sun (1987) by Steven Spielberg.

Among these films, High Road to China (1984) and Empire of The Sun (1987) take China merely as a background of their unfolding story lines and do not deal with China directly. Tai-Pan is a film loosely based on James Clavell's 1983 epic saga about the founding of Hong Kong in the early nineteenth century. The film loses the exquisite complexities of intercultural conflicts, and the storyline is incoherent from time to time. This makes it difficult for viewers to follow if they are not familiar with the book.

The Last Emperor stands out in its portrait of China in terms of complexity. In the film, China is constructed as the Other, a land far away from the fallout of industrialization and diametrically different from Western modernity. Bertolucci uses China as an allegory against his own culture. Though in a sense he follows the Hollywood tradition by using China as a foil to long-held Western values, he is beyond the good/bad dichotomy charted in Sinophiles and Sinophobes by Colin Mackerras, who switches between positive and negative images in response to the history of western views of China.

Ten years after the release of The Last Emperor, four films about China appeared on the Hollywood silver screen: Red Corner (1997), Kundun (1997), and Seven Years in Tibet (1997). These films reflect two diverging trends in Tinseltown's image-making of China. On one hand, the films serve as critiques of China's social issues such as the judicial system and Tibet's independence. On the other, they depict Tibet as an innocent victim of Chinese government by idealizing the pre-1949 Tibet as Shangri-la, full of spiritual, peace-loving, and harmonious people, especially ancient, wise Tibetan monks. These stereotypes, sinister or favorable, are harmful because they obscure reality and justify irrational expectations. A major reason for constructing the stereotypes is that most Americans form impressions about China through the prism of popular culture.

Shangri-la, first introduced by Lost Horizon (1937), points to some important aspects of the position Tibet holds in the Western imagination today -- as a religion and culture of immense spirituality and ancient wisdom and as a place and people whose chief attribute is their perpetuation of a premodern, preindustrial, preconsumer and nonviolent ethos and way of life. These impressions are profound and have a wide impact on public understanding of U.S.-China relations and therefore can have an impact on public policy and diplomacy. They reflect changes in the cultural landscape in the United States.

The Last Emperor by Bernardo Bertolucci

After Tragedy of A Ridiculous Man, I have never felt the desire to make another film in Italy. On the contrary, I wanted to go as far away as possible. I made a move towards the Far West but I didn't get very far. It seems only logical I should eventually head for the Far East instead...

(Ungari 189)

Bernardo Bertolucci's trips to the Orient eventually resulted in three consecutive films made in areas other than Europe: The Last Emperor in China, The Sheltering Sky (1990) in Morocco, and Little Buddha (1993) in Nepal. Rather than understanding the Other, Bertolucci's interest in exotic stories and places is part and parcel of his continued project of identity quest. The complex process of "Othering" provides Bertolucci with fresh space for his ever-changing views on identity. In other words, "Othering" is the new battlefield for his longstanding warring views on identity: changing vs. static, passive vs. active, and individual vs. collective. However, his trilogy of the Orient does

not end as a self-serving enterprise. His representations of other cultures have attracted mixed responses to problems of the Other, a heated topic of contemporary cultural studies.

The Last Emperor, the highly acclaimed 1988 nine Oscar winner, is primarily based on Pu Yi's autobiography, From Emperor to Citizen (1964). The film unfolds the life of China's last emperor, Pu Yi, born in 1906 and crowned emperor when he was only three years old. In 1911, when China became a Republic, Pu Yi remained in a small section of the Forbidden City as an emperor-in-name until expelled to Tianjin in 1924. As a puppet of the Japanese government, Pu Yi was recoronated in 1927 in Manchuria, the northeastern part of China. At the end of World War II, Pu Yi was captured by Russian soldiers and handed over to the Chinese communist government as a traitor and war criminal. After ten years in reeducation camp, he was finally released as an ordinary citizen and lived the remaining years of his life as a gardener.

To Bernardo Bertolucci, China in The Last Emperor is "fresh air" not yet polluted by European industrialization and he was looking for what the contemporary Europe is NOT in this foreign land. He was literally thrilled by the refreshing otherness, which, he terms as "the ecstasy of difference" (Ungari 280). Bertolucci's construction of the Other in his film serves as the foil to Western modernity. In this sense, he is "the allegorist of difference," a particular type in Tzvetan Todorov's traveler gallery, who is after "the elixir of difference" in these remote places for his own stagnant, if not dying, sense of identity.

Bertolucci's own identity, an Italian director making a film on China, is essential in understanding his representation of other cultures. His representation of China has been widely criticized for being from a tourist point of view, which celebrates the exotic visual beauty of China: extravagant customs, gorgeous architecture, and dazzling artifacts.

Before we turn to the discussion of Bertolucci's perspective, I find Todorov's categorization of travelers to be useful in helping us achieve a better understanding of Bertolucci's interest in foreign countries and cultures.

As discussed earlier, Tzvetan Todorov groups travel writers according to their motives in the foreign countries. Among the ten categories, three are of immediate relevance to my discussion of Bertolucci's trilogy of Orient: the tourist, the impressionist, and the allegorist (133).

While the boundaries of the above categories may seem blurred sometimes, it is helpful in analyzing Bernardo Bertolucci's wanderlust in foreign lands. The question now is which category fits him best? When asked if he has come to know China better after making The Last Emperor, he answered bluntly, "[t]o understand China was not the goal of the movie. To allow China to seep through the images of the movie would be a more accurate way to describe what I have in mind. Looking through the rushes at the assembly stage I feel that China breathes through the shots without the filter of exoticism" (Ungari 280).

Like the tourist and impressionist, Bernardo Bertolucci does not explicitly set his goal to understand the Other. His intention, however, is far more sophisticated than that of the tourist as defined by Tzvetan Todorov. Bertolucci's year-long research and numerous interviews with acquaintances of Pu Yi bear witness to his ambition. Years of preparation went into the film, during which Bertolucci read extensively about China – "the country, its culture, its history, its psychological syndromes" (Ungari 247) and interviewed surviving friends, relatives, former servants, and prison officials. However, not all commentators gave credit to his hard work. John Simon, for instance, concludes that the film is "for the eye only." Simon celebrates the visual beauty of the film --

extravagant customs, gorgeous architecture, and dazzling artifacts -- but criticizes the film for “leaving little more for the foreground.” Simon is not alone in feeling this way. Vincent Canby sees the film as “an elegant travel brochure,” in which “the eye is entertained while the center of the screen remains dead” (C3). In this sense, it seems that both John Simon and Vincent Canby align with Todorov’s portrayal of the impressionist, that is, The Last Emperor is little more than well designed postcards sent home as feast to the eye. Indeed, Bertolucci’s several trips to China and his long research became a documentary titled Postcard from China (Tonetti 203).

Though admittedly cinematography has created a world of oriental beauty, John Simon and Vincent Canby have ignored that, behind the matrix of visual eroticism, Bernardo Bertolucci actually attempts to make a statement. Therefore, it is at this point that he parts company with Tzvetan Todorov’s impressionist and finds himself a place among the allegorists.

What is, then, the statement he is trying to make through these films and what kind of message is he trying to get across to his audience? Here the director’s own confession is the best clue to find out his intention. The part of the interview conducted by Ellen Spitz regarding the filmmaker’s motivation deserves a full quotation here:

Spitz: I’m curious about what drew you to doing a film about China’s history in the first place.

Bertolucci: First of all, the challenge of remaining Italian in China... The other reason is that I was and I am a little fed up with reality in my country -- even here, everywhere in the West, and so I go looking for a cultural atmosphere which has not been completely invaded and polluted and

suffocated and killed by consumerism and monoculture. And that's why China is okay. And North Africa, Africa is okay.

Sklarew: And possibly India?

Bertolucci: India is possibly okay. These are places with strong cultures. I miss the feeling of local culture that has been swept away by TV, and so I'm starving for ancient popular real memory, and that's why I found China so attractive, so irresistible. (49)

After The Last Emperor, Bertolucci did go to Africa and made The Sheltering Sky (1990) and his pilgrimage to Nepal, birthplace of Siddhartha and Buddhism, became The Little Buddha. To Bertolucci, China, Morocco, and Nepal are the opposite to contemporary Europe.

Though using China as a foil to long-held Western values, Bernardo Bertolucci is beyond the good/bad dichotomy charted in Sinophiles and Sinophobes, in which he switches between positive and negative images in response to the history of western views of China. The portrayal of Pu Yi attests to this.

It is interesting to note that the discrepancy in the criticism regarding Pu Yi's agency goes along the dividing line of "western" critics vs. Chinese critics. Most western critics view Pu Yi as a passive character, whose agency is denied from the very beginning. Pauline Kael describes Pu Yi as "a man without will or backbone who lives his life as spectacle, and who watches his life go by" (Kael 98) and simply "a cork bobbing on the tides of history." Similarly, Vincent Canby sees Pu Yi as "an accident of meteorology, a calm, rather empty center of the political hurricane blowing around him ... a cipher compared to the remarkable characters who...shaped his utterly passive life" (Canby C3).

While these critics accuse Bernardo Bertolucci of portraying a passive character in the film, which is against the Hollywood tradition, Chinese scholars critique him for diametrically opposed reason: they see too much freedom and agency in the character of Pu Yi. Qingxiang Wang, a scholar specializing in Pu Yi, is one of them. He argues that “Bertolucci’s Pu Yi is not the Chinese Pu Yi at all” (Wang 10). He goes on to explain that Bertolucci was only interested in the court life of Qing Dynasty in the beginning of the film making but gradually came to realize that the most amazing part of Pu Yi’s life is his transformation from the Emperor to a citizen. He comments that Bertolucci has raised the provocative question of who has transformed Pu Yi. Although Bertolucci thinks that Pu Yi’s transformation occurs in freedom or human agency, Wang disagrees with him. He argues that the portrayal of Pu Yi has been distorted. Bertolucci has made Pu Yi a warrior battling among the hardcore conservatives in the Qing court as well as a Westernized gentleman partying in foreign concessions in Tianjin. He has also made Pu Yi a hero who has confronted the Japanese in Manchuria, a celebrity in prison who believes in no freedom rather than death, and a soldier who has fought for freedom in the Cultural Revolution (Wang 10). In other words, Wang thinks Bertolucci has granted too much freedom to the character, which betrays historical facts. The discrepancy, however, is not about the cultural difference in defining freedom. It is indicative of Bertolucci’s swinging between these two positions throughout the film. His ambiguity is a result of his inheritance of the double legacy of Marxism and of Freudian theory.

It is characteristic of Marxism to waver between a fatalistic determinism and an activist voluntarism. According to Marxism, a man can change his environment (both natural and social) and even himself but he cannot change his natal situation. Man is born into a definite society that shapes and defines an individual. Through prevailing

social consciousness, social relations give shape to the individual. In this sense, social relations create the individual. Man is a product of both nature and society. The Marxist definition of human beings as “social animals” underlies the biosocial nature of human beings. Man is the product of evolution from more primal species to Homo Sapiens. Yet human is only distinguished by its social characteristics, among which is labor. Marx sees labor as a process in which man transforms the objective reality (both nature and society) and even himself. Labor thus is the fundamental form of this transforming activity. Marx formulated and developed this point in Manuscripts of 1844:

The outstanding achievement of Hegel’s Phenomenology . . . is, first, that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process... and that he thus grasps the essence of labor, and comprehends objective man -- true, because real man --as the outcome of man’s own labor...Hegel grasps labor as the essence of man...(177)

It is on this very view that Chinese Communist government built its faith in transforming Pu Yi. Communists believe that Pu Yi can change through labor, though not exactly in the Marxist sense of it. There is a scene in the film where one of Pu Yi’s former servants is waiting on him by preparing water for washing and even tying his shoelaces. The governor sees this through a peephole on Pu Yi’s cell door. When Pu Yi leaves the cell, the governor undoes his shoelaces and asks him to retie them himself. This is a symbolic act of the importance of labor in changing a person, especially one who has been waited on all his life. For the same reason, upon release, Pu Yi is asked to take a trade and he chooses to be a gardener, who works to support himself. Through labor, the Chinese

Communist government, which the governor represents, believes that Pu Yi can recreate himself as a model citizen. So does Bernardo Bertolucci.

The dynamics of individual vs. collective identity forms the other pillar in Bernardo Bertolucci's ambiguity in The Last Emperor. Bertolucci attempts to highlight the collective dimension of identity in order to question individualism, which is deeply rooted in Western modern thought and the composition of identity in the modern Western tradition. In the film, Bertolucci attempts to make Pu Yi represent more than an individual protagonist, in the Hollywood sense. Pu Yi's individual identity parallels transformations of China's national identity, that is, from a feudal society to a Republican, and then undergoing Fascism and eventually Communism. Pu Yi represents other Chinese and China as a nation. Bertolucci explains Pu Yi's representiveness as follows:

There is the implicit awareness that each Chinese man and woman stands for millions of other men and women. Maybe, it's because they are such an ancient race. It's like a 'special effect' Chinese style. The relationship between individuality and collectivity is very different from that which we experience in the West. The Emperor represented all the Chinese.(Ungari 20)

Bertolucci was first surprised by the collectivity in China when he was given a tour of the Forbidden City for the first time. The Chinese guide could not provide a satisfactory answer when asked about the names of the designers and craftsmen of a particular architecture, or a piece of artifact. He could only specify rough historical time period. This is in sharp contrast with the counterpart in Italy, where Italians are proud to

introduce their household names. In the same interview, Bertolucci further explains what he means by the difference in the relationships between individuality and collectivity:

...in China where you can't be isolated because the number of people is so incredible, you're always surrounded; solitude can be even more painful. In the West when we see big crowds our immediate defense is to feel strong as individuals, to experience our individuality even more intensely. But the old Chinese culture is based on the fact that the individual is not the real focal point as here in the West. In China the individual is fed by feeling a part of the crowd, and the notion is that everybody is enriched by being part of the collective. (Ungari 41)

Unlike Bernardo Bertolucci's "Chinese special effect," George Lukacs' notion of "typical character" offers an alternative way of understanding Pu Yi's representativeness as Chinese by focusing on the passivity that Kael has severely critiqued. Following the Marxist tradition, Lukacs defines historical characters as those whose "innermost being is determined by objective forces at work in society... the determining factors of a particular historical phase are found in them in concentrated form"(122). Those characters who experience history without affecting its course are the typical ones to represent history. In light of this theory, Pu Yi, as a person of inaction, who left little marks on the track of Chinese history, is more qualified than those heroic figures making history.

It is one of many pitfalls in cultural criticism to argue about whether portrayal is favorable when another culture or any Other is involved. Rather, we should take note of an undeniable fact that in both cases, positive and negative representation, Other is *used*

to make a statement about one's own culture. This is the stake of any intercultural project. The one-way traffic method is in no way a healthy recipe for crosscultural transactions to follow. Again, Tzvetan Todorov suggests a rather promising model for us: the Connoisseur type, who not only evaluates and appreciates other cultures but also engages himself in a two-way exchange of cultures that also benefits the Other in question. In this sense, Todorov's vision is quite similar to Gadamer's "fusion of horizons." (Gadamer 27)

Besides the positive vs. negative obstacle, another issue deserves a second thought in intercultural criticism: "coerced authenticity." It proposes that literary and cultural projects are expected to reflect a culture's reality. Some historians and cultural critics, such as John Fairbank and Ding Ning, have questioned authenticity of historical facts in the film. Here I am not arguing that they are in the wrong by pointing out the historical inaccuracies in the film; rather, my point is that to expect historical films like The Last Emperor to follow every historical detail is not as justified as it may sound. How authentic is academic history? Isn't it true that even institutionalized version of history is undergoing constant revision all the time? In what way is it more authentic and authoritative than the so-called "fictive history" in the film? Bernardo Bertolucci has challenged the authority of academic history by declaring himself to be a "naughty child," who plays with fantasy and history and has a tendency "to be more accurate when the movies are complete fantasies and to be more free when the movie is more historical" (Ungari 53).

It is equally dangerous for critics to dismiss these historical inaccuracies just because Bernardo Bertolucci is an Italian filmmaker who is not familiar with Chinese

culture. The danger of this tendency lies in the underlying presumption that natives are more privileged than foreigners in knowing their own cultures and history. However, the seemingly natural privilege of being native is fraught with questions. The history of a culture is as foreign to natives as to others. Bertolucci retells a scene he shot for The Last Emperor, which best exemplifies this point. Bertolucci assembled a thousand Chinese students, who have no personal experiences of the Cultural Revolution, for a Red Guard procession scene. To his greatest disappointment, Bertolucci was completely unable to find that “mixture of innocence and fanaticism, which was the hall-mark of the day” (Ungari 276). Even the recent past of the nation seems to be remote and foreign to those youngsters, who belong to another age. Thus, being native does not automatically register more authenticity and authority.

Bernardo Bertolucci is conscious of historical reflectivity in the film by employing flashbacks and multi-perspectives as narrative strategies. The film is punctuated with thirteen flashbacks with Pu Yi as the narrator reflecting upon his life in the past. The credibility of Pu Yi, as a story teller, is marred when Jin Yuan, the prison governor, points out the contradictory account offered by Johnston in his memoir The Twilight in the Forbidden City regarding Pu Yi’s relationship with the Japanese in Tianjin. Pu Yi’s initial response to the memoir is to accuse Johnston of being a “liar.” Under the governor’s further urging and pressure, Pu Yi has to revise his own version of what has happened between him and Japanese during his stay in Tianjin. Whatever really happened, Pu Yi’s reliability as the narrator in the film has been seriously undermined. Thus far, Jin Yuan’s claim that “[w]e know all what has happened” seems to possess a more authoritative account of happenings surrounding this event. Unfortunately, his authority and the authority of Chinese Communist government’s version of history that

he represents do not go far when he is accused of being a “rotten rightist” and “lackey of the Emperor” during the Cultural Revolution.

Bernardo Bertolucci pays his audience a compliment by allowing them to reflect not only on history but on film making as well. There is a scene where Pu Yi and other inmates are watching films that purport to document the Japanese occupation of China. One newsreel footage is taken by the Japanese propagandist Amakasu of Pu Yi. The same footage that has been used to justify Japanese invasion of China is now being used to reeducate the war criminals, who used to facilitate Japan’s invasion of China. It is evident here that Bertolucci manipulates how the film is viewed. With the deconstructive tension and self-reflectivity, Bertolucci leaves his audience more questions than answers, passing onto them the challenge to reach their own conclusions about self, other, and history.

Seven Years In Tibet by Jean-Jacques Annaud

Hollywood’s fascination with Tibet began early in the 1930’s with the release of Lost Horizon (1937), a film based on James Hilton’s renowned novel of the same title. British diplomat Robert Conway and a small group of civilians crash land in the Himalayas. They are rescued by the people of the mysterious and Eden-like valley of Shangri-la. Protected by the mountains from the world outside, where the clouds of World War II are gathering, Shangri-la provides a seductive escape for the world-weary Conway. Yet, they point to the important aspects of the position Tibet holds in the Western imagination today -- as a religion and culture of immense spirituality and ancient

wisdom and as a place and people whose chief attribute is their perpetuation of a premodern, preindustrial, preconsumer and nonviolent ethos and way of life.

Loosely based on a 1953 memoir of the same title by Heinrich Harrer, Seven Years in Tibet tells the adventure story of Heinrich Harrer (Brad Pitt), an Austrian mountain climber. He leaves his very pregnant wife at home in 1939 and joins an expedition team to India with the aim to summit Mount Nanga Parbat, the ninth highest summit of the world. He and his teammates are arrested by the British army before they could reach the summit and detained in a POW camp in northeastern India. Disguised as Indian laborers, Harrer and his teammate Peter Aufschnaiter (David Thewlis) successfully escape from the prison and arrive with much difficulty in Lhasa, where they are granted asylum and live a comfortable life among the upper-echelon Tibetan society. Harrer finally gets the chance to tutor the 14th Dalai Lama, a teenager and the spiritual leader of Tibet, who is curious about the outside world, especially the West. The encounter with Dalai Lama and Tibet transforms Harrer spiritually in many ways. He begins to regret his earlier abandonment of his wife and his son. He begins to repair the damaged friendship with Peter Aufschnaiter and he also reflects on the evil nature of war. His peaceful life in Lhasa, however, is interrupted by the Chinese army's takeover of Tibet in 1950 and he has to leave. Finally, Harrer returns to Austria and gets accepted by his son, who later joins him in climbing mountains.

Like The Lost Horizon, the film idealizes a Tibet "lost" -- Shangri-la before 1949 -- and at the same time demonizes Communist China for narrative convenience and perhaps also political reasons. None of these images bear scrutinization of historical accuracy. The idealized Tibetan Buddhism in the film attests to the baby-boomers' religious quest outside of the United States for spirituality other than the dogmatic

Christianity: in this case, they seek the spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism, a spirituality from a far away land that is little known to the outside world.

Seeking enlightenment experience from another culture and a foreign religion does not begin with Harrer. It has long been a tradition of the West. The Beat Generation in the fifties had a long love affair with Buddhism. American artists and writers of the 1950s, such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, tended to reject traditional social and artistic forms and sought artistic expression through multiple intense experiences and gained inspiration through Eastern religions, especially Buddhism. The films with a Tibetan theme that appeared in the 1990s, however, speak to a different audience: the baby boomers, who experienced similar spiritual and religious crises and turned their eyes to the East for a solution. Becky Johnston, the screenwriter of Seven Years in Tibet, says during an interview that she was interested in the subject because, “like most baby boomers, I went through a period of spiritual crisis, examining other faiths. I was always interested in studying Buddhism because it's more than a religion, it's a philosophy” (Corliss 82). Johnston’s turning to Tibetan Buddhism is shared by many baby boomers.

Focusing on a number of individual Baby Boomers who exemplify the generation's suspicion of religious institutions, Wade Clark Roof interviewed some Baby Boomers for one of his books and concluded that they are seeking new forms of spirituality. Barry Johnson, one of his interviewees, describes his life during the social revolution of the 1960s as being a time of the “rejection of old values” (12). Johnson, like many others of his generation dropped out of church during his teen years. Now in adulthood, he would only join a church that “doesn't have rigid beliefs or guidelines” (11). Roof accredits Johnson's skepticism to a “loss of confidence in governmental and social

institutions” (12). Such skepticism toward institutions parallels ideas about lost enthusiasm for American institutions as well as Amanda Porterfield's “breakdown of belief” in American culture. Johnson's skepticism was fueled by his resistance to the Vietnam War and the events of the Watergate scandal in the early 1970s. With these historical events, Johnson lost faith in the reality with which he was raised and was forced to begin questioning the world around him. Many Baby Boomers share Johnson's experiences and his accounts exemplify the attitudes of most of his generation in their early adulthood and present beliefs.

Baby Boomers grew up learning the values of questioning authority from their preceding generation that was influenced by the Beats. With the power of religious institutions already in question by the Baby Boomers, the increasing religious pluralism in the United States gave this generation an opportunity to find spirituality elsewhere. This increasing pluralism began with the loosening of immigration laws during the 1960s (Lippy 156). The legal changes at the time brought more immigrants from Asia, who brought with them Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The Hippie subcultures of the Baby Boomers were quick to embrace these religions as they saw a more openly intellectual approach to life than the dogmatic religions of Christianity. With the seeds of skepticism planted after World War II, Amanda Porterfield describes the attitude of the Baby Boomers during Vietnam as “a break down of belief in the sacred canopy of American culture” (93). Such values derived from this education sent Baby Boomers on a quest where they would “stand up against society for the sake of conscience” (Porterfield 95). This quest, which began with questioning the greatness of American government, evolved into questioning the greatness of organized religion with another catalyst that would also facilitate such questioning: increasing religious pluralism.

Echoing these baby-boomers, Becky Johnson, the screenwriter of The Seven Years in Tibet, depicts a highly idealized peaceful and religious Tibet. She spells out her perspective during an interview by Orville Schell:

I admit I was drawn to the subject because I hoped to find paradise. I had a fairly romanticized vision of old Tibet as an idealized theocracy based on spiritual principles. I was completely unwilling to see anything negative, like the Chinese argument about a feudal society [laughs]. I think my need, and other people's need, to idealize Tibet stems from some latent, ancient dream of an earthly paradise, a place where human goodness, or perfection, has been fully realized. Needless to say, that dream exists only in the mind. And at its core is the desire to re-create oneself, to be made pure, or better, or more complete by touching that place. Tibet was probably the last holdout of that dream. I think my need, and other people's need, to idealize Tibet stems from some latent, ancient dream of an earthly paradise, a place where human goodness, or perfection, has been fully realized. (19)

Johnson's confession also echoes a time-honored tradition of popular culture, especially Hollywood, in creating a paradise out of Tibet. In The Lost Horizon one finds a Tibet where youth is preserved and treasures are found, a mythologized version that has much less to do with the reality of Tibet than the collective Western desire to seek asylum from the horror of World War II. In this sense, Johnson's view of Tibet is that of an allegorist, who comments on other cultures and people with the purpose to establish an argument about himself, his home country, or his own culture. Johnson knows exactly what she is

looking for in Tibet even before she sets foot on it. Her conclusion on Tibet is not a result of her observation and research but a flipped picture of her own society, what her own is NOT.

Like The Lost Horizon, Seven Years in Tibet depicts a Tibet that is ideally and conveniently different from the Western culture so that the protagonist's self transformation can be accomplished. The ultimate goal of the film is to use Tibet to facilitate the psychological development of the protagonist instead of understanding it. In this sense, Jean-Jacques Annaud the filmmaker is an allegorist, who makes statements on Tibet in order to establish an argument about his own culture. Though painstakingly trying to achieve verisimilitude in its depiction of the land and its inhabitants, this film lacks the reflectivity and deconstruction of authenticity found in The Last Emperor.

The narrative of the film basically follows the Hollywood convention: an active goal-oriented protagonist faces and overcomes conflicts, which are embodied as both internal and external in Seven Years in Tibet. With its plot driven by the climbers' goal of climbing Mount Nanga Parbat, the ninth highest summit of the world, the first one-third of the film resembles a typical adventure story full of physical ordeals and breathtaking dangers. The conflict pits the mountain climbers, especially Harrer, against the severely harsh natural environment: high altitude, cold temperature, and avalanche. This conflict is heightened by the incident where Harrer injures his ankle. After Harrer and his teammates are arrested by the British army, the goal of mountain climbing dissolves and transforms itself to prison-breaking with the conflict between Harrer and the Indian guards and British officers. Harrer successfully escapes but he has another goal: to go to Lhasa, where he hopes to be granted asylum. The final external conflict is

between Tibet and the Chinese Communist government, embodied in the battle to defend Lhasa, in which Harrer allegedly participates.

Alongside all these external conflicts, there is also an internal conflict throughout the film. It is the spiritual transformation of Harrer. To emphasize this conflict, unlike the memoir, the film portrays Harrer as an irresponsible husband and father-to-be, who joins in the expedition to escape his responsibility of taking care of his wife and unborn son. He is also a less than pleasant companion, being selfish and egocentric. It is also indicated at the beginning of the movie that Harrer has been hailed as a national hero for his deeds in the German army and close relationships with Nazis. It is later revealed by the press that the real Harrer is actually both a Nazi SA (Storm Trooper) and SS (the Elite Guard) member. His transformation begins on his way to Lhasa, his pilgrimage to redemption. It is the encounter with Dalai Lama that finally completes his transformation. The production note attests to this, saying “as the deep and abiding bond between these two isolated, lonely people evolved, the selfish and egotistical Harrer experienced selflessness for the first time, allowing him to complete the emotional transformation which began on his way to Lhasa” (Abramson 8).

In order to heighten the drama, the film dramatizes the conflicts. For example, Harrer is cast in a rather negative light in terms of personality at the beginning of the storyline, which is quite different from the image one gets in the original memoir. This change sharpens the drastic transformation to come. Also, the portrayals of Communist China and Tibet have been simplified and caricaturized in order to serve the magnified conflicts, central to Hollywood narrative convention. Communist China has been demonized.

The director of this film has tried hard to achieve verisimilitude by recreating a life-size Lhasa in the foothills of the Andes, importing costumes made of fabric shipped in from Tibet, shipping in dozens of yaks, and casting diasporic Tibetans. The set is so close to the original that some of older Tibetan extras, with tears in their eyes, congratulated and thanked Hoang Thanh At, the Vietnamese production director, for bringing their home and their memories to life (Schell 252). It is also an improvement for Hollywood to cast Tibetans, considering the all-Caucasian cast in The Lost Horizon, although these Tibetans have lost the unique bronze skin tone credited to the strong plateau sunshine as a result of their relocation.

Thus authenticity proves to be superficial and partial in the end. To further demonstrate the lack of authenticity in the film, Harrer's depiction of Tibet is severely restricted to the high society he finds himself in. Hosted by Lord Chamberlain, Harrer is busy attending parties offered by the Tibetan noblemen, who lead comfortable and leisured lives. But this is only one of the many faces of Tibetan society before 1950. The ruling class consisted about only two hundred households out of a population of more than one million while the majority were serfs living under the double yoke of monarchy and patriarchy. It is an oppressing and exploitive system that even the Dalai Lama himself condemns. It is, however, conveniently wiped out in Seven Years in Tibet in order to portray a totally idealized society of happy people that only exists in the Western mind and imagination.

The nonviolent and life-cherishing side of Tibet is also a simplistic generalization in the film and has been caricatured to the degree of being ridiculous. Tibetan scholar Jamyang Norbu singles out the earthworm saving scene for its absurdity (Abramson). Harrer has been assigned by the Dalai Lama to build a movie theatre but the Tibetan

workers refuse to proceed since they don't want to hurt the earthworms in the building site. One worker offers the reason instructively, "[i]n past life, this innocent worm was your mother. Please, no more hurting!" Finally Harrer resolves this problem by having some workers transfer these worms to other safety sites while the monks offer prayer. The film sells the notion of peaceful Tibetans to such an extreme that one may find the incident rather laughable.

The film sacrifices authenticity for the sake of the plot, which results in sympathetic yet unrealistic views of Tibet. On their way to Lhasa, for example, Harrer and Aufschnaiter are attacked by a troop of Tibetan bandits, who pull them out of the camp during night and expose them to the severe cold. However, because these bandits would not fit the film's idealized representation of the peace-loving Tibetans, these bandits are not identified by nationality. Abramson argues further that these bandits, actually Tibetan tribesmen, also serve in the Tibetan army, which has been portrayed with much sympathy.

Some of the Tibetan extras of the film also find the Western obsession with the "quintessential" Tibet troubling. "Westerners look at us with a kind of unreal awe," says a young woman who lives in Vancouver, Canada. "They think we're all monks or at least that we always meditate. Somehow Westerners think Tibetans are so spiritual that they don't expect us to have two eyes and a nose." Though maybe exaggerating the stereotypes of the Tibetan, she is right pointing out the absurdity in blind and wishful thinking about what Tibetans are or what they are like. The stereotype is so deep-rooted that sometimes Westerners refuse to register real Tibetans who do not conform to the idealized view. "Lama-chic Westerners don't like young Tibetans like us with long hair

and jeans,” another woman comments. “If someone doesn’t have a robe and a shaved head, they think that we’re not a real Tibetan” (Schell 210).

More troubling is the film’s simplistic depiction of Tibetan Buddhism in fortune-cookie wisdom style. When Harrer shows off to Lhaki the clips of his achievements in sports, Lhaki, rather than being impressed, dismisses mountain climbing as a fool’s pleasure, comparing the two civilizations, “you admire the man who pushes his way to the top in every walk of life while we admire the man who abandons his ego. The average Tibetan would not think to thrust himself this way.” Pema Lhaki (Lhakpa Tsamchoe), Aufschnaiter’s girlfriend and then wife, plays the role of one who disseminates nuggets of Tibetan Buddhist wisdom to Harrer and Aufschnaiter, as well as the audience, who have little knowledge of it.

Besides stereotyping Tibetan people and culture, the film, in order to develop the storyline, also sacrifices historical accuracy. In the film Harrer remains in Lhasa when the Chinese Liberation Army marches into Tibet, advising on firearms, helping building defense and training soldiers. Moreover, the film has Harrer stay in Lhasa even after China took it over in 1950, persuading the Dalai Lama to escape to India and even assaulting with impunity a Tibetan collaborator in full view of Chinese soldiers. In reality, none of these events happened. Harrer actually left Lhasa as early as mid-November, 1950, prior to the arrival of Chinese army. He remained in Chumbi Valley near Indian border, keeping the Tibetan foreign minister updated on the news in the radio until March 1951, when he decided to leave for India (Harrer 131-133). When the Dalai Lama’s envoys signed and sealed the Seventeen-Point Agreement on May 23, 1951 in Beijing, Harrer was already in India. To have a satisfactory Hollywood ending, the film has it that Harrer witnesses the signing ceremony in Tibet, which is inaccurate. Though it

is not justified to expect autobiographical films like Seven Years in Tibet to follow every historical detail, these inaccuracies still weaken the film when reflectivity of history is absent in the film. In contrast, Bernardo Bertolucci does a better job in The Last Emperor by employing flashbacks and multi-perspective narratives.

These historical inaccuracies are not in the film as a result of carelessness; rather, they are intended to serve the development of the main storyline of the narrative: the protagonist's emotional growth. Alongside the other conflicts that facilitate Harrer's inner and spiritual development, such as mountain climbing, prison breaking, and Lhasa seeking, China fighting is the last piece of the conflict that completes his spiritual journey. Through the friendship with the Dalai Lama, he has transformed himself into a better person: a more sincere friend to Aufschnaiter and a more caring father to Rolf. However, there is still one final obstacle that he needs to overcome -- his own Nazi past. In other words, the protagonist needs to fight the final fight to purify himself. The inner conflict in the film is externalized as the battle between Tibet and Communist China in which Harrer participates, where China is seen as a parallel to Nazi Germany. "The fear on my friends' faces strikes a deep personal chord," reflects Harrer as voiceover in the film, seeing the anxiety of Tibetans when they are preparing for war. "Echoes of aggressions of my own country and the will to overpower the weaker peoples bring shame to me. I shudder to recall long ago I embraced the same beliefs. I was in fact no different from those intolerant Chinese." Here, the internal conflict between Harrer's conscience and his past is embodied as the external war between Tibet and China. It is only with the help of a vilified China set against a mystified Tibetan Buddhism that the protagonist can fulfill his ultimate goal of overcoming his ego and enter an enlightened self.

Toward the end of the film, Harrer tries to persuade the Dalai Lama to escape to India to seek security. The Dalai Lama, however, refuses. He says, “[h]ow could I leave my people when they are fighting for liberation?” “But you are my path to liberation,” Harrer protests. Quoting the Scripture, the Dalai Lama replies thoughtfully, “[s]alvation does not come from the sight of me. It demands strenuous efforts and practice. So work hard and seek your own salvation.” This remark actually addresses a wider audience than Harrer, one that includes Baby Boomers who are still seeking their salvation through a mystified Oriental religion.

Kundun by Martin Scorsese

Based on the Dalai Lama’s autobiography My Land and My People (1962), Kundun recounts his life story beginning from a two-year-old farmer’s son to the leader of Tibet. Unlike Seven Years In Tibet, Kundun approaches the Tibetan subject in a different way. Its narration unfolds through the point of view of the Dalai Lama at different ages, an anti-protagonist by the Hollywood standard due to his lack of action. Compared with Seven Years In Tibet, it also attends more to the complexities of Tibetan historical and social realities and tries harder to avoid a simplistic portrayal of Tibet by being more reflective in filmic techniques and adopting an anthropological approach. Nonetheless, the Tibet in Kundun is again a Westerner’s own projection, especially Scorsese’s attempt for a personal redemption, and fails to challenge the predominant representation of Tibet in the West.

Kundun follows a chronological order in presenting Dalai Lama’s early life as recounted in his autobiography and interviews with him by Melissa Mathison, the

screenwriter. The narrative structure of Kundun diverges from Hollywood convention in its lack of drama and conflicts. The first half of the narrative centers on the young Dalai Lama's initiation into a role that is totally foreign to him: that of the spiritual leader of Tibet. Upon the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1937, a search party for his reincarnation arrives at a home in Takster, a village in northeastern Tibet, a region then ruled by a Muslim governor and nominally part of China. A two-year-old boy named Lhamo Dhondrub asks for a rosary worn by a monk who is in disguise as a servant in the search party. The monk is taken by the child since the rosary belonged to the late 13th Dalai Lama and more amazed when the boy sees through his disguise and calls him lama of the Sera monastery. Later on, the boy is presented with several pairs of objects: one of each pair belonged to the 13th Dalai Lama. The boy correctly claims those objects that belonged to the late leader and is able to speak the refined dialect spoken at the court in Lhasa. The search group then addresses the boy by his spiritual name -- Kundun, meaning "ocean of wisdom", and thus he becomes the fourteenth Dalai Lama. The boy, who is then renamed Tenzin Gyatso, is taken at the age of four to live in the Potala Palace, the great residence built by the Fifth Dalai Lama in Lhasa. In 1950, at the age of fifteen, he was enthroned as Tibet's ruler while Tibet was facing the threat from the newly-founded People's Republic of China.

It is not until the middle of the narrative that the film begins to take on more drama and conflicts in the Hollywood tradition with the introduction of China's threat to Tibet. After breaking with Mao, the Dalai Lama moves with his officials to Dungkhar Monastery near the Indian border. With no immediate support from other nations in sight, the Dalai Lama returns to Lhasa and finds the conflict between Tibet and China even more intense. The Dalai Lama travels to Beijing to negotiate with Mao Zedong. First

impressed by the parallel between socialism and Buddhism, the Dalai Lama is soon disheartened by Mao's remark that "Religion is poison." When he returns to Lhasa, reports of bombing and killing reach him and disturb him greatly. However, he refuses to resort to violence and finally chooses to flee to India and begins his life of exile.

Kundun, especially the first half of it, tells stories entirely from the young protagonist's point of view, full of impressionist shots of the surroundings. The film opens with a close-up of the eyes of two-year old Lhamo Dhondrub waking up, followed up by a horizontal low angle Point Of View shot showing the interior of a farmer's house and the parents' legs moving around, as seen by the two-year-old who wakes up in the morning while still lying in bed. After the boy is discovered as the Dalai Lama, he is traveling to Lhasa in a "dreljam" -- a rough palanquin attached to two poles and carried between two mules. Inside the vehicle, which rises and falls along the road to Lhasa, the young boy fixes his gaze on the curly-toed shoes he is wearing -- exquisite, brand-new with highly elaborated embroidered patterns on yellow silk and at the same time he has no idea of the importance of the position he has stepped into. The camera follows the boy from the angle he sees things while he walks along a long patterned carpet, looking up at the stunning blue silk ceiling of the lofty tent. After he is lifted to a tall wooden throne, the camera, imitating the young Dalai Lama looking down, sweeps at the hundred of monks, abbots, noblemen, and foreign diplomats below who bow to him. Within the monastery in Potala, the young Dalai Lama sits crossing legs together with a dozen other monks practicing mediating. Restless, his eyes drift to the surrounding while the other monks, eyes closed in meditation, are rapt in otherworldly contemplation: first a rat lapping water from a cup of holy water, then the tall Buddha statues.

Shot through the boy's eyes without explanations or a Western protagonist like Henrich Harrer as medium, the world in Potala and in the monastery looks as strange and wondrous to the young Dalai Lama as it does to the audience who don't possess an intimate knowledge of Tibetan culture and religion. In place of explanatory dialogue or narrative, the audience finds a pageant of pure visual display of vibrant and colorful Tibetan rituals and religious icons. While some key recurring symbols and rituals in Kundun are somewhat accessible to the audience, such as the disappearing sand mandala and the Nechung oracle, other important elements defy interpretation to all except the best-informed viewers. For example, the dance performance outside Potala witnessed by the Dalai Lama is actually satirizing the Nechung oracle. This scene gives a whole new understanding of the role of prophecy in the film, which is significant. It also adds a different dimension to Tibetan Buddhism, which is rather heavy on formality yet light on adversity, but here it comes across to the typical viewer as merely added spectacle. In keeping his audience in the dark about the significance of this scene, Martin Scorsese aims to challenge an audience comfortable with Hollywood narration convention. He explains, "[n]ot to condescend, but to throw you into the middle of a culture and let you sink or swim," and "[i]f it's alien, if you've never seen anything quite like it, you don't know what they're doing or even the ceremony is sometimes.... You hook on to the people, which is what it should be" (Smith 244-245).

Kundun is an intensely visual film, eschewing words for images. Martin Scorsese should be applauded for making such an expressive and, indeed, pure film, given the temptation when making a biopic to preach, as in Seven Years in Tibet. He risks incomprehensibility in order to portray the impressionistic, emotional, and unreliable tesserae of a child and young adult's memories.

The film indicates that the protagonist's point of view is not only impressionistic but also limited and sometimes even obstructed. There are many scenes where the point of view is filtered through curtains, robes, or fabric. For example, afraid of the ritual of hair cut before ordination, the young Dalai Lama seeks shelter in the monk's massive robes and the view becomes sunlight through deep, maroon wool while the monk recites from Shantideva's Bodhisattva Vows -- "May I be the doctor and the medicine and may I be the nurse for the sick beings in the world until everyone is healed...." Through the textured wool appears the face of the Reting, who joins in the chanting, "May I be a bridge, a boat, a ship for all who wish to cross the water." The view through the robe texture adds a dreamlike quality to the whole scene as if the story was told from the blurred memory of an older Dalai Lama.

Eyeglasses and telescopes also serve as tropes for the mediated representation in the film. The eyeglasses are symbolic in the sense that the Dalai Lama's perception of the world is somehow restricted due to isolation of Tibet then. The film shows that the young 14th Dalai Lama is very curious about the outside world but the only resources he has are back issues of Life magazines or film projectors where he runs cowboy films and silent movies.

Enclosed in the Palace, the young Dalai Lama can only learn about the outside world through a telescope. He uses it to look at the people and the city below. One day, looking through the telescope, he spots a prisoner in torn clothes with feet and hands cuffed. Almost at the same time, realizing that he is being watched by the Dalai Lama, the prisoner prostrates himself full-length on the ground and pays the utmost respect to him. The Dalai Lama turns away from the telescope, shocked by the sight of the prisoner. The initial shock arises from the first encounter with the part of Tibetan life that he

cannot see in the Palace where he lives a comfortable and well-protected life. In the interview with Garvin Smith, Martin Scoreses explains:

Basically, it's about the boy becoming cognizant of the world around him, and that means people's behavior, politics, and how people live daily life only given glimpse of the everyday life of his people through the fractured viewing. It's not complete. He's not allowed out, it's just not done. Dying to get out. Again, this played right into what I wanted to do with how much he could see. If it's one-third of a Cinema Scope frame, that's what he can see and he's removed from that -- and yet he's the spiritual leader of the country. (250)

At the end of the film, once again, the Dalai Lama looks at Tibet through his telescope, however, afar from the Indian territory. The vantage point of the Dalai Lama changes from far above from the top of the Potala to look down at the people and the city below to the current retrospective and diasporic one to look at Tibet beyond the Indian border. In either situation, his view is restricted and limited. It is the very awareness and self-reflection of the limitation of the vantage of the protagonist as well as the filmmaker himself that has empowered the filmic narrative.

If the first half of the film is well conscious of the limitation of representation mainly through the impressionistic scenes from the protagonist's youthful and naïve point of view, the second half achieves the same awareness by way of employing dream sequences and dissolves, which blur the boundary between reality and dreamland. For instance, in one of the dream sequences, blood gushes into the fish pool and finally the whole pool is tainted in red. A more frequently cited dream sequence is a surreal scene

of the Dalai Lama, in his red robes, standing in a sea of slain monks in red robes. The camera slowly pans overhead until the effect is like an impressionist kaleidoscope of reds. Moreover, the dissolves further wash out the demarcation between reality and dream and it is hard to tell where the dream begins and where it ends. This dream-like representation gives the film a subjective and emotional tone rather than the objective tone that most bio-pic tries to claim.

On several occasions, Martin Scorsese has made it clear that his intention is not to make an objective and historical movie about Tibet and the Dalai Lama. Initially he was attracted to the “simplicity” and the “childlike nature” of the script Melissa Mathison wrote about. He declares, “it wasn’t a treatise on Buddhism or a historical epic in the usual sense. It’s too much to know about Tibet and China and their relationship over the past fifteen hundred years” (Smith 238). The film is successful in approaching the subject from the perspective of the young protagonist and at the same time trying to avoid an over-simplified version of Tibetan history and culture that one can find in Seven Years in Tibet. For example, the political conflicts within the Tibetan nobility have been hinted through the perception of the young Dalai Lama. In 1947 Reting was implicated in an antigovernment plot that was supported by monks from the Sera Monastery. He died under mysterious circumstances in the dungeons of the Liptala Palace. In fighting at the Sera monastery, 200 monks were killed by government troops. In the film, this incident is shown through a conversation between the Dalai Lama and Taktra, his senior tutor. “Where is Reting?” “Well, he’s away.” “How long he’s going to be gone?” “Oh, about three or four years.” In a similar way, a more complicated picture of Tibetan religion is indicated. For instance, the young Dalai Lama later asks, “Why do monks have guns?”

The answer he gets from the Chamberlain is equivocal, “Yes, in this case they have guns.”

The film is more attentive to the complexity of the Tibetan history and culture and tries to present more facets of the. Nevertheless, it fails to challenge the dominant Western perception of a highly religious and peace-loving Tibet. The rolling caption at the beginning of the film first reveals that the sons of Genghis Khan gave the Dalai Lama his name, which means “ocean of wisdom.” Then it claims that in a war-torn Asia, Tibetans have practiced non-violence for over a thousand years with the Dalai Lama as their ruler. It is nothing but an inaccurate overstatement to declare that any nation has been non-violent throughout its history, given human history and the specific history of Tibet. Elliot Sperling mentions the terrible civil war between the Gelugpas and the Kagyupas from which the “Great Fifth” emerged as the hero of the battlefield and writes that the Fifth Dalai Lama does not fit the standard image that many people today have of a Dalai Lama, particularly the image of a Nobel Peace Prize laureate” (Sperling 319). At the end of the 18th century, a Red Hat lama sought revenge for the humiliation of his order by the Dalai Lama and fetched the Indian gorkhas into the country. The “Great Thirteenth” himself formed an army consisting of regular troops, a lay militia, and the “golden army” (known as the monastic soldiers). Warrior monks were nothing out of the ordinary in the Tibet of old, although their training and their military equipment were less than desirable. They firmly believed in the law of violence, worshipped their special deities, and maintained their own secret cults. Lama ‘Longear’ was the leader of the troops in the lamasery, it says in western travel report of a lama commander (at the start of the twentieth century). “Although a monk, he didn't know how to say his prayers and because he had killed several people was not allowed to have part in the chanting services.

But he was considered a man of courage and audacity -- greatly feared in the lamasery, a mighty friend and terror to his enemies" (Sierksma 130).

Here I do not mean to single out Tibet and expose its bellicose history; rather, I see it consistent with any human history. More importantly, the less known side of Tibetan history forms a sharp contrast with the blind idealization of Tibetan pacifism as manifested in the opening caption of Kundun. In contrast with the Western idealization, one can see China's stereotype of Tibet to the other extreme. Joan Chen, who made a film on Tibet in 1998, airs her view on Tibet, "For us growing up in Mao's China, the Dalai Lama was a slave owner, Tibetan Buddhism was a tool for oppressing and exploiting the serfs, and Tibet was considered a backward, feudal place that we didn't want to go to" (Schell 270). Chen's view is widely held and typical among Han Chinese and it is a reminder of how culturally and ideologically dependent one's perception of a particular foreign culture is. In one dream sequence in the film, the Chinese are given a chance to air their views on the Tibet issue. The general says, "We are here to rescue you from the imperialists, or they will do the same [trade opium] to you." On another occasion, General Tan emphasizes, "We are here to liberate you, to heal the people." The totally different views on Tibet from China and West are both the projection of their respective society: as a postmodern society, disillusioned by modernity, the West is looking for something they have lost -- a pre-industrial world with devoted religious people. China is still in the process of pursuing modernity, taking progress and technology indispensable to developing (as China) and undeveloped society (as Tibet). Both perceptions are more about themselves than about Tibet.

Jamyang Norbu notes on Frontline, "It's a fuzzy kind of sympathy because it never touches on the reality." Yet I see these interpretations more as narrow and partial

than as unrealistic. Like any caricature, each touches and exaggerates a certain aspect of the Tibet society and culture but fails to balance it against the more contradictory and complicated realities.

As discussed in this chapter, all three filmmakers are allegorists in the Todorovian sense, using China to make statements about their own cultures. Bernardo Bertolucci is more reflective and self-conscious about authenticity by adopting flashbacks and multi-perspective narratives. Though Jean-Jacques Annaud tries to achieve physical verisimilitude, he risks stereotyping Tibetan people and culture in order to serve the protagonist's spiritual development. Martin Scorsese attends more to the complexities and of Tibetan history and culture by employing reflective filmic techniques and an anthropological approach.

CHAPTER TWO: TRAVELERS AND TOURISTS

Though usually interchangeable, “traveler” and “tourist” have different connotations in cultural studies. It is not difficult to detect contemporary distain toward the term “tourist,” which is said to have lost the qualities such as “adventurous,” “arduous,” “individualistic,” “original,” “daring,” and “independent,” words usually associated with “traveler.”

Enjoying longer etymological tradition, “traveler” first appeared in English in the fourteenth century, meaning a person who travels or goes from place to place, along a road or path. It shares the root with “travail,” that is, to suffer, to torment, to labor, and to toil. It is also used to refer to a person who travels abroad and journeys in foreign countries and strange lands. One of the earliest examples of this usage can be found in Shakespeare’s As You Like It (1600): “When I was at home I was in a better place, but travelers must be content.” Here court jester Touchstone is complaining about the hardships as a result of fleeing from the court. “Tourist,” in contrast, made a much belated debut in the late eighteenth century. It was used as a synonym for “traveler” but lost the overtone of “suffering.” It defined a person who visits places for scenery, recreation, or pleasure. Sir Walter Scott wrote in St. Roman’s (1824): “It provoked the pencil of every passing tourist” (Simpson & Weiner 23). Tourist, in this context, refers to the nineteenth century Scotsman who traveled around for social calls and sight seeing.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, “tourist” began to take on negative meanings, “vulgar” in Henry James’s term. The distinction between a “vulgar” tourist and an “elegant” traveler is an extension of the divide between high and low cultures in

early modernity and a testimony to people's love/hate affairs with modernity (Rojek 23). The vestige of the divide and its emotional associations last till today.

One of the reasons tourists are detested is that they no longer "travail" during their journeys with the help of modern means of transportation, which accelerates the divorce of "tourist" from physical suffering, originally associated with "traveler." Booking trips on-line, sitting in air-conditioned tour buses, and taking jet planes, contemporary tourists take advantage of what modern technology has offered to them. The animosity towards tourists in terms of transportation embodies the early modern discontents generated by technology in the industrialization era: it is not natural, not authentic as traveling on foot, on horse, pre-modern modes of transportation that become increasingly rare with the modern conveniences in cars, buses, and on planes and cruises.

Another reason for the aversion to tourists is that they always travel in groups, which discourages individual discovery. It is thus a violation of "individualism" and "freedom," values that modernity holds high. Tourists, unlike travelers, expect to discover what has already been pre-packaged by tourism. Also, tourists are consumers as opposed to travelers being artists. Travel is lamented as a "lost art" by Boorstin (5), who claims that the traveler works at something like an artist while the tourist seeks pleasure by spending money.

Tourists and travelers interact with the foreign culture they visit differently. Tourists tend to spend most of their time visiting everything that is "typical" to that culture: artifacts, museums, and buildings. They tend to see what is advertised by tourism and confirm the pre-packaged stereotypes. As a result, it is less likely for them to change their set beliefs and values after the tour, which is defined by the Webster Dictionary as "a journey where one returns to the starting point."

Unlike tourists, travelers interact much more with the people in that foreign culture by observing more closely and talking with them. They enjoy not only the tourist sights but also the back streets and hidden neighborhoods in and about their destinations. They observe the local culture and people and keep a more open mind to what is different from their own and seek to understand the difference. In the process, they might reach a new understanding of their own culture.

Despite all these differences, tourists and travelers do share one thing in common: both of them pursue difference. If a traveler is an individual adventure seeking difference, a tourist is an individual consuming difference. Tourists seek a spectacle, the scene of difference, and an older, less urbanized and less industrialized locale. This consumption of difference has grown to become a mass industry and vital player in the operation of global capitalism. In a postmodern age of globalization and mass tourism, the demarcation between the traveler and the tourist is always artificial and blurred. One can hardly avoid being a tourist, as Paul Fussell proclaims, “we are all tourists now, and there is no escape”(49). Those who resent tourists are “anti-tourists,” tourists themselves and snobs at the same time, according to Fussell.

Paul Fussell's notion of tourism is European, historically progressive, and "materialist" in that the status of human travel is a function of social development. That is, if people have explored a region, then it's no longer available for exploration; if the tourism industry reaches a certain critical mass, then travel is no longer possible. Nonetheless, one can also look at exploration, travel, tourist, and anti-tourist progression epistemologically and historically. Put another way, one can look at travel as a way of knowing about the places you see and, more important, about yourself. The distinction between the tourist and the traveler can be made by examining not only the goal of travel

(the fantasist tourist or the student-traveler) but also the epistemological lenses through which the tourist or traveler sees the terrain. Travel, then, is an opportunity to gain new understanding of not only the foreign environment institutionalized by print and broadcast media but also of one's own home environment and self identity. In this sense, travel becomes a chance for epistemological renewal of self identity.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine four travel writings published between the 1980s and 1990s to explore how personal identity and national identity have been translated and represented around modernity. Before 1976, foreign visits to China were often of diplomatic nature and visitors had no say in terms of itineraries, which often consisted of banquets, meeting with political leaders, and visiting model factories and farms. Highly politicized and staged, these visits were official tools to boost China's international image. With its Open Door policy since 1976, China has drawn many international travelers and tourists, who have been driven by all kinds of purposes.⁹ The incoming visitors during the late and early eighties found a China with poor infrastructure to accommodate international tourism. It is not until 1986 that China began to include tourism in its economic plans by focusing more on economic gains. By the late eighties China had become one of the major players in international tourism.

It is in the wake of China's shift to economic development and construction of new images that many foreign travelers were able to visit China and share their experiences and explorations. Christina Dodwell, author of A Traveler in China (1985),

⁹ The Open Door Policy has been carried out for more than 20 years since the late 1970's by Deng Xiaoping. Before Deng's era, China was ruled under the radical politics-oriented and self-sustained policy by Mao Zedong, which had China's door closed in front of the foreign countries. From the failure experiences from Mao's bloody political revolutions, Deng realized that in order to let China to be modernized, the reforms should be taken initially on the interest in the economic sector. Deng started his goal by advocating China to open her door to the rest of the world, which was the "Open Door Policy."

is a contemporary adventurer in the spirit of precedent explorers, who seeks exotic China in the remote areas in the southwest and northwest and among ethnic population. Her translation of China is light-handed on social and political issues and predominantly in a visualized mode since the Mandarin she crammed for before the journey is of little use when she is in the remote and ethnic areas where few speak and understand it.

Unlike Christina Dodwell, Colin Thubron, author of Behind the Wall (1987), and Paul Theroux, author of Riding Iron Rooster (1988), are sharp yet witty critics of Chinese society, both contemporary and ancient. Having devoted significant time and energy to learning Mandarin, Thubron and Theroux turn a journalist ear to the Chinese they encounter during their journeys. As a result, their narratives are full of journalist interviews, which serve as testimonials to their critique of Chinese society. Thubron focuses on barbarity and cruelty in Chinese culture while Theroux sees it backward and un/under developed. Differences in space are converted to differences in time as a result of the progressive thinking of an earlier century. Though their criticism rings truth in some degree, the mode of their translations is problematic: the recycling of Orientalism and Eurocentrist discourses rather than first-hand experience. Given the readers that are accustomed to this discourse, their narratives do more harm than good in cross-cultural understanding.

However, it is also argued that the counterparts of Orientalism and Eurocentrism in China -- Occidentalism and Sinocentrism are equally undesirable. Hill Gates, an anthropologist and feminist, is the one with most awareness of the trade-off of these discouraging discourses. In Looking for Chengdu (1999), she successfully deconstructs stereotypes by self-censoring her own preoccupations and prejudices with a confessional

and analytical mode of translation. Yet cultural materialism has limited her interpretation of China.

A Traveler in China by Christina Dodwell

A Traveler in China (1985) is Christina Dodwell's account of her four-month journey in remote northwest and southwest China in 1984. Following the footsteps of Marco Polo, Dodwell started from the northwestern border in Xinjiang, traveling along the Silk Road across the Taklamakan and Gobi deserts into Xi'an and on east along the Yellow River to Beijing, then backtracking on west into Tibet and farther south to Canton. It is an emotional and a physical journey for Dodwell to trace earlier female travelers she admires (Alexandra David-Nell, Ella Maillart, Mildred Cable, and Doris Beddow).¹⁰ For this journey, along with twenty more she made in Africa, Papua New Guinea and other areas in the world, she was awarded the Mungo Park Medal by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in 1989.

Though usually known as an explorer, Christina Dodwell sees herself as a traveler in China. The naming is further complicated, given the sensibilities of the tourist age we are living in. What is in a name? An explorer, a traveler, or a tourist? The question is far from clear in the case of Christina Dodwell. She has been acclaimed as "lone explorer"

¹⁰ Alexandra David-Nell, born in France in 1868, traveled extensively since she was eighteen years old. She is known for her visit to Lhasa in 1924 and thus became the first European woman to travel in Tibet. She wrote more than thirty books on travel and Buddhism. She visited China on her way to Tibet.

Ella Maillart (1903 - 1997) is remembered chiefly as a writer, journalist and photographer, but she was also a successful sportswoman. She was born in Geneva of Swiss and Danish parentage. She travelled extensively in little-explored parts of the world, including the new Soviet Union. She crossed the Caucasus and Central Asia and trekked across the desert regions of north-west China. Mildred Cable, Eva and Francesca French were three English missionaries who in 1902 left a comfortable upper middle class lifestyle to work in the Gobi Desert of China. These women set sail for China and the Gobi Desert one-hundred years ago and crossed the Gobi Desert five times.

for her solo journey in Africa from 1975 to 1978, which is followed by a two-year visit in remote areas in Papua New Guinea and many other journeys spanning twenty years. Dodwell herself sometimes seems to be careless, if not confused, about the distinction, which can be seen from the title of a travel manual she wrote: An Explorer's Handbook: An Unconventional Guide for Travelers to Remote Regions (1986) a book intended for "people such as campers, walkers, and travelers who want to know how to fend for themselves in the wilds" (Dodwell 7). Dodwell's definition of explorer seems pale in comparison to what Paul Fussell has in mind:

Explorers are to the ordinary traveler what the saint is to the average church congregation. The athletic, paramilitary activity of exploration ends in knighthoods for Sir Francis Drake and Sir Aurel Stein and Sir Edmund Hillary. No traveler and certainly no tourist are ever knighted for his performances, although the strains he undergo can be as memorable as the explorer's.(39)

Christina Dodwell was decorated with a modern version of knighthood -- the Mungo Medal by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in 1989 as mentioned earlier, which aims to recognize "outstanding contributions to geographical knowledge through exploration and/or research, and/or work of a practical nature of benefit to humanity in potentially hazardous physical and/or social environments" ("A Brief").

When the Royal Geographical Society was founded under Royal Charter in 1830, it had a clear mission: to promote "that most important and entertaining branch of knowledge -- geography." It is not for its educational contribution that the Society is renowned, but for its central role in the exploration of the world. Born out of an explorer's dining club, the RGS started to support expeditions immediately after its

foundation. It received reports from returning explorers and honored the lucky ones with medals. The British excel as explorers and the RGS has involved itself in discoveries by Europeans in every far-flung corner of our planet and the filling-in of many of the blanks on its map. All of these expeditions have involved challenge and personal danger. Some ended in triumph, others in disaster, but many have earned a place in the history book and all have contributed to our knowledge and understanding of the planet on which we live (Hemming 8).

First established in 1930, the award is to commemorate Mungo Park (1771-1806), the first European to travel deep into the heartland of West Africa tracing and mapping the course of River Niger in West Africa on two attempts in 1795 and in 1805 respectively. He drowned as he tried to escape capture by the inhabitants (Duffell 5-7). His recorded experience of these journeys was later published as Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa (1799) and had become classical travel writing ever since. Park, in his own words, was driven by a “passionate desire to examine the produce of a country so little known and to become experimentally acquainted with the modes of life and characters of the natives” (78). Christina Dodwell shares with Park the urge to explore the unknown, seeing in inveterate travelers “an inquisitive nature and a zest for knowledge” (101). Her explorations, however, no longer holds the cultural and political significance attributed to her predecessors.

Unlike Mungo Park, Christina Dodwell is left with little explore, living as she does in an era when almost all the planet has been explored. The role remains for her is adventurer, who seeks to experience physical challenges and keeps track of unclimbed mountains and unnavigated rivers. In Papua New Guinea she canoed four months and made the first complete navigation of the Sepik River in 1979. She carried the same

canoe to China during her 1984 trip and devoted a whole chapter describing an unsuccessful canoeing on Lake Karakol in Xingjiang, concluding, “[b]eing the first wasn’t important. I wasn’t trying to achieve anything”(Dodwell 37). However, trying to be the first is exactly the hallmark of contemporary adventurers. The social and economic value of the explorer’s journey lies in opening up new markets for the mercantilists to exploit; the adventurer’s victory leads to a new kind of market -- tourism. Journals like the National Geographic, with all its alluring pictures, tap into the potential tourist attractions.

Keeping up with the spirit of explorer, Christina Dodwell has to travel further to search for the “exotic” in remote places and the lives of peoples off the beaten track and outside the familiar tourist routes who have so far kept modernity at bay. Interior China and the ethnic people she visited were still off the popular tourist circuit during the mid-eighties. Given the vastness and diversity of China, Dodwell chooses in her trip rural areas and ethnic Chinese rather than urban centers and Han Chinese, regarding the former two as more “interesting” and “colorful” (Dodwell 9-10). Due to the language barrier, she adopts visuals as the predominant mode of translation. She has learned Mandarin before the journey but only finds it useless in the ethnic areas since the people there speak different languages and hardly understand Mandarin. The visualized rendering can be found in her depiction of the natural landscape and the ethnic population with different attires and customs than the Han’s. Her preference for remote and ethnic areas here attests to the identity of the society she is from as well as the identity of China constructed in Western media. As a traveler and travel writer, Dodwell is after the “unknown” and “spectacular,” which is complementary to what both she and her readership are accustomed to at home.

Rural areas in China are thus set against the industrialization and urbanization brought by modernity in England and other Western countries, the modernity that redefines the relationship between nature and human beings. Nature used to be seen as dangerous, representing hazards, threats, and disasters in pre-modern societies. For this reason, comments on natural landscape beauty were non-existent in travel literature during the sixteenth and seventeenth century (Bell & Lyall 56). With the development of technology, nature was “conquered” and altered into urban areas, large and small. The rapid and increasing urbanization ultimately stripped city dwellers of natural sceneries at large scale, which has been replaced with miniature landscape with human touches. The deterioration of environmental quality motivated people to travel in search of more pleasing natural environment in order to compensate for the lost unity with nature, feeling good both physically and spiritually. The most beautiful nature of all is that which is without obvious evidence of human habitation or intervention -- space in which one could enjoy solitary contemplation, simplicity, and apparent total naturalness.

Christina Dodwell obviously shares this aesthetic, sitting in canoe on Lake Karakol, admiring the surrounding silver-white mountains, whose “shape eroded into flowing curves which glistened in the cold sunlight,” realizing that “the beauty there was something special. Perhaps it was enhanced by being so little known and untraversed” (37). Human beings are said to spoil the pure natural beauty. Dodwell writes:

As the sun gradually melted the snow I saw celandines, anemones, and a lot of young wild rhubarb. All the colors, including the blue sky, seemed to be made more vivid by the rarefied air. How wonderful it was to be in a landscape where there are not any people, and I saw none for the whole of that day. (52)

This aesthetic of nature admiring is symptomatic of the psychological discontents to modernity, which, with the domination of technology, has erased nature from ordinary people's daily life.

However, the same pleasure and the sublime that Christina Dodwell experienced could not be shared by all the other population in China, who were absent in the picturesque scenery. Dodwell thought "with a population of a billion, it must be rare in China for anyone to find himself alone for long stretches; the Chinese don't like to be alone..."(52). She thinks that the problem lies in their different attitudes towards modernity and thus nature. For Dodwell, as others from post-modernity societies, nature is her sanctuary to retrieve the lost harmony with nature. For local inhabitants, mostly nomadic and hill tribes, the same nature means something different: it is the location of their home. They live, labor, and do everything there. Being one with the nature, they don't have to go an extra mile and step back to admire its beauty as Dodwell did. They know too well the multiple faces of it -- beautiful, peaceful, caring, but also violent, hazardous and disastrous. A visitor, like Dodwell, may not know it all, either appreciating and idealizing the good side of it or experiencing the dark side of it through adventures and physical challenges.

Unlike local inhabitants and Christina Dodwell, Chinese city dwellers saw yet another picture when they were busy with initiating industrialization and catching up with modernity during the eighties. To them, these remote areas, though picturesque, were undesirable since they lacked modern amenities and infrastructure necessary which the Chinese were pursuing. In this sense, Wang, Dodwell's driver and guide in Tibet, did not share her enthusiasm toward Tibet. His disapproval was more socio-economical than

ethno-racial. In light of this difference in attitudes towards remote areas in China, it is quite understandable that Dodwell felt disappointed and even gave up the idea of visiting Lhasa when learning about Lhasa's change toward modernization. She interpreted this change as replacement of original ancient buildings with modern concrete replicas.

It took years for the Chinese, who have been struggling with modernity since 1976, to learn the mentality of post-modernity and realize those remote areas and their natural landscapes are exactly resources themselves, especially for international tourism. From 1978 to 1985, it was still primarily big cities that opened up to international tourism partly to demonstrate "Chinese modernization."

Beside natural landscape, the other focus of Christina Dodwell's trip is ethnic groups other than the Han, who are the majority and "mainstream" Chinese population. As she defines the "Chinese" in her book:

When we say Chinese, we usually think of all those who live in China as one race, the race being the Han majority from eastern and northern Chinese stock, their name taken from the powerful dynasty that ruled China for four centuries from 200 B.C. But from a Chinese perspective one has to take into account the fifty-four other ethnic groups who are culturally different from the Han, but whose land has been annexed by China. They may comprise less than a tenth of China's total population, yet they occupy about sixty percent of the territory. Some are nomadic. Some are hill tribes. All have distinctive ways of life and I was particularly eager to visit as many of these groups as possible on the remote fringes of China's north-west and south-west border, with their colorful customs and costumes. (80)

Dodwell's overview of Chinese ethnic population is accurate; however, her translation of China as a multi-ethnic nation involves more social implications. The emphasis on the multi-ethnic side of Chineseness runs against the previous dominant image of China in the sixties and seventies that centered on the Cultural Revolution, an ocean of people in Maoist suits, waving the little Red Book and chanting praises to Mao. Whether positive or negative, the image was always highly politically charged, especially during the height of the Cold War. For opponents, China was viewed as a member of the communist block, oppressed and unfortunate under the rule of communist government, which was seen as wrong and evil; for sympathizers, especially the leftist intellectuals, China was a potential alternative to Western capitalism, with which they were disappointed.

Against this backdrop Christina Dodwell's version of China stands out as less political and more colorful, a refreshing spectacle to the Western readership in the mid-eighties ("less political" here means her translation of the ethnic China is straight). She suspends her judgment and never in the book criticizes or supports or even comments on the government's policies on ethnic population. She positions herself as a person "less concerned with social and political issues" (96) just like Doris Deddow, her grandmother, who lived in China for thirty years as a correspondent for English newspapers in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet this seemingly scientific detachment in positioning is far from being "objective."

Christina Dodwell overemphasizes the differences between the ethnic groups and the Han, ignoring their interactions and sameness, especially the same recent history they share. For example, Dodwell overstresses the visual differences as she describes the costumes, "I was the only European; several of the passengers were moon-faced Hans,

wearing drab green or blue Mao clothes. The rest were Turki or Uighur. The men wore skullcaps embroidered with silk or gold thread. Some of the women wore head-shawls with skullcaps on top”(13). Here Dodwell conveniently distinguishes the Han from other ethnic groups by costumes without noticing that some of the Turki and Uighur also dressed in Mao suits, which are the Han’s regular attire. Not accidentally, the majority of the pictures included in the book contain similar colorful and vibrant images of the ethnic groups portrayed. The purpose of stressing the visual differences between the Han and other ethnic people is to provide new images of China that may seem appealing and refreshing to the Western readership in the eighties since most readers had been bombarded with images of the unisex drab blue and gray colored clothing, which predominated during the Cultural Revolution.

Similar illustrations often make appearances in China Today and China Pictorial, two major government-run journals that promote China’s national identity to foreigners. Both Christina Dodwell and Chinese official media have exploited the differences among ethnic groups, but with different twists and for quite different purposes. Where Chinese official rhetoric promotes harmony and celebration of diversity, Dodwell sees the differences as distinct and incommensurable. An example is when she compares the Uighur and the Han in terms of personality traits and concludes, “The Han are conscientious, methodical, and conventional. They like to think things out in advance. The Uighur tend to be pleasure loving, restless, and impetuous. Clearly the two groups have little in common”(19). Not mentioning that this distinction is a recycling of Marco Polo’s observations, Dodwell perpetuates such distinct and essentialist differences in costume, custom, and character, usually leading to references to ethnic conflicts in ancient and recent history. For example, Outer Mongolia declared independence from

China in 1921. For Dodwell, it is the conflicts between the ethnic groups and the Han she is emphasizing in her narrative while the official line of the Chinese government focuses on celebrating diversity and harmony between the Han and other ethnic groups.

Neither of these approaches portrays the whole picture of multi-ethnic China. Differences in cultures and ethnicities negotiate themselves through acculturation, conflicts, and compromises. New cultural landscapes come into being during this process. Christina Dodwell clings to the rigid and incommensurable differences as manifested in clothing and character, ignoring that interactions take place. In the illustration titled “Mutton for Supper in Kashgar” (32), among several men sitting in a line and selling steamed mutton in a market, a young man stands out with his Han outfit -- shirt and an olive hat, contrasting with the other older peddlers in ethnic costumes. Yet his facial features give away his true identity -- Uighur. Beyond being fashionable and “modern,” the adopted Han outfit also bespeaks the young Uighur’s urge to assimilate and take on a new identity. It is interesting to note that the outfit adoption seems to be a one-way street since the Han will dress in an ethnic costume in everyday life, a footnote to the power politics between the dominant Han and the other ethnic groups.

Christina Dodwell is a traveler with the spirit of an explorer. Her narrative provides a fresh glimpse on the landscape and ethnic population in the remote areas of China to the Western readership, who has been fed up with images of the Cultural Revolution. Yet, the depiction of these “interesting and colorful” places and people is well within the tradition of earlier explorers’ search for the exotic.

Behind the Wall: A Journey Through China by Colin Thubron

Like Christina Dodwell, Colin Thubron travels and writes extensively. His travel began early during his boyhood, when his father, in diplomatic service, was posted first to Canada and then America in the late 1940's. He commuted between the two coasts of the Atlantic frequently on his own to visit his parents during holidays. Gayle Feldman suggests that these travels gave Thubron "an early physical love of movement and pleasure and excitement in travel." He also notes that as an adult Thubron ventured further to more remote and different cultures with a "curiosity about worlds, which my generation has found threatening: China, Russia, Islam (and perhaps from a desire to humanize and understand them)" (52). During the 1960's, driven by such a curiosity, Thubron began to travel to the Middle East -- Damascus, Lebanon, Cyprus, and wrote Mirror to Damascus (1967), The Hills of Adonis: A Quest in Lebanon (1968) and Jerusalem (1969), personal travel narratives "rather than telling the reader about the place, inviting them to share his experience of discovery" (Feldman 53).

In 1978 Colin Thubron had a car accident and fractured his spine. During the months of "enforced leisure," dreaming grandiose travel dreams, he wanted to approach "the lands he had always been taught to fear" (Feldman 54). He explored western Russia by car in the last of the Brezhnev years and wrote Among the Russians (1983). Later he traveled in the remotest regions of China, as recorded in Behind the Wall (1987), a winner of the Hawthornden Prize and the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award. Each book takes three years of his life: a year or so of intensive language learning and research, four or five months in the target country, and a year or so of 14-hour writing days.

At about the same time that Christina Dodwell was wandering in the remote areas in southwest and northwest China, savoring the ethnic flavors, Colin Thubron set off on a 10,000 mile journey from a tropical region near the Burmese border to the windswept wastes of the Gobi desert and the far end of the Great Wall, sampling his own China a la carte -- “classical China,” the China excluding Tibet and Manchuria (Thubron 1).

Having devoted a whole year to learning Mandarin, Colin Thubron turned a journalist ear to the Chinese he encountered during their journeys. As a result, his narrative is full of journalist interviews, which serve as testimonials to his critique of Chinese society. Thubron focuses on barbarity and cruelty in Chinese culture. Though his criticism rings true in some degree, the mode of translation is problematic as he recycles Orientalism and Eurocentrism discourses rather than records first-hand experience. Given the readership that is accustomed to this discourse, his narrative does more harm than good in cross-cultural understanding.

Colin Thubron’s travel features big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Kunming, and Guilin as well as well-known landscapes like the Great Wall, the Yangtze River, the Nine-flower Mountain, the Three Gorges and the Yellow River out of about two hundred and fifty regions and cities open to international tourists and travelers. Though Thubron claims his choice to be “random” (Thubron 1), it seems to conform to rather touristy highlights of a “quintessential” China, one that boasts a long history, beautiful landscape and splendid culture -- the China promoted by Chinese tourism from early eighties on. Thubron’s translation of China and Chinese cultural symbols, however, is a far cry from the identity that Chinese tourism has been trying to establish. He reads into these cultural symbols a China that he already knew back at home through childhood memory, media and reading: a country of multitudinous, anonymous, barbarous,

irrational, and inscrutable people. While drawing from the old rhetoric that defines China, Thubron finds new evidence for the dark image of Chinese during his trip. In this sense, his translation of China is a recycled version of Eurocentrism, a member of the Ethnocentrism family, a time-honored tradition in almost every culture, and appeals to those old Occidental sentiments and caricatures, all in the context of Western readership consumption. Despite the genuine efforts involved and intelligent insights revealed from time to time, the journey to China, on the whole, seems to be more like collecting the necessary evidence to prove him right than dusting off his preoccupations and remaining open to a more subtle and complex China that the immediacy of his travel offers. However, given a different context and readership, orientalism discourse may function quite differently, as the following discussion reveals.

In tracing the source of these stereotypes of the Orient, Edward Said finds that the Orient is “a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone’s work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining”(177). Similarly, Colin Thubron realizes that “people’s images of countries are rich in such buried sediment, which goes on haunting long after experience or common sense has diluted it” (2). He still remembers during prep school years that he and his classmates used to tease one another by imitating all kinds of tortures the Chinese used during the Korean War. This memory and many other similar ones seem to have a long-lasting effect on his perceptions of another culture.

One of these ingrained ideas of China that Colin Thubron evokes in his narrative is atrocities: all kinds of tortures designed throughout history, child brides, girl-infant killing, wife beating, cruelty to animals, to name a few. This image of barbarity in his writing, however, is not from first-hand experience but from second-hand sources. These

are mostly testimonies from those who were in the Cultural Revolution, which are followed by references to other barbarity in ancient China that Thurbron uses without questioning his sources. In Thurbron's mind, the Cultural Revolution reached the epitome of atrocities in terms of intensity and scope: "A million were killed, some thirty million more were brutally persecuted, and unknown millions starved to death. Yet it was less the numbers which appalled than the refinements of cruelty practiced -- in one province alone seventy-five different methods of torture were instituted" (2).

Colin Thubron met a Chinese priest in a Protestant Church in Nanjing and struck up a conversation with him about the Cultural Revolution, a recurring topic in his conversations with the local people. When he learned that even the students in the seminary, who were supposed to have Christian conscience, had persecuted their teachers, Thubron felt astonished and outrageous:

Momentarily my head filled with savage, condescending notions. The Chinese (I raged mutely) knew cruelty and squalor enough in their hierarchy-ridden families, where wife beating was common and equality unknown. Their massed millions made the individual expendable, almost valueless. Perhaps it was strange that any imaginative sympathy survived at all.... (100)

This outrage is less a logical conclusion from their conversation than an emotional response from nowhere and it evokes the old cliché of Chinese barbarism since there is no immediate connection between the persecution by the seminary students and family abuse at all.

Consciously or unconsciously, the conversation is employed as the stage to revive the stereotypes of Chinese for generations. This mode of translation leads one to doubt whether the trip itself is necessary. The illogical and violent intervention of the old Orientalist discourse undermines the validity of the directness and physicality of these conversations with locals, which are supposed to yield unmediated observations from direct contacts with local people.

Yet some incidents contradict Colin Thubron's Orientalist translation of Chinese cruelty and thus make his narrative more reflective. For instance, the "surviving sympathy" later was found in a fourteen-year-old girl, who showed pity and felt sad for the jarred chicks in the biology museum when showing Thubron around her high school. He "realized that he was still steeped in a conventional anxiety about Chinese cruelty, and that... he had unconsciously waited for some expression of tenderness, of empathy of pain. And now here it was, absurdly, expressed for bottled birds" (95). However, incidents like this only silhouette and hence intensify the overall Orientalist discourse of cruelty.

The resort to Orientalist discourse might do nothing but reaffirm the popular stereotypes to a Western readership. It can be a mirror held up to the Chinese reader and help them in the process of evaluating his/her own culture. The criticism of an outsider is constructive and instrumental if used wisely. This occurs when Colin Thubron probes the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution. The official line during the eighties was that it was the crime committed by the "gang of four", and later "errors" of Mao. Chinese intellectuals have targeted criticism primarily against Mao or the system. With these explanations, the "lost generation," who were in late teens or early twenties during the Cultural Revolution, present themselves merely as victims, misled and innocent of the

wrongdoings. The flourishing of “Wound Literature” of the eighties attests to this mentality. Thubron, on the other hand, touches on the individual moral realm and points out that the absent sense of sin in each individual is more disastrous than the mass craziness: one tends to find a scapegoat for what happened, either the “gang of four” or Mao without reflecting on one’s own guilt and responsibility. It is not until recently that Chinese intellectuals began to re-evaluate this recent past along this line. Unfortunately, most of the travel narratives to China in English have a particular target readership in mind and cannot reach the readership in China. Also, it is more lamentable that the Oriental discourse in these narratives has a totally different impact in the West since it loses its critical edge and conforms to the dominant Western ideology.

Like that of Chinese barbarism, Colin Thubron’s translation of Chinese cultural symbols and architectures also appeals to Orientalist stereotypes. For instance, he sees “mass coercion” in the architecture whereas Chinese boast about the “culmination of collective intelligence”:

The huge lakes by the Forbidden City and the Summer Palace were scooped out purely by manpower, and the 200-foot Coal Hill -- the highest point in Beijing -- was raised by an army of nameless conscripts. The 1,100-mile Grand Canal between Beijing and Hangzhou was dug by a workforce of five and a half million in the seventh century; the tomb of China’s first emperor engaged 700,000 craftsmen and slaves who labored from the beginning of his reign to its end; the Great Wall... (14)

The Great wall, a contemporary symbol of national and cultural identity is seen by Thubron as the “materialization of a profound psychological fear” and xenophobia.

One year after the publication of Behind the Wall, River Elegy (1988), a Chinese television series with Su Xiaokang as the main screenwriter, was aired. It is interesting to that it embraced the same Orientalist discourse and received tremendous popular reception in China. There are striking similarities between Colin Thubron's translation of major Chinese cultural symbols and River Elegy's reading of them. For instance, Su also renders the Great Wall as a symbol of isolationism and enclosed conformity. Yet the specific social and political context of China in the 1980's lends the Orientalism in River Elegy a fresh meaning that is quite different from the Orientalism found in Thubron's work: It serves as a resistance to the official discourse, the nationalism with an emphasis on the greatness of ancient Chinese history by deconstructing the national symbols such as the Great Wall, the Yellow River, and the dragon. The phenomenal popularity of River Elegy attests to Chinese people's intense yearning for modernity and political loosening, which is different from what is prescribed by the officials. On the one hand, it amounts to a critique of Chinese tradition as isolated, stagnant, stifling and oppressive; on the other, it constructs an idealized West "Other" as China's flip side: advanced, open, and illuminating.

In this respect, it seems, especially by the scholars in the West who are familiar with postcolonial theory, a strange marriage of Orientalism and Occidentalism that should be condemned. However, given that the audience of the television series is the Chinese living in mainland China rather than those in the West, the ideological implications are different from that of Orientalism in the Western discourse. As Xiaomei Chen argues in Occidentalism (1995):

If it is imperialistic for the Occident to "misrepresent" the Orient, then, the Orient can also anti-imperialistically use the Occident to achieve its own

political aims at home. It is by such a political end that River Elegy's screenwriters could justify the anti-imperialistic aims with which they ingeniously fragmented and pluralized the official culture in their very invention of a West. (42)

Moreover, the image of the West, according to Chen, could switch from positive to negative, depending on the Chinese domestic social and political milieu. Though she is right in pointing out the different social and political ramifications of such an Orientalism and Occidentalism, the justification for so doing seems to be more indignantly emotional than reasonable. The cure is as bad as, if not worse than, the disease. For the Chinese, who are pursuing modernity, self-Orientalizing and Occidentalizing prevent a more rational reevaluation of traditional culture and a more balanced understanding of Western culture, which is essential to the modernity project based on the model of Western modernity. Rather, it will only engender more intercultural misunderstandings and contribute to the collection of cultural stereotypes.

Different cultures have to communicate with and understand each other in the only common language left: reason and rationality, though the task of postmodernism for the West is to correct the "over-arrogance" of rationalism, and, for China, to embrace rationalism with caution rather than rejecting it, as River Elegy does by over-denunciating Chinese tradition and over-idealizing the West. In this sense, River Elegy is more a poetic and fictionalized version of comparative Chinese and Western history based on symbolism and allegory than a systematic and rational examination based on historical facts. As a result, it will only mislead China to another dangerous idealism of constructed Western modernity after the disastrous idealism of a communist utopia

during the Cultural Revolution. Without rationality and reason, any attempt to achieve modernity is bound to fail. Only a more balanced and better-informed view on both Chinese tradition and western modernity will facilitate China in finding its own way towards modernity. Orientalism, self-orientalism, Occidentalism, and nationalism are incomplete and one-sided.

In this sense, we need to go back to the Orientalism found in Colin Thubron's book and reevaluate it in different geopolitical contexts. Simply put, Western audience, who are only familiar with an Orientalist discourse, find a China that conspires to the old stereotypes as represented and reiterated in Thubron's book. In the meantime, Thubron as a writer does not provide any analytical examinations of these stereotypes. Instead, he evokes them with the new "evidence" collected during his journey. Yet Chinese readers, who are accustomed to official nationalism and sensitive to national pride, may find it difficult to face the unsavory side of one's own country depicted by a foreigner. But before condemning it as "imperialism" and dismissing it totally, Chinese readers should salvage the half-truth in these caricatures and reflect on a more complex and contradictory national identity hidden behind the Wall.

Riding the Iron Rooster: Through China on Train by Paul Theroux

Like Colin Thubron, Paul Theroux has had a long love affair with both travel and writing. Born and educated in Massachusetts, United States, Paul Theroux traveled first to Italy in 1963 and then to Africa, where for the next few years he worked as a Peace Corps teacher in Malawi and as a faculty member at Makerere University in Uganda. In 1968 he began to teach in the English Department at the University of Singapore and

published short stories, articles, and novels. After leaving his position at the University of Singapore in 1971, Theroux emigrated with his family to England and committed himself to writing. His travel books are perhaps most widely known.

Paul Theroux's travel narratives are a mix of translations: from factual to fictive, from outer to inner, from biased to self-reflective, and from spatial to temporal, combining journalism, fiction, and autobiography into one. Most famous for his train travel narratives of around the world -- Great Britain, Continental Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas -- Theroux always sets his travel narratives against the regularly changing backdrop of a train window. This choice of mode of transportation is far from a coincidence. In his biography of V.S. Naipaul, Sir Vidia's Shadow (1998), Theroux writes that, while "sitting in the big warm bosom of this friendly monster," he stumbles upon an epiphany of train travel on a journey from London to Oxford in the early 70's. He realized that it is comforting, imagination-stimulating, and memory-activating. All these characteristics helped him take "a glimpse of the best of England" (138). Later on, Theroux's infatuation with rail travel led him further to Asia, the Americas, and Great Britain. These trips resulted in popular travel writings like The Great Railway Bazaar (1975), which is an account of a rail journey across Europe, the Middle East, India, South East Asia, Japan, and Mongolia and The Old Patagonian Express (1979), a journey from his hometown near Boston to the southernmost tip of the Americas, the "nowhere place" of Patagonia.

Beginning from April 1986, Paul Theroux spent almost a year traveling in China, meeting people and visiting places. Like that of Colin Thubron, Theroux's narrative is abundant in journalist interviews with Chinese people on trains. Whereas Thubron

focuses on barbarity and cruelty in Chinese culture, Theroux sees it as backward and underdeveloped.

Train, as a mode of transportation of Paul Theroux's choice, first turns out to be his way of avoiding jet lag, which seems to have weakened "every modern account of Chinese travel" as a result of "fatigue and insomnia" (Theroux 15). Theroux began his train odyssey in London and traveled by train across Europe, through the vast underbelly of Asia, into the heart of Russia, and finally in China. Another virtue of traveling by train in China, Theroux claims, is that it allows "one to make visual connections in a place that was otherwise full of shocks and bafflements" given the vastness and diversity of the country (234). Moreover, train travel offers a unique look at all the in-between places that were only accessible by train.

The train is also Paul Theroux's setting for his travel narratives. Against the flickering sceneries from the train windows, Theroux introduces a gallery of vivid portraits: his fellow travelers from England, Australia, Italy, and America and Chinese compatriots, students, workers, officials, and peasants. Theroux, in an interview with The Atlantic, admits he "uses travel as a background for finding stories of places" and identifies himself as a novelist who travels ("All "). This confession from a person with the double role of both fiction and travel narrative writer begs the question of where to draw the line between fiction and travel writing in his works.

Paul Theroux affirms that there is such a distinction at the end of The Great Railway Bazaar, seeing "the difference between travel writing and fiction is the difference between recording what the eye sees and discovering what the imagination knows. Fiction is pure joy -- how sad I could not reinvent the trip as fiction" (434-435). Then, did he record what he sees during his journey in China in 1986? Or does it matter

at all? The answer to the former question is no longer so certain when it comes to his comments later in 2000. When reflecting on the writing of Riding the Iron Rooster, he suggests, "...if you describe precisely what you see and give it life with your imagination, then what you write ought to have lasting value, no matter what the mood of your prose" (Theroux 51). With this remark he seems to have blurred the demarcation between fiction and travel writing he earlier established. A year later, he almost erased the distinction between the two, claiming that the activity of writing itself is "invention, and approximation, and selection" and "so much is left out or edited out or skewed or spun, [he] sometimes think[s] that everything is fiction and that travel is something that happens in your head" (Theroux xx). Truth, to Theroux, is more than actual happenings in travel narratives, a genre that is traditionally reputed for its thin line between truth telling and fiction writing.

Unlike Marco Polo, who went extra miles to claim his account was the true recording of what he saw in the Orient, Paul Theroux, well aware of this mixed nature of this genre, reflects on the complication of truth telling within his own narrative by stepping back from the main line of narrative and commenting on travel and travel writing. For example, in Riding the Iron Rooster, Theroux writes with the hindsight of his second visit to Shanghai during the same year:

In any kind of travel there is a good argument for going back and verifying your impressions. Perhaps you were a little hasty in judging the place? Perhaps you saw it in a good month? Something in the weather might have sweetened your disposition? In any case, travel is frequently a matter of seizing a moment. It is personal. Even if I were traveling with you, your trip would not be mine. Our accounts of the journeys would be different.

...You would write about the kinds of Chinese food, I about the way they wolfed it. If you spoke about Mao, I would contradict you. (390)

Theroux is right in pointing out the different factors that might affect an individual's portraying of a culture and the personal projections on the portrayal. His remarks here touch on two important components in the act of translating a culture: the origin to translate from and the role of the translator. One has to be more attentive to the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of the origin of the target culture. It is not a homogeneous object frozen in time and space out there for one to capture its "essence;" rather, it is internally contradictory, unstable, and ever changing. At the same time, Theroux also notices, the translator is not spared from personal projections in the process of translating mood, personal taste, and political views. In this sense, translation, with such a translator as its agent, is tainted and distorted. The translation is the product of the interactions and negotiations between the origin and the translator. From the translation, one can read as much about the target culture as about the translator. In this sense, travel narrative is a form of autobiography, mixing with journalism and fiction.

This critical distancing in Paul Theroux' narrative is embedded in a post-modernist sensibility. It deconstructs travel, traveler, and travel writing by personalizing, subjectifying, and multiplying "Truth." Truth is no longer ultimate, absolute, and objective. Instead, it is ephemeral, relative, and subjective. However, this is not to say that any translation is equally valid and one should not pass judgment on it since the opinion expressed in it is personal. Instead of asking if the translation is true to origin, one should probe into the social milieu and personal experience that shape this particular version of translation.

It is exactly Paul Theroux's translation of China that demand further examination. As a sharp and tireless critic of humanity, Theroux targets not only Chinese, but also British, American, Australian and Italian, and all his fellow travelers on the international train to China. It is unfair to say he is a racist when his lampoon sweeps across the board and almost no one is spared from his unflattering caricatures. He is a modern loner, snobbish and Eurocentric. He categorizes himself as an outsider:

I had decided quite early in my trip that I was an implausible traveler -- no credit cards, no rucksack. I was not well dressed enough to be a tourist on a ten-day jaunt through ruins and cathedrals; nor was I dirty or frazzled enough to be a wanderer... Tourists regarded me as a backslider, wanderers seemed to think I was an intruder, and natives did not understand me." (470-471)

Registering the difference between himself and the rest of the passengers, Theroux goes a step further by reserving his snobbery:

English youth went to places like the Bratsk Hydroelectric Dam on package tours in order to get drunk on cheap vodka, Eastern Europe was uproarious with nurses from Birmingham, Americans took these tours to meet other people and go shopping and Australians always seem to go home. (18)

Just by separating himself from tourists and passing scorn on them, Paul Theroux becomes a perfect candidate for anti-tourist, who is a snob and a tourist at the same time. Paul Fussell reads the anti-tourist sentiment as a symptom of class distinction, where "the working class finds nothing shameful about tourism" while "the middle class has read and heard just enough to sense that being a tourist is somehow offensive and scorned by

an imaginary upper-class which it hopes to emulate and, if possible, be mistaken for” (49). Maybe his analysis is based on the British travel literature between the wars and thus will not do full justice to Theroux, who was born and educated in the United States before moving to England.

Here enters another strand of the anti-tourist sentiment: the modern glorification of individualism and solitude. Born into a family of seven children, Paul Theroux fostered from early on the impulse to escape and be alone. As traveler, Theroux stresses that the serious traveler always journeys alone:

Travel is at its best a solitary enterprise: to see, to examine, to assess, one has to be alone and unencumbered. Other people can mislead; they crowd your meandering impressions with their own; if they are companionable they obstruct your view, and if they are boring they corrupt the silence with non-sequiturs, shattering your concentration. (199)

One of the impressions that China leaves on Paul Theroux during the journey is its “backwardness”: the primitiveness of industrial products, places and people. He keeps a list of antiquated Chinese manufactured goods: washboards, quill pens, corsets, backscratchers, fish glue, spittoons, steam locomotives, and antimacassars. Theroux tends to translate the spatial difference between Chinese backwardness and Western “advancedness” in terms of temporal difference: “The Chinese made the eighteen-century products in nineteenth-century factories, and so it was not odd that they should reach even further back in time and even revive a medieval art form” (368). On his way to Canton, he sees a thresher that looks like the first thresher in the world (150). In the same way, Theroux registers Chinese places on a scale of time: for instance, a Datong factory is like a vast blacksmith’s shop that existed in the United States in the 1920s (71). The

public bathhouses in Beijing look Roman and Victorian (100). Lhasa is a medieval-era place, just like Europe in the Middle Ages (467). The same mode of translation also extends to people: Ningxia is full of “backward-looking” Hui people (177). The peasants in the field bear a resemblance to those in Flemish paintings of the 17th century (108).

This mode of translation of difference in space through one in time is nothing novel as Johannes Fabian, in his Time and the Other, identifies a tendency of anthropologists in their fieldwork to arrest various contemporary peoples at lower developmental stages of savagery and barbarism and deny their objects “coevalness” and “contemporaneity” (15). Behind this practice lies the modern sense of history and social progress, which is linear and achieved with true knowledge based on reason and rationality. History is thus progressive and moves linearly “forward.” In the nineteenth century, Darwin’s theory of evolution and Spenser’s theory of social evolution seems to help marry the progressive version of history with a racist taxonomy which popularizes the practice of temporalizing other cultures. Paul Theroux’s translation is invariably a vestige of the older tradition and from time to time racist insinuation is obvious.

Paul Theroux’s translation of backwardness in economic terms has been allegedly endorsed by local Chinese: an official explains to him, “China is in the first stage of socialism-- we are just beginning to develop. In some ways, we are underdeveloped and we are proceeding slowly and carefully” (307). This is the official rhetoric of development and modernity used throughout the 1980s with a focus on the modernizations of industry, agriculture, science and technology, and military. This version of modernity and progress is not exactly the same with what Theroux has in mind: it emphasizes on the economic aspect of it, such as industrialization and technology, rather than the humanist side which is usually associated with freedom and democracy.

To Theroux, the Chinese version of modernity is old fashioned and incomplete. Chinese, on the other hand, agree with the belatedness but question the Western modernity as the only alternative to it.

Paul Theroux is no advocate of Western modernity in China; rather, he loathes the increasingly industrialized urban areas: ugly cities with noise, pollution, unfinished buildings, the nightmarish déjà vu of early modernity back at home and man-made landscape everywhere. But he falls in love with the “medieval” Tibet, finding the untainted scenery is “more than touching”-- it is a safe and reassuring remoteness, with the prettiest meadows and moors buttressed by mountains (476). Not surprisingly, his affection does not extend to the people who “happen to” live in the beautiful place. Using the scale of evolution, Theroux paints a Tibetan innkeeper. “A Tibetan sat on a rugged quilt on the floor, gnawing raw flesh off a yak bone. He was black with dirt, his hair was matted, and he was barefoot in spite of the cold. He looked exactly like a cannibal, tearing shreds of red meat off a shank”(457).

It becomes even more offensive when he alludes to the apeish physical features of Tibetans:

It is a Tibetan belief that all Tibetans are descended from a sexually insatiable ogress who had six children after copulating with a submissive monkey. It is just a pretty tale, of course; but looking at this man it was easy to see how the myth might have originated. (457)

It is worth noting that Paul Theroux is not alone in this practice. Colin Thubron labels his Chinese characters as “Neanderthal” and “Peking” (117, 244) a few times.

Paul Theroux's and Colin Thubron's Eurocentrism meets its counterpart in China. Seeing himself through the eye of Chinese, Theroux realizes that "I was the hairy, big-nosed devil from the back of beyond, a foreigner (*wai-guo ren*), one of those whom the Chinese regard as the yokels of the world. We lived in crappy little countries that were squeezed at the edges of the Middle Kingdom..." (276). Thubron also discovers himself in Chinese eyes: "grotesquely gangling, with skin the color of their gray rock and a proboscis of a nose..." (115). However, their versions of Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism beg updating when U.S. cosmetics claim to make you look "Asian" and Chinese plastic surgery promises you European eyelids and a Greek nose-bridge. At the same time, women in North America are crazy about tanning while their counterparts in Africa are bleaching their facial skin. This reversion of racist contempt is not just yet another cycle of demonizing and idealizing differences. Instead, it is the product of late modernity -- global commodification of cultural and racial differences.

Looking for Chengdu: A Woman's Adventures in China by Hill Gates

Hill Gates' book consists of four separate trips she makes from late 1980s to mid 1990s to Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan, a southwestern province bordering Tibet and Yunan. The first one is a short visit from December 1987 to January 1988 when she toured around Sichuan and landed a contract with local government to do her research on family businesswomen in Chengdu. Then she came back in September 1988 and conducted the research project for four months. The third section covers her project on foot binding conducted on and off from November 1989 to November 1991 before the book ends with a short visit in 1996.

Hill Gates declares that “I will travel to Chengdu not just as an anthropologist. Inevitably, necessarily, I travel as a woman, to understand women’s lives. I am -- inevitably, necessarily -- a feminist, but wanting to study Chinese women grows for me as much out of my subject as out of ideological commitment” (7). This is how she spells out her goal of the journey and emphasizes her triple identities as an anthropologist, woman and feminist at the beginning of the book. As an anthropologist and feminist, Gates is, among the authors discussed in this chapter, the one with the keenest awareness of the trade-off of these discouraging discourses such as Orientalism. In Looking for Chengdu (1999), she is successful in deconstructing stereotypes by self-censoring her own preoccupations and prejudices with a confessional and analytical mode of translation. Yet cultural materialism has limited her interpretation of China.

As an anthropologist, Hill Gates translates China through frequently oscillating between an outsider’s view and an insider’s view; as a woman and feminist, she focuses on her translation on women in particular. Also, her previous fieldwork experiences in Taiwan during the 1970 add a new language in her translation of China. She is not only translating through her native tongue and her American experience but also contrasting Taiwan with Mainland China, particularly Chengdu. The triangular experiences from America, Mainland China, and Taiwan bring forth extra layers of perception in her translation of China. She is well aware of demystifying the stereotypes the general Western readership holds about Chinese and especially about Chinese women.

It is interesting to note that, by contrast, though also a woman, Christina Dodwell does not foreground her gender identity in her narrative nor pay more attention to women than men she encounters. The subtitles of their books give away this significant difference in a symbolic way: Dodwell’s is “A Traveler in China” while Gates gives “A

Woman's Adventure in China." For most of the time, the persona that Dodwell assumes in her book is an "adventurous traveler," who is supposed to meet physical difficulties during her journey and thus does not allow too much space for feminine display and sensitivity.

In contrast, Hill Gates' narrative is abundant with female subjects and sensitivity - marriage life, sexism, glass ceiling, childcare, double burden of family and work, and the like. Making women her main theme is a battle on two fronts: it launches a counter narrative to the male-only discourse in contemporary Chinese economy study in academia and, at the same time, she has to battle sexism in China embodied by the patronizing male officials. With such sensibilities, an otherwise ordinary experience of sleeping on a boat on a cold night seems to be a sentimental and spiritual journey:

Never warm enough in chilly weather, like most women, I am grateful for the thick, wadded quilts, grateful to the women who picked and spun and wove for this journey. I recall the works of one of Taiwan's preeminent feminists, descanting on the exquisite contradiction between well-warmed body and icy nose-tip. And more – this embracing cocoon has cut the moorings of a quotidian bed to go a-roving, moving, rolling on the river. Bedding down in a boat tunes one's heartbeat to the thumping silence of Tina Turner and the cosmos. (16)

With rich female touch, Gates rolls four separate female experiences into one cosmic picture in this short paragraph: her sleeping on the boat, Chinese women making the quilt, Taiwanese feminist commenting on temperature of different body parts and Tina Turner's singing as if they were all connected in a higher cosmic sense.

However, as an anthropologist rather than a novelist, Hill Gates resorts more to scientific methods than the poetic associations shown above. One of her goals is to discover the universal in particulars. This mode of translation, along with tri-cultural comparison, is adopted when Gates compares and contrasts the experiences among Chengdu, Taipei, and American women regarding children/work balance. Based on research and personal experience, she finds that all women in three areas have little choice as to whether they have a child or not, though the pressure comes from parents in the cases of Chengdu and Taipei while from the spouse in the case of American women. Also, all of them have to stretch time and energy in order to strike a balance between the family and work demands. Gates relates to her own experience as a graduate student when she had to give up the idea of having child in order to finish her degree. Similarly, Chengdu and Taipei businesswomen have to accept the trade-offs when they choose to expand business and accumulate capital. This intercultural comparison is effective in demystifying the incommensurable differences circulating widely with stereotypes and preoccupations, which see Chinese women as other, totally different from their counterparts in the West.

However, Hill Gates' feminist approach of discovering the universal among particular women's experiences is not problem-free. Heavily influenced by the second wave feminism, Gates holds that the category "woman" could unite all females, as it is considered the most significant role and therefore the strongest categorical identification. Thus she tends to write as if all women had the same experiences and problems. Additionally, concepts are frequently set up as opposing dichotomies, i.e. men/women, work/home. This may have been convenient for comparison but it did not allow for overlap between these terms. Class, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religion

are also recognized as important characteristics that diversify the category of women. In other words, women do not have the same universal needs and experiences. Gates does divide women into four categories but only along the lines of geographic and age differences: older and younger Taipei women vs older and younger Chengdu women. This categorization is rough and ignores other cultural factors that may have affected their decisions in business and family lives.

Hill Gates has always been conscious of deconstructing stereotypes in her account, realizing “Chinese are still often presented as flat and alien to Westerners” and the media has tried to present them as “well-drilled school of sardines or -- worse yet -- guided in their lives by an unfathomable culture” (viii). For instance, Chengdu and Taiwan businesswomen’s frankness about the double burden surprises Gates, “an attribute that is justly not part of the Chinese stereotype” (169). She further challenges the stereotype about American women’s straightforwardness by giving testimony that she had to be very tactful when revealing to her mother and mother-in-law that she was not going to have a child.

Hill Gates deconstructs another stereotype of Chinese peasants as earth-bound people when she encounters a peasant family of three who are on a vacation trip to Guangzhou, a metropolis in Southern China, concluding “when they have the chance and the money, they are off: on pilgrimages, to Disneyland, to see famous scenery or urban marvels, at home or aboard” (15). Gates is right in her claim. From the late eighties on, China has been on the move, tourists traveling to big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou for urban landscape, to the southwest and northwest for ethnic tours, even outside China to global urban centers. At the same time, some travel not as leisure and entertainment as because of improved economic status but travel in order to look for

better employment opportunities in domestic and foreign urban areas. They become migrant workers and immigrants, sometimes illegally. The juxtaposition of these two trends has become a mixed signal of Chinese modernity. What Gates has foreseen is the first trend but not the second one.

As an anthropologist, Hill Gates incorporates both insider's views and outsider's views in her translation of China. The emic (insider's) perspective focuses on the intrinsic cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society and the native members of a culture are the sole judges of the validity of an emic description; The etic (outsider's) perspective relies upon the extrinsic concepts and categories that have meaning for scientific observers. Scientists are the sole judges of the validity of an etic account. Emic knowledge is essential for an intuitive and empathic understanding of a culture, and it is essential for conducting effective ethnographic fieldwork.

Furthermore, emic knowledge is often a valuable source of inspiration for etic hypotheses. Etic knowledge, on the other hand, is essential for cross-cultural comparison (Harris 32). The definition of "corruption" is a case in point here. By the standard of the society where Hill Gates is from, corruption involves people with power, who give their relatives special business favors. But before judging it, Gates first goes native by giving the emic view -- native's understanding of "corruption" that is a more tolerant version to the misdeeds of those in power. Rather than suspending judgment and stopping here, Gates goes on to put this native definition in the perspective of her own perception: "under 'economic reform' which in large part equates to the appropriation of public goods by private persons with good connections, corruption is the essence of the system" (86).

Hill Gates is self-reflective as an anthropologist. She interviews hundreds of businesswomen in Chengdu and their stories become the main source of her depiction of contemporary China. Yet she does not accept these native testimonies at face value, aware that “anthropologists must constantly tack between what people tell us and what we can see, count, and interpret for ourselves. Indigenous insights are wonderful, surprising sometimes by their obscurity, but just as often by their pounding platitudinousness or stubborn denial of the obvious” (20). She not only decodes language but also reads nonverbal signs. “The way a woman touches a grandchild or spars with her husband are surer signs of family amity and spousal trust than any questions I might frame”(165).

Hill Gates is keen to performativity and stagedness of cross-cultural interaction. Like everyone else, most Chinese would like to be seen, among other things, as good to their mothers, law-abiding before the police, and diligent at work. But as an anthropologist, she is not very interested in the impression they wish to make on her; rather, she is supposed to see beyond what meets the eye and find the elements that might affect the interviewers’ responses. For example, when Gates is quizzing an interviewer together with the Chinese authority, instead of giving straight answers, the interviewer tries to give the “right” answers as in a test in order to please the authority. In other cases, answers to sensitive question like the number of employees the businesswomen have are also dubious since some of them are dodging tax by giving the government a wrong number of employees.

Hill Gates is also self-reflective of the cultural baggage she carries with her, especially the perceptions shaped by her own identity as a middle class, left wing academician. In a park in Liuzhou, not impressed by the densely populated attraction,

she compares it to populous campus of University of California, Los Angeles. Then being aware of and pushing away her “country-club perspective,” she begins to “smell osmanthus, the sweet olive and listen to the quiet” (31). Aware of her class, she admits that she will have more in common with the mistress rather than with the servant who scrubs the floor (52). Riding the Burma Road, her “leftist brain” complains “silently about the egregious expenditure of human effort that building this improbable route required” (41). This self-reflection and awareness are instrumental in reminding readers of their own cultural perceptions and baggage when they interpret the narrative they are reading.

Near the end of the narrative comes a critical moment of belief crisis which, according to Hill Gates, “comes close to turning my mental world upside down” (229) when she interviews an old Buddhist spinster in Ming Shan. Here the “mental world” refers to cultural idealism on which she bases all her anthropological work. She strongly opposes cultural idealism, which assumes ideas to be active agents, existing Platonically outside human selves, and “causing” the events that makes up societies (229). In contrast, cultural materialism is a theoretical paradigm that stresses the empirical study of sociocultural systems within a materialist infrastructure-structure-superstructure framework. The term “cultural materialism” is coined by Marvin Harris in his foundational text, The Rise of Anthropological Theory (1968). According to him, the aim of cultural materialism is “to create a pan-human science of society whose findings can be accepted on logical and evidentiary grounds by the pan-human community” (Harris xii). Cultural materialism seeks to “explain the organizational aspects of politics and economy and the ideological and symbolic aspects of society as a result of the combination of variables relating to the basic biological needs of society.” (Harris 277)

Holding this belief, Hill Gates is shaken by the story of Wang Duli, a 74-year-old spinster, who has lived a life of Buddhist celibacy and independence in Ming Shan, seemingly oblivious to the spectacular politico-economic changes taking place all around her. She has, in short, managed to remain what she is “in the teeth of patriarchy, Communist revolution, and the flesh.” What materialist explanation, Gates wonders, could possibly account for this? “For a few nights, I worried that I had been utterly wrong about the power of culture. Maybe it did float around, like a genie in a lamp, eternal, nonmaterial, but still capable of making us take action”(233). Quickly, however, the anomaly is resolved. Elsewhere in Chinese history one encounters, for perfectly sound politico-economic reasons, enduring cults of female celibacy. But it remains true that “cut from its social and economic roots, belief fades quickly.” The isolated Ming Shan spinster will soon be gone, and Gates can thus “...settle backing into familiar materialism, relieved not to have to refurnish my entire intellectual house”(234). Some readers will perhaps find this odd and unsatisfying.

Cultural materialism has been termed "vulgar materialism" by Marxists. For instance, Jonathan Friedman criticizes vulgar materialism “in light of its intellectual affiliation with older forms of mechanical materialism” (Friedman 444) and argues that cultural materialists’ empirical approach to culture change is too simple and straightforward. Marxists like Friedman believe that cultural materialists rely too heavily on the one-directional infrastructure-superstructure relationship to explain culture change. They argue that the relationship between the "base" (a distinct level of a sociocultural system, underlying the structure, in Marxist terminology) and the superstructure should be dialectically viewed (Friedman 456).

Idealists such as structuralists argue that the key to understanding culture change lies in the emic thoughts and behaviors of members of a native society. Thus, they argue that there is no need for an etic/emic distinction. To idealists, the etic view of culture is irrelevant and full of ethnocentrism; furthermore, they argue that culture itself is the controlling factor in culture change. Culture, in their view, is based on a panhuman structure that is embedded within the brain, and cultural variation is the result of each society filling that structure in their own way.

CHAPTER THREE: AMERICAN TEACHERS

Alongside travelers and tourists, educators, mostly teachers of English language, also began to swarm into China beginning in the late seventies. Among them, American teachers record their experiences in China as travel narratives and memoirs in large volume as a result of the United States-China rapprochement in 1979, when China and the U.S. signed an agreement on culture cooperation between the two countries.

Philanthropic organizations, religious organizations, and university-affiliated programs at Western Washington University, Yale, Princeton, and Johns Hopkins are all committed to supporting educational exchanges between these two countries. For example, Mark Salzman was assigned to teach in Hunan through Yale-China Association in the eighties and Peter Hesseler was an American Peace Corps volunteer in the nineties.

There is a long lineage of predecessors who came before Naomi Woronov, Mark Salzman, and Peter Hesseler. As early as 1862 English language teachers made their debut in China when Qing Dynasty opened a school of foreign languages in Beijing, where an Englishman, an American missionary, and a French missionary were employed to teach English and French. The establishment of this language institution was a reaction of the Qing administration to the impending foreign threats from countries like Britain, France, and the United States and aimed at learning from the West technology and science in order to strengthen its own national security, an agenda persisting until today.

At the same time, missionaries, especially American missionaries, also taught foreign languages, particularly English in the schools they built around China. By 1890, such schools operated in Beijing, Shangdong, Hangzhou, and other centers in China with the evangelical goal of converting pagan Chinese to Christianity. In 1905, the official

civil service examinations -- the primary route to social advancement -- was abolished, and new schools were springing up all over China, offering courses in foreign languages, natural sciences, and other subjects neglected from the traditional curriculum. Among these schools was Tsinghua University, originally designed as a language school to prepare Chinese students for future study in the United States. In the 1930's, these schools were gradually integrated into the mainstream of education system under the Nationalist government. With the founding of Communist China in 1949, most foreign teachers left or were expelled from China because China turned to Soviet Union, its ally, for experts and teachers. As a result, Russian replaced English and became the most important foreign language at educational institutions. Before long, however, discord developed between the ideologies of China and Soviet Union, and Russian teachers and experts left China in 1960. During the Cultural Revolution, English, or anything from the West, was regarded as imperialism and purged.

It is not until the end of the seventies when the Cultural Revolution came to an end that China realized that it needed to learn from the West in order to "modernize" itself. Foreign experts and teachers, again, were invited by China to assist in this modernization project. The majority of them were Americans. They came to China due to a variety of reasons: personal, vocational, political, and religious. Their teaching in China, unlike other exchange programs between China and the United States, which emphasize acquiring natural science and technology to China's advantage, has provided an ideal forum for two confronting cultures with different ideologies and histories to converse, trade, clash, and negotiate.

As a group, American teachers distinguish themselves from travelers and tourists in the same period in certain respects. They usually stay for longer duration of time,

mostly one or two years, in China than travelers and tourists, whose trips usually take a couple of months. Teachers tend to stay at the place of their teaching for much longer period of time than the other places they visit during holidays and vacations. In contrast, travelers and tourists have the tendency of relatively equal distribution of time among the places they visit. Meanwhile, teachers enjoy more opportunities to interact with their students both in class and after compared with tourists and travelers who make casual acquaintances on their journeys. In this sense, teachers, as observer-participants, are more involved with Chinese culture than travelers and tourists, whose roles are mainly observers. The teachers' narratives are abundant in intimate portrayals of Chinese people -- their students, colleagues and friends, and meticulous depictions of their daily lives, including housing, eating, shopping, teaching, traveling, and socializing. The intimacy and minutiae lend humanity to individuals of the largest population of the world, a humanity denied by journalism and general media before the eighties. Their narratives are dialogical and the interactions with locals are reciprocal.

Mark Salzman offers a lively, refreshing and intimate account of his Chinese encounter in Iron and Silk (1986), drawing sketches of a wealth of interesting characters: middle-age teachers, government officials, fishermen, martial arts teachers, calligraphy teachers, a run-away teenager, and a young woman to whom he is obviously attracted. This allows the reader a closer look at Chinese people as distinct individuals, not as a uniform crowd that media has promoted. Salzman's portrayals put a human face on each of his major characters, so refreshing compared with the dehumanizing drab hordes implanted deep in the mind of general Westerners.

In China Through My Window (1988), Naomi Woronov learns about Chinese people and culture by teaching English to scientists and professionals, working and living

with Chinese intellectuals, and talking to Dai peasants in Yunan and herdsmen in Inner Mongolia during her stay in China from 1979 to 1981. Her observation of China in terms of developed characters and detailed daily lives contributes to the knowledge of Chinese people and their lives after 1976. Her journey is also about self-discovery. She learned much about America and discovered herself in a new light during her stay in China.

Peter Hessler came to China as a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1996, teaching literature and writing for two years at a teachers' college in Fuling, a small town on the Yangtze River in the heart of Sichuan Province. His book titled River Town: Two Years On the Yangtze (2001) is an engaging and touching account of his experience during two years' sojourn in Fuling, a river town. As a keen observer and compassionate participant, Hessler engages himself in a dialogical process of understanding local culture and its people. He eyewitnesses local people's everyday lives as well as major events impacting the small town -- the building of the Three Gorges Dam, the death of Deng Xiaoping, and the return of Hong Kong. He also earnestly learns Chinese, enjoys classical English-language literature with his students, debating politics with his Chinese teachers, and befriends park photographer and restaurant owner.

Iron and Silk by Mark Salzman

Upon graduating from Yale in 1982 with a bachelor degree in Chinese language and literature, Mark Salzman embarked on a two-year English teaching assignment in Changsha, capital of Hunan Province. Drawing on this experience, Mark Salzman offers a lively, refreshing, and intimate account of his Chinese encounter in Iron and Silk (1986), giving sketches of a wealth of interesting characters: middle-age teachers, government

officials, fishermen, martial arts teachers, calligraphy teachers, a run-away teenager, and a young woman to whom he is obviously attracted.

Different from the accounts by some other writers on China during the same period, such as Colin Thubron and Paul Theroux, Salzman's narrative is light on social criticism but heavy on interpersonal interactions, which can be seen in the subtitle of the book --A Young American Encounters Swordsmen, Bureaucrats, and Other Citizens of Contemporary China. As a result, unlike the characters in Thubron's and Theroux's accounts, mostly in journalistic sketches and rather than in literary portrayal, Salzman's characters are well rounded; each has developed a rather intimate relationship with the author of one kind or another. This allows the reader a closer look at the Chinese people as distinct individuals, not as a uniform crowd that media has promoted. Salzman's portrayals put a human face on each of his major characters, so refreshing compared with the dehumanizing drab hordes that has implanted deep in the mind of general Westerners.

Out of Salzman's collection of portrayals comes Pan Qingfu, the best-known martial arts master in the region. He is nicknamed "iron fist" and is a winner at national martial arts competition. Salzman has been infatuated with Chinese martial arts since he was thirteen years old and his parents supported him by buying him books on Chinese art and enrolling him in a local kung fu school. He practiced his *kung fu* several hours a day, trying to overcome pain by walking to school barefoot in the snow. Eager to find a Wushu (martial arts) teacher, Salzman first meets Pan in a routine morning training session at the Provincial Sports Unit, where Pan coaches. The debut of Pan is both anti-climactic and anti-heroic with Pan standing

... about five foot eight, with a medium to slight build, a deep receding hairline, a broad, scarred nose and upper front teeth so badly arranged that

it looked as if he had two rows of them, so that if he bit you and wrecked the first set, the second would grow in to replace them. Most noticeable, though, were his eyebrows. They swept up toward his temples making him look permanently angry, as if he were wearing some sort of Peking Opera mask. (64-65)

Salzman instantly associates him with the villain in Shaolin Temple, a Chinese blockbuster *kung fu* movie released in 1981, evoking the Chinese stereotype of bad guys. It is interesting to note that here Salzman is translating by relying on Chinese symbols rather than ones native to his own culture, the latter being the common translation mode in narrative on a different culture. For instance, Theroux labels a salesman he meets on the train to Beijing as “Chinese version of Willy Loman” (297), the protagonist in Arthur Miller’s The Death of a Salesman. The success of this translation presumes the shared familiarity with Arthur Miller’s play between the writer and the readership. Thus a depressed, unsuccessful businessman’s face is attached to his Chinese counterpart’s body. The tradeoff of this translation is the dismissal of other unique characteristics that belong to the Chinese counterpart.

In contrast, Salzman is slow and reluctant to conform to the traditional way of translation. Instead, he draws on his accumulated wealth of Chinese culture as a result of four years at Yale majoring in Chinese language and literature, turning to images and symbols in the target culture. In a paragraph cited earlier, the Peking Opera mask image is employed to describe the angry face of Pan and the Chinese stereotype of villain from *kung fu* movies is evoked to convey the not-so-handsome image of Pan. In this way, the reader is not in a haste to force cultural differences into a ready-made mold of familiarity fostered in his own culture at the expense of dismissing the unfamiliar; rather he will take

time to learn more about the strangeness until he reaches an understanding. In this sense, Salzman is successful in delivering a fresh translation of China, using discourse that is native to China in his translation. He is also successful in reaching a Chinese audience who find the usage of native discourse intimate and non-threatening. The popularity of the film based on the novel among Chinese audience attests to this success. Yet the risk involved with this translation lies in the possibility of Western readership's unfamiliarity with the foreign discourse, Peking opera and *kung fu* movies in this case, which in turn will result in rejection. It is a balancing act for the translator when walking the thin line of foreign/native and familiar/novel. Despite the tradeoff, Salzman's fresh translation is still effective in offsetting a discourse on China full of stereotypes.

The raw "Chineseness" in translation persists with further development of the relationship between Pan and Salzman. After watching Salzman demonstrating the Kungfu he learned in the United States, Pan offers to "fix" it and asks him if he can "chi ku" -- eat bitter, the Chinese expression meaning to endure suffering. Eager to learn from the famed master, Salzman agrees and becomes his student. "Chi ku," the Chinese theme for endurance persists throughout Salzman's martial arts training in China, ranging from six hour's exercise a day to pounding his fist against metal mounted on the wall. The teacher-student relationship between Pan and Salzman is also a very Chinese one. As Pan explains to him, "your only responsibility to me is to practice and to learn. My responsibility to you is much greater! ... If you fail, I will lose face" (86). Receiving martial arts instructions from Pan, Salzman at the same time becomes Pan's English teacher. As stubborn as Pan is, he would not follow Salzman's pedagogy; instead, he develops his own way of learning by repeating after the audio tape. After struggling to

recite English routines from memory to Salzman's friends, Pan is happy since he doesn't lose face for Salzman.

To Salzman, Pan stands for "iron" -- the *yang* of Chinese martial arts, teaching him mostly the external school of martial arts, for instance, long fist, a form of Northern Shaolin boxing and long sword. Hei, another martial arts teacher of his, represents "silk"-- the *yin* of Chinese martial arts, instructing him to move his hands in a "fluid and graceful" way, as if "they were made of silk" (150). Coincidentally, the meaning of Hei in Chinese is black, the color for *yin* in the Chinese diagram of opposites. Pan and Hei together consist of the dualism of "iron and silk" in the title of the book, which distinguishes itself from many other book titles of the same period.

In contrast to the welcoming and warmhearted swordsmen, the bureaucrats are the people that are not so pleasant to Salzman: the angry woman in uniform at the Canton Railway station who demands to see their tickets constantly; the young female attendant in a coffee shop at Hangzhou Hotel, with bureaucratic coldness, frustrates his modest request of getting a cup of coffee; the post office staff with whom Salzman fight over getting the mail back from home.

Salzman also includes other colorful individuals with interesting names in his narrative -- Fatty Du, Old Sheep, Old Ding, and Little Guo. Among them, Old Ding is a fisherman that Salzman encounters on the bank of the Xiang River and later becomes his friend. Ding and his family are boat people who fish and live on the Xiang River. Upon invitation, he sails on a moonlit river with Ding's family and plays Bach's First Suite for Unaccompanied Cello for them who have never seen an American, nor a cello for that matter. They insist on giving one of their boats to him in return for his sketch of their boat and beg him to stay and live with them forever.

Through a series of vignettes Salzman presents these people individually in close-ups, which allows the reader an upfront encounter with each of them and experience their distinctive personalities and characters. The students are yet another group that Salzman interacts with during his teaching in Changsha. He has several dozen students, including twenty-six doctors and teachers of medicine, twenty-five medical students, and a select group of five called the “Middle-Aged English Teachers.” Different in age, cultural background, and nationality, Salzman and his students make the classroom the “contact zone” for two cultures to encounter and engage with each other up close.

During the first class, naming, that is, how to address Salzman, becomes the first incident of cultural confrontation. Writing down his full name on the board, Salzman introduces himself and suggests he goes by Mark, his first name as most young Americans always do. But the students, due to the Confucian tradition of respecting teachers, are not comfortable with the idea of calling their teacher by the first name. Eventually, the naming incident ends with a compromise: Salzman will be addressed as “Teacher Mark” by his students throughout his two-year teaching career in China. Amused and tolerant, Salzman does not point out that the title is awkward in English. The first round of intercultural confrontation concludes with two cultures meeting each other half way. Salzman’s broad-minded tolerance reminds one of Ricci’s eclecticism in the translation of “God” to Chinese. Combining the Christian tradition with Confucianism, Matteo Ricci uses the Chinese term “Shangdi” (Sovereign Lord) to designate God, a term already in existence in ancient Chinese literature but usually

associated with a material heaven.¹¹

Unlike naming, some other issues do not seem so easy to negotiate between Salzman and his students. While teaching a chapter on war, Salzman uses the picture of the atomic bomb during World War II in the textbook to generate conversations and he is shocked to learn that his students believe that the Japanese had already surrendered to the Chinese communist army before the bomb was dropped. What surprises him more is that the students tend to take whatever the official newspapers say as facts since the newspapers are run by the Chinese people while American newspapers, controlled by capitalist, are supposedly full of lies. The simple-mindedness of the students is no doubt a result of the political propaganda throughout the years, but Salzman also has his own share of naivety in believing in the authenticity of American press, unaware of his own tinted view as a product of liberal education, which idealizes reliability of American media and ignores all the “spin” in newspapers and television. Not knowing what else to say, Salzman ends the discussion with a diplomatic speech, in which he condemns war and extols the friendship between China and the United States. The round of confrontation is not fruitful for both sides retreating to their own comfort zones without challenging their preoccupations, leaving the Chinese students to dismiss Salzman’s version of WWII history and Salzman hanging onto his trust in American press.

¹¹ Matteo Ricci(1552-1610) was an Italian missionary to China. He entered the Society of Jesus, and he was called to Macao to enter China. In 1583 he and his companion, Father Michele Ruggieri settled in Guangdong Province, studying the language and culture. In Nanjing he became a court mathematician and astronomer; he made few converts, but he brought Christianity into good repute. He helped translate many Western works on mathematics and the sciences into Chinese. His maps were eagerly perused by the Chinese, who gained from him their first notion of modern Europe. In return, Ricci sent back to Europe the first modern detailed report on China. He composed a number of treatises, the principal being a catechism, True Doctrine of God, which was widely printed in China.

A more successful intercultural exchange happens when they discuss a short story titled “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson. The story tells about a small town’s annual tradition of drawing lottery. All residents are required to participate and the prize for the winner is being stoned to death. After a student, obviously a follower of social materialism, begins the discussion by assuming that the fictionalized story is a reflection of actual happenings in American society, Salzman explains that it is an exaggerated and dramatic example of strange and terrible behavior of a mad crowd and it may happen in any society. Following this line, another student reflects on the irrational behavior of people during the Cultural Revolution, giving the example of many people being drowned when thousands of people jumped into the Yangtse River to emulate Chairman Mao. Although the first student protests that it is an accident, the awkward silence following her remark is a pregnant one, leading her to admit, “we have all seen terrible things” (102). A fictionalized story that takes place in America has traveled all the way to a classroom in China, prompting the Chinese students, along with their American teacher, to contemplate the dark side of both cultures. This is, without any doubt, a precious moment.

The intercultural exchange is not short in light-hearted moments and humor. Salzman’s first session in the Western Culture Lecture Series is an animated, table-jumping review of the popular movie *E.T.*, or the Extraterrestrial. The audience rises to their feet and cheers. During the process, Salzman is at the both ends of giving and receiving and leaves enriched. One of his students even thinks that *E.T.* is a revolutionary in the sense that he gives the children a totally different way of life.

Concentrating on the humor and poignancy in the details of daily life, Salzman draws an intimate and personal picture of the China he finds in Changsha, leaving history

and politics behind. Yet his journey to China is far from a political and historical vacuum; instead, it is yet another slice in the historical and socio-political continuation of love affair between China and the United States. He went to China under the auspices of the Yale-China Association, formerly known as Yale-in-China, a bicentennial program initiated by Yale graduates early in 1901. Having its dual roots in American progressivism and evangelism, the program was established as a mission project with aims to “lead the world in the progressive education of mankind,” and “Christianize the whole world” (Chapman 1). Fueled by these ideals, young founders of then Yale-in-China chose Changsha in Hunan as the field of their missionary, seeing in it special promises and attractions as a place with large population but traditionally hostile to foreigners. In 1906 in the Changsha downtown opened the medical clinic and preparatory school of the Yale-in-China Mission, which evolved eventually into the present Hunan Medical College in Changsha, where Mark Salzman taught from 1982 to 1984.

In order to meet the raising demand of staff, the Yale-in-China Mission began to hire recent Yale graduates for one-year and two-year assignment at the preparatory school in 1909. They were called bachelors, holding different status from those staff with long-term appointments. The bachelors came to China with varied visions and purposes. Some were motivated to do good or for sheer adventure, others for a joyride and getting away from the Prohibition at home (Chapman 16).

The Yale-in-China program provided an eye-witness account of the topple of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the warlord years and the Nationalistic endeavor to strengthen China, anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), and the Civil War between Communism and Nationalism (1945-1949). With the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949,

the anti-west sentiment forced Yale-in-China to terminate their operation on the Mainland and move to Hong Kong and later Taiwan. It is not until 1979 that it resumed its work in Mainland China, changing its name to Yale-China Association. Mark Salzman was among the earliest Yale graduates that went to China to teach English after 1979.

Unlike his predecessors and alumni, Salzman neither had the progressive and evangelist edges nor was he in for adventure. Even his love for Chinese *kung fu* and literature is not strong enough to motivate him to travel to China since “it sounds like a giant penal colony” (17) and he hated traveling. He made the trip, driven simply by the non-grandiose and practical urge to find a job with a bachelor’s degree in Chinese language and literature. It is a genuine and unpretentious motive, given the high unemployment rate during the early eighties, a motive shared by many other teachers of English who were in China around the same period of time.

In Changsha, he was caught in political uncertainty. On one hand, the Chinese government welcomed these teachers of English to teach the language and introduce their culture as a way of gaining access to modernity, which in the official discourse, is restricted to its advanced science and technology; on the other, the Western ideology associated with modernity was greeted with suspicion, to say the least. The suspicion and antagonism in the early eighties ushered in the nation-wide campaign of “rooting out spiritual pollution,”¹² which aimed at Western cultural influences. Chinese were told to keep the distance from foreigners. For several weeks, Salzman is not allowed by the

¹² The Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign was a Chinese political campaign from October 1983 to February 1984 that was started by political factions in the leadership of the Communist Party of China who were fearing the distribution of Western liberal ideas among the Chinese population due to their relatively recent open door policy.

Provincial Sports Unit to visit Teacher Pan for his martial arts lessons. This anti-foreign sentiment is yet another round of the revolving door policy toward the outside world throughout Chinese history.

Looking back at its centennial history at the turn of the century, Nancy Chapman points out that reading the history of Yale-China Associate is to view the twentieth century with dual sets of lens:

One set is that of the ever-changing cast of American characters who set off from Yale to dedicate a significant portion of their lives to working in the Chinese schools, colleges, and hospitals that at different times formed the shifting entity known as Yale-in-China or Yale-China. The other set is that of the Chinese whom they encountered, the students, colleagues, administrators and neighbors, who all had to try and understand -- and adjust to -- the goals and strategies of their surprising and infinitely variegated visitors. (vii)

Salzman, as one of the American characters in this historical cast, presents intimate portraits of the Chinese people he encountered during his two years in Changsha, with great sincerity, genuineness and uniqueness.

China Through My Window by Naomi Woronov

Invited as a foreign expert, Naomi Woronov spent two years in Hangzhou (1979 – 1981), teaching American language and culture at Zhejiang University. During these two years, she learned about Chinese people and culture by teaching English to scientists and

professionals, working and living with Chinese intellectuals, and talking to Dai peasants in Yunnan and herdsmen in Inner Mongolia.¹³ It is also a self-discovery journey for her: she learned much about America and discovered herself in a new light during her stay in China. Her narrative is a memoir punctuated with diaries she kept. Two different voices are woven into this tapestry of texts: a more self-reflective self who, in the late eighties, looks back and narrates the happenings of a couple of years ago; a self rendering in letters her experiences and impressions in terms that can be understood by an audience of her culture; a self in the diary who takes care of her own immediate inner emotions -- fears, worries, delights and sometimes depressions. A keen observer and an active participant, she contributes to filling the knowledge vacuum of the Chinese people and their lives after 1976 with vivid individual characters and detailed daily lives.

Naomi Woronov was caught in the middle of “burn-out, midlife crisis” (5) and a hopeless love affair before the China journey. She used to teach writing and literature at the City University of New York, which gave her life “satisfaction and meaning” (5). This peaceful life, however, was interrupted by New York City budget crisis in the mid-seventies against the backdrop of a nationwide stagflation -- a combination of weak economic growth, mounting unemployment rates, and rising inflation. The university where she taught took the blow by firing more than one hundred faculty members and in turn increasing the class size and the work load of remaining teaching faculty. Woronov had to teach large writing classes and give up literature classes she loved. This burn-out

¹³ The Dai ethnic minority is distributed throughout the Dai Autonomous Region and the Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Region in Xishuangbanna in the southern part of Yunnan Province. In the past, they were called 'Baiyue', meaning a vast living area. Therefore, they have established a close relationship with ethnic groups like the Zhuang, Dong, Shui, Bouyei and Li, who are said to be the descendants of the Dai people.

is coupled with a midlife crisis where she doubted the meaning of her own existence, realizing that her life had half gone and she had not accomplished what she desired. To make things worse, she involved herself in a hopeless love affair, in which she, a Jew and pro-Zionist, fell in love with Nayim, an Arab and Christian. The drastic difference in ethnic and religious background saw no immediate future for their mutual affection.

All these combined, Naomi Woronov concluded that her life was “empty and decaying” (5) and felt the urge to go somewhere. Rather than going to Africa to “help the poor natives” (6), she chose China, which was in the process of making history with modernization, a place representing “energy, growth, and purpose” to her (5). When in China, Woronov does not rush to some neat shibboleth to cover her impressions on China nor does she draw on widely circulated stereotypes. In the late seventies and early eighties, American media’s coverage on China was obsessed and dominated by criticism on the government as totalitarian and wanting in democracy, as well as the absurd and hair raising stories during the Cultural revolutions, especially in the form of first-person narratives on “speaking bitterness” (89). As a keen observer and active participant of Chinese daily lives, she learns about her own China, concluding that “China is neither ‘totalitarian’ nor ‘a bitter sea.’ China is Chinese. It was. It is. It will be” (260). Her narration of China contributes to the knowledge of Chinese people and their lives right after 1976.

Naomi Woronov’s narrative opens with depictions of two major characters in the book: Lao Fan, her fellow teacher, guide, translator and daily companion, and Madam Lo, head of the Foreign Affairs office. Suzy Fast, another American teacher who has come to China eight months earlier than Woronov, called them “snake” and “dragon lady” respectively. Lao Fan, according to Fast, is good at talking foreign teachers into working

until they drop and Lo always carries herself with a serious and authoritative air. Rather than buying into the stereotypes, Woronov is dubious of them, arguing that there are exceptions to both stereotypes in two cultures. Although snakes are symbols of evil and deceit for Chinese and Americans alike, there are examples of benign and even helpful snakes. As for dragon, it possesses a double nature of being fierce and benevolent at the same time.

Naomi Woronov also lets her characters unfold themselves through a series of events and interactions and reveal their true identity and character in the process. On a trip to Shaoxing, seventy kilometers south from Hangzhou, she gets a chance to know Lao Fan much better through his life story. She devotes more space to depicting central characters than most of the travel writers on China despite the fact that her characters still remain very flat and one-dimensional compared with those in fiction. By the end of her narration, Lao Fan has become family to her in China and earns her sisterly affection. The intimate and personal portrait of Lao Fan definitely contributes to humanizing Chinese as individuals rather than a crowd and horde.

Besides intimate character depiction, Naomi Woronov also presents detailed daily lives of Chinese to the reader. She sets up role-playing situations with daily life topics in class in order to get a glimpse of Chinese daily lives. For example, she assigns Mr. Li and Ms. Hua the roles of husband and wife who are facing unequal housework division situation. Despite their hesitant English, they play out the bickering couple vividly. This role-playing ends Woronov's vision of a perfectly harmonious Chinese family that she picked up during a trip to China in the early seventies.

It is not just similarities that Naomi Woronov finds among Chinese and American daily lives. She discovers huge differences as well when she observes the Chinese daily

routines in people's real lives. Like an anthropologist doing fieldwork, she follows Wu, one of her scientist students, around for a day to observe how the daily housework is done. It includes everything from grocery shopping in the market, boiling water, doing laundry, cooking for lunch to mending clothes for the entire family. After buying frozen chickens whole or in parts at a supermarket, Wu has to kill, bleed, clean, and pluck them before cooking. After getting hot water from the tap, Wu has to boil enough hot water and store it in thermos. Whereas Woronov machine-washes and machine-dries her laundry, Wu has to hand wash it against a stone slab and air-dry it.

Naomi Woronov is more than a mere observer. She is also a participant by living her share of Chinese life when she has a chance. She used to live in the Friendship Hotel where she found herself isolated from the Chinese and confined to a small community of six foreign teachers. Her Chinese students are not allowed to visit her at the hotel without getting permission from the Foreign Affair Bureau. Furthermore, she never really enjoys the company of her fellow foreign colleagues. After a successful yet laborious argument with the University, Woronov moves out of the hotel to a three-room apartment in a faculty and staff quarters. It is here in her own Chinese apartment that she has a chance to experience the reality of Chinese daily lives: a bathtub not used for bath but as a water container due to frequent water outage; a kitchen without cupboards for storage; a two-jet burner attached to a large gas tank; no heating and bone-chilling winter.

Naomi Woronov's observant-participant positioning lends her narrative to a meticulously detailed description of Chinese daily lives that are not obtainable otherwise. Through her narration, the reader back at home acquires more knowledge about the daily lives of ordinary Chinese people, a knowledge that humanizes the uniform crowd that they are exposed to through Western media. Through the differences and similarities in

daily lives that Woronov has found between Chinese and America, the reader relates to his Chinese counterpart without dismissing the differences. This “de-othering” effort runs against the grain of Orientalist discourse. Woronov’s conclusion that “people are the same all over the world -- and very different” is neither a rehash of universalism nor an echo of relativism. Instead, it is based on the “*exote*” model proposed by Victor Segalen, a French philosopher who wrote extensively in exotic experience in the early twentieth century.¹⁴ He coined the term *exote* to define the type of traveler who enjoys the full flavor of differences without overlooking the sameness. An *exote*, according to Segalen, experiences a harmony of identification and difference, but in temporal order. It involves two phases: the *exote* first seeks the common denominator or the sameness with the subject and then enjoys the differences based on the sameness.¹⁵

To Naomi Woronov, understanding and translating China is more than an aesthetic process that suggested by Segalen’s *exote*. It is also a moral and ethical obligation for her. Her comparison between two cultures is a case in point. Woronov finds similarities especially among young people in both cultures. They all desire a decent living; “some degree of vocational, financial, educational, and health care security;

¹⁴ Victor Segalen (1878-1919) was born in Brest and trained as a naval doctor. His first literary work, *Les Immémoriaux*, is based on his experiences in Tahiti, where he held a medical post for roughly two years. Written upon his return to France in 1905, the book, part novel, part documentary, looks at the influence of French missionaries on native life, and departs from other colonial writings of its time by taking up the perspective of the colonized. In 1909, after studying Chinese for a year, Segalen made the first of many journeys to China, participating in several archaeological expeditions. The hieratic prose poems collected in *Stèles* (1912), his masterpiece the novel *René Leys* (1922), and *Equipée* (1929), an account of an imaginary expedition, were all inspired by his contact with Chinese culture. His other works range from *Le Fils du ciel*, an early novel about China, and a long prose poem, *Thibet*—both unpublished during his lifetime—to various essays on the arts and especially on the works of Gauguin and Rimbaud, as well as two libretti for his friend the composer Claude Debussy.

¹⁵ The role of the *exote*, one who travels to deliberately seek out the strange and new, is a construct of Victor Segalen. Travel writers often deliberately set out on their journeys to seek out something new about the foreign city or land. One of the key moments for the *exote* is their encounter with the Other. Tzvetan Todorov theorizes around the self of the traveler in contact with the Other. Segalen’s *exote* is one of the categories. Meeting the Other can result in the return of the uncanny, the previously known or the repressed; the self can thus be recovered, a lost aspect of identity can be restored in these encounters. (Todorov, 245).

sufficient love and affection; some fun; and finally, a useful and meaningful existence” (3-4). Yet the difference, according to Woronov, lies in how history shapes the definitions of these things in different cultures. She gives the example of bathtubs. A bath lover herself, she is at first surprised when she learns that none of her Chinese colleagues take baths even if living in apartments equipped with running water, Western-style toilets and bathtubs. Later on, when she moves into such an apartment herself, she puts it into a Chinese perspective, explaining:

Water pipes were still being laid and the water often went off. If you didn't keep your bathtub filled with water to flush the toilet and wash your vegetables and your face, you had to go off to the local well to pump it and carry it home. There was no hot running water at all. If you wanted a hot bath you'd have to heat a dozen pots of water which would consume an inordinate amount of your monthly coal supply, and if there were four people in the family....(4-5)

Here Woronov starts with non-understanding or misunderstanding of the bathtub incident in the beginning, but with the new knowledge gained from the Chinese perspective, she then revised her previous perception and reached a new understanding of it. This process is exactly what Hans-Georg Gadamer has promoted in his dialogue model: one may start with prejudices and stereotypes during initial encounter with a foreign culture, but as the dialogues go on, one will see things that contradict his/her perceptions, thus prejudices and preoccupations will be revised and replaced with new understanding.

Naomi Woronov extends the dialogue mode of translation and understanding from simple matters as a bathtub to significant social issues like the population control in her narration. Although she initially regarded the family plan policy abhorrent in

personal terms, when facing the Chinese reality of highly limited arable and inhabitable land, which is half as large as that of the United States and a population almost five times of that of the United States, she begins to “understand why everyone says population is China’s number one problem, and that the one-child family, however, odious in personal terms, is crucial to survival, no less improved living conditions” (34).

In the process of cross-cultural dialogue, Naomi Woronov achieves a better understanding of herself and her own culture as well. She is told a story about a married Chinese army officer, who ran away with somebody else’s wife one day. The officer was later imprisoned for this since adulterous affairs were severely punished during the seventies and eighties in China. The punishment, according to Woronov, stems from the Chinese philosophy, which valorizes family and social interests over personal fulfillment as well as duties and obligations over personal emotional needs. Contemplating her own life against this philosophy, she realizes:

I have been conditioned to be primarily interested in my love life, my career, my psychological development -- in short, the pursuit of my own happiness. I spent my time and energy trying to get reality to conform to my ideal; if my ideal changes, why, then, I change my plans and pick up and go off to China, for instance, or get involved with a man of whom my family could not approve. It’s my business, my life. In other words, I define myself in relation to myself -- or I believe I do, anyway, as horizons shift in different periods, places, and cultures. (150)

Though in no sense refreshing, Woronov’s realization is neither narcissistic nor patronizing. She does not celebrate the individual freedom that she enjoys at the expense of chastising the Chinese social responsibility as simply oppressive. Nor does she try to

sell the American ways to the Chinese. Instead, she is well aware of China's own choice in terms of the decision and both societies have had sad and unsuccessful experiences of imposing one's own values onto others. This seemingly liberal approach is not exactly in line with relativism, which suspends moral judgment and takes different values in different cultures as equally legitimate and valid. Rather, she is quite attentive to the repressive nature of the philosophy behind Chinese social order and at the same time the lack in Western individual freedom. She stops with evaluating and discerning but, again, ethics refrains her from imposing. The delicate balance is achieved through cross-cultural comparison in Woronov's narration.

Another case in point is Naomi Woronov's discussion of supervising delinquents in the neighborhood. Suzy Fast is repulsed by the idea of "mass supervision" as a breach of privacy while Woronov argues that it is a version of China's social work organizations, which serves to "keep an eye on one another, occupy idle hands and mind, and prevent family or neighborly squabbles from escalating into full-blown feuds or fisticuffs" (161). In contrast, the majority of American parents assume the responsibility of taking care of their children and as a result, if the parents fail in this function, nobody else will step in and keep it on the right track until it is too late.

The idea behind this practice of mass supervision, Woronov argues, is to sustain the harmony and stability of the society as a whole rather than the well beings of individuals, which is held high in American society. As a result, where America views crime as the transgression on the individual rights, China sees it in a social context -- damages to family, community, society, and even the nation.

Though successful in shedding the cultural baggage she carries through the dialogical mode of translation, Naomi Woronov has to battle stereotypes and

preconceptions other than her own no matter if they are benign or harmful. The stereotyping comes even before Woronov makes her appearance in China. Learning her last name as “Woronov,” the students who used to be Russian teachers assume that she can speak Russian and are really disappointed when they find out she cannot.

Also, Naomi Woronov has been more than once instructed by her colleagues on how to dress like a Westerner. When she and Li Xuemei go shopping for silk dress, Li insists on bright patterns for her, saying, “[y]ou are a foreigner and you may wear whatever you like” (27). The stereotype of brightly-dressed foreigners that Chinese holds comes mostly from a few imported foreign movies during the early eighties and domestic movies with pseudo-foreigners in them. It is almost a comical scene when she wears wooly hat and is dubbed as “a lady in an old man’s hat” (74). The absurdity is a result not only from visual effect but also deeper symbolic meanings. It just does not seem right to juxtapose a Western lady, symbol of advancement, with an old man’s hat, symbol of tradition and backwardness. People read into clothing cultural meanings. The same goes for Woronov. When she catches the first sight of lipstick in Hangzhou, she finds it a sign of westernization.

In the meantime, Woronov’s Jewish heritage puts her under the Chinese and Western gaze in different manners. The Chinese version of Jews is very flattering: Jews are smarter and richer, which may be the well-circulated knowledge of Einstein being a Jew and Jews making shrewd merchants and good at making money. The Western version, however, is full of biases. Mary Elizabeth, a new teacher to Hangzhou to “spread the Word” (239), claiming she has never seen a Jew before, asks if she has a tail and whether the Jews and the Arabs are related through Ishmael. No matter if the

stereotype is favorable or derogative, it is a result of ignorance or partial knowledge and will do potential damage to cross-cultural communications.

Naomi Woronov tries to avoid stereotyping Chinese culture and its people and make efforts, among other things, to provide individual portraits and detailed daily lives of Chinese. In the process of this, she also gains new perspectives on herself and her own culture. Her narrative is an attempt to engage in a dialogue with a foreign culture.

River Town: Two Years On The Yangtze by Peter Hessler

After graduating with a master's degree in English from Princeton University and studying at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, Peter Hessler came to China as a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1996, teaching literature and writing for two years at a teachers' college in Fuling, a small town on the Yangtze River in the heart of Sichuan Province. His book titled River Town: Two Years On the Yangtze (2001) provides an engaging and touching account of his experience during two years' sojourn in Fuling. As a keen observer and compassionate participant, Hessler engages himself in a dialogical process of understanding local culture and its people. He witnesses the everyday lives of local people as well as major events impacting the small town -- the building of the Three Gorges Dam, the death of Deng Xiaoping, and the return of Hong Kong. At the same time he earnestly learns Chinese, enjoys classical English-language literature with his students, debates politics with his Chinese teachers, and befriends park photographers and restaurant owners. The exposure to Chinese culture more than often leads him to reflect on his own culture and himself. Intellectually sensitive and analytically

sophisticated, he refuses to depict China and himself in a black-and-white manner, claiming, “I was a Peace Corps volunteer but I wasn’t; China was Communist but it wasn’t” (Hessler 9). An outsider and insider at the same time to Chinese culture and his own, Hessler adopts double distancing in his translation of cultures, both Chinese and his own.

Peter Hessler chose to come to China as a Peace Corps volunteer for personal reasons and with clear goals: to teach, to be a better writer and to learn Chinese (60). His love affair with China began as a pleasant accident years ago. Hessler had never had any interest whatsoever in China before he first came to China in 1994 during a long trip that he took after finishing his master’s degree. An originally planned one-or-two-week trip stretched to six weeks after “something clicked” (Coyne 2). After the trip his stories about China were published in the New York Times and other major magazines, among them was a story about the trans-Siberian train journey from Moscow to Beijing. With the earnest desire to return to China, he applied for the Peace Corps China program and was accepted. Despite the not-so-grandiose personal motives behind the lofty mission ideals to begin with, Hessler, nonetheless credited the goal of the mission to help promote a better understanding between the United States and China with his hard and devoted work in Fuling as well as his sincere and passionate writings about China.

In his writings, Peter Hessler is aware of his own positioning as both an observer and a participant. He claims, “[s]ometimes I was an observer, while at other moments I was very much involved in local life, and this combination of distance and intimacy was part of what shaped my two years in Sichuan” (Hessler 1). This clear-minded awareness of positioning is mainly the result of an ethnography fieldwork he did during his undergraduate years at Princeton University, a project that “prepared him more for his

book than anything else,” according to Hessler. During his junior year, he conducted an ethnography project on race and poverty in Sikeston, a rural town in southeast Missouri. Having benefited from this experience, Hessler sharpens his observation of China without isolating himself from the local life.

As an observer, Peter Hessler is not satisfied with settling with impressions; instead, he always attempts to probe below the surface of impressions and decode the meaning behind them. Speaking and reading little Chinese, Hessler’s initial understanding of Fuling is through observing the surroundings and reading students’ English writings. Located on the top floor of a six-story building on a hill and overlooking the Wu River, his apartment gives him the best vantage point to observe the river and campus below. At the beginning, Fuling is a cacophony of noises to Hessler -- ship motors coughing, croquet clattering, rooster crowing, alarm clock buzzing, students jogging, bells for classes and students reading. Rather than disturbed, he soon identifies the routine of the noises and immerses himself rather comfortably in it. It is only through students’ journals that he decodes the deeper meaning behind the seemingly simple, if not dull, routine. For instance, the students’ training routine is a way of disciplining after the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989.¹⁶

Besides audio symbols, Peter Hessler is also alert to visual presentations of Fuling. He notes that Fuling is “all steps and legs” (29). With the narrow streets rising or falling with the contours of hills, staircases and steps ease people’s efforts to climb and descend these hills. The steps are so steep and narrow that, when one walks on them, he can only

¹⁶ The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, commonly referred to as the Tiananmen Square Massacre, were a series of demonstrations led by labor activists, students, and intellectuals in China between April 15 and June 4, 1989. In Beijing, the resulting military crackdown on the protesters by the PRC government left many civilians dead or injured.

see the legs of the person who is in front. Hessler does not stop at the impression of “step and legs;” instead, he devotes more space to depicting the Stick-Stick Army, a group of local porters carrying loads on bamboo poles balanced across their shoulders, the hardest job in a tough city, according to Hessler. His description of Stick-Stick Army is not only vivid but also compassionate:

They [The porters] are short, stocky men, their bodies shaped by the hilly city and the nature of their work. In summer, when they go without shirts, you can see where the bamboo poles have burnished the skin along their shoulders like leather. In hot weather they are drenched in sweat; in winter their bodies steam. Below rolled-up trousers their calves bulge as if baseballs have been tied to the backs of their legs. (29)

The compassion between the lines parallels that of a native Chinese writer -- Feng Jicai,¹⁷ whose story of the porters on the Tai Mountain has been canonized in Chinese elementary school readings. With Hessler’s vivid and intimate strokes, a city comes alive, full of real people who are living and working, rather than mere abstract impressions of being crowded, noisy, busy, and dirty.

Besides battling impressions, Peter Hessler also adopts the positioning of both an insider and outsider. The Three Gorges Dam Project issue is a case in point. Rather than a remote buzzword, the project is related to everyone in Fuling since part of or the whole city will submerge in water when the Dam is completed in a few years. Hessler begins to explore the issue when he first encounters the official line in a sample essay in the writing

¹⁷ Feng Jicai is a Chinese writer who focuses most of his works on writing stories that occurred in his hometown of Tianjin, China. “The Carriers in the Tai Shan Mountain” (1983) was Feng’s famous prose in which he sung highly of the carriers’ hard-working and dauntless spirit. This prose once got the “National Excellent Prose Award.” It was selected into Primary School Chinese Textbook in 1983 and thus read by millions of Chinese children.

textbook, in which the project has been hailed as highly beneficial and desirable since it will provide electricity, flood control, and transportation to the area. The official line on this issue strikes him as “China is accustomed to making difficult choices that Americans might not dream of considering” (106). More surprising to him is the indifference and calmness of local people toward the prospect of the project, which bothers him greatly. From an American’s point of view, it seems outrageous and incomprehensible that most local residents just accept it without even questioning the potential dangers it might have, such as the destruction of the natural environment, more severe flooding, and the damage to historical relics. Rather than resigning with an initial American perception on the issue, which can be found in many articles in American newspapers, Hessler puts the issue in perspective by drawing on recent Chinese history and applying Chinese standard. He argues:

The truth is that the disruption of the dam, which seems massive to an outsider, is really nothing out of the ordinary when one considers recent history in the local context.... Fuling and the other Yangtze River towns have the additional experience of being a focal point of Mao Zedong’s Third Line Project,...something like that of picking up the whole of California’s high-tech industry and moving it bodily to the wilds of Montana.... (108-109)

Compared with this, Hessler concludes, “it seems a small matter to turn the river into a lake” (109). Hessler achieves new understanding of Chinese perspective on the issue when electricity outage is frequent during the winter and he has to endure the unbearable coldness during blackouts for hours at a time. He begins to think more in Chinese terms,

“What I thought about was getting warm. Cold was like hunger; it had a way of simplifying everything” (115). He gained the new perspective with the actual experience of being an insider and participant who has lived as locals. This particular moment allows Hessler to look back at American society with a Chinese eye, “[i]t’s different from America, where there is an average of three thousand watts of electrical power for every citizen -- enough for every single American to turn on an oven and a hair dryer at once” (115).

The same combination of distance and intimacy is applied to his reflections on his own culture, in which Peter Hessler is an insider and outsider at the same time. An intellectual dissident who feels alienated from his own culture, he exiles himself to teach in China with the hope of escaping the politicization of literature in the United States. Already with a master’s degree in English at hand, he gives up the original plan of becoming a professor of literature when faced with the disillusionment of institutionalized literary criticism practice, which parts way with the traditional mode of appreciative aesthetics, that is, literature for literature’s sake and becomes increasingly politics saturated. The contemporary theoretical approaches such as Deconstructionism, Post-Modernism, and New Historicism seem to make no sense to him and they are no more than “a hopeless mess of awkward words” to him (45). He resists the tendency to read literature as symptomatic of social realities rather than artistic. Rather than reacting to the text, according to Hessler, critics of all theoretical and political affiliations tend to force a literary work into a straightjacket no matter it fits the work or not.

Peter Hessler is right in pointing out the danger of complete politicizing literature, but like aesthetics of literature as an art, the social aspect of it is yet another face of literature. It only happens that in the past the aesthetic and artistic aspect was much

emphasized and now the social and political side has been pushed to the front. This change in literary critical landscape itself reflects socio-political and demographic shift in contemporary American society and makes one realize that literary interpretation itself is a social practice. To do justice to literary works, both critical dimensions should be brought to bear on a text.

It is in China that Peter Hessler sees more clearly the potential damage the trend of politicizing literature might do to American cultural and intellectual foundations. “For years the Chinese had mined literature for its social value, especially during the Cultural Revolution, when all operas were banned except for a handful of political works like The Red Detachment of Women. Even today there was much that had been lost. All of my students know Marx; none of them knew Confucius” (45). Though maybe a little exaggerating in the students’ ignorance of Confucius, it is true that, due to decades of Marxist ideology dominant in every aspect of Chinese society, it also influences Chinese reading of literature. In his literature class, Hessler has students, who read Robin Hood along the party line as counterrevolutionary and regard Shakespeare as a representative of the Proletariat to criticize Capitalism, or pigeonhole Hamlet as a character caring deeply about the peasantry.

None of the interpretations surprises Peter Hessler, but he is amazed by how some of the students, tired of political routines, succeed in avoiding them. For instance, a student named Lily dislikes Hamlet just because she thinks he is too “sensitive, conservative, selfish” and hesitant, in a word, not manly enough (46). Admiring her straightforwardness, Hessler exclaims, “You couldn’t have said something like that at Oxford. You couldn’t simply say: I don’t like Hamlet because I think he’s a lousy person” (46).

Escaping from politics in literature, both Peter Hessler and his Chinese students seek refuge in the literature classroom, a sanctuary, where literature is still to be appreciated and enjoyable. Hessler realizes, “We are all refugees here. They’ve escaped from their classes on Building Chinese Socialism, and I’ve escaped from Deconstructionism” (47). The students would scan rhythm, beat time softly on the desks when reading Shakespeare’s sonnets. They paint a mental image of Shakespeare’s lover, in which she is transformed into a Tang beauty. They put on Shakespeare’s plays such as Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, where a Chinese Horatio cradling a dying Hamlet, saying sadly, “Good night, sweet prince, And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.”

The reading of classical English literature in Peter Hessler’s class is a dialogical and reciprocal process across time and space. Studying Shakespeare’s Sonnet XVIII “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”, Hessler challenges his students to think about the impact of it across time and culture:

Four centuries ago, Shakespeare loved a woman and wrote a poem about her. He said he would make her beauty live forever -- that was his promise. Today the year is 1996, and we are in China, in Sichuan, next to the Yangtze River. Shakespeare never came to Fuling. None of you has ever been to England, and you have not seen the woman that Shakespeare loved four hundred years ago. But right now every one of you is thinking about her. (42-43)

Absolute silence falls after this remark. It is a powerful and pregnant moment of revelation for both Hessler and his students. For the students, they are amazed by the power of an intellectual dialogue that touches them from across time and space, a

dialogue between Elizabethan England and post-Mao China. For Hessler, he gains new understanding of a poem that is so familiar to him in a different cultural context. He admits, “I had read the poem countless times, but I had never heard it truly until I stood in front of my class in Fuling and listened to their stillness as they considered the miracle of those fourteen lines”(43).

Peter Hessler’s dual positioning as insider and outsider in relation to both Chinese and American cultures is in line with what Said extols in his study of Erich Auerbach, a twentieth century German philologist, educator, critic, and literary historian. In order to seek a way out of the ideological restraints of Orientalism, Edward Said seems to endorse the aesthetic positioning exemplified by Auerbach’s humanism. In “On Palestinian Identity”, he summarizes it as such:

The more one is able to leave one’s cultural home, the easier is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance. (259)

To Said, a better perspective to perceive a culture, both one’s own and a foreign one, is that of the combination of an outsider and an insider at the same time. The positionality of double distancing seems to be more moral than an aesthetic one, given the rapid increase in cross-cultural interactions. It is a moral obligation for anyone who is involved in the representation of the Other. It demands the acknowledgement of the other as an equal existence of some diversity and dynamics as one’s own culture in the first place. Orientalism is the result of subjective projection and objectifying other cultures as the foil

to its own. It also requires an openness of mind in face of difference. Rather than doing violence to the alterity by explaining it within the limits of one's own cultural framework, one should keep his interpretations open and let the difference challenges and revise them.

Peter Hessler's particular positioning gives birth to his new identity under the Chinese name Ho Wei. Coming along during his second year in Fuling, Ho Wei is a separate and distinct identity from its American counterpart Peter Hessler. In contrast, Ho Wei is friendlier, more talkative, funnier, and entertaining. Yet, Ho Wei is "stupid," speaking Chinese with an accent and bad grammar and laughing at his own mistakes. There are even two separate desks for them: Ho Wei's for studying Chinese only; Hessler's for writing in English about his experiences in China and mailed back to home. "Sometimes this relationship unnerved me -- it seemed wrong that behind Ho Wei's stupidity there was another person watching everything intently and taking notes. But I could think of no easy resolution to this divide; I had my Chinese life and my American life, and even if they occupied similar territory, they were completely different. Ho Wei and Peter Hessler never met each other. The notebook was the only thing they truly shared" (239).

American teachers, as observer-participants, are more involved with Chinese culture than travelers and tourists, whose roles are mainly observers. The same combination of distance and intimacy is applied to their reflections on their own cultures, in which they are insiders and outsiders at the same time. It demands the acknowledgement of the other as an equal existence of some diversity and dynamics as one's own culture in the first place. The teachers' narratives are abundant in intimate portrayals of Chinese people -- their students, colleagues and friends, and meticulous depictions of their daily lives including housing, eating, shopping, teaching, traveling and

socializing. The intimacy and minutiae lend humanity to individuals of the largest population of the world, a humanity denied by journalism and general media before the eighties. Their narratives are dialogical and the interactions with locals are reciprocal.

CHAPTER FOUR: CHINESE-AMERICAN NOVELISTS

The Woman Warrior (1976) and The Joy Luck Club (1989) have made their authors, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, popular among American readers. The two best sellers also marked the entry of Chinese-American literature into the American mainstream. While Chinese-American literature is flourishing in the United States, the “China image” is also changing.

Chinese-American literature refers to fiction written in English by Americans of Chinese origins. As Chinese began to immigrate to the United States during the Gold-Rush,¹⁸ most of them struggled at the bottom of the American society, while the representative image of Chinese-Americans described in American literature has been that of a weak female. In the eyes of Westerners, they were always “outsiders.” Under such circumstances, even America-born Chinese writers went against their mother culture in their creations of Chinese and Chinese Americans.

The situation did not change until the latter half of the 20th century when the Civil Rights Movement took place in the United States. Many Americans began to think about people of other races and their cultures in a different way. The following campaigns of Women’s Movement, Anti-Vietnam War and Minority Rights, in addition to the improvement in Sino-US relation, helped the mainstream of American society pay more attention to the image of the Chinese. In the 1970s, when more and more people

18 In the mid-19th century, Chinese came to “Gold Mountain,” as they called America, to join the “Gold Rush” that began at Sutter’s Mill, Sacramento, California. As the lure of gold diminished, they came simply to work. Initially welcomed, they became a significant part of the labor force that laid the economic foundation of the American West. Chinese could be found throughout the region, laboring in agriculture, mining, industry, and wherever workers were needed. They are best known for their contribution to the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, the completion of which united the country economically and culturally.

accepted the idea of globalization, they also accepted the Chinese-American writers whose works focused on the Chinese culture but also fought against authority and centralization. Meanwhile, these writers' unique viewpoints and writing skills, as well as the profound background of Chinese history and civilization, had a strong impact on the American readers.

Nevertheless, Chinese-American writers are a unique group. To the American culture, they are Chinese who followed the Chinese tradition, but to the Chinese civilization, they are also outsiders. Living as "outsiders" of both cultures, their interpretations of the "China image" may not be as accurate as it is supposed to be. It is natural that they have to follow the American cultural trend and aesthetic taste. Therefore, in their fictions, Chinese immigrants cannot get rid of the image of "outsider" and "the weak" while their knowledge about the Chinese civilization is far from enough. This is the dilemma for Chinese-American writers.

In fact, many Chinese-Americans live in these dilemmas. Parents want their children to grow up as Americans well adapted to the mainstream cultural environment but at the same time with typical Chinese virtues such as respecting their parents and being modest. As Maxine Hong Kingston stated in the first chapter of The Woman Warrior, her writing was an attempt to bridge the wide gap between her and her ancestors. "I have to continuously classify the different sections of my life: childhood, imagination, family, village, movie and survival"(29). During this process, the child gradually lost her own identity. As a matter of fact, the "Chinese characteristics" praised by many Chinese parents represent traditional morality and Confucian teachings, which go against the American lifestyle and individualism. How should a child grow up with education from two different cultures? For children who learned about the Chinese civilization from

their parents only but never got a chance to live in a Chinese society, the so-called “Chinese culture” has left them nothing but strange ideas and ghost stories. This is the main factor that has formed the generation gap between the immigrant generation and the U.S.-born Chinese-Americans.

Both The Woman Warrior and The Joy Luck Club focus on America-born daughters struggling to understand their China-born mother’s cultural sensitivities within a dominant American culture. Their struggles are worked out through acts of translation: they not only translate the language, but interpret cultures as well. Acts of translation in both texts engage with issues of cultural representation, authenticity and ethnological authority.

Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior and Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club are relevant to the discussions within anthropology and literature highlighting the intersection of ethnology and fiction. The writers’ positions as ethnic female writers parallel the positions of native women anthropologists, who are expected to write with cultural “authenticity” and “authority.”

The China narratives presented by Kingston and Tan emerge as narratives of recollection -- which means that in their memoirs or novels they have reconstructed various narratives of experiences in China against the background of American society and within the context of American culture. This chapter argues that Chinese-American writers like Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan employ multiple-narrative strategy in their China narratives, which is a result of their divided ethnic experience in the United States. Through multi-narration, The Woman Warrior accomplishes the deconstruction of the culturally inscribed binarism by being true and fake, typical and nontypical, and individual and communal. As a mode of cultural translation, the art of ambiguity offers

an alternative to avoid the dilemma of being caught in the irreconcilable binarism and negotiate a fluid space for the marginalized subject.

Like The Woman Warrior, Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club adopts a multi-narrative strategy in its translation of China. Tan avoids creating a single voice and offering a uniform translation of China and Chinese experience. Instead, she employs different narrative voices and weaves a web of tales alternating between four Chinese mothers in pre-1949 China and present-day America, and the lives of their American-born and American-educated daughters in San Francisco, California. This narrative strategy helps deconstruct essentialist concept of China experience and definitions of gender and ethnicity in both cultures.

The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston

Critical debates about Maxine Hong Kingston have persistently focused on issues of representational and cultural authenticity. As is the case with many works by writers of color, theirs have been scrutinized as ethnographic and sociological documents of the Chinese American women's experience. On the one hand, they confront a dominant culture that persistently exoticised the "Chinese" contents of their works. An overwhelming number of mainstream book reviewers as well as a number of mainstream feminist critics associate the story with a Chinese female experience rather than a Chinese American one. On the other hand, Kingston also face Chinese American reviewers and critics who often hold her accountable for providing correctives to such stereotypical premises. To this Chinese American audience, authenticity tied to Chinese culture is inimical to an alternative authenticity tied to Chinese American culture.

Since its publication in 1976, The Woman Warrior has received mixed but tremendous attention from both popular readership and academic critics. The New York Times applauded the book for being an authentic representation of Chinese culture despite the disturbing even savage portrait of China and Chinese. It remained on the New York Times bestseller list for more than nine months, a record yet to be broken in Asian American literature. A final canonization of The Woman Warrior guaranteed it a position in “great” American literature, a fame never enjoyed by any other Asian American writers before.

Although acknowledged as one of the most read novelists in Asian American literature, Kingston received severe criticism and even attack from a group of contemporary Asian American scholars, led by Frank Chin. They accused her of depicting a “fake” China in order to pander to Orientalist American readership. Critics, like Frank Chin, held Kingston responsible for pleasing Caucasian readers. The debate over “typicalness” of the book is approached differently by Caucasian reviewers and Chinese-American critics. A reviewer for the Columbia Dispatch found the story to be “atypical of the relationship between Chinese parents and their American-Chinese children whom I have known in New York City and in Cincinnati” and also of the “business friends” and “servants” whom the reviewer knew when she lived in China (25).

Yet, I would argue, Chin has missed the complexity of multiple narratives as a mode of cultural translation embedded in the book. In establishing who is “fake” and who is “authentic,” Frank Chin is actually aping the nativist and sexist critics, in that both collectives suppress the heterogeneity of Chinese American experience, that is, he entertains a certain irrational fear of “the many” and multifarious. Therefore, Frank Chin,

according to King-kok Cheung, have actually fallen in the Eurocentric trap that they have elsewhere criticized:

in their vehement insistence on "Asian-American integrity"[these writers] may have given in to the Western conception of a unitary self and underestimated the potential of a multiple consciousness--one that is neither schizophrenic nor bisectable into East and West, neither merely preserving the ancestral culture nor dissolving into the mainstream.

(Cheung, Articulate 19)

Moreover, whatever Kingston's original intention of writing this book would be, it has a life independent of the author's intention once published. That is to say, how the reader receives it is beyond the author's control. To borrow from Lewis Nkosi, "What we see in a text is what ideology has equipped us to see." Nkosi's comment is quite helpful in our understanding of Caucasian reviewers' reading of the book and identifying the sources of their perception. First, historically, Chinese immigrants in the United States have been the target of exclusion and permanently been treated as foreigners. In her essay, "Cultural Mis-reading by American Reviewers," responding to the question of her identity, Kingston argues that the reviews identify her as a Chinese woman writing about things Chinese rather than an American writing about her American experiences. Kingston argues that she is Chinese-American but she should be judged as an American writer who wants to write the great American novel.

Obviously, this is not what the reviewers had in mind. In their eyes, Maxine Hong Kingston is a Chinese and therefore they look for some "Chineseness" in her book, which is primarily defined by the ideology that is dominant in the society. Second,

readers bring their preoccupations, that is, ideology shapes how the reader approaches a text and interprets it.

Though apparently conflicting, the two above-mentioned trends of reactions to The Woman Warrior, in essence, share an underlying common ground of favoring “original” or “authentic” over “fake” and “unoriginal.” Before plunging into the discussion of these binary opposites, I feel the necessity of introducing the concept of “cultural translation” to facilitate the following discussion. “Translation,” in its narrow sense, means an act of changing linguistic signs, both in speech and in writing, in one language into another. In the same way, we can extend the notion to culture, which can be regarded as a system of signification as well, but with more complicated codes to be rendered from one form into another, for instance, from a linguistic sign system (a book) into a visual one (a film) etc. In The Woman Warrior, the object in question is “China.” As an origin, it was translated in Kingston’s own ways. Born to Chinese immigrant parents in the United States, her childhood was surrounded by “China”: her mother’s stories about China, Chinese food, customs and a Chinese immigrant neighborhood. However, living in America and having never been to China, she must determine what is Chinese and what is American and, above all, what it means to be a Chinese-American through the bifocal lens of Chinese and American cultures. Thus, cultural translation is a primary mode of representation in The Woman Warrior.

In his article in The Big Aiiieeeee! (1991), Frank Chin accused Kingston of writing in a white racist mentality by exaggerating Chinese sexism in order to please the orientaling taste of dominant Euro-American readership. In Chin’s opinion, the artist is responsible in representing the community and, to represent a “good” image of the community. “Don’t humiliate us!” the mother in The Woman Warrior warns the

daughter. Chin regards himself as the one in Chinese-American community with the commitment to rectify the effeminate image of the Asian male in American society and he expected Kingston to do the same as well.

Maxine Hong Kingston responded to Chin 's invectives by invoking her artistic freedom and problematizing the representativeness of the "ethnic writer." Trinh Minh-ha briefly describes this situation as "the automatic and arbitrary endowment of an insider with legitimized knowledge about her [sic] cultural heritage and environment" (Minh-ha , 374), so that all works written by Chinese-Americans in this case would function as ethnographic documents. (3) Thus, the creative possibilities for these writers would be greatly reduced, as Kingston points out:

Why must I 'represent' anyone beside myself? Why should I be denied an individual artistic vision? ... I'm certain that some day when a great body of Chinese American writing becomes published and known, then readers will no longer have to put such a burden on each book that comes out.

Readers can see the variety of ways for Chinese Americans to be. (63)

The controversy that both King-kok Cheung and Elaine Kim call the debate between nationalism and feminism (construed as "white," assimilationist feminism) reflects the conflict between two diametrically opposed ways of understanding identity and culture: a purist school that indelibly "fixes" both or a pluralist perspective that de-stabilizes the very notion of identity and opens it up to multiplicity and "free play."

Both responses foreground being "typical" as the book's obvious duty by denying heterogeneity in a culture. In Chin's argument, he privileges the masculinized Chinese-American experience over the feminized one. He thinks that the problem with the Caucasian reviewers is that they tend to place special burden on all minority writers, that

is, they expect their works to represent their community rather than the individual. At the crossroads of gender and ethnicity, female writers of color have to deal with the double burden, as Trinh T. Minh-ha has observed:

Many women of color feel obliged [to choose] between ethnicity and womanhood: how can they? You never have/are one without the other. The idea of two illusionarily separated identities, one ethnic, the other woman (or more precisely female), partakes in the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning and its age-old divide -- and -- conquer tactics.... The pitting of anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles against one another, allows some vocal fighters to dismiss blatantly the existence of either racism or sexism within their lines of action, as if oppression only comes in separate, monolithic forms. (105)

Well aware of the heterogeneity in her culture, Kingston acknowledges and appreciates it in The Woman Warrior. A most powerful example is the legend of Fa Mu Lan. First, this legend can be seen as a good example of the breakup of male/female and public/private split, which can be found at the heart of liberal humanism. Disguised as a male soldier, Fa Mu Lan takes the place of her aged father to fight against invaders of her country. However, different from “bourgeois individualism” narrative, Fa Mu Lan is a national heroine, that is to say, she is accepted by her community at large, different from the individual breaking away from the society narrative dominant in American literary tradition. This is the place where Kingston challenges the often-unexamined assumptions that yoke feminism with bourgeois individualism that is popular in feminist autobiography of the 1970s and 1980s. Rita Felski in Beyond Feminist Aesthetics plots

what she sees as the usual trajectory of feminist autobiography and relates it to the masculine tradition of the Bildungsroman. In contrast, Mu Lan, in The Woman Warrior, returns to her domestic sphere with public glory and promises to do farm work and housework and give birth to more sons. Like Mu Lan, the protagonist in the book also acknowledges the community:

I live now where there are Chinese and Japanese, but no emigrants from my own village looking at me as if I had failed them. Living among one's own emigrant villagers can give a good Chinese far from China glory and a place.... I refuse to shy my way anymore through our Chinatown, which tasks me with the old sayings and the stories. The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so that I can return to them. (52-53)

Her search for self-understanding and for her identity is invested in recognition by the community since her identity cannot be fully realized outside of a social relationship. By insisting on a feminist view while maintaining the centrality of community, Kingston presents greater opportunities to speak to more subaltern groups.

Regardless of whatever the conclusion one may draw, the underlying premise of both arguments lies in two assumptions: First, there is such an authentic and real China for Kingston to translate; second, the original is privileged over the translated. A closer look at the first premise may trigger another complicated question: Is there a version of China, with its vast expanse in time and space, that can claim itself to be authentic without overlooking any heterogeneity in Chinese experience? Even such a problematic China seems to be remote to the author, a second-generation Chinese-American immigrant, who had never been to China when the book was written. The primary

sources from which she learned about China are her mother's story telling, which by itself, is already a personal version of China. Besides these stories, *kung fu* movies, western anthropology books and letters from her folks in China are some other channels that she has access to. Though heterogeneous in nature, these sources share the characteristics of second-handedness, each in its own way demanding justification of being an "authentic" translation of China. In this sense, China in The Woman Warrior is the translation of translation.

I find Jacques Derrida's theory quite helpful in understanding the second premise, that is, the privileged binary opposites of origin/ translation. Reading Ferdinand Saussure's structuralist theories, Derrida detected a hierarchy in his thinking which privileged speech over writing. Saussure assumed that speech has the immediacy and authenticity or 'presence' of a moment of transparent and original articulation while writing is its delayed and distorted representation on a further, impure medium. Derrida argues that, on the contrary, there is no such prior and pure moment of presence. Speech is a variable medium, which is itself distant from any supposed moment of pure origin. Speech, hence, shares the characteristics of writing (Derrida 17-28). In this sense, "writing" emerges not as the secondary and distorted rendering of speech but as its very precondition. Similar opposites, according to Derrida, which privileges the first term of a given binary pairing such as nature/culture, reality/appearance, man/woman or white/black are similarly open to deconstruction and critique. Instead of contained or "centered" and hierarchically arranged differences, there is "différance." This term, which is Derrida's coinage, combines the notions of difference or 'differing' with 'deferral.' Rather than being prior to a given articulation or identical with it, signification,

or presence, is always postponed. In other words, difference, and therefore meaning, is in a constant process of being constructed.

In the same vein, Paul De Man made a deconstructive reading of “The Task of the Translator” by Walter Benjamin, questioning the priority given to origin in the binary opposites of origin/translation. Arguing against the conventional principle of translation, that is, “fidelity to the original,” De Man persuasively decenters and devalorizes the original. Frank Chin’s critique of Kingston’s “fake” China obviously sides with privileging the original. However, the question of a principle of translation is still untouched. What is a more desirable mode of translation without valorizing either the original or the translation then? In “The Problematics of Kingston’s ‘Cultural Translation,’” Toming Jun Liu proposed a principle, “cultural translatability” (Liu 15-30), which is defined as (despite the differences between cultures, and despite the hard-to-translate aspects of a specific culture) the general intentions of a culture are perfectly comprehensible, and thus translatable into the language of another culture. This principle affirms our common humanity or commonality-in-difference.” Having failed to point out what the intentions of Chinese culture would be, Liu falls back to reinforce the original by accusing Kingston of faking, albeit to varied extent. In contrast, Vattimo, in Human Science and the Society of Communication, offers a more promising alternative to the either/or stalemate of binarism. He says:

Instead of moving toward self-transparency, the society of the human sciences and generalized communication has moved towards what could, in general, be called the “fabling of the world.” The images of the world we receive from media and the human sciences, albeit on different levels, are not simply different interpretations of a “reality” that is “given”

regardless, but rather constitute the very objectivity of the world. “There are no facts, only interpretations,” in the words of Nietzsche, who also wrote “the true world has in the end become a fable.” (24-25)

Reading specifically for a tactics of cultural translation, I find Vattimo’s writing useful in several ways though he comments on the studies of media specially. First, his point moves beyond the deadlock of the binarism situation with one privileged due to the asymmetry of power relationship on different levels of human society. Second, he deprivileges the centered “reality” or “truth.” Lastly, he acknowledges the multiple nature of interpretations.

Sau-Ling Wong pinpoints the strong correlation between translation and a realistic notion of mimetic verisimilitude that Kingston’s critics make in their polemical stance. Wong points to the pitfall of looking at translation and representational authority too narrowly. Whereas Kingston’s detractors hold her to “authentic” translation, Wong points out that Kingston actually questions the premises of translation in her text. Wong has praised the interrogative modality of Kingston’s work.

Maxine Hong Kingston, from the very beginning of the book, has raised the question of the problematic and multiple nature of interpretations: “Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?” (5-6) Kingston refuses to offer any authoritative interpretation or definite answers, which I call the art of ambiguity. In this way, the bind of binarism is transcended. In the cultural translation in The Woman Warrior, China or Chinese culture, as a “reality,” is not only decentered but also given multiple interpretations by Kingston.

However, the multiple narratives that Kingston uses as a cultural translation strategy are often overlooked by critics. In order to see this, we need to turn to some examples from the text.

The story of no-name woman is told three times throughout the first chapter of the book. The first version Kingston introduces is the protagonist's mother's "talk-story." Taking place twenty years before the "present" in the book, the mother's story is embedded in the daughter's first person narration. The first chapter opens with the mother's warning "You must not tell anyone" and thus the mother's story of no-name woman is alleged to be quoted as direct speech. The protagonist's aunt on her father's side, known as the no-name woman, is pregnant from an affair while her husband is away in America. On the night of the birth of the baby, villagers raid the family and the aunt has to hide in the pigsty to give birth to her baby. The next morning, the woman throws herself into a well together with the newborn baby. The mother gives a vivid yet terrifying account of the attack mounted by the villagers. Within a historical context, Toming Jun Liu justifiably questions the possibility of such an attack. However, what he has overlooked is the text's own deconstruction of this account. Following the narration of the raid, Kingston also reveals another side of the same story: "My mother spoke about the raid as if she had seen it, when she and my aunt, a daughter-in-law to a different household, should not have been living together at all" (7). Therefore, probably, the mother is not an eyewitness at all and her account is also a secondhand story.

After the mother's story, the narrator of the book continues to offer other possible versions or interpretations of the same event from her own point of view as an adult, about twenty years after she first heard the story from her mother. Hence, in the daughter's version, two possible interpretations are presented. In one of the renderings,

the aunt is translated into an unconventional and even a “loose” woman, who actively pursues sex outside marriage:

But perhaps my aunt, my forerunner, caught in a slow life, let dreams grow and fade at the enormities of the forbidden kept her desires delicate, wire and bone. She looked at a man because she liked the way the hair was tucked behind his ears, or she liked the question-mark line of a torso curving at the shoulder and straight at the hip. For warm eyes or a soft voice or a slow walk -- that's all -- a few hairs, a line, a brightness, a sound, a pace, she gave up family. She offered us up for a charm that vanished with tiredness, a pigtail that didn't toss when the wind died.... It could very well have been, however, that my aunt did not take subtle enjoyment of her friend, but a wild woman, kept rollicking company. (8)

On the very same page, the narrator voices her doubt about this translation by saying that “Imagining her free with sex doesn't fit though” and offers another translation of the same event to fill in the gaps in the mother's version. In this rendering, the aunt is imagined as a victim of sexual abuse:

My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex. Woman in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret devil.... Perhaps she had encountered him in the fields or on the mountain where the daughters-in-law collected fuel. Or perhaps he first noticed her in the marketplace. He was not a stranger because the village housed no strangers. She had to have dealings with him other than sex. Perhaps he worked an adjoining field, or he sold her the cloth for the dress she served and wore. His

demand must have surprised, then terrified her, she obeyed him; she always did as she was told. (6)

More than occasionally, Kingston keeps rectifying the accounts with uncertainty. Words such as “perhaps” are all over the narratives. Undermining and contradicting each other, these already fragmented accounts of the no-name woman are further complicated by authorial interruption when the story is told once again in the third person omniscient narration. Unlike the previous narratives with limited knowledge and access, this one is an attempt to reconstruct the event as if there is a ubiquitous being who has eye-witnessed the whole incident and has access to the innermost thoughts of the aunt as well:

She ran out into the fields, far enough from the house so that she could no longer hear their voices, and pressed herself against the earth, her own land no more. When she felt the birth coming, she thought that she had been hurt. Her body seized together. ‘They’ve hurt me too much,’ she thought. ‘This is gall, and it will kill me.’ With forehead and knees against the earth, her body convulsed and then relaxed....(14)

Most commonly employed in both traditional and modern narratives, the omniscient narration, as a piece of salvaged history, seems to give a final and “authoritative” version of the event that the reader can most easily identify with. However, the sense of uncertainty still haunts the narration with trace of doubts at the end of it: “She may have gone to the pigsty as a last act of responsibility: she would protect this child as she protected its father.” (15) With this uncertainty, once again the reader is rewarded with a construction of facts rather than facts themselves, and once again, reader’s expectation of gleaning “facts” fails.

As the author, Maxine Hong Kingston has every right to tell the story just once with the third person omniscient point of view and construct a more “authoritative” version of the story in the first place. Why does she instead apply such a complicated narrative structure, which contains three different versions of the same happening, with the reliability of each being deconstructed in different ways? It is, I would argue, Kingston’s intention to play with the reader’s expectations in order to pose some basic questions such as: Is narrative a fundamental form of knowledge (giving knowledge of the world through its sense making) or is it a rhetorical structure that distorts as much as it reveals? Is narrative a source of knowledge or of illusion? We are not given any answers to these questions in the text. Kingston, with the art of uncertainty, is attempting to present to the reader how problematic the “reality” and “facts” can be rather than giving any definite answers.

Throughout the first chapter, the focal character, no-name woman remains silent. She is not only deprived of a name but a voice as well. She is also a no-voice woman; that is to say, no version of the story is given from her perspective. She is the mysterious person, who seems to hold the keys to all the questions left unanswered and doubts and confusions presented in other narratives. Instead of letting no-name woman speak for herself, Kingston opted to dance around by offering a multi-voiced discourse with conflicting voices and deconstructing nature and leave the reader contemplating the secret in the middle. Therefore, Kingston challenges the hierarchical oppositions that have structured liberal humanism: true/false, original/ fake and etc. by showing that an opposition is not natural and inevitable but a construction, produced by discourses that rely on it. Yet, we are still not ready to answer the question that whether there is knowledge of the world that is independent of narratives, as embodied by the silent

secrets of the no-name woman, and it will still haunt us as no-name woman haunts the protagonist in The Woman Warrior.

In Articulate Silences, King-kok Cheung discusses the multiple meanings of silences in works by Maxine Hong Kingston and other Asian American women writers. She questions the placement of verbal and nonverbal forms of communication into hierarchical terms, suggesting that the meanings of silence must be culturally contextualized. Through her discussion of distinct forms of silence, including “rhetorical,” “provocative,” and “attentive” silences, she argues that Kingston employs strategies of silences to engage directly with history, offering critiques of histories that homogenize them, exclude them, or efface their subjectivities.

Some more examples of ambiguity and plurality of narrative can be found in the different accounts of the meeting between Moon Orchid and her husband in America. In the chapter “At the Western Palace,” the meeting is told for the first time from a third person omniscient perspective. And at the beginning of the next chapter, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” Kingston switches back to first person narrative, in which the narrator “I” is telling the reader her brother’s account of the story. Compared with that of the previous chapter, the brother’s account is incomplete due to the limit of his role of a participant-observer in the event. Since he does not accompany his mother and aunt to lunch, the lunch scene was never described by anybody. In addition to this, another striking difference between these two versions is the way it is narrated, the former with relatively more authority, and the latter with ambiguity. In the brother’s version, many details have already become blurred in memory. When asked by his sister what their mother has said, he answers, “I don’t remember.” And later, “No, I don’t think she said anything, I don’t remember her saying one thing” (129).

Contrary to the ambiguity of the brother's account, the third person version in the previous chapter offers different details as if they are facts:

You weren't supposed to come here," he said, the first seat a barrier against the two woman over whom a spell of old age had been cast. "It's a mistake for you to be here. You can't belong. You don't have the hardness for this country. I have a new life.

"What about me?" whispered Moon Orchid.

"Good," thought Brave Orchid. "Well said. Said with no guile."

"I have a new wife," said the man.

"She's only your second wife," said Brave Orchid. "This is your real wife." (152-153)

A third difference is that the brother's version is sketchy and dry, the narrator's full-fleshed and full of details. As the narrator comments, "His version of the story may be better than mine because of its bareness, not twisted into designs. The hearer can carry it tucked away without it taking up much room"(60). As the reader expects to read more about these two versions of the same story, the narrator abruptly begins afresh in the same paragraph an old Chinese story about knot-making, which seems to bear no connection with what is going on in the narrative. The story goes:

Long ago in China, knot-makers tied string into buttons and frogs, and rope into bell pulls. There was one knot so complicated that it blinded the knot maker. Finally an emperor outlawed this cruel knot, and the nobles could not order it anymore. If I had lived in China, I would have been an outlaw knot-maker. (163)

On the first reading, we can barely establish any connection between this story and the context. However, a closer reading will reveal that Kingston attempts to compare knot making to story-telling, whose narrative techniques demand no less complexity than the designing of a knot. The most complicated and breath-taking twist of the Moon Orchid story is not the different versions I have been discussing, but an untold third version existing in between the two aforementioned versions in terms of time: "In fact, it wasn't me my brother told about going to Los Angeles; one of my sisters told me what he'd told her," says the protagonist (163). Thus, the seemingly more factual and authoritative version actually is based on a twice-told account, that is to say, a translation of translation of translation. The irony lies in the fact that the seemingly real account given in the first place is actually based on the already blurred memory of the brother, and let alone the accuracy of the other sister's recount of this piece of blurred memory as well as the narrator's own interpretation. What is the reader's memory of the event? After reading the multiple narratives in the text, what will the reader's version of the stories be? What will happen if the reader tells these stories in the book to those who have never read it? It seems to be an endless circle of relay story telling, beginning from nowhere. And once again, a version told by the central character, Moon Orchid, is absent, like the missing account of the no-name woman herself in the first chapter. Like the knot-maker who is blinded by the cruelly complicated knot, the protagonist seems to have been confused as well in terms of which version bears more truth than the other and whether there is a "true" account of anything, including history. The ambiguity in the book blurs the distinction between fact and interpretation, determined and undetermined, and text and reader.

The text's ambiguity can also be seen in the translation of Chinese sexism. The sexist proverbs in Chinese language are scattered all over the text, for instance, "Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds," "Better to raise geese than girls," (46) and "When fishing for treasures in the flood, be careful not to pull in girls" (52). Though they are symptomatic of misogyny in Chinese culture and in the Chinese American community, Kingston at the same time provides an anti-thesis to it. Reading an anthropology book, the protagonist learns for the first time that Chinese consider girls are necessary too, an idea she has never heard of among the Chinese immigrants she knows. The irony lies in the fact that there is always conflicting discourse about anthropology: Under the impact of positivism, anthropology is sometimes styled as a "science of interpretation," which is designed to offer "objective, universally" accessible knowledge; while at the same time it is often accused by the natives in study of distorting the representation of "Other." Here the competing discourses arouse questions of outsider/insider, objective/subjective binary opposites. As an insider of the Chinese-American community, that is to say, the emigrant village, the protagonist has experienced quite differently from what is described by anthropologists, as an outsider of the culture, in terms of treating girls. Which version is true? Rather than being locked in the deadlock of these binary opposites, the text goes on to give one more account of sexism, but this time the setting is in Communist China:

Nobody wrote to tell us that Mao himself had been matched to an older girl when he was a child and that he was freeing women from prisons, where they had been put for refusing the businessmen their parents had picked as husbands. Nobody told us that the Revolution was against girl slavery and girl infanticide (a village-wide party if it's a boy). Girls would no longer have to kill themselves rather than get married. May the

communists light up the house on a girl's birthday" (190-191).

Here, this version from an unknown source not only forms a contrast to the previous discourses, but also points out the lack in the abrupt allusion to letters from the protagonist's relatives in Communist China. Different from that in the previous discourses, the positioning of the protagonist in this one is rather as an outsider (to Communist China), who has never visited Communist China. As an outsider, she is also exposed to Chinese government's propaganda, a fourth version of China. She once catches sight of pictures of a woman contentedly sitting on her bunk sewing. Above her head is a box on a shelf. The words stenciled on the box mean "Fragile," but literally mean, "Use a little heart." The woman looks pleased. The revolution put an end to prostitution by giving women what they wanted: a job and a room of their own (62).

One interpretation is just as confusing and unfathomable as another. By offering multiple competing discourses, the text refuses to judge what is true and what is false. "Soon I want to go to China and find out who's lying -- the Communists who say they have food and jobs for everybody or the relatives who write that they have not the money to buy salt" (205).

Through the art of ambiguity, The Woman Warrior accomplishes the deconstruction of the culturally inscribed binarism by being both true and fake, typical and nontypical, and individual and communal. As a mode of cultural translation, the art of ambiguity offers an alternative to avoid the dilemma of being caught in the irreconcilable binarism and negotiate a fluid space for the marginalized subject to move within it.

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan

The Joy Luck Club features Chinese mothers for their ability to “translate.” Each mother shares her past of history of hardship in China in order to give her daughter strength to cope with American life -- as a minority within the dominant culture, each daughter face the dilemma of having low self-esteem within her relationships and career. The mother is valorized as the holder of “authentic origin.” Maternal stories guide the daughters through their Americanized lives as the mothers recount their stories in China.

Like The Women Warrior, Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club adopts a multi-narrative strategy in its translation of China. Tan avoids creating a single voice and offering a uniform translation of China and Chinese experience. Instead, she employs different narrative voices and weaves a web of tales alternating between four Chinese mothers in pre-1949 China and America, and the lives of their American-born and American-educated daughters in San Francisco, California. This narrative strategy helps deconstruct essentialist concept of China experience and definitions of gender and ethnicity in both cultures.

The almost rigidly mathematical structure of the book gives equal emphasis to narratives of four mothers and their four daughters. As in The Women Warrior, each chapter and each tale within can stand alone. Tan’s book seems to be crafted like a mah-jongg game itself, with the women of the Joy Luck Club telling their stories around the four-cornered mah-jongg table. The novel has four mother-daughter pairs, four parts of four chapters each, each chapter beginning with a Chinese parable setting the theme of the section. These serve as universalizing backdrops against which can be seen the

particularized monologues, each parable thematizing an aspect of the mother-daughter relationship. One of Tan's themes is the impact of past generations on the present, and the structure, in which the daughters' eight stories are enveloped by those of the mothers, implies that the older generation may hold a key to resolving the problems of the young. The chapters, too, are influenced by the principle of the mah-jongg game, with each round one of the four assumes the narrative voice or the "boss", who rolls the dice and counts out where to break an opening in the wall of the mah jong tiles.

The narratives of the mothers foreground the subjective and unstable nature of Chinese experiences. Suyuan Woo's narrative is an example. Unlike the narratives of the other three mothers, Suyuan Woo's narrative is embedded in the narrative of her daughter, Jing-Mei Woo, due to the mother's sudden death at the beginning of the novel. This shift in narrative strategy is symbolized by the daughter taking the place of the mother at the mah jong table. The ontologically unstable nature of her narrative is revealed through the daughter, Jing-Mei Woo, who remembers, "Over the years, she told me the same story, except for the ending, which grew darker, casting long shadows into her life, and eventually into mine" (7). There are different versions of ending that the mother has told the daughter throughout the years:

My mother used to end the story on a happy note, bragging about her skill at the game. "I won many times and was so lucky the others teased that I had learned that the trick of a clever thief," she said. "I won tens of thousands of *yuan*. But I wasn't rich. No. By then paper money had become worthless. Even toilet paper was worth more. And that made us laugh harder, to think a thousand-yuan note wasn't even good enough to rub on bottoms. (12)

Yet with the ending keeps changing all the time, Jing-mei remembers:

Sometimes she said she used that worthless thousand-yuan note to buy a half-cup of rice. She turned that rice into a pot of porridge. She traded that gruel for two feet from a pig. Those two feet became six eggs, those eggs six chickens. The story always grew and grew. (13)

The version that intrigues and shocks the daughter most is the one in which Suyuan says that she has to abandon her twin daughters from her first marriage in China when she flees Kweilin knowing of Japanese army's invasion. Yet the reason for her so doing is not revealed to the curious daughter until the end of the book where the father tells his own version of the story, in which he explains that Suyuan is extremely sick and has to give up the twin girls hoping that some kind person may find them and take care of them. It is exactly the hope of survival for the twins that prompts Suyuan to make the hard decision to leave them behind. The irony in this is exemplified by her name, Suyuan, which can be read as "long-cherished hope" or "long-held grudge" in Chinese. The juxtaposition of "hope" and "grudge" is imprinted on Siouan's Chinese narrative. She gives up the twin daughters in hope of their surviving the war, but at the same time she cannot forgive herself losing them. It is the grudge that holds her back from telling the true ending to her story to her daughter in the first place.

The same paradox extends to Sudan's experience with her American daughter -- Jing-mei. On one hand, she lays triple hopes on the Jing-mei as a result of the loss of the twins; on the other, she is disappointed with the daughter's indifference and even defiance to her hope:

In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband's belch. Over

there nobody will look down on her, because I will make her speak perfect English. And over there she will know my meaning, because I will give her this swan -- a creature that became more than what was hoped for. (3)

From here the mother's China narrative contextualizes itself in an American culture and transforms into a Chinese version of American dream: the realization of self-value in a land of opportunities for the daughter rather than the mother. Suyuan believes that one can achieve anything and be anybody in America and in particular she believes that Jingmei can be a prodigy, fashioned first after Shirley Temple, then a boy of marvelous memory and finally a music talent. The mother's high hope for her daughter is voiced through the given name "Jingmei", in which "Jing" means excellence, purity and best quality (323).

The high hope is partly the result of her loss of the twins in China, but is also powered by the semiotics of American dream. She firmly believes that one can achieve anything and become anybody in America regardless of one's gender and ethnic background. "You could open a restaurant. You could work for the government and get good retirement. You could buy a house with almost no money down. You could become rich. You could become instantly famous"(141). Thus, Suyuan's high hope is the product of these two combined where the China narrative extends and joins her American dream seamlessly. Yet the American dream is a version of a Chinese mother for her daughter, that is, all Suyuan's high hopes are for Jingmei, her daughter, rather than herself. On one hand, she hopes Jingmei to be a prodigy, on the other; she herself is contented with a cleaning job. In this sense, the American dream is transferred to the daughter and serves as an extension of the mother's dreams and loss in China.

The subject matter of the role of women or femininity is further explored and redefined in the narrative of another mother -- Lindo Jong, whose story helps deconstruct essentialist concept of China experience and definitions of gender and ethnicity in both cultures. Unlike The Woman Warrior, what is central in Tan's book is the subversion of the ready-made cultural definitions of both femininity and ethnicity. Aware of the theory of double-disempowerment, Tan "attempts to undermine "universalist feminism" by "polemically recording the marginalization and disempowerment of all women within patriarchal institutions- whether in China or America", Schueller claims; and she argues that while "wives within the traditional Chinese family are taught to find satisfaction in waiting on their husbands and their families, in America the mass media insidiously reinforces the same subservience (Schueller 78).

Indeed, as Lindo Jong, one of the Chinese mothers, reflects on her married life in China:

What was happier than seeing everybody gobble down the shiny mushrooms and bamboo shoots I had helped prepare that day. How much happier could I be after seeing Tyan-yu eat a whole bowl of noodles without complaining about its taste or my looks? It's like those ladies you see on American TV these days, the ones who are so happy they have washed out a stain so the clothes look better than new. (56)

Not only are traditional Chinese equated with ostensibly progressive and free American women, but Lindo is even aware of the universal nature of patriarchal prescriptions of models of femininity. Similarly, Tan uses another Chinese immigrant mother to voice the idea of the disempowerment of women across cultures and generations. Reflecting on

the despair of her American-born daughter over an impending divorce, An-Mei Hsu concludes:

If she doesn't speak, she is making a choice... I know this, because I was raised the Chinese way: I was taught to desire nothing. And even though I taught my daughter the opposite, she still came out the same way! Maybe it was because she was born to me and she was born a girl. And I was born to my mother and I was born to be girl. All of us are like stairs, one step after another, going up and down, but all going the same way. (215)

Tan's formulation of a common oppression shared by what is traditionally perceived as Chinese-raised and American-raised women again subverts East-West cultural dichotomies. Tan carefully relies upon and upsets these hierarchical cultural expectations. Nevertheless, double-disempowerment does exist, with Western men exerting it. Ying Ying St. Clair's American husband adopts an imperialist's stance toward his wife. Ignorant of her past and former high status, he treats her patronizingly, changing her name to "Betty", insisting she speak English, in short, "colonizing" her. Ying Ying "escapes" into madness. The question remains which is worse: the male colonizer's attitude toward ethnic women or male polygamy in China, which sanctions the mistreatment of women and their relegation to concubine status, the humiliation of which An-Mei Hsu's mother escapes only through suicide.

Tan's intention in this book is two-fold: while she undermines pre-established notions about Chinese-American women by means of her deliberate use of narrative strategies -- the very structure of the novel helps express her conviction that she considers the strategic adoptions of an essentialist group identity to be necessary. Critics and reviewers have complained about the fact that it is not easy to keep the characters apart.

Susan Doley, for instance, regrets that “the reader is not always sure who is who and what the complex web of generation Joy Luck Club relationships actually is”(Schell 93). David Gates goes a step further by suggesting, “inevitably the voices sound alike, and the ill-chosen men folk seem interchangeable. So do the mother’ awful stories”(Schell 93).

However, I feel the critics are missing an important point here. It is the case that the women in The Joy Luck Club, despite their differences, seem to merge into a concept of common Chinese-American womanness. However, given that the book is so skillfully and carefully crafted, we can assume that it was largely Tan’s intention to write a book about Chinese-American women in which she stresses their differences within a context of sameness. She therefore advocates assertion of an anti-essentialist identity for each individual, while propagating the adoption of strategic essentialism for political reasons so that Chinese-Americans will be recognized as a relevant group of individuals.

The last chapter proves that Tan is acutely aware of the problems and simplifications the adoption of strategic essentialism can create. Jing-Mei Woo travels to China to look for her sisters. She feels herself “becoming” Chinese as her train crosses the border from Hong Kong. When Jing-Mei meets her sisters, she understands an ethnic identity that is beyond language. Reading the last pages of the book, one might fear that Tan resorts to a reductionist ending. The assumption that recovering one’s roots and one’s identity is possible by simply going back to one’s homeland is based on an imperialistic point of view positing that there is one universal, readily available “Chineseness.” This, however, is exactly the thesis Tan has undermined so far by presenting multiple representations of ethnic origins and so advocating ethnicity as a constantly shifting social construct. In fact, while Tan celebrates this moment of ethnic wholeness, she is also aware of the problems that such essentialist concepts pose. The

text ends with Jing-Mei and her sisters looking at a Polaroid photo of themselves that Jing-Mei's father has just taken, and with Jing-Mei recognizing an ethnic identification but only through her active interpretation and by deliberately framing ethnic subjects in a momentary stasis beyond language. Tan's way of making ethnic oneness possible in a snapshot rather than in real life further attests to her determination to use ethnicity as resistance, to articulate it in such a manner that it cannot be reduced to any single narrative.

CONCLUSION

Taking as its topic the images of China in travel discourse since late nineteenth seventies, this project revolves around the questions of representation and authenticity, and their relationship with a larger power structure, be it economic, cultural or political.

One can conclude that no representational endeavor is innocent, being shaped as it invariably is by the intricate networks of identities: political orientation, race, ethnicity, and gender. As a result, some of the discourse invokes more stereotypes of China, providing a convenient framework for the representation of a “real” China, and, on the other hand, others lean toward challenging the pre-perception of China as static and monolithic by offering multiple representations. The case can be extended to the works of so-called “native” informers, who present China from the inside to the outside in their “auto-ethnography.” The question follows them primarily focuses on whether their presentations hold more truth than those of the “outsiders” and, if so, is it because they possess the first-hand native experience that the “outsiders” lack?

The appeal to first-hand native experience as authority is very tempting at first since it is naturally regarded as “authentic” and “inside” vs. “inauthentic” and “outside.” It is hard to deny that this assumption is totally unfounded. However, this appeal to the authority of experience or identity as the ultimate gauge of representation of a culture is problematic since there is no such culture that is monolithic and static for either the natives or the foreigners to represent. The task of representing is equally challenging to insiders and outsiders, to whom, however, the difficulties may vary due to their specific positioning of identities. That is, no representation can be spared from the entangled

network of social identities, such as education, gender, ethnicity, political orientation and so on.

The films of Zhang Yimou are a case in study. Though as successful in the international film market as he is, Zhang Yimou is criticized to use clichéd iconography, melodramatic plot or sensationalism, and even make up Chinese customs to represent a China that caters the Western taste. In her study, Rey Chow takes a positive view regarding auto-ethnography. She observes that Zhang Yimou is confronted with the inherent contradiction, “the double gaze of the Chinese security state and the world’s, especially the West’s, orientalism” (170). Therefore the exhibitionism of Zhang’s works, as a response to the double gaze, on the one hand returns the gaze of the official surveillance. On the other hand, “the ‘ethnicity’ -- ‘Chineseness’ -- of Zhang’s films is also the sign of cross-cultural commodity fetishism, a production of value between cultures.” In this way, Zhang “is showing a ‘China’ that is at one subalternized and exoticised by the West” and “returns the gaze of orientalist surveillance, a gaze that demands of non-Western peoples mythical pictures and stories to which convenient labels of otherness such as ‘China’, ‘India’, ‘Africa’, and so forth can be affixed ” (Chow 170-171).

Rey Chow advances her theory by regarding Zhang Yimou’s exhibitionist self-display as “a critique of the voyeurism of orientalism itself.” This exhibitionism is called “the Oriental’s orientalism.” It turns “the remnants of orientalism into elements of a new ethnography...this ethnography accepts the historical fact of orientalism and performs a critique (i.e. evaluation) of it by staging and parodying orientalism’s politics of visibility.” Moreover, “the Oriental’s orientalism is first and foremost a demonstration -- the display of a tactic” (Chow 171).

Nevertheless, while acknowledging that Zhang Yimou has deployed the “exhibitionism” or “fetishization” in his “visual ethnography”, some critics differ from Rey Chow in the interpretation of Zhang’s “politics of visibility” and his intention of “to-be-looked-at-ness.”

Dai Jinhua contends that Zhang Yimou, instead of returning the gaze, has internalized the gaze of Western culture. In his auto-ethnography, Zhang Yimou has displayed the willing compliance with the Orientalist’s gaze. It is further pointed out that, because securing foreign investment for future projects through successful appearances at Western film festivals has become the priority, the Fifth Generation filmmakers have constructed their filmic narratives in accordance with the Western expectations and conventions, thereby “simultaneously sustaining and creating a national culture predicated on allegorical depth and superficial pretense”(Dai 25).

Reserving doubts for both claims, I would rather consider the mutual relationship an ongoing, negotiating process between the local and the global, between the West and the non-West. Therefore, ethnographic cinema can be regarded as the product of the uneven power structure of the West vis-à-vis China and the global capital vis-à-vis local film industry.

Rey Chow argues eloquently about the Chinese filmmakers’ struggle with the politics of “translation” and their experience as cross-cultural translators. “In dazzling colors of their screen,” Chow describes:

the primitive...stands as the naive symbol, the brilliant arcade, through which 'China' travels across cultures to unfamiliar audiences. Meanwhile, the 'original' that is film, the canonically Western medium, becomes

destabilized and permanently infected with the unforgettable 'ethnic' (and foreign) images imprinted on it by the Chinese translators. (202)

Cultural translation, therefore, is not “a unidirectional, one-way process,” but a mutual delivering action, that is mutual and reciprocal between the “original” and the “translation” (188). The tension produced by the paradoxical relation of both conflict and convergence between globalization and localization is an important feature of postmodern cultural diaspora in which various cultural presences constantly translate themselves.

Rey Chow attempts to refigure some new models for cultural translation in terms of a global/local dialectic. The issue she raises is how the demand for self-translatable cultural products has increased as a consequence of global/local interaction. In Chow's opinion, cultural translation suggests a kind of global consciousness that undermines the rigid compartmentalization of cultural consumption. In order to share and exchange in a global market, opinion-makers and filmmakers of different cultures must translate their cultural products into terms that are interculturally accountable. Cultural translation will not lead to dissolution of local cultural difference; on the contrary, it demands vigorous re-examination of the changing mechanism of the international flows of various national and local cultures. This re-examination, as Chow has demonstrated, can help us perceive how “the less powerful (cultures) negotiate the imposition of the agenda of the powerful” (201). By linking filmmaking with translation, Chow emphasizes that contemporary Chinese films are cultural translations, which provide a process that “we must go through in order to arrive -- not at the new destination of the truth of an 'other' culture but at the weakened foundations of Western metaphysics as well as the disintegrated bases of

Eastern tradition”(201). Cultural translation, therefore, informs a paradox of global/local interaction in the postcolonial, post-third-worldist critical moment.

Films produced within a given social and economical system signify in ways that are culturally and ideologically specific. Notions and concepts that seem fully justified in one context might become problematic when transferred to another with distinct socio-cultural, historical, and political codes. Thus consciousness toward difference, readiness for intersections and multiple perspectives for interpretations are pivotal for cross-cultural readings. The argument stressed here is not that we should not apply Western criticism to non-Western cultural products but that neither critical methodology nor cultural tradition suffices as controlling discourse. To examine a Chinese discourse with Western theoretical assumptions is to expand our understanding of both cultural differences and critical concepts.

To Said, a better perspective to perceive a culture, both one’s own and a foreign one, is that of the combination of an outsider and an insider at the same time. The positionality of double distancing seems to be more moral than an aesthetic one, given the rapidly increase in cross-cultural interaction. It is a moral obligation for anyone who is involved in the representation of the Other. It demands the acknowledgement of the other as an equal existence of the same diversity and dynamics as one’s own culture in the first place. Orientalism is the result of subjective projection and objectifying other cultures as the foil to its own. The positionality of double distancing also requires an openness of mind in face of difference. Rather than doing violence to the alterity by explaining it within the limits of one’s own cultural framework, one should keep the framework open and let the difference challenge it, revise it and expand it to what Gadamer calls “the fusion of horizon.”

There is no pure discursive space in cross-cultural study, only a dialogic mode of cross-cultural interpretation. The dialogic mode means to dislodge the dominant theoretical paradigms and call for dialogues, negotiations, and interactions among critics, texts and various discourses.

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