The man who finds his country sweet is only a raw beginner; the man for whom each country is as his own is already strong; but only the man for whom the whole world is as a foreign country is perfect.

—by Hugh of Saint Victor (1096?-1141)

读万卷书，行万里路。——中国古训

(Read ten thousand volumes; travel ten thousand *li*s. —an ancient Chinese maxim)

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The Question of Cross-Cultural Understanding in the Transcultural Travel Narratives about Post-1949 China

by

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For Xiaoguang and Zhenchun

who accompanied me along this journey

Abstract

My dissertation, “The Question of Cross-Cultural Understanding in the Transcultural Travel Narratives about Post-1949 China,” aims to intervene in the genre of travel writing and its critical scholarship by studying a flourishing but under-explored archive. Travel literature about (post-) Communist China is abundant and has been proliferating since 1979 when China began to implement its open-door policy. Yet its scholarship is surprisingly scanty. Meanwhile, in the field of travel literature studies, many critics read the genre as one that articulates Western imperialism, an archive where peoples and cultures are defined within conveniently maintained boundaries between home and abroad, West and non-West. Others—in the field of literary and cultural studies as well as other disciplines—have started to question the binary power relationship. However, some of this work may well reinforce the binary opposition, seeking only evidences of the traveller’s powerlessness in relation to the native; and some, conceiving travel only on a geographical plane, seems unable to transcend the dichotomy of home and abroad, East and West at a theoretical level.

My project is committed to further interrogating the binarism constructed by the genre of travel and its scholarship. My intervention is not to argue who gets an upper hand in a hierarchical relationship, but to challenge the stability of the hierarchy by foregrounding the contingency and complexity of cross-cultural relationships. My dissertation engages with the key issue of cross-cultural understanding and explicates various modalities of the traveller’s interpretation of

otherness. By reading Canadian journalist Jan Wong, geophysicist Jock Tuzo Wilson, US Peace Corps volunteer Peter Hessler, American anthropologist Hill Gates, and humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, I examine the ways in which the Western traveller negotiates and interprets foreignness, and probe the consequences of transcultural interactions. The overall argument of my dissertation—in dialogue with other scholarship in the field—is that travel not only (re)produces cultural differences but also paradoxically engenders a cosmopolitan potential that recognizes but transcends them.

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Introduction

> . . . the ‘post-colonial’ . . . obliges us to re-read the binaries as forms of transculturation, of cultural translation, destined to trouble the here/there cultural binaries for ever. (Hall, “When” 247)

> . . . the term ‘post-colonial’ is not merely descriptive of ‘this’ society rather than ‘that’, or of ‘then’ and ‘now’. It re-reads ‘colonisation’ as part of an essentially transnational and transcultural ‘global’ process—and it produces a decentred, diasporic or ‘global’ rewriting of earlier, nation-centred imperial grand narratives. (Hall, “When” 247)

> . . . the only place in which the human subject dwells is between. (Radhakrishnan 8)

The Traveller as a Transcultural Subject

Reflecting on my travel experience in Canada, I always wonder how much one’s understanding of a place is affected by preconceptions, and how far one can go beyond them through the experience of travel to obtain a new understanding of home and abroad. I remember how excited I was when the University of Alberta granted me the FS Chia PhD Scholarship, which meant that I was able to travel to Canada, a country I imagined as a paradise on earth where people enjoy the best social welfare and a place where so many Chinese have made their second homes.

The experience of travelling in Canada, however, resulted in successive cultural shocks; my idealized knowledge about this country was constantly contradicted by other versions I learned on arrival. In a course taken in the first semester, I was astounded when reading about Canada's Residential Schools where First Nations children were starved, raped, and tortured: a country that enjoyed the reputation of peace and equality also implemented ghastly racist and inhuman policies! Then in a brief tour in the summer of 2006, I learned about the social conditions of downtown eastside Vancouver where underprivileged women, trapped in drug use and prostitution, are constantly abused and even assassinated. They are still missing,[1] and those remaining on the streets are neglected and stay peripheral in an affluent society that I imagined championed peace and equality.

The gap between my imagination about the traveled place and the reality I have learned and experienced in the place catalyzed a reconfiguration of my understandings of both Canada and China, my home country. I started to distance myself from my idealized perception of Canada as a country of paradise, knowing that, though Canada in general provided a better life for its residents and citizens compared to China now, it was not as free from problems as the circulation of its stereotypes and my previous scanty knowledge allowed me to envision. At the same time, I acquired a critical attitude toward things at home: while Canada enforced a different policy for aboriginal peoples, didn't China do the same thing to its minority peoples too? Although my limited knowledge forbade me to tell

[1] *West Coast Line* has a special issue on the representations of missing and murdered women in Vancouver and British Columbia on top of other places. See *West Coast Line* 41:1 (Spring 2007).

how different China is from Canada in terms of the nature of these policies, I could not help wondering.

Essential to this reconfiguration of China and Canada is the comparative vision as a result of travel that seems to me inevitable. This vision not only showed the similarities that connected two apparently different countries but also generated a critical distance from both places. With regard to the social reality of women in the downtown eastside Vancouver, it disrupted my romanticized vision of Canada but at the same time made me think naturally how equally miserable some Chinese women's lives were. Those in Dongguan and other economically advanced places in China were (and still are) cornered into the same situation of prostitution and drug addiction, and some were made to work overtime underpaid fourteen hours a day.[2] I began to realize there was almost no attention paid to their deplorable condition, and such a belated observation alerts me to my blindness: without the comparison of the culturescape in the traveled place, I wonder how long I would have had to wait to see the same social ills in my home country.

In retrospect, this personal travel experience and the resulting change of my understanding of places seems sketchy and naïve. Nevertheless, it brings to the foreground the essential question of cross-cultural understanding that my thesis undertakes to address. My transcultural experience shows that travel contains a gradual distancing from one's preconceived notions about the traveled place, engenders a new understanding of one's home country because of the

[2] See Tiantian Zheng's work on female sex works in Dalian for instance, *Red Lights: The Lives of Sex Workers in Postsocialist China* (2009).

comparative vision obtained through travel, and constitutes s a process where the traveller is able to see the connections between cultures that are previously conceived to be "remote" from each other. It indicates to me that travel is not just about going to places, as James Clifford seems to indicate;[3] it is the conceptual movement and perspectival shifts geographical displacement catalyzes that makes travel experience enriching, and this forms the core of the question I intend to explore in this thesis.

My reading of travel literature about post-1949 China has placed on view a mixed picture: a large corpus of texts represent a somewhat static process of understanding of China and home, and another few record travel experiences as transformative. So, when engaging with these texts, I am curious to know how travel elicits or does not elicit a change of the traveller's vision and how such a change affects the interpretation of the foreign and home cultures. Paul Theroux's *Riding the Iron Rooster: By Train through China* (1988), for instance, largely confirms his preconceptions about the visited country; his contact with the traveled space reinforces the unbridgeable gap between China and the West he imagines prior to his travel. Jan Wong's travel account, *Red China Blues: My Long March from Mao to Now* (1996), does involve a change of vision of home and abroad, as travel in China results in a disillusion about her belief in Chinese Communism. Yet what is problematic is that her change of understanding of the visited country shuffles between two seemingly disconnected, oppositional poles;

[3] James Clifford's anthropological approach to travel seems to have neglected the epistemological change during the course of travel. Please see my detailed inquiry in the following section.

China is either a country where she imagines she can live out her egalitarian utopia or one that should be condemned and ridiculed when it fails to meet her expectations. What is lacking are the comparative moments during her change of vision that allows her to see the complexity of the country she visits and the connection of the places she dwells in.

Peter Hessler's *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze* (2001), however, stages a complicated process of interaction between the traveller and the traveled place, during which the self-other divide is disrupted and becomes unstable, elusive, and even artificial. In his writing, he gradually develops a new identity as he dialogues with Fuling, the small town where he lives for two years as a U. S. Peace Corps volunteer. Without losing his American self, he is able to see things from the perspective of the other, which brings about new and broader visions of both China and home. Another case of travel, Yi-Fu Tuan's brief tour in China recorded in *Coming Home to China* (2007), lasts only two and a half weeks, yet it engenders a contemplation of self and home as rooted but constantly evolving through interaction with new places.

These different modes of representation about the experience of travel trigger immediate questions:[4] given that the traveller is a transcultural subject experiencing conflicting cultural forces in the "contact zone" (Pratt, *Imperial* 6), why do travel writers represent their understanding of home and abroad so differently ranging from unchangeable to evolving? Is cross-cultural

[4] For representation in the context of ethnographical travel, see J. Clifford, "Introduction" 6-7. For the concept of representation, see also Eagleton 118; Hutcheon 105-23; White 121-34.

understanding possible? And how do I define it? Essentially, what do the representations of understanding of foreign and home culture have to say about the relations between self and other, home and abroad?

Travel Writing and the Question of Travel

These research questions triggered by my personal travel experience also coincide with my critical engagement with the existing scholarship about travel writing and the question of travel on a broader scale. My study of the scholarship foregrounds the necessity of an on-going critical inquiry about the binarism constructed by this particular genre.[5]

Some critics of travel writing argue that this is a genre that constructs the hierarchies between the imperialist West and the non-Western space; their readings examine various representational strategies employed in travel narratives and conclude that the diverse rhetorical modes embody the uniform ideological commitment to re-inscribing the colonial relations between the West and the non-West. Mary Louise Pratt's seminal work *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), for instance, reads travel writing about Africa and South America from 1750 to 1980 as following an imperialist rhetoric where travel

[5] My intended definition of the genre of travel writing is a broad one and may include many possible forms such as travel memoir, journalistic account, missionary writing, anthropologists' fieldwork notes, and even travel guide. I read travel literature as fictional in the sense that, despite its apparent connection to the actuality of travel experience, it is subjectively constructed and ideologically charged. Therefore, travel writing for me is more a rhetoric than a genre; like Mary L. Pratt, I tend not to "circumscribe travel writing as a genre" but to "suggest its heterogeneity and its interactions with other kinds of expression" (Pratt, *Imperial* 11).

writers codify a polarized relation between home and abroad. She observes two predominant subgenres of the eighteen-century travel writing, namely, "scientific report" (which can be further categorized as maritime paradigm and interior exploration) and "survival literature" (Pratt, *Imperial* 20). She argues that, although drastically different in form, they both serve the same ideological goal of constructing a rational, mobile, progressive Europe and its primitive, static, and uncivilized African and South American other.[6]

Pratt also identifies in her study a myriad of representational strategies with which the travel writers other the traveled space. "Estheticization, density of meaning, and domination" are the three characteristics she has recognized that are typical of (post)colonial travel writing (Pratt, *Imperial* 217). Travel writers such as Richard Burton and Paul Theroux create density of meaning through "the plentiful use of adjectives, and a general proliferation of concrete, material referents introduced either literally or as metaphors" (217). Estheticization enables them to depict the traveled place as characterized by "beauty, symmetry, order, the sublime" in Burton's case or, in Theroux's, by "ugliness, incongruity, disorder, and triviality" (217). In both ways, the writers produce stereotypes—either positive or negative—to codify the visited place as "the Other."

Also significant, according to Pratt, is the strategy of what she calls "anti-conquest" by which the travel writers "seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (*Imperial* 7). She provides a list of

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[6] Pratt also discusses these two subgenres in her essay entitled "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen." *Critical Inquiry* 12:1 (Autumn1985): 119-43.

examples of this representational mode such as the figure of "the seeing-man" "whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess" (7), "deculturation" of the natives as natural and non-historical beings (53), the feminization of the male traveller by "the indigenous female gaze" in Mongo Park's travel narrative (82), the "confessional" or self-questioning but non-transformative mode of John Barrow (67), and the "female anti-conquest" where female travel writer such as Anna Maria Falconbridge shares the same imperative for innocence with the male writers though the imperative is fulfilled in a different and gendered way (105).[7]

Pratt has laudably contributed to the study of travel writing by identifying the tradition of the genre, one that goes hand in hand with Western imperialist expansion, providing a way of reading that pays "serious attention to the conventions of representation" that fabricate a superior West in opposition to its inferior non-Western other (*Imperial* 11). However, her "serious attention" seems to have excluded the complexities of cross-cultural interactions taking place in the contact zone as is suggested by the term "transculturation" in her book title.[8] She

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[7] Pratt observes that Falconbridge's rhetoric is "less an antithesis to male rhetoric of discovery and possession than its exact *complement*" (*Imperial* 105). "Her language," in particular, "shares the same imperative for innocence as Park, Barrow, or Stedman, though the imperative is fulfilled in a different way: Falconbridge claims an innocence already given by her gender" (Partt, *Imperial* 105).

[8] When borrowing "transculturation" from Fernando Ortiz, Pratt declares that her purpose is to appropriate the concept to avoid "reproducing the dynamics of possession and innocence" despite her analysis of those dynamics, and she emphasizes taking into account the subordinated groups' role in re-organizing and reinventing materials transmitted to them by a dominant culture (6). It is plausible that she applies the critical impetus of the term to deconstruct the authority of the texts she reads. But it seems to me that it is not enough to absorb the critical spirit of the term only on a theoretical level. While demonstrating the power of the imperialist travel writing as omnipresent and seemingly inviolate, Pratt's critical

seems quite certain of the transformative force of intercultural contact when critiquing John Barrow, noticing that "Barrow's loss of innocence produces no new self, no new relations of speech" (Pratt, *Imperial* 67), but one finds not much space in her book for the transformation she expects to see in the experience of travel. In fact, her minute examination of the imperialist rhetoric in travel writing across an extensive historical and geographical span leaves me wondering: is the binary logic of self and other problematized or reinforced?

A similar way of reading travel writing is seen in David Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (1993). This work groups travel writing with journalism, exploration narratives, and the memoirs of colonial officials as the constituent of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial discourse. Like Pratt, Spurr theorizes twelve rhetorical modes of the colonialist non-fiction, showcasing "a range of tropes, conceptual categories, and logical operations" with which Western travellers represent non-Western peoples as the antithetical other (3).

Ali Behdad's *Belated Travellers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (1994), in a similar fashion, recognizes the discourse of Orientalism constructed in the nineteenth-century travelogues and travel guides, and argues that the travellers' discursive practices multiply orientalist representation that sustains the colonial power relations between the West and the Islamic. Illuminating the "dispersive tactics, discursive heterogeneities, strategic

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perspective contains a material effect that contradicts the critical momentum she means to imbibe from the term. For Pratt's appropriation of the term, see Pratt, *Imperial* 6, 228.

irregularities, and historical discontinuities" within the orientalist travel discourse, he contends that the ideological consistency of domination is maintained precisely through "Orientalism's ambivalence and discursive discontinuities" (Behdad 134, 135). For him, oppositions or counterideologies are absent from a hegemonic discourse: "oppositions . . . was not a negative force outside the dominant, but a formative element that mediated the production and maintenance of orientalist power and knowledge" (1-2). So, like Pratt and Spurr, Behdad reads travel writing as a particular corpus of texts with an entrenched ideological commitment to constructing Western imperialist power and its hierarchical relationship to a non-Western space. This way of reading enhances the critical awareness of the imperialist ideology within the discourse of Western travel about non-Western place, which informs my own reading of travel literature. But this critical focus also seems to have rendered Western imperialist power monolithic and inviolate, and besides, it has left out other aspects of travel that cannot be subsumed within the critical framework it offers.

These other aspects of travel have been accounted for by a growing number of scholars. In the introduction to *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit* (1999), Steve Clark sees the limited nature of the approach to travel literature shown in Pratt, Spurr, Behdad and the like; without denying the legacy of colonialism as generic in travel genre, Clark draws attention to the vulnerability and susceptibility of the Western traveller. He identifies the cases in which the traveller is constantly shaped by the mobile experience, showing that the traveller is susceptible to "perpetual redefinition" as a result of

separation from family, home and community, and that the old self can never remain the same as the journey progresses (Clark 13). He sheds lights on travel as "voluntarily self-imposed disruption" of the integral sense of self and a revelation of the traveller's "cultural status (or lack of it)" in the domestic context (14). Also, he takes into consideration the embarrassing moments of travel caused by "misunderstanding, presumption, and the catalogue of errors and endemic lack of dignity to which any cross-cultural interchange must be sensible" (14). Clark's is "a proleptic reading" of (post)colonial travel literature: readers need to see what is absent from the narrative—the fundamental lack, the feeling of isolation, the sense of failure which necessitates departure—that constitutes the "pretext for imperial expansion" (15); the traveller who fabricates stories as the conqueror, the usurper, the enslaver is also guilty of what is to be done.

In *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (1998), Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan highlight the self-reflexive nature of travel writing produced after the Second World War. When reading their primary texts as "an imperialist discourse," they do not ignore the fact that "travel writers . . . have always had a say in the critical reassessment of their own [people and cultures]," and in this sense, travel writing "can be seen as a useful vehicle of cultural self-perception; as a barometer for changing views on other ('foreign,' 'non-Western') cultures; and as a trigger for the informational circuits that tap us in to the wider world" (xiii). In other words, Holland and Huggan call attention to the travel genre as a potential reversal of the gaze upon the other: it contains spaces for the evaluation of the travelling self and the culture from which s/he

comes. Also evident in Holland and Huggan's approach is that travel writing illuminates the moments of transformation of the travellers' visions of foreign cultures and suggests multiplicity of the dimensions of travel that have not yet been given voice to by the hegemony of Western travel discourse.

Dennis Porter's study of European travel writing from mid-eighteenth century up to the present also attends to the transformative nature of travel. Drawing from Michel Foucault's argument for exploration and self-transformation through a dialogic engagement with alien modes of life, Dennis Porter's work, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (1991), contains a major premise that the most interesting travel writers "have managed to combine explorations in the world with self-exploration": "[t]hey submitted themselves to the challenge of travel and, in the process, managed . . . to know themselves differently" (5). Also, enlightened by the theory of deconstruction and Roland Barthes's definition of literature, Dennis Porter sees the subversive nature from within travel texts, maintaining that travel writing contains a "literary cunning" that willy-nilly undermines the information it codifies (7). He is also illuminated by psychoanalytic theory and considers the motivations of travel such as the pursuit of what is lacking at home, the pleasure of meeting the exotic, the desire to transgress boundaries, and so on, in order to attend to the dimensions of travel still rejected by the conventions of the genre.

Although Clark, Holland and Huggan, and Dennis Porter engage with different travel texts, their works all highlight the subject position of Western traveller in non-Western space. All challenge not only the power relations

codified by the convention of Western travel writing but also the scholarship that reinforces the hierarchical relations between the West and non-West. Their approach to travel writing suggests that it is not just a genre where cultural hierarchies are constructed and boundaries reinforced; it can also be a place where authority, power, and the stability of hierarchies and boundaries are called into question.

Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk contribute to the scholarship that reads against the convention of travel writing by giving voice to the experiences of travel of the marginal social groups. They edit *Travel Worlds: Journeys in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (1999) to feature a collection of writings—essays, poems and fictions—in order "to chart other directions and dimensions, and to anticipate other neglected horizons" that have been excluded by the (post)colonialist travel discourse (Kaur and Hutnyk 12). So, in their book, we find the kind of travel that is not a pastime of the socially privileged but a means of survival of the subordinate group; we learn the travel narratives of diasporic Asians that demonstrate "the creative fusion of culture reference points, rather than exemplifying an entrapment between the 'two cultures' of East and West" (Kaur and Hutnyk 10); we see still another mode of travel back and forth between various destinations highlighting the traveller's debts to various homes, where home is redefined as tied more to "a sense of belongingness" to various places traveled than to any "specific geographical and physical presence" (Housee 153).

My present study of travel writing is inspired by Kaur and Hutnyk's articulation of the subaltern travel experience and the effort to seek other

dimensions of Western travel experience shown in the works by Clark, Holland and Huggan, and Dennis Porter. But I also think that their deconstruction of the power of the dominant risks the trap of tautology: to account for the powerless without giving sufficient consideration to the powerful follows the same logic of attending to the omnipresence of power without taking into account its vulnerability. What seems significant to me is that, to deconstruct the binarism of the genre of travel, one needs not only to examine diverse modes of travel as previous scholars have done, but also to continue to theorize the traveller's conceptual shift as a result of transcultural experience.[9]

J. Clifford's comparative cultural studies approach to the question of travel continues to urge me to think in this direction. In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), he advocates attending to "everyday practices of dwelling and travelling: travelling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-travelling" (J. Clifford, 36). J. Clifford's concept of "travelling-in-dwelling" positions the anthropologist—a particular kind of traveller—as one of "the natives" of the visited society; s/he needs to learn their culture and language to develop "both personal and 'cultural' competence" (*Routes* 22). The traveller, in this sense, is also a dweller; the practice of participant-observation is "a sort of mini-immigration," and the traveled place is "a home away from home" (*Routes* 22). Here, not only the binary oppositions of the traveller and the traveled,

[9] The self-reflexive and transformative nature of travel writing identified by Clark, Holland and Huggan, and Dennis Porter embodies the conceptual shift of the traveller I am suggesting here. My thesis is intended to probe both these and other aspects of epistemological change engendered by transcultural travel as indicated in the title of the thesis "the question of cross-cultural understanding."

mobility and stasis, the native and the diasporic, home and abroad need to be reconceptualized, but also travel is conceived as an experience of on-going negotiation between the traveller and the space where s/he travels.

But what are the specifics of negotiating with the foreign culture? J. Clifford's idea of travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling problematizes travel binaries by illuminating the connections between travelling and dwelling, the traveller and the native, but what *is* the relationship between the two entities of each dichotomy after all? And how do we conceptualize the travelling self in relation to the travelled other in the process of cultural translation? Without investigating the epistemological movement, travel, as is seen by J. Clifford, seems to be only about going and staying in a culturally different place and can only be conceived at the level of physical movement (travelling) and time duration within the traveled place (dwelling).[10] In other words, J. Clifford brings to light travel as a process of negotiation with a new culture that involves a conceptual movement. However, he leaves out the specifics of transcultural communication that may illuminate the dynamics of self-other relations as well as the productive impact of this critical focus.

It is through the dialogue with the existing scholarship about travel and travel writing as outlined above that this present work gradually comes into being. I situate my reading of travel narratives about post-1949 China in the midst of a critical debate in order to further challenge the literary and scholarly binarism evident in the discourse *of* and *about* travel. To question the self-other binary

[10] Arnold Krupat calls James Clifford's critical stance "ethnographic conjucturalism"—a stance "constantly moving between cultures" (102).

represented in the relation of Western traveller to non-Western space, I read my primary archive neither by focusing exclusively on the subaltern's travel experience as Kaur and Hutnyk choose to do, nor by giving voice to what is silenced by the hegemony of Western travel discourse as Clark suggests, but by attending to the nuances of cross-cultural interplay where the conceptual movement of the traveller is involved. I intend to demonstrate the intricacy and contingency of the relations between the traveller and the native. My contention is that the binaries such as self and other, home and abroad, should be conceived on a relational rather than hierarchical plane where the power relations can never remain stable.

Travel writing about China

I choose travel writing about post-1949 China as a case study to comprehend the question of cross-cultural understanding because this contributes to the particular scholarly field of travel literature pertaining to China, especially China in the post-Mao period, an area that has not yet been sufficiently explored. Since 1979 when China implemented its open-door policy, travel books about China on the English-speaking market have been proliferating but remain a relatively under-explored archive. Although there have been reviews about these books here and there, they are mostly blurbs which promote rather than critically engage with these books.[11] Choosing this case study not only charts a rarely marked territory of scholarship but also, by asking the question of cross-cultural

[11] See, for instance, Buck 57-58, Campbell, Foran, Gittings 173-75, Hull and Rawlinson 58, Leach 57, Skow, and Zong 40.

understanding, positions the unmarked territory in relation to the vast map of travel literature studies as a whole.

Given that most studies pertaining to travel writing about China started to emerge after 1999, my project also turns out to join this new ascendance of scholarship by bringing in a different critical voice. As far as my research goes, I have identified two major debates within the field of travel literature studies about China. The first debate resonates with that happening in the larger field of travel literature studies in general, which I discussed earlier, represented on the one hand by the critique on the orientalist ideology of the texts, and on the other, by the effort to complicate the orientalist voice of the narratives. In reading Australian travel accounts produced during 1963 to 1973, Timothy Kendall explicates the derivative, subjective, contingent, restrictive nature of the representation of China and argues that these representational features follow the conventional vision of China as the oriental other of the West dating back to Marco Polo's time. While this critical method follows the (post)colonialist reading of travel genre, studies by May C. Chan and Susan S. Thurin are committed to problematize the orientalist gaze of Western travellers. Chan's doctoral dissertation "Truth Stranger Than Fiction: British Travel Writing on China 1880-1916" (2005) complicates British travellers' range of voices by analyzing how their travel accounts disclose "a shared humanity" between the travellers and the Chinese and how the myth of the stereotype about Britishness is "exploded by these narratives, even as the writers strive to reify and assert its power abroad" (287). Thurin, in a similar fashion, fleshes out the paradoxical nature of writing

about China in her study entitled *Victorian Travellers and the Opening of China, 1842-1907* (1999): "Most travellers find much to praise as well as fault . . . calling China both backward and the most well-educated society on earth" (17). For Thurin, Pratt's theory of gazing as an imperialist trope of conquering is inapplicable to the texts she studies: all the six travellers she reads have experienced Chinese natives' gazing back at them as "foreign devils," and are occidentalized by the curious gaze of the Chinese.

Another debate rises with Nicholas Clifford's approach "of a historian, not a literary or cultural critic" to travel documents about China represented in his work *"A Truthful Impression of the Country": British and American Travel Writing in China, 1880-1949* (2001). Different from most scholars of travel and travel writing who challenge the authenticity of the genre regarding its description of the other culture, N. Clifford accounts for the truthfulness of travel writing, arguing that "the study of travel writing must pay attention not only to the representations and discursive strategies of travel texts themselves but also [to] . . . the objective situations of the peoples and cultures they purport to describe as well as the changes taking place therein" (xix). He also argues that "travel writers claim a particular kind of veracity and ask for a peculiar kind of trust on the part of those readers," and his reading follows the travel writers' quest for authenticity, "the desire to discover what it is that constitutes the true heart of the culture and people under observation" (N. Clifford xix-xx). For me, N. Clifford's study of travel is laudable in the sense that his approach stresses the material and historical context of travel. Yet his methodology, while searching for travel accounts'

authenticity in depicting the "true heart of the culture and people under observation," also leaves me wondering how it does not participate in reinforcing cultural essentialism.

Therefore, I hope my present work also speaks to the studies conducted in the field of travel writing about China as outlined above. I participate in the critical inquiry about the binary rhetoric from a new perspective, looking in particular at the process of cultural translation and the consequences of travel without neglecting the historical context where the represented travels take place. In addition, with the ascending significance of China on the global stage and an increasing interest from the West to know the country in better terms, my project is not just important on a theoretical level; it offers—practically—a productive way of understanding China, not by producing the actual knowledge about it as a Sinologist would do, but by critiquing the binary logic of knowing the country as represented in travel narratives.

The Question of Cross-Cultural Understanding

In this thesis, I endeavour to comprehend the question of cross-cultural understanding by examining the specific ways in which the Western traveller *negotiates* and *interprets* otherness as a temporary dweller in the foreign space of post-1949 China. By "cross-cultural understanding," I do not presume that there exists a "real" China that needs to be understood as it is, nor will I conduct this project as a quest for an "authentic" version about Chinese people or culture, if

such a version exists at all.[12] On the contrary, I remain skeptical about the assumption that a culture has an "essence" or "soul" that defines the culture as it stands.[13] I also differentiate my use of the term from the conventional disciplinary assumption of anthropology that designates a foreign culture to be understandable on the basis of the Western ontological system. Cross-cultural understanding, for me, is a potential of comprehension set in motion by the catalyst of transcultural travel, a potential allowing (or disallowing) the travelling subject to see connections between cultures through successive comparisons, contrasts, approximations, and translations. By probing the question of cross-cultural understanding, I aspire to study travellers' different ways of translating foreignness as represented in my primary texts and to comprehend through the traveller's cultural translation the political, social, historical, and philosophical ramifications of "Western travel" in post-1949 China. In particular, I illuminate various modalities of self-other relations by investigating the traveller's understanding of the familiar and the strange, home and abroad, self and other in order to further question the binarism *of* and *about* the discourse of travel.

The question of cross-cultural understanding is approached in five chapters of this thesis. In the first chapter, I engage with the texts that conspicuously reproduce the binary epistemological logic—books by Canadian journalist Jan Wong, namely, *Red China Blues: My Long March from Mao to*

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[12] It is my belief that China is a representation; it means different things for different people and in different contexts. There is no totalizing version of China. For the idea that "China is written," see Hayot xi.

[13] This assumption embodies the notion of cultural essentialism which I remain critical about. There are numerous criticisms on the essentialist view of culture. For a relatively recent one, see Appiah, "The Case for Contamination" (2006).

Now (1996) and *Beijing Confidential: A Tale of Comrades Lost and Found* (2007). Central to my critique is the epistemological Manichaeism and the "ontological imperialism" Wong's writing embodies.[14] The problematic of binarism confines her travel narrative within the conventional imperialistic rhetoric which essentializes the antithesis between China and the West. Yet, I argue that the difference between China and "the West" is not indisputable however authentic the rhetorical maneuvers render it so; the "literary cunning" of the narrative subverts the encoded dichotomies and reveals the traveller as the transcultural subject who cannot avoid the influence of the other no matter how reluctant she is to admit in her own writing (Dennis Porter 7).

Jock T. Wilson's *One Chinese Moon* (1960), Hill Gates's travel book *Looking for Chengdu: A Woman's Adventures in China* (1999) and Peter Hessler's *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze* (2001) are respectively the focuses of my second, third and fourth chapters. These texts provide a complicated understanding of the relationship between self and other, and home and abroad. Wilson's book records his travel to Great Leap Forward China in 1958 as a Canadian geophysicist. Despite that his trip took place at the height of the Cold War and when Canada had not yet established diplomatic relations with China, his writing showcases a conscious effort to reach an understanding of China based upon his recognition of the common ground underneath striking national, cultural, and political disparities. Wilson comprehends cultural

[14] My use of the term Manichaeism comes from Abdul R. JanMohamed's essay "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature" (1985). For the concept of "ontological imperialism," see Levinas 44.

difference not as an obstacle to knowing a foreign culture, but as a puzzle that elicits interest in that culture and causes an urge to learn the culture better. The process of interacting with the foreign culture not only brings about an insightful vision of home but also results in a global consciousness throwing into doubt the constructed boundaries between nations and cultures.

Hessler's book provides a travel instance "anthropological" in nature. With a keen interest to learn the Chinese language and become a better writer through the experience of Chinese culture, Hessler proves a thoughtful learner of the country he visits. His two years of teaching and living in Fuling as a U. S. Peace Corps volunteer unfold a dialogical and bidirectional process of negotiating with the strange place. For him, cross-cultural understanding is achieved by bracketing his familiar ways of knowing when encountering the other, by identifying the commonality between two cultures, and by perceiving the visited culture within its own historical and socio-cultural context. His text instantiates the contact zone as an in-between space where the self-other binary can seldom hold stable, a space where the old, coherent sense of self is disrupted and a new self emerges with an "enlarged" understanding of self and other, and home and away.

Gates's book offers an anthropologist's account of China that also destabilizes the binary oppositions. My fourth chapter peruses her writing as a case study of cultural translation that testifies both the autonomy of self and other and their interdependent relationship. Theoretically and practically, Gates endorses what I call the contextualized translation of China, with which she

interprets the country by putting it in its own cultural and historical context; this, in turn, engenders her incisive understanding of self, culture, and travel literature itself. At the same time, Gates's writing reveals the untranslatability of self and culture evident in her pronounced Anglo-American subjectivity and the domestic vocabularies, values, and interests that she inscribes during the course of translation. The untranslatability, I argue, rather than a signal of the unbridgeable gap between self and other, and home and abroad, emblemizes the autonomy of each side and opens up a space for the traveller's sustained efforts to understand and translate otherness, which proves in turn to be a most productive way of rediscovering herself.

Yi-Fu Tuan's *Coming Home to China* (2007), representing a distinguished American humanist geographer's travel to his ancestral home, is studied in the fifth chapter of the thesis. Tuan's travel narrative to China is embedded in the account of his other travels elsewhere around the world. His contact with various places is indispensable to his understanding of self, place, and culture. The transcultural subject Tuan represents is a unique travelling self moulded by history, language, and geography but one that is also constantly changing and growing, defying any fixed definition by racial, national, cultural, and gender labels.[15] Tuan also illuminates an open-ended notion of home and communal selfhood; home, for him, is different from abroad by seamlessly relating to it, being transformed by it, enlarged and enriched by it, a place that has its enclosure but at the same time remains open to the sphere that is outside and foreign.

[15] With regard to gender, see Tuan's autobiography *Who Am I* (1999).

The question of cross-cultural understanding, as represented in the primary texts of this project, refers not only to the understanding of the foreign but also to a new perception of the familiar. The process of defamiliarization as a result of travel, I believe, is significant to comprehending an alien culture. A better understanding of the alien culture is not to confirm what one already knows about the culture but to see elements that contradict presumptions and to envisage connections between home and the traveled place. The understanding of the foreign place in turn brings about a new vision of home and the traveller's own self because travel defamiliarizes, and the process of defamiliarization allows the traveller to see the familiar with new eyes.

Hence the critical impetus of my thesis: contemplating the question of cross-cultural understanding highlights the trope of travel as powerful in destabilizing the boundaries between cultures. Pointing to the binary epistemological problematic, the concept of transcultural understanding challenges the master trope of travel that endorses Western imperialism predicated upon the allegory of Manichaeism. It brings to light the complexity and contingency of the self-other relationship, showing that the two entities are more interdependent and mutually influential than oppositional and antithetical.

Enlightening Concepts and Ideas

Along the journey of my study, many works have offered me enlightening thoughts that bring me to my present position. I have already shown how postcolonial scholarship of travel writing and anthropology of travel both guide

my own reading of travel books and elicit my critical responses to their various approaches to the study of travel. Now I would also mention some concepts that are particularly beneficial in helping me formulate the critical framework within which I read my primary texts.

Homi Bhabha's contemplation of cultural difference enables me to see the interdependent relationship between self and other on a theoretical level. In his essay "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" (1993), Bhabha explains that "[c]ultural difference marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification, through processes of negotiation" (313). It can never stay fixed or be essentialized, or to use his words, "[t]he signs of cultural difference cannot . . . be unitary or individual forms of identity" because these signs always point to other systems of knowledge and representation, which always leaves them "open to cultural translation" (313). Bhabha sees in cultural difference an "*uncanny* structure" that "enables us to coincide with forms of activity which are both *at once ours and other*" (313). For this theorist, cultural difference is not a sign that posits self and other as polar opposites and forecloses connections between them, but rather, one that denotes an internal link between the two precisely because of their difference. This perception of cultural difference encourages me to conceive cross-cultural understanding as not only possible, but also inevitable in the globalized context that travel and travel writing provides.

Emmanuel Levinas's concept of egology helps me think imperialism on the ontological plane. The problematic of egology, according to Levinas, is its

tyrannical rendition of the other for the satisfaction of the self. While a productive pursuit of knowledge depends on one's openness to the unknown and the critical consciousness of the familiar, Levinas maintains that the knowledge of the other is only accessible by "calling into question of the same," a commitment in line with the "critical essence of knowledge" (43). Failure to do so results in the self's self-centric relation with the other that is characteristic of "ontological imperialism" (44), a relation that is non-ethical and within which the other only remains inscrutable.

Tzvetan Todorov's analysis of the process of a traveller's understanding of the foreign culture in *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* (1993) offers another source of inspiration and helps me pursue a definition of cross-cultural understanding in my own work. He speculates about transcultural travel as a movement toward the level of the universal: the traveller's back and forth move between the foreign culture and home culture catalyzes an involuntary comparative vision where the foreign is understood with the familiar and the familiar is envisioned in new light with the presence of the strange. Cross-cultural understanding is gradually achieved as the traveller envisages a universality between cultures, a universality obtained "by comparison and compromise, with the help of successive approximations," and "a universal that remains as close to the concrete as possible" (Todorov 84).

Another important idea that enlightens my thinking of travel is Kwame A. Appiah's philosophy of "rooted cosmopolitanism" articulated in his work entitled *The Ethics of Identity* (2005). He argues for a cosmopolitan outlook that embraces

cultural difference and diversity, and this is based on taking seriously "the value of human life, and the value of particular human lives, the lives people have made for themselves, within the communities that help lend significance to those lives" (Appiah, *Ethics* 222). A cosmopolitan, according to him, understands the fallacy (limitation) of taking pride in any form of communality including home, community, nation, religion, race, gender, class, etc. At the same time, though, a cosmopolitan has a clear sense of home and rootedness. The rootedness, however, is not bound to a communal mindset but suggestive of openness to foreignness. "Rooted cosmopolitanism" further illustrates the interdependence of self and other, home and abroad.

Transculturation, the concept transported by Mary L. Pratt into the field of travel literature studies, helps me envision the traveller as a transcultural subject. Coined by Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, the term "transculturation" signifies the dialogical and mutually influential state of cultural coexistence in postcolonial Cuba. Speaking against "acculturation" or "deculturation" that connotes the power of the dominant culture, "transculturation" emphasizes the influences of minority cultures and indicates "the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called *neoculturation*" (Ortiz 103). Later, Alan West-Durán further develops Ortiz's idea in his thinking about transcultured identity. He maintains that transculturation "does not abolish difference" but "is syncretic": "The different components do not lose their individuality; they maintain their particular identity and flavor" (West-Durán 972). He also maintains that transculturation entails "a philosophy of listening" that embraces the idea of

"being open and empathic to the other," which embodies the ethics of encounter that is to benefit my definition of cross-cultural understanding (West-Durán 974).

Critical Reflections of the Thesis

This project, charged with an ambition to explicate a travel complex as the convergence of my personal travel experience and my scholarly journey of engaging with various approaches to the study of travel and travel writing, is inevitably eclectic and hard to pinpoint to a particular area or even discipline. It bears the critical consciousness of postcolonialism and remains critical about racial and cultural hierarchies constructed in literary texts, and yet it holds a critical distance from those postcolonialist readings that render these hierarchies hopelessly pervasive and inviolate. It welcomes as an effective methodology both the excavation of buried narratives and attendance to aspects of travel excluded by canonical travel literature. Yet, it deems problematic the same binary logic this approach endorses which simply reverses the oppositions. My project is situated in the field of literary studies but pertains also to anthropology, history, and philosophy. It deals with travel writing in the specific period from 1979 to the present, but relates to other historical periods when dialoguing with the scholarship about early travel writing about China. It is conducted in an English department, but the cultural translation as an essential part of its focus also makes it comparative in nature. So, mine is an eclectic approach because I tend to absorb the critical impetuses of different methodologies to construct my own work. I find it hard to define the disciplinary field represented by this work. If I suggest terms

such as an interdisciplinary study of travel writing, travel writing about post-1949 China, postcolonial travel writing, anthropology of travel, Western perceptions of contemporary China, cross-cultural understanding, cultural translation, transculturation, I also know how vague and deficient all these labels are and how much each requires a careful definition in marking the content of the thesis.

When I say "construct my own work," I understand the ideological nature of this thesis as a critical work. It is based on extensive research, careful reading, theoretical speculations, ethical commitment to the well-being of humanity, and other elements required by the discipline of my field. Nevertheless, this project—like any other critical work—is an ideological construct: it is intended to articulate a particular trope of travel for the particular purpose of speaking against the master trope favoured by the convention of travel genre.

That being said, I hope to make clear my theoretical commitment to a relational critical perspective: I would not castigate or eulogize my subject without carefully considering both its positive and negative sides. For example, while postcolonialism offers an insight into the legacy of colonial history regarding Western representations of the non-West, I would consider how the insight confines and prevents the critic from seeing other aspects of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. While being suspicious of Nicholas Clifford's reinforcement of cultural essentialism in his "historical approach" to travel writing in China, I also see as plausible his commitment to the social, historical, and cultural context of travel. Similarly, when critiquing Jan Wong, I am also aware of the material context of her travels—the legacy of the

Cold War, the publishing industry as part of the capitalist market economy that targets Western readers, for instance—that helps produce the kind of travel books she is good at writing.

But a critical stand needs to be taken and an argument made. I want to make it clear that—at the risk of repetition, when I am critiquing a certain text,[16] I am not unmindful of its positive values. I find this particularly important to declare because I am reading travel literature written by "Western" authors (however problematic the label is), and because I am a reader with a Chinese identity (however insufficient it is to define who I am). This declaration, stated at the outset of my thesis, serves as a self-reminder: I deem it important to maintain a self-critical sagacity when critiquing a "Western" literary text, that is, to remain critically sensitive to possible biases from my cultural background.

[16] Regarding literary criticism, my work aims more at the text itself than its author. When critiquing Jan Wong's text, for example, I do not mean to castigate the writer for producing "bad writing"; rather, I mean to explicate the problematic as represented in her text. I am not in a position to quantify the responsibility of either the text or the author in generating information, but I hope that my choice of a critical stand brings about some kind of social change by focusing on the textual rather than authorial side of a text. With this standpoint, I tend to think of the author as subject to a larger social, political, cultural, historical, and economic system which compels her to produce the writing in a certain way.

Chapter One The Egology of Cross-Cultural Understanding: Jan Wong's Journalistic Travel Writing about China

Near the end of Canadian journalist Jan Wong's recent travel book *Beijing Confidential: A Tale of Comrades Lost and Found* (2007), the writer duplicates the last scene of her earlier travel memoir *Red China Blues: My Long March from Mao to Now* (1996):

> I have changed . . . When I was young, I believed that ideology trumped everything. I thought I should save people from themselves. Now I understand the sheer arrogance of that stance. Having lived in China under Mao, having witnessed the massacre at Tiananmen Square, I now believe in human rights for all. I have raised my boys to respect others, to fight prejudice wherever they see it, to speak out about racism, sexism and homophobia. In my workplace, I am ferocious about freedom of the press and the responsibility that goes with it. I try never to be an innocent bystander—because there is no such thing. (*Beijing* 318-19)

This conclusion reminds us of the similar ending in *Red China Blues*, a book recording her three earlier trips to China first as an exchange college student from McGill University to study at Beijing University between 1972 and 1980 and then, from 1988 to 1994, as the Beijing correspondent of Canada's *The Globe and Mail*. On the last of these trips, she observes that "China had changed, and so had I" (Wong, *Red* 390). Her final proclamation is that she is "suspicious of anything that's too theoretically tidy, too black and white," and that she has a "belief in

human dignity and strength" (Wong, *Red* 390). So, in both books, Wong emphasizes her resolute commitment to social justice and her newly transformed insight and complicated vision of the world as a result of her travel in China.

In spite of Wong's self-proclaimed egalitarianism, I sense that her insights remain predicated on the binary logic of the self and the other that informs what Emmanuel Levinas would call the "egology" of understanding otherness. For Levinas, this "egology" is an ontology which seeks pleasure by "a reduction of the other to the same" (43). Or, in other words, it is a way of knowing, or a system of thought, which tyrannically interprets the other in accordance with its own cognitive habit and does not make the effort to understand the other by a "calling into question of the same" (Levinas 43).

It is not hard to see that, in both of Wong's books, her alleged changes are more of a radical reversal of China with home than a genuinely dialogical, interactive exploration of the two places. Before her first visit to China in 1972, Wong imagines the country as a paradise of equality and makes an effort to fit into its social environment. She believes, like others of her generation who grew up in the rebellious 1960s and 1970s, that her own country of Canada is "one of those running dogs of US imperialism" and that "Western society was a hopeless mess of racism, exploitation and shopping malls" (Wong, *Red* 12). China, with its Communist system allegedly meant to protect the interests of the downtrodden and as a place where the other half of her cultural heritage is rooted,[17] is idealized

[17] Wong's grandfather immigrated to Canada from Canton province in China in late nineteenth century. See the immigration history of her family in *Red* 13-14, 23-29.

as the epitome of "harmony and perfection" (Wong, *Red* 12). Yet, after travelling in China, Wong's vision reverses. No longer the utopian paradise, China becomes almost exclusively distasteful in her eyes. Her focus on China's problems, her distortion of the culture, and her alienating and othering portrayal of the Chinese people render the country a contemporary "heart of darkness."[18] Early in the book, when reflecting in hindsight about the value of Maoism versus drugs and alcohol—two icons she conveniently selects to represent Western culture—Wong implicitly designates Mao as more destructive (*Red* 15). And, near the end of her memoir, she writes:

> The Western world, especially Canada, is far more socialistic than China has ever been, with its free public education, universal medicare, unemployment insurance, old-age pensions and government funding for television ads against domestic violence. Living in China has made me appreciate my own country, with its tiny, ethnically diverse population of unassuming donut-eaters. I had gone all the way to China to find an idealistic, revolutionary society when I already had it right at home. (Wong, *Red* 390)

Obviously, Wong's understanding of home and the visited country shuttles between two oppositional poles—China versus "the Western world, especially Canada." Either "good" or "bad," China and "the West" are always subjected to her monological, non-reciprocal interpretation.

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[18] I am appropriating Joseph Conrad's title of his novel *Heart of Darkness*.

The egology of her understanding of home and abroad proves to be intrinsically problematic and causes crisis in her narratives. When Wong proclaims in both her travel accounts her professional as well as maternal commitment to promoting human equality and social justice,[19] her bifurcating epistemology actually forbids her from doing so. At the textual level, Wong represents China as the antithesis of the West, which confines her writing within the conventional imperialistic rhetoric of the genre of travel writing. What is always present is the authoritative traveller—and one with the cultural camouflage of a native informant—who monologically reports, judges, and criticizes China in front of a domestic audience. At the conceptual level, Wong's interpretation of the foreign, hinging on a dichotomous structure, lacks the comparative and reciprocal contemplation of the other in relation to her individual and communal selves. The social problems in China are not examined in China's own historical and cultural contexts but rigidly gauged against the Western standard familiar to herself and her targeted readers. The imperialistic rhetoric of her representation of China and the binary episteme with which it goes hand in hand embodies the traveller's egological understanding of the other, the kind of "ontological imperialism" Emmanuel Levinas critiques (44). In this chapter, I wish to demonstrate that, while the writer's literary representation of China in the two travel documents constructs the totality of egology with regard to cross-cultural understanding, the texts also willy-nilly contain traces of the egology's vulnerability and unproductivity. The details about the reality of the traveller who

[19] Wong, *Red* 390; *Beijing* 318-19.

lives between cultures and who resides in the Chinese community as one of its members reveal gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions within the narrative that undermine the clear-cut binary between the self and the other, and China and the West, that the narrative strives to construct. The traveller's unidirectional observation of China positions her within the ideological cage of the same, and her self-interested, non-reciprocal interpretation of China directed at a domestic audience results in a non-ethical knowing of China, a non-knowing.[20]

Concocting the Discourse of Difference

In Wong's two travel books, the overall literary effort is to codify the difference between China and the West. China is always scrutinized and judged by what Mary L. Pratt would call the "imperial eyes" of the traveller; the country, its people, and its culture is always interpreted in a non-reciprocal fashion purely from the traveller's perspective. The following passage describing what she sees through the plane window is typical of the egological knowing of the other:

[20] My use of the term "ethical" owes to Levinas's concept of ethics. For him, ethics does not mean what is typically referred to as "morality," or a code of conduct about how one should act. It is a commitment to "the critical essence of knowledge" by "calling into question of the same." He explains, "A calling into question of the same—which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same—is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge" (Levinas 43). Put simply, for Levinas, the ethical relation with the other is achieved by maintaining a critical distance from the I and the same.

> In the distance, worker ants swarm over a dusty battlefield, the construction cranes like ancient catapults, red flags aflutter like medieval standards. This is the sit of Beijing's new airport, slated for completion by the 2008 Olympics. Its four-year construction schedule is, as the *Guardian* points out, "somewhat less time than lawyers have spent arguing over London's Heathrow Terminal 5." And only one more year than Kublai Khan and Emperor Yong Le spent building their imperial palaces. . . . Work is proceeding at breakneck speed. (Wong, *Beijing* 27)

While the bird's eye view through the plane window conveys a sense of "mastery over the unknown" commonly present in colonialist journalistic writing (Spurr 15), phrases such as "worker ants swarm over a dusty battlefield," "ancient catapults," and "red flags aflutter like medieval standards" exemplify the "esthetic and semantics of underdevelopment connected with the prehistoric" that Pratt identifies as the major characteristic of imperialistic travel writing (*Imperial* 218). By quoting the British newspaper and comparing China with its feudalistic past, the writer reproduces the familiar stereotypes such as China's present-day totalitarianism, its ancient despotism, and the modern democracy of the West.

In the swan song written near the end of her stint as the Beijing correspondent for *The Globe and Mail*, Wong monologically interprets China as a dystopian country plunging into trouble. For the writer, Deng Xiaoping's reforming economic policy and his opening of China to the Western world has "sown the seeds of instability by creating a Communist-capitalist hybrid," a system destined to chaos (Wong, *Red* 385). She predicts "a post-Deng power

struggle between Beijing and the provinces" and a possible disintegration of the country like a "post-Tito Yugoslavia" (Wong, *Red* 385-86). As she speculates:

> Is there a Gorbachev or a Yeltsin waiting in the wings? It is impossible to say. In any dictatorship, the smart players keep their heads down until the coast is clear. But whoever ultimately seizes the reins of power has to confront Deng's contradictory legacy. Is the solution to abandon Marxist controls—to unleash economic growth? Or clamp down—and stifle the economy? Either way, the Communist Party is in trouble. (Wong, *Red* 386)

Wong's understanding of China starts by wrongly grouping it with the Soviet Union, completely neglecting the fact that the two countries, though both embracing a Communist system, have different historical trajectories and cultural contexts.[21] Categorizing them together without providing specific historical contexts of both countries replicates the vocabulary of stereotypes. As Sander L. Gilman maintains, the moment of creation of categories occurs "when the vocabulary of stereotypes crystallizes," and he believes that it is through this categorization that "we label and classify the Other" (22). Wong's classification of China with the Soviet Union exemplifies this way of reproducing stereotypes.[22]

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[21] In comparison with Wong's stereotypical interpretation of China and the Soviet Union, Jock T. Wilson's *One Chinese Moon* has a more nuanced vision. See my analysis in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[22] David Spurr, from a different angle, critiques the classification of nations according to their relative failure or success in meeting the Western standard. He believes that such classification provides "a hierarchy of political configurations while plotting these [nations] in the temporal dimension along a single line of development" (Spurr 62). For more examples of this way of reproducing stereotypes, see Wong, *Beijing* 87, 207, 258, 293.

Also problematic in the passage above is the writer's loose use of "dictatorship": unplugging it from its social and historical context, Wong renders the term a transhistorical reality when it is employed to define Communist countries. In addition, when she concludes that either economic development or shutdown would plunge the Communist Party into trouble, she certainly has no imagination for the possibility of a more complicated future for China. Her unilateral interpretation catering to the taste of the domestic readers does not advance their knowledge about China, but repeats the century-old stereotypical image of China's despotism and cyclical dynastic change which differentiates China as the antipode of the West.[23]

When Wong appears to be a bit sophisticated trying to imagine an alternative revolution in China, her text is again reduced to binary oppositions. This time she perceives China as hopeful because the Chinese are "natural entrepreneurs":

> They may behave like sloths under socialism but when they can work for themselves, they make money hand over fist. A generation that has never experienced capitalism somehow knows instinctively about things like profit margins and opportunity costs. (Wong, *Red* 389)

Not only is the Chinese othered by the writer's alienating vision, but socialism and capitalism are taken for granted to be polar opposites that cannot coexist together. In addition, Wong holds that

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[23] For a history of the stereotype of China's despotism, see Mackerras 40, 271, 116-120, 190.

> the future of China may be the West's past. The Chinese are working very hard, but for their own sakes now, the way people in the West did during the industrial revolution, before they decided they wanted a forty-hour work week, labor unions and a minimum wage" (*Red* 389).

By defining China as the past tense of the West, the writer egologically appropriates "chronopolitics" to interpret the country as the inferior other, gauging it against the standard of the linear modern history of the West familiar to her readers (Fabian 144).[24]

The othering representation of China goes to the extreme so that the narrative contains double binds, as is shown in Wong's writing about the consequence of China's one-child policy:

> Many people thought that a country populated with Little Emperors was headed for disaster. I disagreed. Granted, it might be unpleasant to live in a nation of me-first onlies, yet I saw a social revolution in the making. For generations, Chinese society had emphasized the family, the clan, the collective over the individual. Now, for the first time in four thousand years of history, the relationship was reversed. Pampered onlies were growing up to be self-centered, strong-willed, knife-wielding individualists like, well, Americans. Where the Mao generation failed, the Me generation just might succeed. (*Red* 384)

[24] A similar representation of China reappears in Wong's *Beijing Confidential* (2007): "Now China is going through a belated industrial revolution, experiencing the same problems as the West—pollution, exploitation, long working hours—telescoped into two frantic decades" (220-21).

In addition to Wong's favorite devices of sweeping generalization and clear-cut dichotomization evident here in her representation of China's collectivism and individualism, the passage is confined by a double bind. By representing China as a society where the collective is valued over the individual, Wong makes it different if not despicable for her targeted Western readers who are more at home in a culture that values individualism. Simultaneously, portrayed as a nation full of pampered, self-centred individuals like Americans, China is equally distasteful. Whether the traumatized "Mao generation" or the triumphant "Me generation," the Chinese are to be pitied and ridiculed.

While literally imagining a democratic future for China, Wong also agrees with her friend Michael Crook, who believes that the "Me generation" is "China's salvation": "If you have a population of Little Emperors, you can't have little slaves. Everyone will want to tell everyone else what to do. You'll have *democracy*" (*Red* 384). Here the crude logic, the mocking semantics, and the tone of irresponsibility and nonchalance of an onlooker caricature a democratic China in the hands of a bunch of "self-centered, strong-willed, knife-wielding" Little Emperors. The double bind goes further when Wong continues to reveal the result of research that the only child tends to be "more selfish, less modest and less helpful in group activities," which "boded ill for the collectivism espoused by the Chinese Communist Party" (*Red* 384). Now we would ask: when Wong portrays the "Me generation" as the light of hope for China's democratic future, does she also mean that Western democracy is successful because of a generation of "self-centered, strong-willed, knife-wielding" brats in the West? As she indulgently

pours out her anti-China sentiment from a unilateral point of view, her narrative is confined by a double bind that makes it intrinsically self-contradictory.[25]

If *Red China Blues* codifies China as Communist, despotic, anarchic, and a Socialism-Capitalism hybrid with zillions of problems, *Beijing Confidential* is intended, as Wong says, to show "what China does better than we do" (57). Putting aside the content of the book, we see the recurrent binary in the proposed rigid comparison between China and "we." Despite her claimed lenience, however, Wong's second book turns out to be a twin narrative of the earlier book, still holding fast to replicating the Communist stereotypes about the country she visits. She repeats the theme of the Chinese government dictatorship, concluding that "in the run-up to the Olympics, [Beijing] accomplished something possible only in a totalitarian regime: to clean up the air, it exiled the city's heavy industry, including Capital Steel, the Beijing Petrochemical General Factory and other major polluters, to outlying counties" (Wong, *Beijing* 36). She repeatedly describes China as a police state, mentioning the surveillance cameras in the apartment building where she stays and reporting the rules keeping cars at home to guarantee a free flow of traffic during the 2008 Olympic games (Wong, *Beijing* 35, 46-47).

Besides, Beijing in Wong's bifurcating eyes is a miniature of a Westernized China with old Beijing fast "disappearing" along its journey "from communism to capitalism" (*Beijing* 318). The journalist's selective vision reveals old Beijing as "a city of cells within cells, moats within moats, walls within

[25] The double bind is also seen in her writing about dogs in China. See Wong, *Beijing* 190, 192.

walls," and by 1972, the city walls have vanished and are going to be replaced by the Second Ring Road aboveground and a subway below ground (Wong, *Beijing* 51). She spots endless road construction, quickly erected luxury complexes, a dazzling change of the city's taxis, and the capital's commercialization. "Selling is in Beijing's blood," writes Wong, employing personification to essentialize Beijing's difference from the rest of the world (Wong, *Beijing* 84). She writes about the Oriental Taipan Spa and, in particular, Sex in Da City where Caucasian performers wiggle and thrust their pelvises in the "two-story, neon-lit boite," painting a Westernized China nearly deformed in her judgmental eyes (Wong, *Beijing* 194). With her binary vision, the picture of transculturation in contemporary China, with its emerging new cultural forms coming out of the "sociocultural brew" of the country's own tradition mixed with Western cultural elements, becomes one of abnormality and the grotesque (West-Durán 968).[26] For Wong, it seems that China can only be called China without the influence of the West. Gilman would deem Wong's differentiating mindset intrinsically pathological, as he regards the tendency to see "the entire world in terms of the rigid line of difference" as a characteristic of "the pathological personality" with which one is unable "to repress the aggression and deal with people as individuals" (18).[27]

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[26] For the concept of transculturation, see Fernando Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint* and West-Durán 967-76.

[27] In *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (1985), Gilman writes: "The pathological personality's mental representation of the world supports the need for the line of difference" and is "consistently aggressive toward the real people and objects to which the stereotypical representations correspond" (18). In comparison, the non-pathological individual

When portraying ancient Beijing, Wong reverses the binary putting China on top of the West. With regard to demography, "When medieval London was bustling with eighty thousand people, Beijing's population was already one million, making it the biggest city in the world" (Wong, *Beijing* 19). As for city designing, Beijing's planners in the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1370) made the perimeter of the city walls thirty kilometers and "filled in the rectangle with an efficient grid of roads and streets," while "Paris would not do the same until the 1850s, when Emperor Napoleon III ordered his engineer, Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann, to replace the medieval chaos with wide boulevards radiating from central points" (Wong, *Beijing* 20). Whether China surpasses or is inferior to the West, the two geopolitical entities are always conceived on separate planes that remain different from each other.

The egology of understanding China leads the writer so far that she misinterprets the culture and distorts the facts to make the country fit into her binary paradigm. In her note about Chinese names, Wong explains that the Chinese dub acquaintances "Big Wang, Little Wang, Old Wang, Mama Wang, Old Man Wang, Granddad Wang, Uncle Wang, Antie Wang, Granny Wang and so forth" to minimize confusion caused by the ubiquity of the surname (*Red* x). While different ways of addressing people with the same surname does help to differentiate among them, Wong's explanation overlooks the tradition and history that shape people's forms of address, which results in producing knowledge about Chinese names as different and exotic. As well, she interprets Chinese family

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"is able to repress the aggression and deal with people as individuals" (Gilman 18).

names preceding personal ones as an evidence of "the paramount importance of the family over the individual," and by doing so, she reproduces the familiar stereotype of Chinese culture without actually advancing readers' knowledge about the country (Wong, *Red* x).[28] In *Beijing Confidential*, Wong randomly accuses the Chinese government of "banning local dialects in public schools" to promote Mandarin (17).[29] And she more than once makes nonsensical interpretations about Chinese etiquette:[30]

> According to Chinese etiquette, you always refuse when someone offers a treat. The host then ignores you and gives you what you just said you didn't want, on the assumption that you really want it. (Wong, *Beijing* 310)

What Wong offers here is a translation rigidly literal and superficial; without providing the context of the Chinese etiquette, the pure description of the social formality informs nothing about the visited culture. In fact, the explanation

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[28] A brief look at the studies of Chinese names shows that, while inheriting only one surname, one may give oneself or be given many other personal names to mark individuality. Su Shi (苏轼 1037-1101), famous among the literati of the Song dynasty, has fifteen personal names, and Lu Xun (鲁迅 1881-1936), a distinguished novelist and essayist in modern Chinese history, uses different names at different times throughout his literary career. Kongzi (孔子), or Confucius, has eight personal names, not including the other ten given later by people to commemorate his contribution to Chinese philosophy and ethics. 王 [Wang] 333-50.

[29] Though *putonghua* is promoted in various ways in China, my schooling experience from kindergarten to high school in Suzhou, a city in northern Anhui province, shows that local dialects were predominant even in Chinese classes. For studies of the promotion of *putonghua* and its complex consequences, including its vernacularization, see Blachford 99-122, Saillard 163-75.

[30] See also Wong, *Beijing* 88.

resembles the Chinese's translation of the "common colds of the wind heat type" to Western users of *banlangen* as Hill Gates notices while travelling in China (4).[31] Rendering her interpretation as the definition of Chinese etiquette, Wong transforms "social and historical dissimilarities into universal, metaphysical differences" and essentializes Chinese culture as exotic and unfathomable (Jan Mohammed 68).

The egological interpretation is also demonstrated by her portrayal of Chinese people as strangers with whom she can never connect herself emotionally and psychologically. She exoticizes Chinese names, translating them literally and even taking liberties so that they become Long March Wang, Fu the Enforcer, and Lacking Virtue Pan, and she justifies her strategy as "a memory aide" (*Red* ix). Her rendition of Mao Xinyu's name reveals the problematic of her translation: "The name of Mao Zedong's grandson, Xinyu . . . literally means New Universe, but in English I think the meaning is more faithfully rendered as New World" (Wong, *Red* ix). This method of translation represents "the fluent translating that seems untranslated" according to Lawrence Venuti who critiques the "regime of fluency" in translation practices ("1990s" 329, *Translator's* 1). Walter Benjamin also finds this kind of translation ineffective and points out that the error of the translator is that she has "a far greater reverence for [the target] language than for the spirit of the foreign [language]" and that she "preserves the state in which [her] own language happens to be instead of allowing [her] language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue" (qtd. in Dingwaney 72). Wong's

[31] See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion on the failure of this way of cultural understanding.

translation, either as a memory aide or as a commitment to pampering her readers' sensibility, is a "domesticating translation" (Venuti, *Translator's* 17), a form of egological interpretation of the others' names which, by sacrificing their original individual contexts, caters only to the interest of the self and the same.[32]

Having lived in China for decades since 1972, Wong sees her Chinese acquaintances as eternal strangers. Her teachers at Beijing University are nothing but a group of dogmatic Communists who determine to brainwash the bourgeois thoughts of the Montreal visitor. Fu Min (whom Wong calls Fu the Enforcer), for instance, is portrayed as her antithesis: "she was the most politically correct teacher they had and I was the most politically suspect student in the whole of China" (Wong, *Red* 58-59). Huang Daolin (Cadre Huang) is caricatured as a feminized Communist official: "When embarrassed or upset, he laughed as if he were having a nervous breakdown, coyly shielding his bad teeth with his hand in a strangely feminine gesture" (Wong, *Red* 48). The Party Secretary Pan Qingde (whom Wong nicknames as Lacking Virtue Pan) is "a male version of Fu the Enforcer": "He was both ignorant and despotic, the kind of cadre everybody hated" (*Red* 121). Her roommate, Zhang Hong (Scarlet Zhang), is also a stranger in Wong's eyes; her help with the chores is regarded as a "monopoly," and her kindness and friendliness is taken as that of "a dull conformist" even though Wong knows that Hong is not even a Communist Party member (*Red* 62, 63, 52). Years later, Wong claims that they become real friends, but in the book Hong

[32] For a discussion of cross-cultural understanding from the perspective of translation theory, see Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

remains a representative of "Mao's Lost Generation," a person to whom Wong cannot relate on personal terms (*Red* 66).

Wong loathes other Chinese people at first sight. The little boys who enjoy sliding along Beijing's canals and lakes on metal runners in 1972 are in her eyes "legless cross-country skiers" (*Red* 67). The unsmiling border official at the Beijing airport does not satisfy her supposedly therapeutic desire to encounter a sexy man after an exhausting long flight. She spots a vulgar man picking his nose in the subway to justify her opinion that the Chinese are utterly distasteful.[33]

The othering delineation of the Chinese is most typically shown in her writing about the dissident named Wei Jingsheng. Given Wong's passion in exposing the follies of the Chinese government, we would expect her sympathy—if not affiliation—with the anti-government people in China. Jingsheng, who is incarcerated for almost fifteen years due to his subversive engagements, is nonetheless ruthlessly dehumanized in Wong's account. Inviting him to dine at her Beijing home to tease out a good story, Wong

> had no idea what to feed someone who had spent one-third of his life in the gulag. Most Chinese were revolted by bloody slices of beef and considered raw lettuce an invitation to dysentery. But I figured Wei Jingsheng wasn't an average Chinese. I suggested to Mu Xiangheng, the *Globe*'s chef, that he make rare filet of beef, French fries and a green salad. (*Red* 285)

[33] Wong, *Beijing* 28, 208-09.

Without trying at all to understand what her guest really likes, Wong hosts in a detached manner. She generalizes the Chinese dislike of Western cuisine. By deciding on feeding her guest "rare filet of beef, French fries and a green salad," she treats him hardly as a human being who—just released from long-term imprisonment—is unlikely to eat unfamiliar food. Jingsheng, in her eyes, becomes a dehumanized thing that eats anything that is edible.[34] Her perception that "Wei Jingsheng wasn't an average Chinese" further alienates her subject: even though Wong shares the same anti-Chinese-government sentiment as her guest, her egological rendering of her character allows her to make no connections with her guest whatsoever.

Authenticating the Egological

As a journalist and traveller, Wong tries many means to authenticate her egological account of China and the West. She claims that her profession makes her an "objective observer" (Wong, *Red* 190). She emphasizes that working for the *Times* makes her "view China through dispassionate eyes" (Wong, *Red* 192). And she highlights her credential of reporting China when she became *The Globe and Mail*'s Beijing correspondent: "I was . . . the first of Chinese descent and the first to speak the language. I was also the first with a complete Cultural Revolution wardrobe" (Wong, *Red* 207). A recipient of the US George Polk

[34] Although being critical of Wong's writing about China, I am not unmindful that it is her established modus operendi to produce venomous accounts which make her both a controversial and successful journalist. For a detailed commentary on Wong's hostile journalistic style, see Julia Williams. "Little Miss Mischief." Ryerson Review of Journalism. Summer 2004. 23 March 2010 <http://www.rrj.ca/issue/2004/summer/437/>.

Award, the Canadian National Newspaper Award, the New England Women's Press Association Newswoman of the Year Award, and a Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Silver Medal, Wong obviously has won recognition for her journalistic achievements. The reading public, too, considers her writing about China to be an acclaimed contribution to the knowledge about China in the West.[35] I, however, find the objectivity of Wong's writing questionable and believe that, when Wong exposes the poverty of the great inland areas and the resulting diseases, high infant mortality, malnutrition, tuberculosis, and cretinism; when she discloses the crimes of corruption, rape, opium dens, the abduction and trafficking of women; and when she lists the horrors of the incarceration of people in inhumane conditions, the "harvesting" of human organs from prisoners sentenced to death, and the unwarranted executions, her text is restricted by a predetermined principle of selection in terms of what to see, what to hear, and what to write. Wong herself admits that her training by working for the *New York Times* is to "dig out dirt" on China, and that, later as *The Globe and Mail*'s reporter, she is compelled to write only about China's dark side (*Red* 192, 319). Obviously, before Wong sets out to know China more, her mind is preoccupied

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[35] *Red China Blues* was named one of *Time* magazine's top ten books of 1996. It has been translated into Swedish, Finnish, Dutch and Japanese, and optioned for a feature film. In addition to the two travel documents I discuss here, Wong has another book on China titled *Jan Wong's China: Reports from a Not-so-foreign Correspondent* (1999). For some laudatory readings of Wong's China books, see the reviews by Brian Bethune, Lorraine Campbell, Mark Meng, John Skow, and Wendy Zong. See also "Media Advisory / Photo Opportunity," Vaughan Public Library, Thornhill, 19 Feb. 2010 <http://www.vaughanpl.info/files/news/news042409.pdf>. And "Beijing Confidential: A Tale of Comrades Lost and Found," 6 March 2010 <http://www.chapters.indigo.ca/ books/Beijing-Confidential-Tale-Comrades-Lost-WONG-JAN/9780385663588-item.html>.

with a specific China she wants to know. When Wong articulates the ideology of visualism and experience by predicating the authenticity of her writing on what she witnesses and experiences,[36] she is actually trapped within her own ideological cage so that she can only understand China in the way she preconceives it. Since she already knows what type of China she wants to share with readers, her understanding of the country as represented in her books is subjected to her subjective predetermination, and her interpretation—instead of an objective account as she claims it to be—proves to some extent to be a tyrannical, egoistic rendition of the other for the satisfaction of the self and the same—the domestic reading community with which she affiliates herself.

In his study of literary journalism and travel writing, Spurr correctly explicates the alleged truthfulness of the genre: literary journalism as well as travel writing is generally conceived to emphasize "observable phenomena," yet the emphasis "obscures the way in which such observation is ordered in advance, a misrecognition that allows interpretation to pass for objective truth" (71).[37] When Wong possesses the social reality of China in the name of a journalist and a traveller and makes it—with her writing—into the object of horror, pity, and

[36] For the critique of the ideology of visualism and experience, see Fabian 106-10, Scott 773-90. See also Bourdieu's concept of objectivism quoted in Spurr 26.
[37] In "Travel Literature and the Art of Self-Invention," Stephan Kohl also reads literary travelogues as composed "according to a number of formal conventions" and shaped "not by the laws governing the description of actual experience, but by literary conventions used for the recording of past experience" (174).

contempt, her writing falls into the imperialistic mode of representing foreign places underpinned by the egological understanding of the other (Spurr 59).[38]

By appealing to her Chinese cultural heritage and the linguistic and cultural competence she gains by living in China, she defines herself as a native informant of Chinese society and uses this to authenticate her writing. When she prepares herself physically in front of the hotel mirror, feeling "pleased" at her "authentic revolutionary self," she does not emphasize particularly her Chinese appearance (a job already done by the photographs inserted before each chapter of her first book), but her satisfaction with her Chinese camouflage of "black cloth shoes," "baggy gray trousers," and "plaid blouses" sends a signal to her readers about her "authentic Chineseness": "The best way to see China was as a Chinese," she writes (Wong, *Red* 11-12).

Nevertheless, astute readers find that her Chinese identity only serves to promulgate racial and national difference. When negotiating with the cultural shock of rural Chinese's way of greeting—"Have you eaten?" Wong reflects:

> I finally understood my own preoccupation with food. I was born with Chinese starvation genes. When I first arrived, the question always stopped me in my tracks. I had to think twice. Was I just about to eat, so

[38] In *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, Spurr studies "aestheticization in journalism as distantiation, transformation, privilege, displacement, consumption, and alienation" (59). He maintains that "taken together, these terms imply a certain possession of social reality which holds it at arm's length and makes it into the object of beauty, horror, pleasure, and pity," and that "when this act of possession becomes a mode of representation by which a powerful culture *takes* possession of a less powerful one, it can be understood quite literally as colonization" (Spurr 59).

> the answer was no? Or had I recently finished a meal? What about snacks? Did a chocolate bar count? By the time I opened my mouth to answer, the other person was halfway down the street. (*Red* 30)

It is understandable that the rural way of greeting is one of the cultural shocks the traveller needs to deal with in the foreign country, but what is problematic is that she racializes the Chinese as the starved through her own preoccupation with food, making use of her Chinese identity to essentialize the difference of Chinese people. When she notices the expansion of the demonstration at Tiananmen Square in June 1989 with police officers, Foreign Ministry aides, steelworkers, bankers, and even *People's Daily* reporters all marching in the streets, she again plays the politics of identity:

> The biggest silent majority in the world was no longer silent. For the first time since my misguided Maoist days, I could relate again to being Chinese. I felt a surge of pride. The Chinese people didn't accept being downtrodden. They had real backbone. (Wong, *Red* 229)

Given the omniscient presence of the writer's Western persona,[39] I would argue that Wong's declared affiliation with the Chinese is more her pronounced alignment with the ubiquitous Western media's voice supporting the demonstration than her embrace of the other half of her cultural identity.[40]

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[39] The construction of her "Westernness" is ubiquitous in both of Wong's books. See, for instance, her pronounced nausea for Chinese food (although her father runs chain Chinese restaurants) and her left-handedness in *Red* 31, 43, 119.

[40] See Hill Gates's observation of the ubiquitous Western's media's report of the Tiananmen riot. Gates 192.

Wong also authenticates her writing by structuring a time lapse between her travel and writing. Published in 1996, her first book is written on the basis of her journal about her experience in China covering about two decades from 1972 to 1994. The temporal gap between the actual travel and the writing of the book allows the writer to authorize her account by contrasting the maturity and sophistication of the narrator with the innocence of the young traveller:

> I noted in my journal that the skies were a startling azure, but it didn't occur to me that the lack of pollution was due to lagging industrial production. As I biked down car-free streets, I thought happily that China had chosen the right path for development. I didn't think about how the very old, the very young, the handicapped, the sick, not to mention entire families, got around the vast city. Everyone glowed with health. China resembled a Colorado health spa. There was the same low-cholesterol vegetarian diet, known as meat rationing. There was the same early-to-bed regimen, known as power outages. And instead of working out with a personal trainer, the Chinese just plain worked. The only difference was you could never check out. (Wong, *Red* 43)

Through the contrast of two different visions assumed by the young, Maoist traveller and the mature, worldly journalist, the writer encodes and authenticates China as the antipode of the West. Even the commonalties they share are rendered signals of their difference: if China's azure skies during the Cultural Revolution resemble those of the West, it is a sign of China's lagging industrial development; if the Chinese's low-cholesterol vegetarian diet and early-to-bed lifestyle is

similar to that at home, it flags their poverty rather than the familiar, chosen healthy lifestyle more often seen at home. The Chinese, besides, is permanently confined by the state of working; the stereotype of Communism is made even more believable with the wise hindsight of the narrator.

If the enlightened persona of the narrator lends authority to Wong's writing, the innocent image of the Maoist traveller is meant to accentuate the absurdity of Maoism or Chinese Communism. What Wong calls the beginning of her "real awakening" illustrates my point:

> So this was thought control, I realized. I had arrived believing everything the Chinese told me. Even after I began to have doubts, I still believed most of what they told me. What didn't make sense, I blamed on my own lack of understanding and my bourgeois world outlook. Now I understood that you not only weren't free to do what you wanted but you weren't free to *think* what you wanted, either. The Communist Party said black was white and white was black, and everyone agreed with alacrity. There was not a single murmur of dissent. It was the beginning of my real awakening, a long, painful process that would take many years more. I was not falling out of love with China, but I was beginning to understand it better. (*Red* 84)

Portraying herself as an innocent, obedient learner of the new culture, Wong appeals to the readers' sympathy for her as a victim of China's Communist system. Although she claims that she begins to understand China better, it turns out that Wong's loss of innocence "produces no new self, no new relations of

speech" (Pratt, *Imperial* 67); her bifurcating vision is seen to always generate a monological, one-sided account about the country.

The innocence of the Maoist traveller persists in Wong's second book and becomes a recurrent theme that personalizes and depoliticizes her binary representation. Written with a journalistic mission, the book turns out to be the writer's personal account of looking for Yin Luoyi and coming to terms with her own Cultural Revolution-ary past (Wong, *Beijing* 7). As she has been tortured by her guilty conscience for snitching on Luoyi after the latter asked Wong to help her go to the US, the writer hopes that, with the support of her family, she can find Luoyi and make apologies in order to have peace in her mind. The following passage reveals her intention of concocting Luoyi's story:

> I considered omitting any mention of the young stranger. If I didn't write about her, who would know? If I did write about her, I'd be pilloried for sure. Still, as a journalist, I've always demanded honesty in others. If I wanted to write truthfully about China, if I wanted to show the true face of Communism, it was essential to come clean myself. I had harbored no ill will toward Yin. I didn't even know her. And yet I had betrayed her. Why? I wasn't even sure myself. (Wong, *Beijing* 13)

With the delineation of a conflicting mind, the writer corners herself in the predicament that begs for the readers' sympathy. Yet she decides to write the story after all, heroically choosing to be "pilloried" for the sake of being an honest journalist with an unflinching commitment to writing "truthfully" about China. For Wong, it is clear enough that Luoyi's story is a must-do. It secures the Maoist

traveller's innocence—first the "guinea pig" innocence that leaves her a victim of China's Communist regime (Wong, *Beijing* 6), then the innocence of a journalist dedicated to honesty and truth, and finally the innocence of a woman loved and supported by her husband and two teenaged sons who help her fulfill her wish. Ideologically, the innocence is the writer's maneuver with which she condemns China's Communist system, a system that has inflicted damage on the young traveller and a generation of the Chinese like Luoyi.

Either through appropriating her real experience and her Chinese cultural identity or by creating the persona of an enlightened, skeptical journalist gaining wisdom from her past experience of the "stark, raving Maoist" traveller (Wong, *Red* 45), Wong's travel writing seeks to authenticate the one-sided knowledge she produces about China. Taking advantage of the domestic readers who do not have the same privilege of experiencing Chinese society as she does and who have no direct contact with the object of her representation, Wong fetishizes the authenticity of her writing. But in fact, her texts are underpinned by the "Manichean allegory," one that JanMohammed defines as "a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions" lying at the centre of colonialist discourses (63, 65). With the "Manichean allegory," Wong's travel writing does not allow an interpretation of China "on the same temporally and socially valorized plane as that occupied by the author and the reader" (JanMohammed 69). The constructed complicity between reader and author symbolically sustains the totality of her representation of China, a representation that woos readers' sensibilities by reinforcing their familiar stereotypes and common sense rather than presenting a

discovery of the country through a dialogical and reciprocal contact with its people.

“Literary Cunning”

The egological totality of Wong’s report about China can only be a utopia, though. Quoting Roland Barthes, Dennis Porter believes that literature is “a sphere of language use that resists the exercise of power encoded within it”:

> “Literature” is a form of “trickery” with and against language: “That salutary trickery, that art of evasion, that magnificent deception, which allows one to hear our-of-power language in the splendor of a permanent revolution of language, is what I call ‘literature.’” (6-7)

While Wong strives to essentialize the difference between China and the West, her texts simultaneously contain a “literary cunning”—traces of the gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions—that discloses the artificial nature of the binary totality of her narrative (Dennis Porter 7). The enlightened, skeptical persona of the narrator in her first travel book bestows the text with an authoritative and seemingly insightful aura, but by contrasting it with the naïve Maoist believer, it also flags the temporal gap between the travel and the writing and leaves the readers wondering: who was the young Maoist traveller? And what was actually in her mind when she was in China two decades ago? Seeking answers to these questions, however, we only find the raw innocence of the “True Believer” repeated again and again. The writer herself never tires of describing her Maoist fervour: “I . . . took to heart all the Maoist tenets about improving

myself as a human being. I really believed that if I worked hard and reformed my 'world outlook,' one day I would be worthy of joining the Chinese revolution. I dismissed the culture shock as character-building" (Wong, *Red* 76). Cadre Huang describes her as one who is "earnest, hard-working," "enthusiastic about manual labor and studying Chairman Mao's writings" and who has a "good attitude" in renouncing her bourgeois background, at which Fu the Enforcer nods "enthusiastically" (Wong, *Red* 85-86). At Beijing Number One Machine Tool Factory, her master praises her for not being afraid of "fatigue or dirt" (Wong, *Red* 100). Her Chinese American friend Erica, Aunt Yuying at Tianjin, her husband and son all confirm her unconditional embrace of Maoist conviction.[41] However, when the overwhelming piety of the young believer is put side by side with the boorishness of the reporter who is persistently hostile to her former belief and the country endorsing it, an absence—of twenty years of dialogue, negotiation, and gradual coming to terms with what she learns in an alien country—looms large in the narrative. As the narrative strengthens its totality of the binary representation of the self and the other, and China and home, it also demonstrates that, in between the absoluteness of the Maoist and the anti-Maoist, there is a lack of a middle process of negotiation, which puts the authenticity of her narrative into question.[42]

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[41] Wong, *Red* 107, 108 and *Beijing* 41, 71.

[42] In *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1991), Stephen Greenblatt argues for the productive power of representation which provides insight that helps undermine the totality of Wong's representation of China: " . . . representations are not only products but producers, capable of decisively altering the very forces that brought them into being" (6). In this context, the totality of Wong's narrative is also a dynamic medium capable of gesturing meanings

The flashback narrative mode with multiple personas of the writer also suggests the "inherent ambiguity in the relation between author and text" which Spurr identifies as typical for literary journalism: "the text speaks ambiguously. Is it the voice of an individual writer, the voice of institutional authority, of cultural ideology? It is all of these things, often at the same time" (11). "This ambiguity in writing itself," Spurr believes, "joins with the logical incoherence of colonial discourse to produce a rhetoric characterized by constant crisis" (11).[43]

One such crisis is seen in the text's revelation of the fictionality of the journalistic account that erodes the edifice of truth built upon the writer's proclaimed commitment to objectivity. The following passage where the writer notices people trying to feed the hungry strikers at Tiananmen Square shows the untruthful nature of the news report:

> . . . who wanted to hear that the students were just ordinary kids, trying to be heroic by day but nibbling on snacks at night? It made for much better copy to show them as earnest waifs fighting against evil. The protesters and the media fed on one another . . . For our part, we reporters loved

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subversive to itself as a signifier. A similar argument is also seen in Jean Baudrillard's concept of "simulation," in which he believes that "representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real" while "simulation, on the contrary, stems . . . *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference" (6).

[43] For literature's inherently subversive elements, Michel Foucault also makes his point in his discourse theory:

> There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relation; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy (qtd. in Spurr 11).

> getting our stories on page one. Who wanted to let a few unromantic facts get in the way of a good story? (Wong, *Red* 236)

In *Beijing Confidential*, the myths surrounding the Tank Man who single-handedly confronted a tank during the Tiananmen Massacre also indicate the mythical nature of the objectivity that Wong claims for her writing. After Alfred Lee, an Australian journalist, published his story in a British newspaper and was congratulated by Margaret Thatcher on his world exclusive, *The Globe and Mail*'s editors "screamed at us to match the story," as Wong reveals, and "the resident foreign correspondent, who spoke Chinese and had excellent sources, tried hard to duplicate the story" (*Beijing* 77). Five days after Lee's story was published, the London *Evening Standard* published an article about the Tank Man by its Beijing correspondent, John Passmore, but later, when interviewed by Antony Thomas, Passmore denied ever writing the story at all (Wong, *Beijing* 77).

As a professional story-teller, the writer is aware that the story is told subjectively and has inconsistencies and concealments. When listening to Luoyi (Lu Yi), Wong writes:

> I sense Lu Yi is recounting her story for the first time and, as such, is engaged in an act of re-creation. I will let her tell her story in her own way. I will not press her on inconsistencies, or on silences. (*Beijing* 273)

The revelation of the writer's own consciousness of the subjective and elliptic nature of stories and the disclosure of the fictional nature of the journalistic report in her own account willy-nilly casts doubt on the truthfulness she claims for her writing about China.

Also, when Wong's travel writing rests upon a binary opposition, the totality of her account is nonetheless challenged by the elements in the narrative that transcend the binary paradigm. While her writing is overwhelmed with the exoticizing and alienating delineation of the Chinese, it is also replete with details implying her intimate relations with them. Gu Weiming (Future Gu), for instance, is Wong's favorite classmate "with a sense of humor" (*Red* 142). She sends him Canadian stamps from her mom's letters when they are classmates at Beijing University. She visits him both when she is *The Globe and Mail*'s reporter in 1994 and during her recent stay in Beijing in 2006. Pan Qingde, though described as "a Marxist watchdog whose full-time job was monitoring [the] ideological purity," is seen to help Wong diligently to find Luoyi. When Wong reveals that in her mind "Lacking Virtue Pan has just morphed back into Celebrating Virtue Pan," [44] her writing offers us a glimpse of Qingde as a helpful, friendly, and warm-hearted person and one of her long-time connections in Beijing (*Beijing* 154). Yin Luoyi (later Lu Yi) is represented as a near "stranger" whom the writer barely remembers until she re-reads her journal years later (Wong, *Beijing* 13). Although a character haunting the writer "for many years" and finally helping her come to terms with her guilty conscience, Luoyi remains the other in her eyes (Wong, *Beijing* 14).[45] However, reading between the lines, we see Luoyi treats Wong as an old schoolmate, inviting her and her family to lunches and dinners almost every day after they find each other, and eating at her own home on the

[44] Qingde literally means "celebrating Virtue" in Chinese.
[45] See in particular Chapter 26 "Lu Yi's Revenge" and Chapter 27 "Lu Yi's Revenge II" in *Beijing Confidential*.

campus of Beijing University or her luxurious condo or in popular restaurants. Even Luoyi's husband treats Wong with hospitality; he goes to meet her and her family when they get lost visiting and, when they are at his home, makes them "a pot of green tea" and puts out "a dish of small red grapes, each already plucked off the stem and set out like a bowl of candies" (*Beijing* 306). Before Wong leaves Beijing, Luoyi sends her a teapot as a gift "hewn from a solid piece of milky white jade, its handle and spout carved to look like bamboo" (*Beijing* 308). Knowing that durian is Luoyi's favorite fruit, Wong herself brings it when visiting her. Despite the fact that neither she herself nor her sons have a taste for this spiky tropical thing that "looks like a medieval instrument of torture," she diligently holds the seven-pound durian with an outstretched arm to keep the thorns from stabbing her in the calf while walking under Beijing's August sun—her effort of befriending Luoyi is axiomatic (Wong, *Beijing* 305, 306).

If Wong's close connections with her Beijing friends call into question the self-other binary her writing constructs, her book also contains her own questioning of binarism which further contradicts the dichotomous logic her narrative endorses. When the Chinese Communist Party formally declares the end of the Cultural Revolution, the writer feels betrayed "like the victim of a massive practical joke": "One announcement, and we were consigned to the dust heap of history. That, I suddenly realized, was how dictatorships worked. . . . Now, everyone told me, the Cultural Revolution had been a bad, bad thing" (Wong, *Red* 185). A victim of the "abrupt ideological switch," Wong learns firsthand the folly

of binarism; her open condemnation of the black-white reversal as a dictatorial deed no doubt contradicts the binary totality of her own writing.

She understands the binary episteme as problematic even before she comes to China. Enrolled in Asian studies at McGill University in 1971, she finds herself in "an academic world that mirrored the cold war": "Pro-China professors taught me that Mao was creating a New Man. Anti-China sinologists were derided as U. S. government stooges" (Wong, *Red* 16). She decides to see the country for herself because she is troubled by the reality that "there was no middle ground in studying the Middle Kingdom" (Wong, *Red* 16). When her Australian classmate fails to obtain a tourist visa to go to China because "she was white" and she successfully gets hers because she is an "overseas Chinese," the writer questions why human beings "should be separated into categories" (Wong, *Red* 17).

The porosity of binarism is also conspicuous when Wong conceives China's democratic future. She disagrees with the classic argument that "democracy is too inherently messy, too chaotic" for the Chinese and believes instead that they will have their own democracy: "the Chinese may not use our terminology" (Wong, *Red* 388). This vision of hers allows the possibility of a democracy with Chinese characteristics and bespeaks a tolerance for a complicated form of democracy suitable for China's own social and cultural setting. What's more, she bases her vision on the recognition of genuine responses from people she visited in Yuan Village: "ask a peasant in Yuan Village if he would like a way to dump Party Secretary Shen, preferably without bloodshed, and you will get a resounding yes" (Wong, *Red* 388). When the writer is able to

listen to the Yuan villagers with an empathetic ear and to imagine a democracy of Chinese design, her narrative opens toward the possibility of cross-cultural understanding and reveals a complexity that goes beyond the rigid binary paradigm it fetishizes.[46]

The binary even disappears when Wong's writing records similarities across the boundaries between the Chinese and Western camps she creates. When Air Canada makes her sign a contrite letter for smuggling box cutters and other sharp implements to test airport security, they force her to promise "never, ever to do it again on pain of a lifetime ban," and this reminds her of the Chinese Communists (Wong, *Beijing* 70-71). Fu Min's father who names all six of his children Fu Min, using different characters for Min, is "like George Foreman, who named five sons and two daughters George" (Wong, *Beijing* 85-86). As well, she sees the resemblance between China and France, as both cultures "revolve around agriculture and cuisine" and both countries emphasize the importance of rules in maintaining an orderly society (Wong, *Beijing* 80, 92-93). These cultural similarities again contradict the rigid boundaries Wong's narrative constructs and indicate the binary's artificial nature.

As one who lives between cultures, the writer turns out to be unable to fully conceal her mixed Chinese and Western lifestyle even though she makes an

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[46] West-Duran explains the importance of listening in relation to human bonds and cultural understanding:

> Listening is not a passive activity; it is an active engaged attentiveness that is central to a dialogical ethics and understanding. It requires an openness that goes to the heart of translation and philosophy: "Anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without this openness there is no genuine human bond (relationship). Belonging together also means being able to listen to one another" (Gadamer 361). (974)

effort to bifurcate the Chinese and the Western in her own works. Along with her pronounced affiliation with the West is her unconscious, habitual delight in the Chinese way of life. She gets "hot soy milk and *baozi*" as breakfast for her family on arrival in Beijing (Wong, *Beijing* 40). She vetoes eating at McDonald's on their first full day in Beijing and persuades the boys to dine at a nearby Chinese fast-food restaurant where she orders "*xiao long bao*"—"small-basket dumplings" handmade by "wrapping pasta around minced pork and cabbage and . . . hot broth" (Wong, *Beijing* 56). On another occasion, she and her husband choose "a classic Beijing dumpling house" and order "chilled tofu dressed in light soy, vinegar and chopped cilantro; flash-fried thinly sliced pork liver with garlic; dumplings of napa cabbage and pork; spicy dan dan noodles" (Wong, *Beijing* 156). Even Sam, her thirteen-year-old son, who is represented as a conspicuously Canadian kid, enjoys "chopped-up chicken with dry-fried whole chilis"—his favorite Sichuan cuisine (Wong, *Beijing* 302).

As parents, both Wong and her husband commit themselves to educating their sons about Chinese culture.[47] Wong hires a Chinese tutor, Wang Zheng (Long March Wang), to teach her two boys Mandarin during their one-month stay in Beijing. But the boys' Chinese training starts long before that in Toronto: "As a Chinese Canadian parent, I dutifully ensured that they . . . suffered through pointless years of Friday afternoon Mandarin lessons" (Wong, *Beijing* 65). The negation contained in this sentence does not persuade readers that learning

[47] Norman Shulman (Fat Paycheck), Wong's husband, had also lived in China for a long time and is fluent in Mandarin. Wong even thought he was Chinese when she first met him (*Red* 154).

Chinese is a bad thing, but implies the stubbornness of a mother who believes the opposite. When Ben, the elder son, catches a cold in Beijing, her husband takes him to Tong Ren Tang, the most famous herbalist in Beijing, holding it as a "perfect opportunity for the boys to experience traditional Chinese medicine" (Wong, *Beijing* 280). When both Wong and her husband take care to give their children "a well-rounded education" through travel, they are actually trying to rid them of their coarse parochialness and to instill a refined sense of cosmopolitan complexity in their understanding of the world (*Beijing* 99).

Wong's book also reveals scenes of transculturation which challenge the China-West and home-abroad dyad. Swedish IKEA's Beijing store has "large black and white photographs on the wall [featuring] Asians, not Caucasians" (Wong, *Beijing* 149-50). The popular American chain convenience-store 7-Eleven is localized to extend the open hours from 7 a. m—11 p. m. to 24/7, and instead of "Big Bite hot dogs, Go-Go Taquitos or Bloody Zit Slurpees" and coffee, it offers "hot soy milk, congee and steamed *baozi*," and *hao dun* for breakfast (Wong, *Beijing* 39). As Wong makes it a family habit to check out McDonald's around the world, her book shows that the McDonald's franchise in Beijing sells "purple-hued taro pies, red bean sundaes and deep-fried chicken wings," and they sampled lobster rolls at a McDonald's in New Brunswick and tacos at one in Mexico. She adds, "In Rome, the McDonald's sold shrimp salad, fresh-squeezed blood-orange juice and espresso" (Wong, *Beijing* 56). These scenes form a tapestry of a multiculturescape: Western culture needs to go through the process of localization in order to be accepted by other cultures, and the new cultural forms emerging out

of the creative blend of two or more cultures transcend the binary framework Wong prescribes for her literary composition.

Conclusion

When Mario Cesareo contemplates the fate of travel writing in his essay "Anthropology and Literature: Of Bedfellows and Illegitimate Offspring," he holds the genre as "necessarily connected to an (un)intended affirmation of Empire" (170). Jan Wong's domestication of China that caters to the interest of a Western readership stands as a case in point; her journalistic travel writing still echoes the conventional egological voice of the genre. Nevertheless, Cesareo seems to be surprisingly oblivious to the complexity of the genre. When he bifurcates travel and travel writing, defining travel writing as "not travel—its destabilizing, dis-centering experience—but its exorcism," he is trapped by the metonymic mechanism of binarism that sustains the imaginary Empire he himself tries to debunk (Cesareo 169). The porosity of Wong's edifice of binary representation at least indicates that Cesareo's pessimism about the genre is overdone. Cesareo might want to rethink his thesis as the chapters that follow explore a corner of the travel archive where the symbolic Empire of the West is called into question by comparative, dialogical, and self-reflexive modes of understanding China. The reality of happenings in the zones of cross-cultural contact, or the "irreducible ecology," to use Cesareo's term (164), does not exist exclusively in the social practice of travel; it is always there in the archive no matter how the conventions of travel literature maneuver to erase it.

Chapter Two The Horizon of Cross-Cultural Understanding: Jock Tuzo Wilson's *One Chinese Moon*[48]

When Canadian scientist Jock Tuzo Wilson was thinking of visiting China in 1958 after attending the International Geophysical Year in Moscow, the historical situation was unfavourable to his intended trip. From China's side, the country was largely closed to the West. Under Mao Zedong's leadership, the whole nation enthusiastically engaged with the Great Leap Forward movement, aiming to surpass Great Britain in fifteen years in industrial development. It was a time when Western travellers were rare and tourism was barely developed in this country. In particular, the anti-rightist campaign—launched to criticize and reform intellectuals in the summer of 1957, the year just before Wilson's travel—caused extra difficulties for Western scholars who wished to enter into the country.[49] From the Canadian side, the 1950s is the decade that historians have described as "the model Cold War decade" since this period was the high point of the anti-Communist movement in which Canada aligned itself with the United

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[48] A version of this chapter has been published in *Studies in Travel Writing* 14:1 (2010): 77-96.

[49] There were only a few countries having diplomatic relations with China from 1949 to 1961. *China Research Associates,* 585-86. For an introduction to the Great Leap Forward movement, see Lawrence, *China since 1919* 170-71. Lawrance, *China's Foreign Relations* 66. For an introduction to anti-rightist movement, see Schurmann and Schell 146-49. For anti-rightist movement that affected Western scholars" visits of China, see Passin 18. For the information on Western visitors to Communist China, see Passin 1-9. It was not until August 1959, which is after Wilson's travel, that the first Canadian tourist group of seventeen members went to China (Passin 7).

States.[50] The "Red Scare" still permeated every corner of society that included even the scientific community to which Wilson—a Professor of Geophysics at the University of Toronto—undoubtedly belonged (Whitaker and Hewitt 10, 24, 44-6). In addition to the ideological conflict that had separated China and Canada, China also remained historically and culturally remote and irrelevant. By the time of Wilson's travel, the Canadian government still had no diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (Bothwell 28). When Wilson inquired, the Canadian Department of External Affairs did not object to his visiting China. But since they had no embassy in China, they recommended him to the offices of the British Embassy in Peking and cautioned him that, if he was so unfortunate as to get himself into trouble, "there would be little they could do to help" (Wilson, *One* 19).

Despite the potential difficulty and even danger of travelling to China, the collegial and friendly atmosphere Wilson experienced at the meeting of the International Geophysical Year in Moscow (hereafter referred to as I. G. Y.)—the centre of a Communist state—aroused his interest to visit China anyway. As one of six Canadian delegates that participated in organizing the I. G. Y., Wilson was very much impressed by the cooperative spirit of this international gathering. Scientists from sixty-six countries of different political and ideological commitments could work together productively and with "a lively spirit," as he recorded in his travel book *One Chinese Moon* (1960) (Wilson 17). He reflected that the greatest achievement of the I. G. Y. was its demonstration of the fact that

[50] Whitaker and Hewitt 6. MacKenzie 17.

"the people of the earth can work openly and harmoniously together in a world-wide enterprises" (Wilson, *One* 18). This optimism made him skeptical about the common assumption that between politically divided citizens of countries "cooperation cannot be real and hospitality cannot be genuine" (Wilson, *One* 18). If the cold reality of the East-West divide warned him against his visit to China, the goodwill generated at the I. G. Y. enticed him to go anyway. As he wrote at the beginning of his book:

> . . . my visit to China started propitiously, stemming as it did from a splendid meeting marked by a feeling of triumphant and good-humoured fellowship, natural among men who had managed a great co-operative effort in the midst of a divided world. (Wilson, *One* 16)

Given the Sino-Soviet friendship that existed since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949,[51] Wilson's optimistic trust in China as a place worth seeing is not hard to imagine. After all, this is another Communist country on good terms with the Russia he just visited and therefore could be a place to build similar harmonious scientific working relations. Such an assumption is problematic, however, not because Wilson is wrong to expect good scientific cooperation in China but because he envisions China as just like Russia, a comparison that tends to erase the respective specificity of two different countries.

Meanwhile, Wilson did express his genuine interest in seeing China. An exploratory person always keen to visit new places, he deemed it unattractive "to fly back by the way [he] had come" via Western Europe (Wilson, *One* 15-16). He

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[51] For Sino-Soviet friendship, see Lawrance, *China's Foreign Relations* 15-34. Schurmann and Schell 227-60. China Research Associates, 585-86.

preferred to go the other way round first to China and then over the Pacific to Canada. The traveller's natural interest in visiting China brings him to the foreign land finally, leaving the door open to apprehending a country both culturally remote and politically antithetical to his home country. Yet, at the same time, he approaches China with an optimistic vision that affects his understanding.

This chapter is an exploration of the question of cross-cultural understanding by examining the achievements as well as limitations of Wilson's representation of China as he observed it on his 1958 trip. After the I. G. Y., Wilson's observations disrupt his Cold War assumptions; he continues to be articulate about the discrepancies between the imagined China and the one he experienced in his travel. We see with privileged hindsight that, on most occasions, his understanding cannot transcend the limit of history and his realm of knowledge. Either confined to some extent by well-known stereotypes or replicating traditional Western discourse about China, his interpretation of China proves to be partial and limited. However, the way he translates foreignness showcases a conscious effort in understanding an alien culture based upon the recognition of the common ground underneath striking national, cultural, and political disparities. Such an understanding comprehends cultural difference not as an obstacle to knowing a foreign culture but as a puzzle that elicits his interest in that culture and his passion to understand it better. The process of cultural translation not only brings about an insightful vision of the traveller's original culture but also results in a global consciousness or a cosmopolitan conviction that casts into doubt the constructed boundaries between nations and cultures.

Preconceptions Disrupted

Not long after he got to Peking, Wilson began to doubt a popular image of Chinese people:

> The idea that the Chinese are impassive and inscrutable people seems entirely wrong to me. The different scientists whom I met each day, although serious and hard-working, seemed to be full of good fun and humour. When we relaxed over a meal or on a trip to see some palace, we all enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. They were polite and considerate and seemed genuinely glad to see me, for my visit provided them with opportunity to display their achievements and to get news of the work of others. The fact of the matter is that they gave me a very good time in China. (Wilson, *One* 69)

As a result of the traveller's contact with his "serious and hard-working" but humorous, "polite and considerate" Chinese colleagues, he questions stereotypes about Chinese people being "impassive and inscrutable." Later, he reasserts his learning about the Chinese: "I found the Chinese whom I met to be warm and intelligent people, humans exactly like ourselves" (Wilson, *One* 106). Travel brings Wilson to "the contact zone" where encounters with the native Chinese present a new picture of these people that goes beyond a familiar stereotype (Pratt, *Imperial* 6). Letting his experience disrupt preconceived stereotypes, as it shows here, forms the starting point of a productive process of knowing the foreign place.

Yet, Wilson does not abandon stereotypical thinking completely. He speculates two causes for the formation of the stereotype of Chinese "inscrutability": one is China's "former position of inferiority, which they felt keenly," and "the other is a more fundamental matter, connected with their philosophy and the nature of their language" (Wilson, *One* 69). Wilson's judgment sounds arbitrary because he provides no evidence for his assertion. Additionally, his explication of Chinese language evidences his ignorance:

> Chinese is a language with an unfamiliar grammar and a comparatively small vocabulary. A great wealth of meaning is conveyed by the skillful use of this vocabulary and by giving a multitude of meanings of a single syllable, differentiating these meanings by inflection and tone. By "tone" is meant the manner in which a syllable is pronounced, whether upon a single pitch or with a steadily rising accent, or a falling accent, or an accent that rises and then falls. There are said to be as many as eight different tones in use in some Chinese dialects.
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> In other languages these tones are not needed for this purpose, for a greater variety of words is available; and inflection is therefore set free to express emotion, rather than to convey meaning. I suspect that a Chinese cannot display so much emotion in his speaking as we can, for to do so would alter the meaning of his words. He has to speak impassively to be correctly understood. It is also traditional good manners to be calm and not to display emotion. (Wilson, *One* 69-70)

From a linguistic point of view, Wilson obviously did not understand what a word means in Chinese; he did not know that Chinese has many words that are monosyllabic or mono-morphemic. He seemed to have some vague idea about the language's "skillful use of [its] vocabulary," but he did not know that the skillfulness of the language lies partly in the compounding, which makes Chinese very productive: this language combines single morphemes to create complex words easily. For example, while *cha* (茶) means "tea," by adding *ye* (叶) meaning "leaf," *cha-ye*, tealeaf, is created. If adding *pin* (品) before *cha* which means to taste in an appreciative manner, *pin-cha*—to taste tea appreciatively—is formed. Obviously, in Chinese, many of the mono-morphemic words are meaningful by themselves, so in combination of the compounds and mono-morphemic words, Chinese vocabulary is certainly not small. Also, Wilson seemed to have no idea of what tone means Chinese language. By understanding tone as a way to differentiate meanings, he seemed to think that words with the same consonant and vowel combinations are the same words, which is certainly not true: a Chinese dictionary, say, *Xinhua Zidian* (新华字典), shows that it is hardly the case that there is only one word listed under the same sound—composed of the same consonant, vowel, and tone.[52]

Wilson's incorrect understanding of Chinese language and his explanation for Chinese inscrutability reveals the limitation of his cross-cultural

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[52] *Xinhua Zidian*. For the Chinese concept of "word," see Packard 14-18. For tone, morphemes, and compounds in Chinese, see Li and Thompson 6-9, 10-15, 45-84.

understanding. It is an epistemological achievement that he lets what he observes—his warm-hearted Chinese colleagues—disrupt the inscrutable stereotype he knows so well and that he learns new information as he interacts with the visited place. Yet this achievement is conspicuously partial: while travel brings him to challenge a stereotype, he also justifies and even reinforces it, believing that it is "traditional good manners" for the Chinese "to be calm and not to display emotion" (Wilson, *One* 70).

Nevertheless, the process of translating Chinese inscrutability ends up with an enlightening conclusion. He pondered the question "whether one can thoroughly understand Chinese culture, or any other, without first knowing the language," and began to envision the necessity of learning the language in order to know its corresponding culture better (Wilson, *One* 70). Here, linguistic and cultural difference turns out to be not an obstacle in understanding a foreign place but a marker that flags the need to learn it more.

The New Vision: Validity and Limitation

Wilson's visit to a commune in the suburbs of Peking exemplifies another case of productive but questionable understanding of the traveled place. Again, he laudably lets what he observes disrupt his preconceptions:

> Although it was Sunday, most of the men were using the fine summer weather to plant and irrigate the fields and most of the women were in their houses, busy with their children and their household duties. The children were running around in the sun and playing in the mud or dust

> outside the doorways. They had few clothes on and the boys under four wore none. They strutted about, proud of their bare brown bodies. The scene was peaceful, industrious, ancient and not at all miserable. The houses were old and the village had an air of accumulated untidiness. There was no outward sign of regimentation or evidence of any violent uprooting or upheaval. (Wilson, *One* 115-16)

The scene he saw is "peaceful," "industrious," and "ancient." The negative expressions such as "not at all miserable" and "no outward sign of regimentation or evidence of any violent uprooting or upheaval" indicate the images of China he knew of prior to his travel. This contrast between what he had known about Communist China and what was actually in front of his eyes marks his learning of another aspect of the country that contradicts what he was familiar with before.

However, this new vision is also limited: basing his understanding solely upon what he sees results in an idealized version of the visited place. The following paragraph is found in Wilson's later version of the same trip:

> I saw much in China to admire. I wandered through beautiful old temples and palaces that are now being restored and opened to the public. I liked the theatres and the food, and the quiet, polite, and good-humoured Chinese people. . . . I sympathized with the gargantuan efforts the Chinese are making to reorganize the life of their nation and improve the lot of the people. Some of these efforts have been misunderstood in the West by reason of insufficient knowledge or special pleading. The commune system is a case in point. As I saw it on travelling through the countryside,

> it is not a matter of rehousing people in barracks, but of reorganizing village life. . . . The peasants, instead of each working his own plot to pay the landlord, have been formed into groups to work much larger tracts, and they have established communal dining halls and day nurseries to economize on labour. The uprooting caused untold misery, but now everybody works, some enthusiastically and some because they have to. Whether willingly or unwillingly, the activity is prodigious, and because of it new railways, new factories, new dams, new universities, and new cities are sprouting up all over China. ("China " 243).

Wilson is quite right in representing the efficiency of the Chinese system he witnessed during his trip in order to challenge the misunderstanding of the country in the Cold War West, but it would be interesting to know that he traveled in the year when China reaped a good harvest thanks to favourable weather conditions. The enthusiasm, the fervour, and the prosperity Wilson witnessed may be a manifestation of the joy, pride, and optimism of the harvest year, while the hidden problems of the Great Leap Forward movement and the commune system are things Wilson could not see. Throughout the country in the year of Wilson's travel, cadres reported exaggerated production figures in both agriculture and industry. The Central Committee of Chinese government, instead of taking seriously doubts raised at the Wuchang conference in November 1958, endorsed the inflated figures, which encouraged the planners to set unrealistically even higher targets for 1959. Historians conclude that it was the exaggerated nature of the prosperity that undermined the success of the Great Leap Forward movement

(Lawrence, *China since 1919*, 170-71). Actually, the next year, China suffered from drought in the north-east and flooding in the south, and the whole country plunged into the catastrophic famine period that was to last for three years until 1961 and caused forty million people to starve to death. As the Cambridge economist Joan Robinson who visited China in the summer of 1963 studying the commune system notes:

> Although the achievements of the Great Leap in 1958 are a matter of pride and satisfaction to the Party and the people, it is admitted that serious mistakes were made and that overinvestment occurred which put the economy into an unbalanced position. In the normal way this would have been corrected over the course of a year or two without any great disturbance. But, as bad luck would have it, the three "bitter years" of natural disasters followed, and the unbalanced state of the economy made them all the harder to meet. (Lawrence, *China since 1919*, 174)

Not only that. The community kitchens and canteens that impressed Wilson as being effective to raise people's living standard gradually went out of fashion. The system of so-called free-food as the basis of these communal canteens proved to be wasteful and weakened the incentive to earn (Lawrence, *China since 1919*, 170-71). Of course we cannot blame Wilson for not being able to see things he could not see, but, with a historical perception, we understand how limited and risky it is for the traveller to make judgment only by trusting his eyes.[53] Johannes Fabian critiques this way of knowing as insufficient because of

[53] In another essay, I articulate the "suspension of judgment" in understanding the

its predication on "visualism" (106), or "objectivism" as Pierre Bourdieu would call (qtd. in Spurr 26), that forbids the viewer from seeing the complexity of things. Wilson proves to be a sensitive traveller in catching scenes that challenge the notions about China popularly accepted at home; he is yet to learn the visited country in its complexity, seeing that China, probably like any other country in the world, is far more complicated than what his eyes can tell.

Wilson's understanding of China also lacks complexity in a broader sense: when representing his two visions of China, he echoes the binary images of this country that have long permeated so many classical Western texts. The suburban commune scene in the earlier quotation turns out to be "not violent uprooting and upheaval" but "peaceful, industrious, [and] ancient." In a description of rural China when the Trans-Siberian Railway had reached the Yellow Sea, Wilson has another version of Chinese idyll:

> The train was running along an embankment by the edge of the sea where the last fields give way to salt marshes. Fascinated, I watched fishermen tending their intricate bamboo traps among the reeds. Along an ancient canal, laden barges sailed almost imperceptibly forward. In crowded villages of mud huts, women washed clothes, swept dust and nursed their children. In this peaceful corner of an ancient land, nothing appeared to have changed. (Wilson, *One* 15)

Wilson admits in the Preface that, when writing his travel book, he had little time to read others' opinions about China. So, unlike other travel writers about China

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foreign. See Chen, "Enlightened" 59.

who always find themselves quoting earlier texts about the places they visit,[54] Wilson's writing is largely generated out of his observations, or as he claims, "[i]t naturally gives the first impressions of a traveller and not the dicta of an expert" (Preface). Yet, perhaps not a pure coincidence, China's changelessness has long been a recurrent image in various Western texts. Dating from the eighteenth century, J. G. von Herder (1744-1803) denounced the Chinese empire as an "embalmed mummy" with an "inner cycle like the life of hibernating animals" (qtd. in Mackerras 110). Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) maintained that, because of China's lack of change, it has no real history and cannot count as part of the world's history, and Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) coined the famous phrase "nations of eternal standstill" and counted China among them (Mackerras 111). Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels perceived China as having been unchanging up to their own time, and Marx replicated Herder's "mummy" metaphor by calling China a "mummy carefully preserved in a hermetically sealed coffin" (qtd. in Mackerras 113). On the other side of the picture of stagnation coexists China as a country of "oriental despotism"—echoed by Wilson's imagination of "violent uprooting or upheaval"—that constitutes an oppositional discourse represented by Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu (1689-1755), Karl Marx, Karl Wittfogel, and, most recently, anti-Communist Richard Walker (Mackerras 40, 271, 116-20, 190). British philosopher Bertrand Russell on the one hand sketched Chinese history as a repetition of despotism, and

[54] Theroux, *Fresh-Air* 147, 152; Ehrlich 78-79, 87, 92; Bordewich xxiii.

on the other, praised China's "tradition of civilization far longer than any known in Europe" (Russell 39).

Wilson's two-sided vision of China also resonates with the representation of China in the travel literature archive. To name just a few writers publishing their books from the nineteenth century up to 1960 when Wilson's own book was published, Mary Gaunt (1861-1942) and George E. Morrison (1862-1920) represent those who tend to see more chaos and backwardness in China, while George N. Kates is mesmerized by the ancient, civilized, and undisturbed way of life he experienced during the eight years of living in Peking from 1933 to 1940. Peter Fleming, travelling in China during the same period when Kates was in Peking, offers a completely different scenario. In *One's Company* (1934), Fleming echoes the stereotype of Chinese despotism, describing the Communists as bandits and condemns their "Red regime" as "a reign of terror" (190). In addition, his representation of Chinese cities is dichotomous: Harbin, Shanghai, Chinchow, and Canton were hopelessly distasteful, while Dairen and Hangchow appeared pleasant and beautiful.[55]

The inadvertent parallel of Wilson's account with the traditional ontological and literary discourse about China denotes that the traveller, though a careful observer, cannot transcend Western tradition in understanding the country. At this point, his vision of China, like his predecessors', stops at the level of a binary vision: they *only* see either China's changelessness or despotism, or both, but nothing more.

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[55] I use these city names as they appear in Fleming's book *One's Company* (1934).

However, the traveller does reveal *a consciousness of the complexity* of the foreign place although his representation appears reductive. In the same chapter where he describes the commune scene, he writes: “The programme of establishing communes, as I saw it, meant that people were being organized into gangs for work, that villages and factories had community kitchens, dining-rooms, wash-houses, and day nurseries” (Wilson, *One* 111). If gauged against a Western standard, this Chinese commune system—disrespecting individualism and private space—sounds unattractive and even condemnable. But, when Wilson noticed that “[t]he programme was designed to increase efficiency and to improve standards of living, and appeared to be doing so” (*One* 111), he has a different viewpoint: “What is being done in China must be considered in terms of whether it is an improvement over the former extremes of poverty and backwardness, rather than whether the conditions are as good as those we are accustomed to in the West” (*One* 111). Adhering to a familiar standard in apprehending a foreign culture, for Wilson, is an inefficient way of knowing that culture. He insists that the foreign culture be read in its own context and articulates a way of learning by positioning China in its own trajectory of history.

Obviously, understanding the foreign place in its own context makes Wilson’s travel in China epistemologically productive. Insisting that a foreign culture be understood in relation to the historical and social context from which it is generated, this way of knowing promotes a profound learning of the foreign culture by going beyond its visible—usually unfamiliar or exotic—forms: it requires probing other ramifications that put such forms into focus. Although

Wilson's text does not show his personal interest in the discipline of Sinology after his travel, a major part of his "Broad thoughts from at home" recorded in the last chapter of his book is his advocacy of establishing institutions for the study of different cultures and civilizations in addition to those only obtained from Western classical texts (*One* 223).

Despite the imperfections and mistakes of his understanding of China, Wilson proves to be a traveller naturally interested in the foreignness of the country visited. Unlike those Western travellers in non-Western places who almost always tend to justify their former knowledge about the place they visit,[56] Wilson is able to see new visions and absorb new information that contradicts what he previously holds to be true. Wilson is also outstanding because he is able to depart from an ethnocentric way of understanding an alien culture. With his natural interest in strangeness and his ability to discard temporarily his preconceived ideas and Western-centric standard of judgment, he presents a potentially productive way of knowing the other place although his translation of the place is always questionable in one way or another.

Learning through Travel as a Scientist

Wilson also obtains a new understanding of the relationship between science and politics. Prior to Wilson's travel in China, he tends to see science as something barely relevant to political setting. He observed at the I. G. Y. that "the

[56] To name just a few examples within the archive of contemporary travel writing, see Joan Didion, V. S. Naipaul, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* and *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*. Julie Checkoway, Gretel Ehrlich, Sarah Lloyd, and Paul Theroux's *Riding the Iron Rooster*.

divisions between the debaters on scientific subjects are not on national lines" and concluded that he could "think of no more homogeneous group in the world than its senior scientists" (Wilson, *One* 18). He was brought to China by "the goodwill generated by the I. G. Y." where he was equally impressed by the collegiality among his Chinese colleagues (Wilson, *One* 16). The cordial collaboration Wilson experienced among scientists of different nationalities laudably makes him rethink the Cold War ideology that splits the world, but his vision of science and scientific communities is undoubtedly an idealistic one. For him, science seems to be an entity that always remains free from political concerns, and scientists can always converse in an easy manner without letting mundane cultural elements get in the way. Such a rosy vision leads in turn to a romanticized picture of the place visited. As Wilson acknowledges—though not without good reasons, "my view of China was more favourable than I had expected or than the reader would expect" (*One* 223).

However, Wilson also unfolds his learning through travel that science cannot remain free from political concerns. In Moscow, encouraged by the friendly relations among scientists and eager to go to China to build more connections, Wilson soon found himself in difficulty travelling to Peking by the Trans-Siberian Railway. The Russian officials did not help facilitate the trip immediately but recommended that he take a jet-plane. Later, when Wilson succeeded in persuading them to accept his preferred means of travel by emphasizing his profession as a geologist, he ran into other difficulties first in getting an extension of his tourist visa and then obtaining a special visa to cross

the Sino-Soviet border. Wilson sighed twice "how watertight the Soviet departments are" (*One* 23).

Besides, his trip to China, though undertaken out of his genuine interest in this country, is meant to solve a problem of a political nature. Due to Taiwan's participation in the I. G. Y. in 1957, two years after the People's Republic of China had adhered to the program, the Academia Sinica in Peking sent word to the central organization that its I. G. Y. committee had withdrawn from the program (Chapman 108). Wilson, a representative of the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics under whose aegis the I. G. Y. was launched, was supposed to visit mainland China and Taiwan "to ascertain which of the two rival claimants was responsible for geophysics and geodesy in various parts of China" (*Unglazed* xi-xii). At some point during his meeting with the Chinese colleagues in Peking, Wilson brought up the matter of "the possible relationship of Chinese geophysicists with the international organizations of their colleagues in other countries," but the discussion was "brief"; he knew that "it was a delicate matter" and therefore "made no attempt to seek an immediate solution" (*One* 77-78). As Sydney Chapman, president of the Guide to I. G. Y. World Data Centres, records, it was "with extreme regret" that on the eve of the beginning of the I. G. Y. the international science community eventually lost its valuable partner the People's Republic of China (*IGY* 108).

The damage politics does to scientific cooperation is not only evident from China's side but also true with the West. In the later version of his Chinese trip

including Taiwan, Wilson criticizes both China and Taiwan and his own country in this respect:

> So ended my investigation of Chinese science. Two Chinas, two academies, each claiming to represent the whole and neither having intercourse with the other. This great rift in Chinese science affects not only science in China, but in the world as a whole. One cannot do global research by studying only three quarters of the earth, any more than one can settle the affairs of the world by pretending that one quarter of it does not exist. As a scientist, I was disturbed to discover that the Government of Taiwan, which is the government of China recognized by my country, does so much less to support academic and scientific work than does the People's Republic of China, which we choose to ignore. ("China" 244-45)

Political enmity apparently poses obstacles for more productive scientific collaborations. While Taiwan and Mainland China competed for membership of the I. G. Y., Canada, too, chose to identify with the participant based on the latter's political affiliation rather than its qualification and competence in conducting scientific work.[57]

As he continued to interact with China as a scientist, the traveller developed a more complicated picture of the country that contrasts with his initial optimistic vision. Earlier in his trip, Wilson more than once marvelled at the diligence and enthusiasm of his Chinese colleagues. As well, he was impressed by the science journals in various languages displayed in the libraries he visited.

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[57] For a brief history of Taiwan, see Lawrance, *China's Foreign Relations* 34-35. For its relation to the People's Republic of China and the US, see ibid. 43.

When visiting the Institute of Geophysics and Meteorology of the Academia Sinica on August 28, 1958, for instance, he showed his admiration for its library which reminded him of the fact that "there were good libraries to be found in every institute and university" he visited in China (Wilson, *One* 81):

> By counting the shelves, I estimated that the reading room held about four hundred current journals on geophysics and related subjects. It was impressively complete and up to date, having, for example, four Italian geophysical journals, five Japanese ones, and all the well-known journals published in English, French and German. I also went carefully through the stacks and opened a variety of volumes there. The sets of all important geophysical journals were complete and there were many marginally related publications such as the Proceedings of the American Society of Civil Engineers, which would be of value when considering the design of earthquake-resistant structures. (Wilson, *One* 80)

In the later version of his travel, he records his good impression for Chinese government's support for education and science:

> All in all I was agreeably surprised by what I saw in China. The Government clearly believes in and supports education and science. The many scientists from the old regime who have remained, although overworked, have never before had so much support, and they are enthusiastic at the material progress being made in China. (Wilson, "China" 239)

At the earlier stage of his travel, Wilson had no idea that prosperity in the sphere of education and science was not a manifestation of freedom to pursue knowledge but a consequence of the unpredictable governmental policies determining the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and the intellectuals. In the mid-1950s, Mao wanted a strong intellectual force to reduce reliance on Soviet experts and also to help bypass bureaucratic channels. So he launched the Hundred Flowers Campaign, a term from a line in his speech: "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend." Although the campaign initially gave intellectuals more freedom to voice their opinions and conduct their research (Lawrance, *China's Foreign Relations* 142), Mao discovered that they made countless criticisms directed at the Communist Party. By June 1957, Mao saw the Hundred Flowers as a threat to the Party and enforced the anti-rightist campaign in order to criticize and reform intellectuals. Historians show that 700,000 Communist and non-Communist intellectuals and officials suffered "remoulding" in the campaign.[58]

Wilson did notice, though, political interference with the scientists during his visit of the Institute of Geophysics and Meteorology of the Academia Sinica in Peking. He saw political meetings wherever he went. He was unable to know the details of the discussions, but he had a sense that, like the wall posters he saw there and on university campuses, those meetings were "one ingenious method of

[58] For the severe criticisms of the Communist Party from Chinese intellectuals, see Dennis J. Doolin's *Communist China: The Politics of Student Opposition*. For the history of the Hundred Flowers, see Lawrance, *China Since 1919*, 141-43. For the anti-rightist campaign, see Schurmann and Schell 146-49 and Passin 18.

keeping technically competent directors and indeed everyone, on the correct political path without destroying their authority" (Wilson, *One* 83).

He also knew that the director of the Institute, Chao Chin-chan, was the target of the posters, as the latter admitted "with a wry smile" when they walked together past the walls and stairways plastered with posters (Wilson, *One* 84). Chao had not lost his authority at the time of Wilson's visit, but he was certainly one of the millions of intellectuals criticized and remoulded in the anti-rightist campaign. Later, when the Cultural Revolution started in 1966, the authority of these intellectuals was completely destroyed. Chao, as the leader of two central scientific institutions, was incarcerated, tortured, publicly humiliated, and persecuted until finally he committed suicide in 1968.[59] Wilson could not have anticipated the ways in which the Cultural Revolution would interference with science and scientists in China. However, his sensitivity to the political discussions and the wall posters complicates the picture of China's enthusiastic scientists and the excellent libraries. Later, he concludes pessimistically: "Communist dogmatism and the free spirit of scientific enquiry cannot long exist together[; one]will destroy the other" (Wilson, "China" 242).

Critical Sensibility Engendered

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[59] Institute of Geology and Geophysics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, "历任所长," http://www.igcas.ac.cn/about/info-49.html. Baidu 百科, "Zhao Jiuzhang," http://baike.baidu.com/view/50822.htm. It is not clear why Wilson recorded his name as Chao Chin-Chan. The director of the Institute of Geophysics of Academia Sinica from 1950 to 1968 was Zhao Jiuzhang (赵九章) in modern Pinyin (reading as Chao Chiu-chang).

Wilson's cross-cultural understanding is productive in another sense: given the disrupted preconceptions about the place visited, his experience in reality prompts a critical reflection about his domestic culture where his preconceived understanding of the place was formed. American mass media, according to Wilson, played a major role in shaping his imaginations about China. "Indeed," as he writes, "anyone who has read the descriptions of China common in the American press for the past several years would expect me to have seen little but brutality and misery" (Wilson, *One* 223). We should know that, though not an American, Wilson, like all other Canadians, was constantly exposed to American media. The United States, arguably China's biggest enemy during the Cold War, had influenced its Canadian neighbour not only at the political and ideological level but also in the social and cultural realm; the American way of life infiltrated every aspect of Canadian life ranging from mass media to everyday life style.[60] In particular, Canadians watched American television directly or via the government-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and were regularly exposed to the anti-Communist propaganda from the US.[61] It is not surprising that, when Wilson's travel experience in China led him to rethink his preconceptions about this country, the first thing coming to his mind was the American press.

Wilson's negative attitude toward American media revived an earlier memory of talking with sixteen Canadians who represented all shades of opinion from ardent left-wing writers to conservative newspaper editors and bank

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[60] Bothwell 26, 49-50; MacKenzie 1, 12, 16.
[61] Bothwell 50; MacKenzie 16; Whitaker and Hewitt 95.

presidents. They had all been in China but "without exception all found much that was praiseworthy in China" (Wilson, *One* 227). He mentioned in particular Walter L. Gordon, a most respected chartered accountant, businessman, and adviser to the Canadian Government, who wrote the unfaithful report of one of the widely circulated weekly news magazines about a 1959 May Day Parade which Gordon also attended. Gordon quoted from the magazine containing an account of squadrons of Russian-made tanks of the People's Liberation Army and forktailed MIG-17 having been displayed in the parade. While he had no doubt that the Chinese had Russian tanks and planes, Gordon believed that the report from the magazine was not true because he was at the parade from the beginning to the end and yet had seen none of these things himself. Wilson also remembered that once when he pointed out the biased published account about China to a group of business men in New York, the publisher of a well-known American weekly magazine sympathized with his view but explained his own stand by saying: "We can't move faster than our public" (*One* 229).

The words of this publisher and other travellers to China disclose the propagandistic nature of American and Canadian mass media. What is at stake here, however, is not Wilson's critique of the media *per se* but rather, that he has acquired through travel a critical distance from his home culture. This critical distance enables the traveller to detach from his communal self and to think critically about the material context at home that generates his preconceptions of the place he visits. The consequential new, retrospective, and critical vision of home makes Wilson's cross-cultural travel productive.

Meanwhile, as a transcultural traveller, Wilson remains critically sensitive to the blinkered vision from the Chinese side. Mr. Tien Yu-San, Wilson's translator, is insensitively parochial and narrow-minded in the traveller's eyes. "He knew English well but knew little about the West," Wilson noticed, "and most of what he thought he knew about it was quite wrong and distorted" (*One* 139). In their conversation about international affairs, Mr. Tien turned out to be strongly indoctrinated and immensely nationalistic, regarding the US and Britain only as China's enemies. As the Soviet Union was no longer China's favorite partner since 1956, he denied Russian influence in China, regardless of the eight-year alliance between the two countries since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, claiming that "[t]he strength of Russian influence in China is a false idea planted by American imperialists" (Wilson, *One* 175). When commenting on the issue of Taiwan, Tien said:

> You see the spontaneous expression by the Chinese masses of their hatred of the American imperialist aggression . . . The Chinese people have risen as one man to repel the United States invasion of our country. We will defend our homes and repel the American invaders and liberate the oppressed people of Taiwan from the corrupt dictatorship of the Chiang Kai-shek clique. (Wilson, *One* 179)

In a sense, Tien is a reflection of Wilson's former self full of imaginations about a foreign place before travel takes place. Tien is too much confined by the propaganda of his own country just as Wilson was by that at home. Though Tien knows English well enough to interact directly with English speakers, his

understanding of places such as the US, Britain, and Taiwan only parrots the stereotypes widely circulated in Communist China. He is incapable of communicating with people from a system different from his own and cannot conceive of a different perception, which is shown in the following retort by Wilson, the Western traveller:

> I admit that we Westerners in our dealings with China did not always behave well. Merchants advanced their own interests and our governments backed them up, but you should nevertheless be grateful to them as well as to those who acted unselfishly. Had not the West forced its way into China, you would still be serfs under a decadent Chinese imperialism. Very wisely you are copying us in an attempt to raise your standard of living. Every dynamic innovation introduced by your new regime is borrowed from the West. . . . (*One* 175)

Wilson's retort, probably out of anger, tends to romanticize Western expansionism and underestimate the value of China's openness to foreign systems and styles. Nevertheless, he expresses a different perspective in looking at the relations between China and the West, a perspective that Tien found himself unable to imagine: "What you say may sound superficially correct," said Tien, "but of course it is wholly wrong . . ." (Wilson, *One* 176).

Removing Biases and Translating Cultural Differences

Wilson's critical awareness of the biases from both home and the visited country entails a series of epistemological accomplishments with regard to cross-

cultural understanding. He starts to consciously avoid the binary vision and replace it with a broader and nuanced understanding that rejects a simplistic interpretation of either the Communist or Western culture. When he overhears an Australian Communist telling the Chinese of the evils of Australia, Wilson thinks it "most unfortunate that a majority of the people who visit China have little good to say about the Western world" (*One* 103). He equally believes it wrong that "most of what we have read in North America for the past ten years about the new [Communist] regime had been wholly bad" (Wilson, *One* 103). Without subscribing to Communist doctrine, he feels that "a lot of the things being done in China had needed doing and were being done well" (Wilson, *One* 103). Despite the superficial nature of this understanding of China's social progress, which I discussed earlier, the significance lies in his attempt of "an objective appraisal" of both home culture and the traveled culture (Wilson, *One* 227): it is important not just to see the good side of one's own country and evils of the other but also to remain sensitive to the problems of one's own culture and to be able to recognize the validity of the foreign culture, something that he found his Chinese translator unable to do. "[T]o achieve an objective appraisal," as he points out, "we must recognize the existence of bias in our thinking" (Wilson, *One* 227). As well, one needs to be aware that "contradictory views are possible and legitimate" (Wilson, *One* 230).

Wilson's nuanced vision eschews the binary epistemological logic and embraces a complicated picture of both home and abroad, enabling him to detect connections underneath cultural differences. After meeting Chinese and Russian

people and the scientists from around the world at the I. G. Y., Wilson sees them as "human beings very like ourselves" who share a variety of traits common to mankind (*One* 233). He detects the similarity between Chinese and Canadian police: the Chinese policemen he observes at a railway station in Manchuria are "brisk and officious," presenting an intimidating effect just like "our own police" (Wilson, *One* 49). Later on, when visiting Chinese institutes, he witnesses the ten-minute physical exercise accompanied by lively music and analogizes it to coffee break at home (Wilson, *One* 83). His sensitivity to the familiar in the foreign also brings him to enjoying Peking opera:

> There was no orchestra such as we are accustomed to, but instead a variety of metal and wooden cymbals, gongs, and sounding boards. . . . These maintained a general background of rhythm, which rose to a deafening clanging when the action became exciting. Whenever the hero stamped his foot and scored a point, whenever the villain entered or embarked upon some nefarious plan; whenever the poor heroine, after much lamenting and wringing of hands, finally made up her mind (usually the wrong way), the gongs beat furiously to emphasize the drama of the moment. (Wilson, *One* 91)

In the next paragraph, he compares this piece of Peking Opera to what is familiar at home:

> So far from being an opera in our sense of the word, the show was a first-class melodrama in which songs played a comparatively minor part. It was

> brilliantly acted, gaily costumed, and enriched by clowning, tumbling, singing, and especially the exotic gongs. (Wilson, *One* 91-92)

While Wilson's interpretation might be superficial to an expert, he is able to translate Peking Opera into something familiar to himself. Phrases such as "orchestra," "background of rhythm," "drama of the moment," and the descriptions of various actions performed by different characters connect the exotic art form to "a first-class melodrama" that makes sense to him (Wilson, *One* 92). Because of this connection, Wilson finds the show "splendid entertainment" (*One* 92).[62]

Wilson also seeks connections between different histories. In the last chapter of the book, Wilson distances himself from his Western cultural background and contemplates the parallel between an evolving Russian Communism and a progressing Western democracy:

> . . . the Russians, having built the foundation of their new life under Stalin's cruel dictatorship, are now avidly seeking freedom. They are making progress in industry and in education, not because of Communism, but in spite of it. (*One* 232)

Different from the common-sensical understanding of Communism as an impoverished ideology, Wilson's interpretation probes deeper into Russian history to contemplate the complexity of Communism. "Communism," for

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[62] Victor Segalen calls the person able to enjoy the difference between him/herself and his/her object of perception "an *exote*." Todorov explicates that "the true exote, like a collector able to enjoy infinitesimal nuances among the objects of his collection, appreciates the transition from red to reddish more than the transition from red to green" (Todorov 328-29).

Wilson, proves to be a useless and misleading term: it cannot connote the actual complexity of social reality within a Russian system that—though different from what is familiar in the West—is equally valid in bringing about industrial and educational process. In order to take into consideration the nuances of the Russian history during the Stalinist era, Wilson should have given a second thought to this part of history reduced simply to "Stalin's cruel dictatorship." [63] But, by grasping the common aspiration for social progress in Russia and the West, Wilson throws into doubt the presumed gaps between different political systems; he demonstrates his competence of understanding things different and foreign by bridging these gaps at a conceptual level.

To understand an alien culture is to see the similarities between that culture and one's own and to perceive its connections with one's home culture through approximation and compromises. This connecting vision rejects a limited understanding of the foreign and home culture as mutually exclusive, completely unrelated, or as related only through opposition, which renders them necessarily and always diametrically different.

However, a conscious effort in seeking connections between cultures by no means indicates an erasure of the differences between home and the visited country. After all, when Wilson translates the Chinese marches and the working songs into "Western military tunes with an Oriental flavour," the similarity he perceives is indispensable to the difference between the two kinds of musical forms (*One* 141). In addition, the exotica of China is always present and

[63] Cohen 161-70; Fitzpatrick 143-59; Reichman 1-34; Ali 9-29.

sometimes overwhelming: the Oriental crowd, the illegible Chinese language signs, the fishermen tending bamboo traps among the reeds are just a few of so many details that make Wilson feel that entering the Orient is like "jump[ing] off a dock into the sea" (*One* 44).

Neither does the ability to build connections with the Other suggest a "loss" of the traveller's self. Wilson frequently represents himself as different from the Chinese. Noticing a parochial Chinese passenger struggling to figure out how to use the facilities of the sleeper in the train, Wilson regards him as a laughing stock:

> While the porter struggled in the crowded compartment to make up two of the berths, I, lying in my lower, had a splendid view of the activity in the opposite upper. Can you imagine an enthusiastic, excited Chinese who has never before seen European bedding trying to make up an upper berth in which he is squatting in a swaying train? He did not know what the towel was for; he did not at first recognize that the pillow slip was a bag; he had no idea of where the sheets went; but he was a quick learner and by leaning perilously over the edge he could catch what the porter was doing to the berth below. Eventually he made it. He got the blanket, himself and all his clothes between two sheets.
>
> For the first time in my life I almost cried myself to sleep—with laughter—before they switched off the light and the Moscow radio (*One* 46).

The privileged persona of a pure observer distances the Western traveller from the Chinese native, forming a sharp contrast between the latter, for whom mobility is a luxury and the former who always enjoys the privilege of travel.[64]

On another occasion, when Mr. Tien introduced a Toast to Peace, Wilson offered the toast before anyone did in order to suggest that "the Western countries were at least as desirous of peace as the Eastern," and he followed this habit for the rest of his trip (*One* 57). And at a restaurant he shook hands with the cook who carved the roasted Peking duck in order to remind his Chinese hosts that "Canadians understand the meaning of a classless society as well as most nations" (Wilson, *One* 78).

Not only does Wilson become more conscious of his Western cultural identity, but also he becomes acutely aware of the differences among countries previously regarded as similar or identical. Reflecting his visit to several other Communist countries during the I. G. Y., Wilson writes:

> . . . what struck me most about them was how greatly they differed one from another, how little like a united bloc they were. The assumption that a common faith is sufficient to hold dissimilar nations together would seem to be disproved by the warring history of Christian Europe. (*One* 232).

History endorses Wilson's learning that it would be a folly to assume Communist countries are all siblings and resemble one another. Simply think of the Soviet-

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[64] In an autobiographical account, Wilson writes: "Travelling when I did and the way I did had given me an opportunity to be shown the world as few people have ever enjoyed." in Kenney-Wallace et al. 281.

Yugoslav intervention in Hungary in 1956, or the traditional anti-Russian sentiments in Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Romania,[65] we know why Wilson was impressed by the differences rather than similarities among countries within the East Europe Bloc. His comparison of the European history is useful where countries seemingly unified by Christianity were constantly at war with one another: even within the same religious bloc, there exist differences and conflicts drastic enough to lead to violence and warfare.

Wilson also noticed during his travel that China did not seem to be as close to the Soviet Union as he had imagined. He was surprised "not to see more Russian influence in China" (*One* 175). When reflecting on his travel experience after coming back home, he noted that "[t]he acceptance of Russian doctrine and help was inconspicuous" (*One* 224). Wilson obviously knew of the alliance between the two countries, but his observations proved to be true: although the People's Republic of China in the early stage was inevitably dependent on the Soviet Union, it gradually found Soviet aid inadequate and its development model inapplicable. Their relationship began to deteriorate after 1956, the year China's economy declined even further with a disastrous harvest. By the time Wilson came to China, the two countries drifted further apart,[66] and it was for this reason that China launched its Great Leap Forward movement, aiming to boost its domestic economy by relying on its own resources.

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[65] For the Soviet-Yugoslav intervention in Hungary in 1956, see Swain and Swain 89-92. For the conflicts and breaking off of the diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, see ibid. 69, 96, 107, and 141. For anti-Russian sentiment in East Europe, see Schopflin 84.

[66] For Sino-Soviet rift from 1956 to 1965, see Lawrance, *China's Foreign Relations* 64-70.

What makes Wilson's understanding of foreign places productive is his rejection of a binary and categorical way of thinking. He abandons the alleged antithesis between China and the West, Communism and Western democracy and remains sensitive to the identical social and cultural phenomena of the visited country. By making sense of the foreignness he encountered and coming to terms with it, the traveller demonstrates his competence in translating a foreign culture where differences are negotiated and assimilated rather than generalized and essentialized. The identification of shared qualities between cultures does not make the traveller less perceptive of cultural differences. Likewise, remaining critical about his own cultural setting—although requiring a temporary distancing from his communal selfhood—by no means entails the loss of the traveller's Western cultural identity. The similarity between cultures the traveller identifies is indispensable to their difference; his ability to discern both simultaneously is crucial to achieving cross-cultural understanding.

"A Broader Humanism"

Wilson has already learned through travel that scientific work can hardly stay free from political interference. Yet interestingly, this learning does not seem to shake his conviction that science can be a possible bridge between peoples and countries. Nor does he seem to ever lose his belief in the productivity of scientific work that transcends political boundaries. He not only contributed to the I. G. Y. that organized scientists from around the globe for the common purpose of studying the Earth and its relation to other planets, but also gave great support to

cultural exchanges. With the contacts obtained through his travels, he had facilitated three exchange visits of designers and consultants between Canada and China as Director General of the Ontario Science Centre. Later, the visiting exhibition on the origin and development of science in ancient China followed, and was recognized to be "an enormous success." [67] In the five years after the exchange, there were one hundred and seventeen science centres built in all parts of China, helping to make science more widely accessible to Chinese people, especially to children and youths (Kenney-Wallace 283-84).

Such a commitment to science as a bridge between two countries contrasts with some early scientist travellers' accounts where science as an imperialist tool stratifies and separates peoples and countries.[68] Wilson's travel results in an acquisition of "a broader humanism" that distinguishes him from those early scientist travellers who were also servants of imperialism (*One* 237). His critique of irresponsible science and humanities articulates "a broader humanism" as a result of travel:

> Unhappily, the scientists, in their preoccupation with the pursuit of knowledge, have taken little responsibility for the results of their search. They often fail to realize that without great effort there may soon be no civilization within which to pursue their quest. Perhaps for this reason, their work has made less impact on the classical centres of the universities

[67] Garland 550. I use the form of Wilson's first name as "Jock" instead of "John" in accordance with the way the name is given on the book *One Chinese Moon*.
[68] See Roy Bridges's analysis of the nineteenth-century scientist traveller, Baron Alexander von Humboldt, for example, and also his study of the Royal Geographical Society as an institution that channels science towards becoming imperialistic.

> than on the rest of the world. The humanists, the custodians of the classical tradition, still dominate Western universities. Resenting the power of science, they seek to oppose it by pretending that life has not changed; satisfied with the 'eternal verities', they are blind to much else in life. Many of them pride themselves on a total lack of scientific knowledge. Is not this attitude as irresponsible as that held by the scientists? (Wilson, *One* 236)

The critical reflection of science and humanities in Western universities embodies Wilson's belief that science needs to be an ethical commitment; scientists need to have a sense of responsibility for the result of their work in order for science to benefit humankind. His 1975 Massey Lecture rearticulates this point in a different context, instructing that scientists need to think how to approach science ethically and combine it with philosophy and social elements to make it benefit humankind as a whole.[69]

At the level of humanities, Wilson sees parochialism as its major problem. This system of knowledge, according to Wilson, resents the power of science as another effective way of exploring the unknown, and it focuses too much on Western traditions and civilizations. Wilson advocates that Western institutions of humanities broaden the scope of teaching and learning to include studies of other civilizations. He remembered musing idly on the Trans-Siberian Railway: "I often wished that I had had more education in the humanities so that I should have more knowledge of the languages, literature, history, religion and philosophies of the

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[69] *Massey Lectures 1975*.

people among whom I traveled, until I reflected that the average course in the humanities would have taught me little of those countries since they lay outside the classical orbit" (Wilson, *One* 236). He criticized the tradition of Western education where "a knowledge of the outlines of Western civilization became the test of an educated man," just like the Chinese tradition of recruiting their civil servants—the literati—where, for two millenniums, only knowledge of the classics of Confucius were tested (Wilson, *One* 235). This closure to other systems of knowledge and civilization only obstructs human development in various realms.

What causes the exclusion of foreign knowledge systems and the antagonism between science and humanities is the lack of "a broader humanism" as Wilson understands it, a humanism "with a regard for all mankind" and—in terms of science—"a sense of the power and responsibility of science to succour all men" (*One* 237). Wilson is blatantly insensitive to the gendered nature of language, yet his advocacy of responsible science and broad humanities denotes a cosmopolitan conviction as a result of travel that transgresses political and national boundaries.[70] He raises a series of thought-provoking questions after his travel in China which further illustrate his cosmopolitan vision:

> Can we use our minds to recognize that while many of us live in greater luxury than man has ever known before, all of us live in greater danger?

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[70] It should be noted that cosmopolitanism is a heavy-loaded term having its own genealogy of significations. My usage of "cosmopolitan" derives more from Ulf Hannerz defining cosmopolitanism as "a perspective, a state of mind, or . . . a mode of managing meanings." Hannerz 238. For the variety and a history of cosmopolitanism, see respectively Malcomson 233-45, and, A. Anderson 265-89.

> Can we recognize that mankind's greatest problems are common problems for all men? Can we overcome our mistrust of and hostility to strangers sufficiently to co-operate with them? . . . Can we see that although governments and individuals differ, the human race is everywhere much the same? (Wilson, *One* 234)

What underlies these rhetorical questions is the traveller's insightful contemplation of the relationship between the self and the other, and the East and the West as a result of interacting with a foreign place. It is a broader, relational, and connecting vision, a global vision that recognizes the differences between peoples, nations, and cultures but embraces a more productive relationship between countries by coming to terms with the differences. Such a vision expresses a willingness to engage with the other and contains a belief that the engagement with the other enlarges one's understanding of both the other and the self and that the knowledge of the foreign enriches that of one's own country and benefits humankind as a whole.

Conclusion

Wilson's *One Chinese Moon* is a significant text in the archive of travel writing. It deserves critical attention not only because it is a neglected account barely read by scholars of travel literature, but also because, thematically, it offers a viable case study of cross-cultural understanding. Wilson's travel in China took place in the height of the Cold War when the traveller's home country was separated ideologically, politically, and culturally from the country he visited, and

yet he attempts an understanding of the visited country that transcends at the conceptual level the boundaries between two supposedly oppositional cultures. In this sense, Wilson's travel narrative intervenes the convention of the genre in which cultural difference is essentialized and the apertures between peoples and cultures seem unable to be understood and negotiated.

Wilson's text counteracts the conventional representation of transcultural contact by offering a horizon of cross-cultural understanding.[71] The traveller represented in the book is sensitive to the contradictions between his preconceptions about the place visited and his actual observations in that place. In the process of coming to terms with both what he preconceives and what he encounters, he shows a conscious effort to understand the foreign country despite the fact that his understanding is always limited in one way or another. His interpretation of the foreign country may bear witness to the limitation of his knowledge and illustrate the difficulty in transcending traditional Western discourse about that country, but he is nevertheless capable of detecting similarities underneath striking differences between cultures, and he embraces a nuanced vision of both home and the visited place that rejects a binary and categorical way of thinking which forecloses understanding of the foreign. The traveller's cross-cultural understanding is productive also in the sense that he acquires—as a result of interacting with otherness—a critical sensibility to the parochialism both at home and in the visited country. Just as being a geophysicist who envisions "an elegant, orderly simplicity" beneath "all the chaotic wealth of

[71] I am enlightened here by Todorov's idea that "the horizon of [the] dialogue between cultures . . . is understanding" (84).

details in a geological map" (Garland 551), as a traveller he envisages a universality between cultures underneath myriads of cultural differences both beheld and imagined. For him, cultural difference is no longer just an obstacle in cross-cultural communication but an invitation for one to approach the alien culture and a call for a better and more systematic learning about the other civilization that is to enrich and benefit one's own.

Chapter Three Enlightened Ambivalence: Peter Hessler's *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*[72]

Peter Hessler has gained the reputation of "one of the preeminent Western writers living in China" after publishing *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze* (2001) and *Oracle Bones: A Journey Through Time in China* (2006) (Carrel 33). Yet in an interview conducted in Beijing by Louisa Ermelino, he denied his authority in speaking about the country:

> I was 29 when I wrote *River Town*, I'd been in China two years and I didn't want to assume this authoritative voice; I didn't want to labor under the pressure that I was writing a book that represented China. It's a massive place. After almost 10 years here, I feel like my approach has changed, but my instinct is the same. I wrote *Oracle Bones* to look at the country from certain angles through certain characters' eyes, not to tell everyone what China means. (26)

Hessler offers here a different kind of profile about himself as a travel writer from Jan Wong's in her travel books I discussed in the first chapter. Rather than claiming authenticity for his account and demonstrating relentless certainty in what he writes about China—the kind of representation we see in Wong's books—Hessler is reserved about his interpretation of the country. This reserved attitude is conspicuous in *River Town*, his travel memoir recording his two-year living experience in Fuling from 1996 to 1998 as a Peace Corps volunteer. I argue

[72] An abbreviated version of this chapter has been published in *Genre* 29 (2009): 53-69.

in this chapter that Hessler's skepticism about his documentation of China derives from a productive interaction with its foreignness. The linguistic and cultural immersion in the traveled place results in a process of transculturation that brings about new understandings not only of the foreign people and their culture but also of his self and his own country.[73] Cross-cultural understanding for Hessler is his enlightened ambivalence about his cross-cultural experience, one that results from his accumulated learning about self and other in the contact zone and registers the understanding of the other as an open-ended, ongoing process of communicating across borders.

The Transculturated Traveller: Linguistic and Cultural Immersion

When Hessler has just arrived at Fuling Teachers College, he describes how the cadres deliver their speeches forcefully, "like old films of dictators," especially Vice President Dou:

> . . . he worked the microphone brilliantly—at first softly, calmly, like a lecturer talking to a group of children; now louder, slowly quickening the gestures, a slender hand waving out over the crowd, almost as if scolding them; and finally he was shouting, arms pumping, eyes flashing, loudspeakers booming, the speaker and his audience now equal, united as comrades, patriots, servants of humanity; the crowd rising and erupting into cheers and a mad rush of applause. (*River* 7)

[73] For the concept of transculturation in terms of cultural identity, see West-Duran 972.

With barely any knowledge of Chinese, the traveller views both the speaker and the audience as close to aliens, funny, crazy, and obviously inscrutable. Or if the scene makes sense to him at all, it retrieves stereotypes about Communist China familiar to Westerners, stereotypes signified by "equal, united as comrades, patriots, servants of humanity" and the overall frantic, revolutionary ambience the passage conveys. Yet, instead of leaving his apprehension of China at this level, Hessler determines "to learn Chinese" and designates it as one of the purposes of his trip to China (*River* 60). What follows is his two-year teaching at Fuling Teachers College which offers him an opportunity of language and culture immersion that brings his understanding of China and his own self to a new level.

Located in the eastern part of Sichuan, Fuling had always been a poor part of the province by the time Hessler stayed there. It had no railroad; to go anywhere, "you took the boat" (Hessler, *River* 3). For many years it had remained closed to outsiders; Hessler and Adam, his Peace Corps colleague, were the only foreigners in town. Learning Chinese in such a place turns out to be not easy, not because of the difficulty of the language but because of the parochialism of the local people. At the beginning, the traveller encounters catcalls such as "Halloo" and "*Waiguoren*" wherever he goes. People's general assumption is that "*Waiguoren* [meaning foreigners] couldn't learn Chinese" (*River* 60). The local prejudice does not dishearten Hessler, however, but fosters a stubbornness that drives him to learn the language anyway. He realizes that he cannot "live there for two years and not learn to speak Chinese" because so much depends on knowing the language—his friendships, his "ability to function in the city," and his

"understanding of the place"; learning the language is as important as fulfilling his obligations as a teacher (Hessler, *River* 60, 61).

When Hessler focuses on studying Chinese, Fuling becomes closer and closer to him. He starts to spend more time in the city, seeking opportunities to make conversations with the locals at teahouses, in parks, and other public places. Eventually, he notices that the city "was slowly becoming less intimidating"; he concludes that it is actually not difficult to learn spoken Chinese in a place like Fuling: "Virtually nobody knew English, and there was so much curiosity about *waiguoren* that people constantly approached me, and once we started talking there seemed no limit to their interest and patience" (Hessler, *River* 140). Despite Fuling people's parochialism, they have a natural interest in foreigners, which facilitates the traveller's learning of Mandarin. He feels—as he says—"[t]he city was teaching me Chinese" (Hessler, *River* 140).

The way Hessler converses with his Peace Corps buddy, Adam, who teaches at the same college, reveals the language immersion they both experience in the place they visit:

> Really we had four languages: Chinese, Special English, which we used when speaking slowly with the students; Normal English, for the rare times when we happened to go someplace where there were other *waiguoren*; and Fuling English, which was what we spoke when we were together. Fuling English consisted of a combination of slang from our previous lives, references to the local mythology, and a sort of pidgin Chinese: certain useful Chinese words and phrases, spoken without tones,

> and often corrupted with an English "s" at the end (there are no plurals in Chinese and words never end in an "s" sound). In our Fuling English, *guanxi* meant "relationship"; *xiaojie* were "young women"; *mafan* was "trouble." (*River* 139)

Living in a different language and cultural environment, Hessler—as well as Adam—experiences an evolution of the language they employ. While Normal English flags their original identity, Chinese, Special English, and Fuling English signal the transformation of the language used in the travelled place as they participate in the realities of the local daily life. Chinese is mandatory for them to function well in Fuling; Normal English is slowed down to Special English in order to suit the students' comprehension level; in particular, they develop a special kind of Fuling English that marks their unique linguistic identity.[74] I endorse Mary Besemeres's argument in her reading of *River Town* as a "language travel" narrative that the traveller's active engagement with the social life of Fuling extends "his Chinese-speaking self" and results in his "self-in-translation" that characterizes his transcultural experience (28, 33).[75]

The traveller's self-transformation through linguistic and cultural immersion is most evident in his relationship with Teacher Liao, his Mandarin

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[74] Eva Hoffman has a similar account of how writing in English—her second language—gives her "a written self" or her "English self" (121). See also Robert Young's analysis of hybrid language in a colonial context as "powerful models" that "preserve the real historical forms of cultural contact" (5).

[75] Michael Cronin notices an indifference about the question of language in the studies of travel literature published in the last two decades, which leads to a serious misrepresentation of both the experience of travel and the construction of narrative accounts of these experiences (2). I hope my attention to the traveller's language immersion contributes to travel literature studies in this sense.

tutor, a lecturer from the Chinese Department. At the beginning, the traveller's American sensibility is frequently frustrated by Teacher Liao's rigid Chinese way of teaching: she is too strict to appreciate the student's effort in learning. No matter how hard her student tries to do things properly, she always responds with a discouraging *budui* (meaning "not right") followed immediately by the correction. It is not hard to imagine that the first tutorial ends up with the learner's head reeling—"had a human being ever compressed more wrongness into a single hour?" (Hessler, *River* 70) Hessler grows to hate *budui*:

> . . . it bothered me . . . because I knew that Teacher Liao was only telling the truth: virtually everything I did with the language was *budui*. I was an adult, and as an adult I should be able to accept criticism where it was needed. But that wasn't the American way; I was accustomed to having my ego soothed; I wanted to be praised for my effort. I didn't mind criticism as long as it was candy-coated. (*River* 70)

This passage explicates that Hessler's desire for ego-soothing out of his American growing experience conflicts with Teacher Liao's adherence to traditional Chinese educational ethics that prioritizes strictness as a teacher's responsibility.

If the cultural clash with his Chinese tutor emblemizes the traveller's original self constantly at odds with the visited culture, as time goes on he develops a cultural sensibility of a person living in between cultures that denotes his transculturated self. When discussing the Opium Wars, Teacher Liao's nationalistic attitude is blatant in Hessler's eyes: she "quietly pointed out that America had also benefited from the unequal treaties that were forced upon the

Chinese," and "lingered over the description of the *waiguoren* looting and burning the Summer Palace" (*River* 146). During the review of the chapter on science and technology, he observes that Teacher Liao is immensely pleased with Chinese scientists' discovery of Daqing fields "after Liberation" as it debunks American experts' claim that there are no major oil reserves in China (Hessler, *River* 146). When Teacher Liao brags about China's oil self-sufficiency for the second time, Hessler retorts by citing *Newsweek* that China had become a net oil importer in 1995, and he further points out: "Americans don't worry much about being self-sufficient in things like oil, because we have good relations with many countries and have never made an effort to close ourselves to the outside world" (*River* 146). Interestingly, such a retort is not shot out of narrow-minded patriotism—"I had never been a patriot, and certainly I had never been patriotic about oil," as Hessler declares—it bespeaks "a *waiguoren*'s sensitivity to any sort of slight" that leads him to resist the parochial nationalism he encounters in the traveled place (*River* 146).[76] For even at the moment of complaint, more sensible voices sound in the traveller's head: "what about Pat Buchanan? America First? The anti-Chinese laws in the nineteenth century?" (Hessler, *River* 146) As a cross-cultural

[76] Besemeres is right to say that the way of using Chinese possessive pronouns in phrases such as "our China" and "your American" "exemplifies a particular (reading as "parochial") way of thinking about nationality," but I part with her when she claims that Hessler's similar use of the pronouns in his retort "involves taking on that way of thinking" (34). By correlating what Hessler speaks with what he thinks, Besemeres imposes a causal relation between language and thought. Such an imposition proves to be groundless if we see that Hessler's retort, though linguistically it bears a parochial attitude, actually articulates a resistance against the parochialism blatant in his Chinese tutor. For the folly of the notion—what language one speaks determines what thoughts or intentions one can have—see Appiah, "Thick" 392.

traveller, Hessler, "like any *waiguoren* in China," is always conscious of the fact that he has access to a great deal of information that is unavailable to the Chinese, due to his lived experience in both places (*River* 145). This consciousness, or the traveller's cultural sensibility, denotes a clear vision of his self obtained through cultural contact with people of the visited culture, a self seen through the mirror of those people and one incorporating with it the element of those people.[77]

As they interact more, both Hessler and his Mandarin teacher experience a change of attitude toward each other. At the end of the first year, Hessler feels that his Chinese life "was developing" and senses that "in the second year everything would be better," and in particular, he writes about his relationship with Teacher Liao:

> Even my classes with Teacher Liao had become markedly less tense. It was as if our Opium Wars had allowed each of us to see the other clearly, albeit in very brief flashes of contrary opinions, but the honesty of these viewpoints seemed to matter more than their substance. To some degree I knew where she stood—she had definite suspicions about *waiguoren* and their views on China, but she was open enough to make these suspicions clear. Increasingly I was inclined to see this as a welcome change from the English department cadres, who smiled and treated me kindly but never dropped their guard. Teacher Liao at least respected me enough to provide

[77] I agree with Richard van Leeuwen's interpretation about self-other relations where he argues: in cross-cultural contact, "the other is incorporated into the self-image; he is related to it and eventually becomes an inseparable component of it. Ultimately, the self-image cannot exist without some related image of an 'other'" (28).

> glimpses of her viewpoints, and I sensed that she saw me in a similar light—a *waiguoren* who didn't always respect China but was at least willing to talk about it. Our Opium Wars didn't end in victory or loss; rather they quietly slipped away, and increasingly I enjoyed my classes. (*River* 167)

Similarly, from Teacher Liao's side, she begins to like that her student is learning Chinese "fairly quickly" and respects his effort to study the language (Hessler, *River* 145). Especially after Hessler wins the Fuling running race, she "beamed" when starting their lesson, feeling proud of him, and on that day she "hardly said *budui* at all" (*River* 93). When, near the end of her student's stay in China, she notices at a college banquet Mr. Wang, an administrator, making fun of Hessler's Chinese by "speaking with patronizing slowness," she stands out to defend him: "Ho Wei"—Hessler's Chinese name—"understands what you're saying! . . . We studied that a year ago. You don't need to talk to him like that!" (*River* 389). Her reaction reminds Hessler of the fierce pride with which she once defended Prime Minister Li Peng, a pride that he would accuse as parochial nationalism or a sign of political indoctrination a year ago but now a pride he "was happy to share in her loyalty" (*River* 389). In their last two classes, Hessler's blunt complaints about "the administration's pettiness and the mocking catcalls in town" no longer elicit her proud justification: "never once did she try to defend any of it" (*River* 390). After a year's time together, Hessler feels that he can fully understand Teacher Liao, as he reflects when waiting for her return from the bathroom after a rush of pregnancy nausea:

> A year ago, I would have assumed that she would cancel class, but now I knew better—we would finish the two hours today. I knew exactly how she would act when she returned, and what she would say. And I knew that I would always remember this woman's quiet pride and toughness, and the way it had gone from being infuriating to something whose consistency was admirable and even comforting. (*River* 390)

Paying tribute to her "quiet pride and toughness," Hessler again reveals an aspect of his self growing out of his contact with his Chinese teacher. On the other side of the cultural contact, Teacher Liao's gradual appreciation of her American student's effort in learning and participating in the life of a foreign place and her open defense for his Chinese competence in the face of the college official indicates a change of her rigid attitude originally cultivated by her Chinese upbringing. Both the traveller and the native experience transformation in the process of their mutual interactions.

While learning Mandarin with a Chinese tutor proves to be self-transforming, teaching literature as an American to his Fuling students is equally transformative. Most of his students are from the local peasant families and do not have much connections to places other than where they reside, or as the writer says, they are "young men and women from the countryside of Sichuan province, a backwater by Chinese standards" (Hessler, *River* 42). Teaching a group of provincial students as a foreigner first of all means "to negotiate your way through [the] political landscape" because, as Hessler observes, the college's priority was political: "All that mattered was that students used the correct

terminology and the correct political framework as they viewed the world around them" (*River* 41, 39). Teaching English and American literature under such circumstances, he needs to learn "how to minimize the politics, to find subjects and ways to approach them that didn't trigger the standard knee-jerk reactions" (Hessler, *River* 41).

In the adaptive process of teaching, Hessler obtains a new vision of things originally familiar to him. He notices in class that his students are able to *hear* a Shakespearean sonnet by scanning its rhythm—"They read the poem to themselves and softly beat time on their desks," and realizes that this is something "few American students could do": "We didn't read enough poetry to recognize its music, a skill that educated people lost long ago" (Hessler, *River* 42). In addition, discussing Shakespeare with his Fuling students brings about a new, refreshing literary experience; he had read the poem countless times but "had never heard it truly" until he stood in front of his class in Fuling and "listened to their stillness as they considered the miracle of those fourteen lines" (Hessler, *River* 43). In fact, the exchange through teaching with his Fuling students "made everything new: there were no dull poems, no overworked plays, no characters who had already been discussed to the point of clinicism" (Hessler, *River* 44).

Reading students' journals, too, enables the traveller to see both self and other, and home and abroad with new eyes. The first thing he finds in the students' writing is himself: everything he did was written about and "every quirk or habit was laid bare" (Hessler, *River* 16). Things that are common for him become uncommon in his students' eyes: his "impossibly long and straight" nose,

his hazel eyes which the students take for granted as blue, his habits of carrying a water bottle to class, his style of dressing casually "with his belt dropping and dangling," and the way of laughing and pacing in class are all regarded as unusual (Hessler, *River* 17). The lazy game of throwing Frisbee becomes "Olympian" and "heroic" and, along with his quirks and habits, acquires a new look in the traveller's mind's eye as he reads his students' writings (Hessler, *River* 16, 17). The friction between his implied self-perception as normal and the unexpected way his students view him sparks the humour of his cross-cultural experience and "transform[s] him in his own eyes" (Besemeres 36).

Also, with the students' journals, "parts of Fuling slowly began to draw into focus" (Hessler, *River* 16). Hessler does not understand the military training in the college, yet the following passage in his student's journal seems to offer him a glimpse:

> Everyone should have a strong sense of patriotism, especially the college students. Our state costs a lot of money to educate them. They should be faithful to their motherland. Army force is a symbol of the power of a country, so it's necessary to have some knowledge about military. In 1989, there was a student movement in Beijing. For the youth, their thoughts don't ripe and they don't have their own ideas, so the surroundings can influence them easily. Also they can't tell the truth for the fault. Where there is exciting thing, they turn up. After the movement, our state decides to have military training in college, to make them understand that it is not easy to obtain our present life. (*River* 15-16)

Later, Hessler is not surprised to find his students having "difficulty in criticizing anything Chinese," as the indoctrination of the political seems too seamless for students to develop their critical thinking (*River* 23). In Ker's fantasy writing about how he chooses to abandon farm work for study, Hessler sees "a great deal of Sichuan in those two hundred words" (*River* 25). In the forty-five shopping lists as a result of the students' collective misunderstanding of the free-writing assignment assigned by Adam—"write about anything you want," Hessler also sees a lot of Sichuan: "I want a new TV, a new dress, a new radio. I want more grammar books. I want my own room. I want a beeper and a cell phone and a car. I want a good job" (*River* 26).

Immersion into Fuling's life relies not only on close interactions with the city's street life and the people he works with in the college but also on his diligent adaptation to the city's daily routine. At first, he does not understand where the boats are going, why the college is regulated the way it is, and what the rules of Fuling croquet are, but he has learned to get accustomed to things as they are; for him, "the regularity was what mattered" (Hessler, *River* 15). He neglects the honking, the noise, the air pollution, and other things that are initially "very annoying" and, like the locals, starts to "talk about other things" (Hessler, *River* 63). He finds it helpful to stick to his own routine of running:

> . . . [jogging] kept my mind steady, because the fields were quiet and peaceful and the activity felt the same as it always had. That old well-known feeling—the catch in my chest, the strain in my legs—connected all the places where I lived, Missouri and Princeton and Oxford and

> Fuling. While I ran through the hills, my thoughts swung fluidly between these times and places; I remembered running along the old Missouri-Kansas-Texas railroad pathway, and I recalled the rapeseed blooming gold on Boar's Hill, and the old shaded bridge of Prettybrook. As the months slipped past I realized that even these Sichuan hills, with their strange tombs and terraces, were starting to feel like home. (Hessler, *River* 72)

The jogging routine he creates for himself provides space for the traveller to negotiate the strangeness of Fuling and helps him establish a connection with the place. The fluid swing of his thoughts about his travelling experiences around the world strings different localities together; Fuling as one of the localities that contains his lived experience becomes familiar and home-like.

The transformation of the traveller's self is most dramatically presented with the contrast of his father visiting China. Having lived in Fuling for half a year, Hessler understands how overwhelming the place is for his fifty-six-year-old father: "The noise, the dirt, the language, the endless swarms of people, the constant bustle of life on the streets—all of that was too much" (*River* 328). Though a person always finding "comfort in hard exercise," the father continues his daily running only to find himself sick: "his nose ran like a faucet and his throat burned; he hacked up coal dust into my sink" (Hessler, *River* 328). Watching his father go through all these difficulties in his ten-day visit reminds him of how much he himself has changed:

> That was perhaps the longest week and a half I spent in China. It was like seeing a reflection of my entire first year, cut and spliced and crammed

> into ten days . . . I found that it was difficult to predict what would bother him, because I had been in Fuling for so long that I no longer saw it with a true outsider's eye. A slow boat that might seem perfectly fine to me was terrifying to him, while other things that I had worried about, like the spiciness of the food, didn't pose the slightest problem. Like many Peace Corps volunteers all over the world, I found that the parent visit was a kind of revelation: suddenly I saw how much I had learned and how much I had forgotten. (Hessler, *River* 328-29)

Indeed, the traveller becomes "a new person, He Wei, or, as the Sichuanese pronounced it, Ho Wei":

> Ho Wei wasn't really a person until my second year in Fuling, but as time passed I realized that he was becoming most of my identity: apart from my students, colleagues, and the other foreigners, everybody knew me strictly as Ho Wei, and they knew me strictly in Chinese. (Hessler, *River* 238)

He further describes Ho Wei, his new self, as "completely different from his American self": Ho Wei is "friendlier," "eager to talk with anybody," "funny" in a simple way; he is "stupid," speaking "with an accent," having "lousy grammar," and laughing at the simple mistakes he made (Hessler, *River* 238). He always carries his notebook in his pocket, and "when Ho Wei returned home he left the notebook on the desk of Peter Hessler, who typed every thing into his computer" (*River* 239). In the eyes of the transculturated traveller, Ho Wei and Peter Hessler represent his different selves growing respectively out of his Chinese and American life. Although, as he says, "Ho Wei and Peter Hessler"—born out of

different cultures—"never met each other," the notebook with which Peter Hessler records his Chinese experience connects the two selves together: it is "the only thing they truly shared" (*River* 239). The notebook, I believe, emblemizes the traveller's transculturation as a result of his language and cultural immersion; with it—where the traveller's two selves unite—generates a new being, a transculturated self watching and analyzing his old self and its new growth. Despite the difficulties and problems his old self encounters in the new place, the traveller feels "an enormous freedom" in his new identity and allows freedom for his new self to grow more, "like an adult watching a child grow up" (Hessler, *River* 238, 248).[78] No wonder that, near the end of his travel in Fuling, his twenty-ninth birthday feels different from any other he has celebrated thus far: "Always in the past my birthdays had felt like somebody else's—it seemed impossible that I had really gained another year. But this time I knew that I was twenty-nine; in some ways I felt much older" (*River* 394).

Epistemological Gain of Travel

The sense of growth the traveller feels no doubt registers the uneasy learning process immersing in a different culture. The learning not only brings him closer to the place and the people there but also teaches him a way of understanding otherness that makes his travel epistemologically productive.

[78] The concept of transculturation embodied in the traveller's new identity coincides with Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity. For Bhabha, the importance of hybridity is "not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity . . . is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge." See Rutherford 211.

When reading his students' journals, Hessler finds it the strangest detail of all that many of them write about his blue eyes. Strange because he never knows that his eyes are blue in others' eyes; they are always hazel. The small detail reveals to the traveller the danger of seeing with preconceptions or stereotypes in one's mind: "my students had read that foreigners had blue eyes, and they saw what they wanted to see" (Hessler, *River* 16). This "cultural dominance of vision," as Kiegel and Wulff describe it (112), is always what Hessler tries to avoid in his viewing of China. He approaches the country thoughtfully and carefully, eschewing the "pre-mediated/mediated vision" and deploying a nuanced gaze rather than being blinded by his own cultural blinkers (Kiegel and Wulff 112).

With such a vision, Hessler sees it as naïve to know people based only on their national identity. While participating in—and later leading—Fuling's long race, he is showered by people's catcalls. Later, when he wins, the front-page story of the city's newspaper reports the attitude of the local community deeming it a shame that a foreigner wins. His Peace Corps friends—from the other side—tell him that he shouldn't have tried to win, as that has obviously offended the Chinese's patriotic sensibility. But Hessler thinks differently:

> . . . I like running races hard, just like many others in the competition, and I saw no reason to treat the people in Fuling like children. I wanted them to know that *waiguoren* were living in their city, and I wanted them to see that despite all my struggles with the language, there was at least one thing I could do well. If they reacted with shame, that was unfortunate, but

> perhaps when they grew to know me better it would be different. I figured it was a good sign that my certificate read "Comrade He Wei." (*River* 93)

Running the race with a strong determination to communicate validly with the local people, Hessler sees both in the local spectators and his Peace Corps friends the limitation of knowing people as racial or national labels. The local community's parochial patriotism blinds them to knowing who the foreigner really is and, particularly, his aspiration to become a member of their community. His friends, by implying in retrospect that he should have pretended to lose, treat the local people "like children" and dismiss them as incapable of communicating at the same level. Hessler, instead, creates chances for the natives to get to know him better by making himself visible when he joins the public race. In doing so, he wishes people to see him as an individual rather than a racial and national emblem. He understands that thoughtless clinging to collective identity when interacting with a foreign culture—evident in both the Fuling natives and his Peace Corps colleagues—confines one's capacity to learn about the foreign and precludes understanding across racial and national lines.

Hessler also learns to maintain a critical distance from the stereotypes of the traveled place and to suspend his judgment when encountering the unfamiliar. When he senses that the benefits of his transcultural experience are starting to outweigh the difficulties, Hessler concludes that "developing patience and trust" is what really matters for one living in a foreign culture (*River* 193). In addition to perseverance and courage in meeting challenges of a different culture, "patience and trust" denotes a kind of productive passivity at the moment of encounter. To

live as a *waiguoren*, he accepts that things happen best when he "simply let[s] them happen" (Hessler, *River* 193). He allows people to approach him instead of suspecting their intentions (which he finds are "almost invariably good").[79] Gradually, in spite of "the stifling attention" and "the constant mocking shouts," he begins to see the other side of Fuling people: they "were fascinated by *waiguoren* and once a conversation started they tended to treat me much better than the average person" (Hessler, *River* 193). His passivity in front of the townspeople is obviously not a nonchalance or indifference toward a culture hard to penetrate but a hope to understand the culture when it can be seen in more discernible shape. It is a gesture of opening up to otherness instead of remaining confined within one's preconceived ideas which urge one to pass snap judgment on people and things strange to oneself.

The suspension of judgment is more revealing when Hessler remains passive in reading his students' writings:

> I sensed that I simply couldn't judge the students for anything they thought, at least in the beginning. Their backgrounds were too far removed from what I had known before coming to Fuling, and, like all young Chinese, they were surrounded by the aura of a troubled past. It was easy to forget this—it was easy to laugh at their ridiculous names, or smile at their childlike shyness, and it was easy to dismiss them as simple young people from the simplicity of the countryside. But of course nothing was

[79] Hessler, *River* 193.

> farther from the truth—the Sichuan countryside is not simple, and my students had known things that I had never imagined. (*River* 22)

The traveller's cautious judgmental pause indicates his consciousness of the gap between what he had known about China and the more complicated backgrounds of his students existing beyond the scope of his knowledge. He foresees the danger of quickly rendering them as naïve and simple-minded by relying on easily available stereotypes. This moment of passivity before interpreting the other resonates "the epistemological dwelling" required by "the ethical performance of travel" which Syed M. Islam believes preconditions learning of the other in its own terms (77). Besides, having in mind the students' "troubled past," Hessler is well aware of the necessity to understand his students within their own specific historical context instead of gauging them against a standard only familiar to himself. The latter way of knowing only reaffirms things already known and overlooks other judgmental standards that are equally valid in a different context. It therefore limits one's learning capacity and forecloses understanding foreignness in its own terms. Seeing that "the Sichuan countryside is not simple" and that his students know things he "had never imagined," the traveller takes into account other dimensions—possibly the social, cultural, and political contexts—when trying to make sense of the traveled place. Although Hessler does not come to any conclusion about his students or China in general, his consciousness of the unknown ramifications of Fuling and its inhabitants and his inclination to understand his students as historical subjects is to engender nuances of the traveled place and make his dialogue with the place fruitful.

The traveller's thoughtful way of understanding expands his vision of things. After conversing with Teacher Kong, Hessler rethinks the issue of democracy in China and the US. He notices "a strain of idealism" in the way Teacher Kong looked at American-style democracy, "because he didn't realize that in fact the poor and uneducated rarely bothered to vote in the United States" (Hessler, *River* 142). American democracy seems to be a matter of choice given his role of "casting meaningless votes and accepting the results," but in China, "democracy is as much a matter of tolerance as of choice":

> In the end, Fuling struck me as a sort of democracy—perhaps a Democracy with Chinese Characteristics—because the vast majority of the citizens quietly tolerated the government. And the longer I lived there, the more I was inclined to see this as the silent consent of people who had chosen not to exercise other options. (Hessler, *River* 143)

Whether this is a proper definition of Chinese democracy is not clear, yet by making sense of Chinese people's tolerance for the government, the traveller envisions democracy with a new layer of meaning.

China's Three Gorges Project also presents a more complicated picture. Aiming to transform part of the Yangtze River into a reservoir for more electricity, the Project means a large scale of gentrification since a large section of Fuling will be flooded for the construction. Hessler feels "a touch of sadness" like most outsiders (*River* 115), and he cannot quite make sense of Chinese people's indifference to the Project that is to cause so much impact upon their lives. Later, living through periodic power cuts in Fuling, he gains new perspective on this

issue: China needs enough electricity to sustain people's everyday life, and the fact that China has a long history of pioneering in managing rivers for the benefit of its people makes the Project a natural solution for this country (Hessler, *River* 115). Without justifying the Three Gorges Project, he envisages it in a new light; his perception of China acquires a visible degree of nuance and complexity.

The traveller's enlightened vision is also evident in the connections he detects between the visited country and his home country. In his reflection about American and Chinese democracy, he realizes that, "regardless of whether it was the Chinese or the American government claiming to be empowered by the common man, part of it was dishonest wordplay" (Hessler, *River* 142). Watching TV in China, he often finds one channel focusing on "some happy minority, usually the Tibetans," which reminds him of the traditional stories about the "wonderful friendship between the Pilgrims and the Indians" told at a public elementary school in Missouri where he tutored for celebrating Thanksgiving (Hessler, *River* 192). He observes that "these myths were a sort of link between America and China—both countries were arrogant enough to twist some of their greatest failures into sources of pride" (Hessler, *River* 192). Seeing similarities between China and the US distances the traveller from the reductive binarism that deems the two countries exclusively oppositional and unrelated to each other. The bridging vision, objecting to essentializing differences between nations and cultures, exemplifies the translatability of cultures by recognizing their shared commonality. In Tzvetan Todorov's sense, this is a cross-cultural understanding

built upon the identification of “a universality” achieved by “comparison and compromise” and “with the help of successive approximations” (84).

Travelling in a strange culture therefore engenders a more nuanced way of thinking. Remaining mindful of the folly of seeing with preconceptions and of judging people in racial and national terms, inclining to translate otherness within its own historical, social, and cultural context, and identifying connections between the visited country and the home country are all valuable learning during the course of Hessler’s consistent dialogue with the traveled place. His way of knowing has brought into light many aspects of Fuling and China as well as of other issues that were beyond his realm of knowledge prior to travel.

Coexisting with the traveller’s harvest in cultural understanding is the feeling of ambivalence about his cross-cultural experience. Being a *waiguoren*, he is always held at a distance and constantly forced to negotiate the strangeness and occasionally inhospitality of the traveled place. Even when he becomes intimate enough with the place to have a sense of home there, the feeling of estrangement still haunts: “in a way that distance was hardest to deal with once it was gone” because he then finds himself outside the context of his Chinese friends and unable to get involved in their lives (Hessler, *River* 395). The ambivalence here, as we see, results from the tangible boundaries between himself and the place he visits. No matter how fluent he is in speaking their language and how hard he has tried in establishing connections with the local community, the dividing line seems always present, mocking the traveller for being an outsider.

Nevertheless, he is certain that the boundaries are elusive and artificial. His official role as a Peace Corps volunteer in Fuling is unreal to him, for he never feels committed to "save anybody or leave an indelible mark on the town" (Hessler, *River* 396); it is teaching and learning about the city and its people—the life of dwelling in and interacting with the traveled place—that is more meaningful to him. Although Hessler is a Princeton-and-Oxford educated English major teaching poor, rustic Chinese students, he feels no difference between him and his students when the simple beauty of a Shakespeare poem mesmerizes them all. He has a firm feeling of being an integral part of Chinese educational system, teaching rural Sichuan students who are supposed to teach after graduation in the same place where they come from. When he tours around the neighbouring places and is surrounded by curious kids, he sees the significance of his job: for two years, he has played "a role in an education system that included children like this" (Hessler, *River* 352). This vision connects the traveller to the local community on a humanistic level—both he and the children he meets, along with his own students at the Teachers College, are components of the same system—a vision casting aside any definable boundaries as artificial and inconsequential.

However, despite his confidence about connecting validly to an alien place, his ambivalence about his transcultural experience never evaporates and is later accentuated by the video he and Adam make to record their life at Fuling. Hessler hopes that the camera will help retain his memory about the place where he has lived for two years, but the outcome is disappointing. So much is missing from the tape that the video turns out to be "the most unpleasant to watch"

(Hessler, *River* 384). It does not show that "confidence and looseness" are the best ways to deal with people's stifling attention—that is, the ways in which both he and Adam make themselves buffoons in front of the Fuling crowd by laughing at themselves and calling themselves "foreign devils" (Hessler, *River* 384). The challenges they confront and the efforts they exert in order to communicate with a foreign culture are completely absent from the video. Neither does the tape say anything about "the baggage that accompanied a *waiguoren* holding a camera in China" (Hessler, *River* 384). For Hessler, knowing the film-maker's cultural baggage is essential for the audience to understand why the film represents China in a certain way. The Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni, invited by Premier Zhou Enlai, made a documentary in 1972, one that was not intended to show China negatively but was regarded as doing just that. This incident teaches Hessler to be careful with his own camera, but still the video is unsatisfactory and his cultural background is completely absent from the film he produces. Most disturbingly, even though he watches the tape more than a dozen times, he cannot spot the moment "when a Fuling crowd became a mob": according to the tape, when someone from the crowd prohibits his videotaping, the townspeople once familiar and nice to him suddenly become an angry and hostile mob, but "the quicksilver instant" of this sudden reverse cannot at all be traced from the video (Hessler, *River* 385).

The ambivalence he feels about the tape denotes an acute awareness of the gap between what he understands about Fuling and what the video represents. While a useful tool, the camera proves to be incapable of expressing Hessler's

impression about the place he visits. As he concludes after watching the tape: “all of our experience failed Adam and me while we videotaped” (Hessler, *River* 385). The camera seems more powerful in highlighting differences between the traveller and the traveled place than recording the complexities of his interactions with it. Despite the traveller’s profound immersion into the Fuling community, all the film shows is “a blunt useless truth”: “after two years we were still *waiguoren*, both in the way we acted and in the way the people saw us” (Hessler, *River* 386).

If Hessler’s ambivalence signifies at first sight the materiality of cultural difference that challenges his transcultural experience, it reveals, at a deeper level, the unresolved paradox about cultural boundaries he has experienced in a foreign place. On the one hand, he feels the distance between him and Fuling no matter how far he has integrated into its language and culture, and on the other, he has a solid sense of growing in the process of dialoguing with the place where the boundaries become mutable and porous. The video no doubt reflects the boundaries, but Hessler’s profound discontentment denotes the big loss of the most valuable part of his living in a place that nurtures the growth of his new identity. What the tape provides is the “truth” that he is still a foreigner in the midst of Fuling people, but it is a “useless” truth since it excludes so much about his relations to Fuling and cannot express how enriching and transformative his travel really is.

This ambivalence, I believe, is an enlightened one. Rather than a feeling of uncertainty when encountering the strange, or an inability to communicate in the presence of otherness, Hessler’s ambivalence is generated from a productive

interactive learning process entailed by his travel. He has not only acquired a foreign language but also obtained new ways of thinking that have expanded his vision of the traveled place. He feels an attachment to Fuling and is confident about his connection to it, embracing it as a place where he grows a new identity that offers him "an enormous freedom" that questions the boundaries between nations, cultures, and races (Hessler, *River* 238).

The Travel Writer as a Critic

Hessler's enlightened ambivalence as a result of travelling in China is also seen in his chosen humility. When acknowledging that China is "a massive place" and denying his authority in speaking about the country (Ermelino 26), he reveals an informed reservation about his knowledge acquired through his travel, an attitude formed by the confidence of knowing coupled with the consciousness of the limitation and partiality of his knowledge. The more he knows about China, the more mysteries reveal themselves, and the more he feels he needs to learn. The matter here for the traveller, though, is not about endless learning—since, understandably, the vastness of China and the limited time of his stay there makes it impractical and impossible to pursue endlessly knowledge about the country.[80] What matters more is his self-critical attitude toward what he has already learned about the country and his self as he interacts with the new culture.

[80] In fact, according to Jacques Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis, one can never completely grasp what is China. Lacan studies the child's self-identification process and concludes that the absolute truth—"the real"—is perpetually inaccessible; one can only approach it but never fully and absolutely grasp it. Eagleton 167-71.

As a traveller gradually getting to know the local people, he is able to look back at his old self from a critical perspective. On Chinese New Year's eve, a young couple Feng Xiaoqin and Huang Xiaoqiang, owners of a local noodle restaurant beside the campus, invited Hessler—the only foreigner in town at that time—to have dinner with their family.[81] Hessler did not expect that their two-year-old son would be terrified of his foreign look: although later on he got used to Hessler's presence, the boy kept crying at the beginning and his mom had to take him away to another room to calm him down. Hessler reflects on the incident in his book:

> There was a great deal of generosity in their having me over for dinner. They had known that the child would cry and possibly offend me, but they had invited me anyway. I thought about Christmas dinner in America, and I wondered if I would invite a foreigner or a black to eat with my family if I knew that my child was afraid of such people. Probably I would—but there would be a point to what I did. I would realize that this was an important lesson for my child, as well as an important gesture toward the guest, and this would make me feel good about it. I would do it for myself as well as for the others involved.
>
> But tonight there wasn't any point. Feng Xiaoqin . . . and her family hadn't invited me in order to make a point about xenophobia, or anything like that. They knew that I was alone on the holiday, and I was

[81] The Spring Festival, or the Chinese New Year, is a time for family reunions. Though Hessler was "the only *waiguoren* in the city," he felt that "Fuling was my home" and decided to stay there when his American friends all went travelling (*River* 295, 294).

> their friend; nothing else mattered. They were simply big-hearted people and that was the best meal I ever had in China. (*River* 303)

Hessler knows that the Huangs are a parochial, "uneducated family" (*River* 295), but this does not forbid him from admiring their big-heartedness. In front of their simple generosity, the traveller's educated rationalization of life is represented to the readers as definitely less heart-warming if not disturbingly self-centric and narrow-minded.

While Hessler does not conceal his humbleness as a traveller during cross-cultural contact, as a writer he openly discusses his writing about a foreign culture as partial and limited: he gradually develops in his book a self-reflexive mode in representing Fuling culture to his readers. When depicting gender relations in Fuling, he is conscious of his limited understanding since these issues are "hard to understand very fully"; they are "sensitive, private" and, besides, he is an outsider (Hessler, *River* 275). He portrays one particular socioeconomic group in Fuling of what he calls "the young moneyed male," but at the same time, he admits that his writing contains "an unfairly narrow prejudice" and acknowledges that he also makes friends with "several wealthy young men who didn't match this stereotype" (Hessler, *River* 277). Similarly, when concluding that in Fuling men are far more likely to cause him trouble than women, he admits that it is a huge generalization. He first supplements his conclusion by disclosing that the phenomenon is not exclusively applicable to Fuling: "it was similar to any sort of harassment in America, which typically comes from young men" (Hessler, *River* 279). He then provides an instance from his own experience that contradicts

his representation of Fuling men: “while I instinctively learned to be more wary of males, I nevertheless found that my closest friends were men, and I was far less comfortable associating with women on a one-to-one basis” (Hessler, *River* 279).

The ambivalence about the video I laid out earlier denotes his critical attitude toward another form of representation. Regarding the video’s recording of his Fuling life as “a blunt useless truth” (Hessler, *River* 386), the writer spots an irony: he needs to rely on his video camera to retain his lived experience at Fuling, yet the images it produces prove to be insufficient and even distorting, incapable of expressing his real emotions about his Fuling experience, which he holds as uneasy but deeply enriching.

Hessler’s ambivalence about language and image as a travel writer coincides with many literary critics’ skepticism about literature as a form of representation. Terry Eagleton, for instance, agrees with the English philosopher J. L. Austin about the performative nature of language and explains: “Literature may appear to be describing the world, and sometimes actually does so, but its real function is performative: it uses language within certain conventions in order to bring about certain effects in a reader” (118). In other words, although literature is often intended to reflect real life, it seldom achieves this goal completely because the production of a text is always mediated through the convention of language use and the expectations of readers that almost always undermine the reflective role literature is intended to fulfil. Eagleton also articulates the insufficiency of the camera in his interpretation of Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory. The camera stands in between the objects and the

spectator; its "obtrusive operation" forbids the spectator to access the objects directly (Eagleton 171). The images obtained are "grasped as the product of a specific set of technical devices"; their meanings are therefore mediated, not "a 'natural' or given reality which the camera is simply there to reflect" (Eagleton 171). If Eagleton's analysis provides a theoretical grounding for the constructedness of literary and cinematic representation, Hessler's experiential learning of the deficiency of his writing and videotaping serves as a revealing footnote, both questioning the absolute truthfulness of literary and visual texts.

Hessler proves to be an insightful albeit amateur ethnographer if we read his skepticism about representation along with the fictionality of ethnographies, a notion James Clifford, the anthropologist, articulates in his introduction to *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986). J. Clifford explains that "fiction" in the ethnographical context does not mean "falsehood," or "something merely opposed to truth"; rather, "it suggests the partiality of cultural and historical truths, the ways they are systematic and exclusive" (6). As well, literary critic Stephen Greenblatt in his study of the narratives of early American explorers regards literary texts as "engaged representations, representations that are relational, local, and historically contingent" (12).[82] Given that Hessler has gradually cultivated a critical attitude towards his own representation about China—either in the form of writing or filming, he not only plays the role of a

[82] For critics' doubt for historical documents as a form of representation, see White 121-34, Hutcheon 105-23. For more explanation of literary representation, see also Barnes and Duncan 1-17.

writer who records his travel in China but also functions as an informed critic who remains critical of the texts he produces.

In the second chapter of the book, Hessler mentions how he chooses to be a writer and how this career decision is related to his travel in China. Originally planning to become a professor of literature, he majors in English at Princeton University and then spends two years studying English language and literature at Oxford. But he finds what had been done "in English departments, especially in America," was aesthetically distasteful: literary criticism's "academic stiffness was so far removed from the grace of good writing," and all it contains is a senseless, "hopeless mess of awkward words: Deconstructionism, Post-Modernism, New Historicism" (Hessler, *River* 45). He is equally disturbed by the politicization of literature in the West, particularly, "the way that literature was read as social commentary rather than art, and the way that books were forced to serve political theories of one stripe or another" (Hessler, *River* 45). Although he is not too biased to see the reason for such politicization "in a more human light" (*River* 46), he cannot come to terms with "Marxist criticism, Feminist critics, and Post-Colonial critics" who "almost invariably . . . wielded their theories like molds, forcing books inside and squeezing out a neatly-shaped product" (Hessler, *River* 45).[83] So, he wants to become "a better writer," believing that the

[83] As a literary critic myself trained in a Canadian university when literary theory is still in vogue, I acknowledge that Hessler's criticism of theory is not unfair. However, rather than choosing between reading theory and experiencing real life, I believe that both are valid approaches of learning. The effectiveness of these different learning approaches is evidenced in the parallels between Hessler and the critics I analyze in the previous two paragraphs. I benefit from R. Radhakrishnan's perspectivism for my standpoint or, specifically, his analysis of

experience of travelling in China will help him achieve his goal (Hessler, *River* 60). Abandoning high theory in the "ivory tower" of Western academia and choosing instead to be a writer by first experiencing a foreign culture underlines an experientialist approach to exploring the world, an approach that attends to the actual lived moments of his daily life in a foreign place and teaches him the complex, contingent, contradictory nature of the knowledge acquired along the way, as is shown in his informed skepticism about his own writing.

Hessler's experience as a traveller and writer seems to coincide—perhaps not coincidentally—with that of Margaret Laurence, a prolific Canadian writer, whose early years of travelling in Africa result in her doubt about essentializing way of representing self and other, home and abroad.[84] As Laurence reflects how her travel experience influences her novel writing, she says:

> . . . my experience of other countries probably taught me more about myself and even my own land than it did about anything else. Living away from home gives a new perspective on home. I began to write out of my own background only after I had lived some years away . . .
>
> And yet, for a writer of fiction, part of the heart remains that of a stranger, for what we are trying to do is to understand those others who are our fictional characters, somehow to gain entrance to their minds and

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the conflict between history and theory in contemporary Western academia. He argues that it is not important to figure out which one is better than the other; what is important is to understand that each writer and theorist has access to different "pregiven realities" and represents them in the context of his or her own particular projects bearing different "human and disciplinary interests and desires" (Radhakrishnan 14).

[84] For a detailed analysis of Laurence, see my essay "The Question of Cross-Cultural Understanding and Canadian Literature Studies," 112-17.

> feelings, to respect them for themselves as human individuals, and to portray them as truly as we can. The whole process of fiction is a mysterious one, and a writer, however experienced, remains in some ways a perpetual amateur, or perhaps a perpetual traveller, an explorer of those inner territories, those strange lands of the heart and spirit. (3)

As a traveller in the exotic land of Africa, Laurence envisions a self and home constantly changing; as a writer going through the journey of exploring the inner world of her characters, she experiences the same process of communication between her self and the African other, a process that is ongoing, open-ended, relational, and one that denies any totalizing and essentializing portrayal of the other.

Likewise, Hessler's pursuit of travel in order to accumulate experience that helps him become a better writer results in the same skepticism about a static and homogenizing representation of the other. He abandons reading high theory in the "ivory tower" but acquires through travel the same critical spirit that informs deconstructionism, feminism, new historicism, and postcolonialism. As a travel writer, he articulates a disobedience to stereotypical and naturalizing representation. His suspicion of static and totalizing interpretation is evident not only in his critical reflections about himself and his own country but also in his discontentment with his writing and filming about China. Hessler's commitment to the experiential exemplifies what Joan Scott advocates about experience: rather than accumulating experience as evidence to legitimize the representation of the other and to naturalize cultural differences, Hessler's travel is "a way of exploring

how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world" (777). Hessler's self-doubt as a writer of a foreign culture embodies a disbelief in "the unmediated relationship between words and things" (Scott 796)— a concept Lacan endorses—and, as well, a willy-nilly deconstructive move Jacques Derrida advocates.[85] His refusal to claim authenticity for his book of China bespeaks an attitude of taking his account of China as contextual, contradictory, and contingent. His experiential approach to knowing the world and the self provides us with a model that focuses on the "processes of identity production" and insists on the "discursive nature of 'experience'" that challenges "the politics of its construction" (Scott 797).

Conclusion

Despite the writer's modest claim about his book on China, the unanimously complimentary reviews of *River Town* flag Hessler's success as a travel writer.[86] Lloyd Macauley Richardson laudably attributes the success of the

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[85] Joan Scott's essay "The Evidence of Experience" absorbs a deconstructive spirit and advocates "changing the focus and the philosophy of our history, from one bent on naturalizing 'experience' through a belief in the unmediated relationship between words and things, to one that takes all categories of analysis as contextual, contested, and contingent" (796). Deconstructionism believes that a word, or "a signifier," does not necessarily correspond to a fixed meaning, or "a signified" but, instead, points to a variety of "signifieds." "Tea," for instance, does not necessarily mean something drinkable; it may also signify "hospitality," "aroma," "coziness" and many other things depending on the specific context of its usage. To put it in Scott's words, the relationship between words and things are "mediated." For Derrida's theory of deconstruction, see *Of Grammatology* (1976). For Lacan, see Eagleton 167-70.

[86] Though the book is sold for "just enough money to get the collection agencies off my back," as Hessler admits in an interview (Ermelino 27), I argue against judging a writer's success only based on its market value. For the book reviews

book to the fact that it is "not driven by the ideology or religion, or the military, engineering, or medical challenges that China has represented to many Westerners"; it is the writer's passion of writing and studying Chinese that makes *River Town* "very much a book about China" (84). The traveller's linguistic and cultural immersion truly helps him produce a nuanced vision of Chinese society, for what is embodied in the immersion is the writer's resolute commitment to the experiential—the face-to-face contact with the detailed realities of everyday life in a foreign place that constantly transforms his understanding of self and other, and home and abroad. Such authorial commitment engenders a complicated picture of his Chinese experience that refreshes a readership so accustomed to the genre of travel writing that symbolically colonizes foreign cultures.[87] The writer's documentation of the process of his transculturation exemplifies "an extraordinary philosophical endeavor that epitomizes the 'openness of listening'" (West-Duran 973).[88] It renders his text a disobedient spirit that challenges the axiomatic cultural identity and an essentialized China constructed in mainstream travel writing.

Loaded with new understandings from the experience of transculturation, the traveller chooses to remain ambivalent at the moment of departure. This

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and comments of *River Town*, See Bernstein 67, Clifford, N. 22-23, Rank 249-50, Richardson 83-93, and *Library Journal* 127: 1 (January 2002): 49.

[87] I have in mind such bestseller as *Riding the Iron Rooster* which sold about half a million copies and the Thomas Cook Travel Writing Award winners such as *Behind the Wall* (1987) and *From Heaven Lake* (1983). For information about the Award, see "Thomas Cook Travel Book Award." Wikipedia 20 April 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/ Thomas_Cook_Travel_Book_Award>.

[88] As Nicholas Clifford comments at the end of his review of *River Town*, "He listens. He learns. And he writes beautifully" (23).

ambivalence brackets his pre-existing knowledge in order to open up to new possibilities of knowing. It signifies the complex, contradictory, and contingent nature of representing a foreign culture, connoting not just the materiality of cultural difference but also a certainty of its superficiality and constructedness. The enlightened ambivalence Hessler gains from his travel in China signals an open-ended, ongoing dialogue between self and other, with the possibilities of cross-cultural understanding that transcends boundaries between nations and cultures.

Chapter Four Contextualizing Cultural Translation:
On Hill Gates's Anthropological Travel Writing about China

Publishers Weekly's review of Hill Gates's *Looking for Chengdu: A Woman's Adventure in China* (1999) claims that Gates, the anthropologist traveller, found two things about China: first, China is "as ethnocentric as in the 19th century when the West 'discovered' it, and similarly poor and inefficient" (60); second, "overall, women's lives are hard, as they have been for most of China's history" (61). Without discrediting the claim, I suspect that it may well be the corollary of a cursory reading. Even from the very beginning of her book, Gates remains critical of the slanted, one-sided representation of China. In the Preface, for instance, she criticizes the popular press that "urges us to see [the Chinese] as well-drilled school of sardines or—worse yet—guided in their lives by an unfathomable culture, 'the Wisdom of the East'" (Gates viii). In fact, her sharp criticism about the stereotypical and single-sided rendition of China runs through the whole book, as I will elaborate later.

Despite its perfunctory reading, however, the review elicits a critical question: why is the anthropologist's travel account, which contains considerable anti-stereotypical insights about human culture and society, received as so stereotypical an account of China?[89] I regard the review as symptomatic of the "domestic remainder" which is part of the cultural translation represented in

[89] My understanding of the problematic of stereotypes is that they are "a crude set of mental representations of the world" offering a one-sided picture of things and are a non-productive way of knowing (Gilman 17).

Gates's travel narrative (Venuti, "Translation" 485). As a veteran anthropologist, Gates offers a translation of China by putting it in its own cultural and historical context so that her translation demonstrates her incisive learning about China and her profound understanding of self, culture, and travel literature itself. At the same time, her translation is conducted through inscribing domestic vocabularies, values, and interests familiar to readers at home, so familiar that the *Publishers Weekly* reviewer never hesitates to receive and promulgate them. While the achievements of her understanding of the foreign culture mark her success in translating the culture, her pronounced Anglo-American subjectivity and the domestic purchases that comply with the convention of travel writing register the untranslatability of the visited culture and the travelling self. It is my contention that her subjectivity and the conventional elements in her writing about China be put into the context of the writer's ethnocritical endeavour when reading her book[90]—a reading that the *Publishers Weekly* reviewer fails to do. The untranslatability, rather than signaling the unbridgeable gap between self and other, and the foreign and the domestic, emblemizes the autonomy of each side of the binaries; it opens up space for the traveller's sustained interest to understand and translate otherness, which in turn catalyzes the constant rediscovery and translation of the travelling self.

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[90] The methodology of ethnocriticism, articulated by Arnold Krupat, "is concerned with differences rather oppositions and seeks to replace oppositional with dialogical models. The latter models call attention to the varieties of empirical differences discernible everywhere. Ethnocritical discourse regards border and boundary crossings, with their openness to and recognition of the inevitability of interactive relations, as perhaps the best means to some broadly descriptive account of the way things 'really' work in the material and historical world" (26). See also Krupat 5, 15, 37, 113, and 116.

The Traveller's Vision: Translating the Context of the Foreign

In the opening chapter, Gates explains the difficulties of understanding China. The political wall erected between China and the West after 1949 poses a big obstacle. Foreign visitors, "often quite unaware of how little they have seen," have written "an enormous amount about this vast country" much of which is simply "drivel"; from China's side, the educated Chinese have certain "protective devices" that Westerners find hard to penetrate (Gates 6). Swallowing "astonishing lies" about China, many Westerners either approach the country as a place where the utopia of Communism is successfully achieved or use it for the opposite reason—"to prove that capitalism is based on human nature and that China's economic difficulties demonstrate the worthlessness of socialism," for which "pan-Chinese behaviors" are taken as examples of "Communist wickedness and deviousness" (Gates 6). "A well-known journalist," as Gates reveals, who had several years of living experience in Taiwan and must have been familiar with the evolution of Chinese telephone manners, arbitrarily attributes the Chinese's difficulty in identifying themselves on the phone to their "suffering under Communist rule" (Gates 6).

For the anthropologist, a professional culture translator,[91] the fundamental lack of attention to the context of the foreign culture underlies the failure of these

[91] By calling Gates "a professional culture translator," I do not mean to authenticate her translation because I am mindful that, although anthropology is one of the disciplines that "belong to the science of translation" (Maranhao xi), it also serves as a pseudo-scientific arena where colonialism and white supremacy is propagated and justified. Mignolo and Schiwy, for instance, identify the danger of

translations of China. She explicates her point when reflecting the tremendous difficulty in deciphering Chinese documents. The Chinese, for later centuries, have left a rich archive of written materials that "are treasures of immense value" for outsider scholars, but "they are by no means easy to use":

> Apart from formidable language difficulties and their volume, they were written by and for Chinese. We must understand the minds that wrote them before we can truly translate what the words mean; yet we must gain that understanding of the intentions of the writers, at least in part, from the texts themselves. It is a slow and contentious undertaking. (Gates 4)

Gates's speculation about the difficulty of reading Chinese texts indicates her consciousness of the contexts of the original texts as a crucial factor for effective translation. Literal translation is not enough; the translator needs to understand the mind that wrote the text or—as Kwame A. Appiah also emphasizes—to identify "the intentions conventionally associated with each of [the] sentences" in order for the texts to make sense ("Thick" 395). Sadly, according to Gates, the lack of attention to the context of the original text is blatant in both Chinese and Western translators:

> The Chinese, when they have had peaceful moments in the last two troubled centuries, have sometimes tried to explain themselves to Westerners. They are, however, as stubborn in their insistence on explicating matters in their own terms as we are in converting them,

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anthropology presupposing "cross-cultural understanding brought about by coloniality and modernity, such that the expansion of the Western world in the name of modernity justifies coloniality" (4).

> somehow, into our own. The handy English translation on the back of a box of Chinese cold medicine shows what I mean. *Banlangen* is said to be especially good for "common colds of the wind heat type" (along with a great many other afflictions). What in the world is a cold "of the wind heat type"? As a literal translation, it is perfect, but it yields little information to the Western reader. One must understand Chinese medical categories to give these everyday English words a meaning which, in our own medical terminology, makes sense. Analyses of Chinese life in terms of such native concepts as "the mandate of heaven," "traditional Chinese culture," or "feudal superstition" do not mean much to contemporary Western social scientists who do not perceive heaven as an agent, who see "tradition" as a way of manipulatively extending the present into the past rather than the reverse, and who find "feudal" too broad, and "superstition" too narrow, to be of much use in describing anything. It is not that the Chinese are wrong in their views, only that they divide up the world and interpret causality in human affairs very differently from the way these things are currently done in the West. (Gates 4-5)

This passage contains a parable of translation Gates's travel narrative about China is to unfold. Interpreting a foreign culture, like translating a foreign text, cannot simply stay at the literal level; the translator needs to probe the contexts of the culture in order for it to make real sense to the domestic readership. Anuradha Dingwaney explains "the contexts" as "a world, a culture" from which the words in the original text arise and which "they, necessarily, evoke and express" (3). In

other words, the contexts connote the historical background, the cultural milieu, the linguistic system and other possible factors in which the text or the culture under translation is originally situated. Translating a culture or a text using "native concepts" such as "common colds of the wind heat type" like the Chinese do and "the mandate of heaven," "traditional Chinese culture," or "feudal superstition" from the Westerners' side proves to be a failure because the translation hinges on the translator's familiar system or domestic context and spends no effort in understanding and interpreting the factors that give shape to the original text. In Gayatri C. Spivak's term, the translator fails to fulfill the task of surrendering to "the linguistic rhetoricity of the original text" so that the translation loses "'the literarity and textuality and sensuality of the writing' (Michele's words)" ("Politics" 377). As far as Gates's examples are concerned, the former translation is unable to put across the real meaning of the Chinese medical concept—"wind heat"—to people having a different system of medical knowledge, and thus leaves the term virtually untranslated, while the latter understands the foreign culture only at the skin level: without digging deeper into the broader ramifications of the culture, the translation stays within the confinement of the translator's domestic linguistic rhetoricity, and the culture under translation only remains different and exotic if not completely inscrutable.

To interpret the contexts of the original text is always within the traveller's consciousness when she tries to make sense of China to her readers at home. After months of fieldwork in Chengdu including "miles of biking, dozens of bowls of *chaoshao* in roadside restaurants, chats with shopclerks and post-office workers,"

and dealing with bank personnel and "funny old women" trying to sell her fruits, the traveller ponders how to synthesize her "packrat perceptions" and to convey them to a reader who has no experience of the everyday details of living in China as she does and who has never seen "an authentic dish of 'husband-and-wife-fatty-slices' or 'ants-climbing-a-tree'" (Gates 173, 174).[92] Gates foresees the danger that, "in the end, without the food and the underwear and the hard knocks, the numbers can be made to mean anything" (174). Taking readership into consideration here signals her consciousness of putting the obtained information into its context to enable the readers not just to see the cultural phenomena and social activities she witnesses in China but also to have a sense of the factors that give context to what she observes. She understands that "[a]n imp of culture does not dangle its legs from a spandrel in each Chinese cerebellum" (Gates 174); she feels obligated to put all the tidbits of information and perceptions into the Chinese context in order for her readers at home to gain a bigger view of the culture. What she aims at is a "foreignizing translation" of China, one that avoids exoticizing the country by interpreting it with all possible elements that have given shape to it.[93]

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[92] I believe "chaoshao" and "husband-and-wife-fatty-slices"—two famous kinds of Chengdu cuisine—should be "chaoshou" (抄手) and "husband-and-wife-lung-slices" (夫妻肺片). Gates makes a mistake when writing the pinyin of "chaoshou"; her literal translation of "husband-and-wife-lung-slices" contains a wrong rendition of 肺 into "fatty" or 肥 in Chinese. While 肺 and 肥 share the same pronunciation, their tones are different, and they are two different characters bearing different meanings.

[93] Lawrence Venuti's concept of "foreignizing translation" articulates the significance of retaining the foreign context of the text under translation—a

For the anthropologist, probing the context of the foreign culture means to immerse oneself into the culture by living among the natives and staying in close touch with them on a daily basis. As far as her research project is concerned, Gates stresses that she cannot understand China's economy without "researching the activities of all its participants, and the processes through which they are born, taught, and defended by their families" (7). Time and perseverance is certainly crucial: "Only time can really peel away formality, *give context to* the women's words (my emphasis), and show me the consistency and consequences of their actions" (Gates 106). The "classical anthropologist," for her, "would camp on these boss-ladies' doorsteps until they grow weary of putting up a front" (Gates 106).[94] She is proud of her expertise about Chinese life garnered through fieldwork in Taiwan and often finds it transferable to the understanding China proper, but she is also skeptical of the transferability because she understands that all kinds of ceremony and social action she observes "take their fullest meaning from the social context in which they are preformed" (Gates 7). She is sensitive enough not to use her camera on the "old-fashioned, inelegant sights" she witnesses at Chengdu Wholesale Market (Gates 159-60), for she knows that, being unable to provide the context of these sights, her snapshots may well be taken at home as "evidence of China's 'backwardness'"—something that her professional ethics would not tolerate (Gates 160).

"resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations" (*Translator's* 16).

[94] "Boss-ladies" here refer to the woman entrepreneurs Gates aims to interview.

With the consciousness of the contexts of China she translates, the traveller maintains a theoretical grounding that, “if we want to know about China, we must do the spade-work of observation ourselves. We need to know the problems before we can hypothesize causes and to develop strong estimates of causality before we can hope to entertain solutions” (Gates 176). Isabella Bird Bishop who traveled in China in the nineteenth century doing this kind of “spade-work” stands as Gates’s role model. Bishop investigated textile crafts in Shashi—then a famous centre of indigenous cotton cloth production—and found that the popularity of the locally made cotton had nothing to do “with Chinese nationalism, with ‘Buying Chinese,’” which is possibly a popular assumption at that time; the villagers purchased Shashi-made cottons instead of English ones simply because they were of the right texture and size that catered to their practical needs (Gates 177). What Bishop teaches her is that

> an intelligent, educated Westerner, if she made an effort, could get the main issues straight and report them clearly. To do this, she needed to travel properly, close to daily life, observing and asking diligently of Chinese she encountered along the way, of her escort-interpreter, of foreign merchants and missionaries, and of the written sources available to someone not literate in Chinese. (Gates 176)

Bishop's travel in China exemplifies for Gates the "foreignizing translation"—a positive example of staying close to the foreign culture in order to grasp the contexts of the social phenomena under translation.[95]

The Traveller's Contextualized Translation

With the vision of translating the contexts of the visited culture, the traveller fleshes out the foreign elements within the culture so that her translation of China reveals a nuance and complexity that is absent in the common-sensical and reductive understanding of China that characterizes conventional travel writing. "China" or "being Chinese" is no longer a term one can take for granted. In her Chengdu trip, Gates notices the striking differences in how Chengdu and Taibei old ladies pray. Even though the rituals they perform are nearly identical, "there is little about 'being Chinese'" she can take for granted (Gates 7). A Hong Kong tourist's doubt about her Chinese identity reinforces Gates's point when they sit together in a minibus touring around Kunming: "We Hong Kong people know we're Chinese by ancestry, of course, but the mixture of the familiar and the really strange leaves me wondering if I know what 'being Chinese' means" (42). Some older Hong Kong people in the group, supposedly Chinese, cannot understand Putonghua (Mandarin), so when, to everyone's amusement, Gates puts

[95] Gates does acknowledge that Isabella Bird is a "*bourgeoise* to her toenails" and travels "in imperialist fashion" (178). But she values her down-to-earth commitment to detailed observation and intimate contact with the traveled culture. I agree with Gates when she criticizes some anthropologists nowadays who only stop at condemning Bishop's colonialist mentality: overlooking Bishop's close attention to the contexts of the culture under observation, their "sneers and snickers" prove to be dismissive and unproductive (178).

to use her Chinese competence and supplies them “an occasional translation from Putonhua to English” (41), she also puts across to her readers how reductive it can be to take “China” or “Chinese” only as an umbrella term, which consequently overlooks all the minute differentiations among smaller categories of meaning the term contains. Even within the same place called “China,” Chengdu differs so much from Beijing: it is “another country” for the traveller when her buddy comes to visit from there and brings her “brandy, croissants, and (gasp!) cream cheese” that she can find nowhere in Chengdu (Gates 163).

The foreign content of her translation is also embodied in the delineation of the dissolution of her preconceptions about China. Her intimate cooperation with Fulian or Women’s Federation for her project on Chinese women makes her abandon her assumption of Communist China’s “mass organization” that is supposed to control everybody. Working together with her Chinese colleagues, Gates is impressed by how accommodating they are: they allow her the freedom of making her own choices and once, when she suggests a change of the plan in the midway, their “flock of bicycle wheels round as one in the new direction” (68). Also, when she converses with Chinese women about their double burden of family care and income earning, their plain speech strikes her unexpectedly: the straightforwardness is “justly not part of the Chinese stereotype” (Gates 169).

Her one-week trip to western Sichuan together with her Chinese workmates turns out to be a process of rethinking her preconceived assumptions about her Chinese experience. Before leaving, she anticipates “a rotten trip, not believing for a moment that the scenery will actually be spectacular . . . or that the

Tibetan domestic visit will be anything other than a *China Reconstructs* dog-and-pony show" (Gates 110). Yet as soon as she reaches Jiu Zhai Gou, she is stunned by the beauty of the place and spends an hour admiring the "passing yaks," "the bluest waters," and the singing river (Gates 120). She can't help recording in her book the wonderful sensation the trip bestows: "I remember this hour as I remember lovemaking. There is little point in reciting a sequence of events, or of trying to describe sensations. It was lovely; it came to me through my whole body, not just the linear and analytical eyes" (Gates 120).

Not only does the mesmerizing scenery prove to disrupt her preconceptions, but she also finds the Tibetan household "deliciously homelike":

> [The Tibetan woman] ushers us into her family's large living room, bare as a tent around a central hearth of two electric rings set into the floor. It is warm, as Chinese houses never are. Kettles simmer, and the room smells both very alien and deliciously homelike from a combination of woodsmoke, tea, and flour or pastry. Could I have been a Tibetan in a previous life? How can this smell be so *right*? Our hostess offers plain brick tea in bowls—no yak butter in evidence—that the Chinese consume with reluctance. I am a bit put off by *this* smell until I taste the tea, then like it very much. (Gates 137)

This cozy Tibetan home scene not only completely contradicts the "*China Reconstructs* dog-and-pony show" the traveller imagines (Gates 120), but also puts into question her implicit assumption that she will feel totally untouched by or disconnected from the people she visits.

The traveller's commitment to presenting the foreign context in her translation is also conspicuous when she describes how Chinese natives are unable to translate the foreign within its own context. Gates notices that "Chinese speak of the Tibetan enthusiasm for song and especially dance with that fascinated tone they reserve for sexual activities" (126), and that they describe nervously the "poor, ill-clad, and fierce-looking young men" as "savages" (130). They see the Tibetans as "filthy squatters" and "tent dwellers," shuttling "between nomadic life in the summer and settlement in the winter" (Gates 130). For the traveller, the Chinese natives who envisage and promulgate the cultural scenes about Tibet without probing their social and historical context offer only an inadequate literal translation of Tibet that exoticizes and debases the place.

Gates's fieldtrips to Chengdu took place both before and after the Tiananmen riot in 1989, and her book includes an account of China with an insight that is lacking in most popular mass media. In a journal entry dated "mid-June, 1989," Gates writes:

> In the tense June days after the crackdowns, I try to superimpose the televised Tiananmen scenes on my memories of the broad plaza in central Chengdu where the forty-foot statue of Mao Zedong stands. I can conjure up nothing but the streams of bicyclists I had joined every morning en route to interviews. Six, eight, twelve riders abreast, these currents pass miraculously through each other at crossroads, ignoring the white-coated cop trying to get the East-West and North-South riders to take turns. It is not chaotic, only messy and productive of occasional small

> and noisy collisions. It works, partly because people like to decide for themselves how to maneuver, and partly because their lives make the Chinese virtuosi in an offhand kind of respect for other people's persons and property. The scenes of popular protest that international television failed to capture in Chengdu would have resembled the city's pattern of street traffic: apparent chaos, much unspoken agreement, and a strong distaste for pushy men in uniforms. (191-92)

The anthropologist's memories of Chengdu's street traffic exhibit an insightful understanding of China which is at odds with the televised representation of the Tiananmen riot in Western media. The latter pays excessive attention to the "great power" of "the few Chinese leaders," so much so that "it is easy for outsiders to miss the complex" (Gates 192). As the traveller detects, "the complex" is the unanimous consent to a certain regularity and a deliberate indifference of the state power represented by the policemen that is covered up by seeming chaos—like the traffic scene in Chengdu. Gates elaborates this complexity, explaining that "powerful state leaders can kill and imprison those who articulate the people's visions, but in the long run, they are guided by them more than they admit" (192). She cites her own research to illustrate how Chinese government implements the policy of reprivatization to accommodate the demand of the country's small producers; officially claiming China a Communist and Socialist country, its leaders have to privatize the economy and yield to "the logic of low-technology production in an overpopulated country" (Gates 192). Once again Gates makes it clear that a profound understanding of the relationship between the powerful and

the subordinate in the Chinese context owes to a translating process holding the context of the foreign as its focus:

> To learn more than we already know about polities, we must track the changing daily lives of ordinary people, find out where they want to go. These changes add and multiply, the irresistible mathematics of history. In the short run, leaders speak with guns; in the long run, people like those I met in Chengdu will whisper the future with their lives. The whispers are soft, and often confusing, so we must listen very hard to hear clearly what they say. (192)

In an essay highlighting the link between translation, transculturation, and a philosophy of listening, Alan West-Duran similarly opines that translation, as well as transculturation, "requires listening" and "being open and empathic to the other" (973). Listening, for this critic, is "an active engaged attentiveness that is central to a dialogical ethics and understanding"; it requires "an openness that goes to the heart of translation and philosophy" (West-Duran 974). Gates's attentiveness and commitment to everyday life of the Chengdu natives and to an intimate reading of the details of Chengdu culture exemplifies the philosophy of listening and generates a contextualized translation of China with nuance and depth that challenges other ethnocentric interpretations of the country.

The Traveller's Self in Translation

Paralleling her translation of the foreign culture is the traveller's rediscovery of the self; Gates envisions the self as constantly in translation.

Attending to the context of the foreign culture requires the anthropologist traveller to be "not merely an observer" but "one of the reagents" and "part of the chemistry" of the cross-culture communication (Gates 104): this intimate communicative mode engenders a self always translating and being translated in the process of interacting with the other. Gates writes her experience of working with the Chinese woman informants and presents a picture of how this bidirectional or reciprocal translation happens:

> It is interesting, part of our job, to see how they define "being a good mother," "honesty," and "working well"; distinctions in such values are the very stuff of cultural difference. But *asking* about values, indeed about behavior in general, calls those we talk to into a relationship with *us*. *Our* presence, *our* anticipated response, becomes part of any answer. In extreme cases—and there seem to be many of these in China—an interview resembles a catechism. . . . Like a catechumen, she assumes I am testing her on an important intellectual code rather than wanting to know concrete things about her non-too-perfect reality. And, like a catechumen, she fears not me—not Hill Gates, a bafflingly meaningless intrusion into her morning routine—but the Chinese authority that stands behind me, that requires she pass this test. It is necessary to acknowledge one's own presence in the paying of a call, and even more necessary to accept that that presence is virtually empty, for the respondent, of one's own complex self. (104)

This passage presents an actively interactive and vividly intertwined relationship between the self and the other. When the Chinese informant struggles to find the "right" answers to the questions of a foreign intellectual instead of providing concrete things about herself that the interviewer actually wants to know, Gates perceives that the information she gathers about the native incorporates her own anthropological self in it: the respondent's construction of the narrative about herself contains a foreign element as her answers are affected by the presence of the interviewer—a foreign anthropologist. Simultaneously, when Gates perceives that the presence of her anthropological self in her informant is "virtually empty" of her "own complex self," she envisions herself through her informant's eyes: she is no longer the intellectually privileged and authoritative Western anthropologist / traveller, for however sophisticated she is, in the native's eyes, she may well simply be—and only be—a person to whom the native fabricates her own story.[96]

Perceiving the mutually containing and interdependent relationship between self and other, Gates finds it problematic that some Western anthropologists habitually position themselves as the remote observers of the natives as if the self and the other were untranslatable and remained perpetually divided and irrelevant to each other:

> As anthropologists, we are not usually very interested in the impression [the natives] wish to make on us except as something to factor out. We

[96] Gates's rediscovery of the self through the mirror of the other—and vice versa—corresponds to Peter Hessler's vision of his self obtained through interacting with his Fuling students and Teacher Liao. See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

> hope rather to see past the odd products of an unnatural interchange to the ways in which they engage with each other. (104)

What is problematic here is the lack of the ability of self-defamiliarization when translating the other. According to Akira Okazaki, ethnographic or intercultural translation is an exercise in self-defamiliarization, questioning the presuppositions of the observer rather than exoticising the observed (167). The inability of self-defamiliarization as Gates observes about her fellow anthropologists inhibits them from envisaging the connections between self and other that makes the translation possible. Gates departs from these anthropologists and, by brooding over the true nature of her book, is able to examine herself in a detached manner, which teaches her that the self is indefinable without the reference of the other.[97]

While she publishes her book out of an urge to redress the biased Western representation about China, aiming to provide "an account of particular Chinese people acting . . . like perfectly ordinary people" (Gates viii), she also declares that hers is not just a book about China. She asks the question "Can one write a book about one's self as that self urgently seeks to understand China without including something useful about the Chinese themselves, if only as a byproduct?" and, then, offers an affirmative answer (Gates vii). She makes it clear that, on the surface level, her book records her fieldtrips in search of a "fuller knowledge of what is happening to Chinese women," but essentially, this travel narrative is about the author herself—a book literalizing her "passage from a time

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[97] Gates's argument of the self being indefinable without the other resonates with Yi-Fu Tuan's definition of the self with the other in his autobiography. See Chapter 5 of this thesis.

of trouble to a sunny stretch of health, confidence, and love" (Gates viii). In Shirley Ann Jordan's study of ethnographic researchers, she discovers that they "at some stage, become somewhat over involved in self-discovery and self-examination, in charting the changes brought about in the self by particular field work experiences" (107), which resonates the autobiographical nature of Gates's travel account. In this sense, self and other, China and home, for the traveller, are certainly not distinctively oppositional and irrelevant to each other:

> Large parts of my life happen in China; when writing in this mode, I cannot disentangle what I am from where I have been, or what I know from where I have eaten and cried and been surprised, or who I am from the others who have traveled with me. Although it is easy to pretend it is so, the self is not inside. (Gates viii)

Gates maintains here that the self cannot be fully understood without the presence of the other; rather than being irrelevant and antithetical, self and other are related in a way to form a "new synthesis," "an unstable and shifting symbiosis" (D. Scott 86). With this vision, she is skeptical when her friends tell her that the learning of one's self and the learning of the other are two separate journeys: she "can no longer tell" when hearing them saying that "the navel gazing is interrupted by substantial close-range sight-seeing into Chinese daily life" (Gates viii). Unlike her friends who only look at themselves by keeping the Chinese at bay and rendering them as irrelevant, Gates discovers herself *with* and *through* the Chinese. Consequently, China remains only a byproduct of her travel book, and her intimate interactions with the country and the people there produce for her a

book about herself—a self translated and redefined as it is in close contact with the other.

With the disbelief in an essentialized self and other, Gates shows how she makes connections across boundaries. For her, she is able to translate her Chinese informants because she shares with them the common humanity:

> I trust the common humanity I share with these women to alert me through posture or tone that we have hit a nerve. 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. (Gates 105)

With the vision of common humanity, Gates regards the difference between her and her Fulian colleagues as necessary and understandable. When she feels that their relationship "move beyond courtesy into friendship," she believes that this friendship is made possible

> because we all have learned recognize how much the differences in our lives are due to the accidents of history. We have measured each other's strengths and weaknesses and know that the work we do together is getting done because each of us has necessary abilities that the others need. It feels interdependent, it feels egalitarian, it feels fine. (Gates 185)

Key to the success of their cooperation is that both the traveller and her Chinese colleagues attend to the respective personal histories when translating others' differences. Though the personal histories may be disparate, they provide a shared framework where individual differences are comparable and understandable. Within this shared framework, the difference between the traveller and the natives

is assimilated or translated into something apprehensible and acceptable, so that the individual differences become each member's asset that contributes to the group work rather than an obstacle that barricades their cooperation.[98]

In her contemplation of women's solidarity across national boundaries through translation, Spivak opines that, in addition to imagining that women "automatically have something identifiable in common," one should "humbly and practically" learn the other woman's mother-tongue—"the language in which the other woman learnt to recognize reality at her mother's knee" ("Politics" 379). During the course of working with Chinese women, Gates not only literally speaks their language but also learns their personal histories that shape who they are. The genuine friendship she feels with them bespeaks their mutual understanding and trust and emblemizes the traveller's success in translating the other which simultaneously entails the self in translation.

The mutual understanding and trust extends to Fulian—the official institution she works with. Working in China long enough to know that foreign researchers there have often met with difficulties in money issues, Gates is "especially touched" when a ranking associate of Fulian "discreetly presses on" her "a wad of one thousand RMB (about U. S. $200)" as her "pocket money on the road" (223). She remembers quoting once the Fulian slogan that "going to Fulian is like going home to Mother's" in response to the Vice-Director's precise and positive criticism of the questionnaire she and her Fulian colleagues make,

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[98] This translation of difference resonates with Yi-Fu Tuan's argument of difference and commonality as a complementary dyad in the relationship of friends and colleagues. See Chapter 5 of this thesis.

which amuses everyone since they all knew that "Chinese mothers proverbially are nags"; this time she knows that "the kindness that prompts the gift of pocket money is also motherly" (Gates 223). Her acceptance of the money implies her genuine appreciation:

> I take it, not because I need it urgently. . . . I take the wad to reaffirm the nature of my relationship to their group. Acceptance makes it clear that I am not buying so many filled-in questionnaires for so much money. I have given them a generous share of what our cooperation has shaken from the money tree and trust them to use it honorably in their own way. They are treating me like a member of the unit, giving me my cut. In ways we both know to be limited by who we are and what we do professionally, we are friends. (Gates 223)

Accepting the one thousand *yuan* from the Fulian official denotes Gates's acknowledgement of the mutual trust between herself and the Chinese institution she works with. Despite personal and professional disparity, the Western scholar and the Chinese institution share the same good will for cooperation that forms the foundation of their friendship.[99]

While the American traveller and the Chinese natives are connected by common humanity, the traveller can be drastically different from people supposedly of her own type, including even her kinswoman. Gates sees herself as the "moral antithesis" of her maternal grandmother (230). Having lived her early

[99] While I underline the friendship between Gates and the Chinese institution, I do not overlook the human agent of the institution. Ultimately, this is a friendship between human beings who are capable of building connections with one another.

life in England under Queen Victoria, her grandmother never questioned the profound inequalities between her and her husband, or between them and people of a higher class. As Gates recalls: “Hierarchy, beginning with that between the sexes, and epitomized in the grand gaps between herself, Victoria, and the Lord, was the guiding principle of her life” (230). Gates herself, however, “divorced, remarried, childless by willful choice, an atheist analyst of religion and a radical critic of social hierarchy,” turns out to “have trampled on every virtue” her grandmother held to be essential (230). Even her job would have troubled her: “she would have found my persistently peripatetic career not only incomprehensible, but vaguely immoral, and certainly not respectable” (Gates 230).

Along with the disparity between grandmother and granddaughter is the similarity between the English woman in Lancashire and the Chinese spinster in Ming Shan. From an anthropologist’s point of view, Gates reflects her grandmother’s life with “the same ethnographic detachment” with which she studies the Chinese women:

> I must work hard to understand Grandmother’s life clearly, a life which in its restraints seems deeply alien. My grandmother’s thoughts are closer to those of spinster Wang than to mine. For women of their time, Ming Shan and Lancashire had much in common (231).

For the traveller, her grandmother represents a culture that needs what I would call intracultural translation.[100] The antithesis between her and her grandmother and the similarities shared by her kinswoman and the Ming Shan spinster challenges the static, binary representation of self-other relationship predicated on racial category.

While the traveller's translation of self is a consistent and ongoing process, her sense of inadequacy, confusion, and frustration flags the process that is never easy to go through. A Chinese expert as she is, Gates always feels her inadequacy in decoding China. She shows on more than one occasion the limits of her Mandarin when communicating with people speaking with strong local dialect. In Golden Cow, she finds the dialect particularly hard to follow: listening intently to people she interviews, she comes out of each encounter "feeling wrung out" (Gates 142). Adding to this linguistic inadequacy is the lack of cultural competence evidenced by the awkwardness of the "spectacularly bad job" she does when inviting two Chinese families to dinner at her hotel: she orders a dish with salted vegetables only to find that her interest in local preserved foods is "absurd in the context," as such foods are consumed when fresh vegetables are scarcely available, usually in hard winters and poor places (Gates 44). Cultural incompatibility even drives her to tears. At the public luncheon with the Chinese she struggles against "the combined effects of shouted conversations," "the same

[100] My term here derives from Michael Cronin's "intralingual translation" which refers to the translation within the same language system (3). In his *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation* (2000), he designates "intralingual translation" as one of the three types of translation along with "interlingual translation" and "intersemiotic translation" (Cronin 3).

old discussions" about her water bottle, and "well-intentioned Chinese solicitude" about every mouthful of what she eats (Gates 123). Her deep sense of frustration even forces her to contemplate abandoning her China-related career forever (Gates 214). The following passage delineates an anthropologist's "perpetual unease in a new fieldwork setting":

> The fundamental task of the anthropologist, getting the confidence of strangers, is a nerve-wracking one. In Taiwan, it ruins my sleep, digestion, and emotional stability, a rolling catastrophe of misunderstanding and collapse. There, I struggle with my own luggage, pound the pavement to secure an apartment, gamble on getting effectual field assistants, and am politely told to go away by about every third person I try to interview. Everything I accomplish stands or falls on my ability to be a healthy, energetic, optimistic, and gregarious leader of my assistants, and persuader of unwilling informants to tell a foreigner their most intimate secrets. (Gates 68)

The difficult and embarrassing moments of cultural encounter Gates experiences presents a picture of the uneasy process of the travelling self in translation.[101]

Difficult as it is to go through the process, the traveller's self in translation is conspicuous throughout the book. A static, essentialized self becomes impossible when Gates reveals that "meal by meal, meeting by meeting, China replaces some of the Anglo atoms and assumptions" from which she "was once

[101] My reading here coincides with Steve Clark's advocacy of reading travel literature by attending to the embarrassing moments of travel caused by "misunderstanding, presumption, and the catalogue of errors and endemic lack of dignity to which any cross-cultural interchange must be sensible" (14).

entirely constructed" (236). In Guangzhou's dirty suburbs where banana and tangerine skins flutter "like jumbo-colossal confetti," she goes local stripping a banana and throwing its peel "to drift with the rest" (Gates 13). She cracks sunflower seeds at the park in Liuzhou and seems to enjoy this popular local snack (Gates 31). When having breakfast at the canteen of Chengdu's Management Institute, she eats "two meat-filled steamed buns, some scoops of salty pickled vegetables, and a nice, hot dipper of soy milk," wondering why "so many non-Chinese cling to the wretched bread (smeared with industrial-grade jam), miserable coffee, and nasty eggs that pass for Western breakfast" there (Gates 71). These visible signs of transformation as the traveller lives in the foreign culture demonstrate the changing and adaptive nature of the self: as she reads and translates the foreign culture, she herself is transformed or translated.[102]

The Traveller's Insights about Travel Writing and Culture

As an anthropologist traveller constantly translating between cultures, Gates maintains a profound conviction in the fictionality of the genre of travel writing. She articulates her point in the same journal entry after she considers Bishop's travel in Sichuan:

> Journals of journeys are, at least in principle, unbuttoned in style and unstructured in analysis. In travel writing we conspire with the author to pretend that her lines fly from hasty pen to eager eyes without editorial

[102] J. Hillis Miller's reading of the story of Ruth in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament as a parable of translation of Western literary theory contains a similar of translation of self. See Miller 214-20.

> interference or second thoughts. We accept that each turn in the road may bring inconsistency and surprise—the inherent disorganization of a purely chronological narrative is what makes the journey ours as well as the writer's. (Gates 50)

Gates detects the interpellative power of travel narrative achieved through the "freshness" of the traveller encountering strange people in the exotic land—its capacity to win the readers' consent to the information it presents,[103] for which the readers tend to neglect the fact that the writing is also a product tailored to certain editorial demands and one subjected to the writer's constantly shifting vision (Gates 50). Gates agrees with Christopher Mulvey, author of *Transatlantic Manner: Social Patterns in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Travel Literature* (1990), and believes that the Euro-American travel tales are "in many respects a form of fiction": she reads "the various 'natives' encountered along the way" and "the landscapes in which they are set" as inventions—"figments constructed of a little swiftly captured detail and a great deal of un-self-conscious imagination" (Gates 50).

What also makes the genre fictional, as Gates recognizes, is the travel writers' submission to the expectation of the publishing institution and its targeted readership, an expectation for a book catering to the particular, domestic taste. Mulvey's articulation of the nineteenth-century travel writer relentlessly constructing the fiction of the gentility of the writer and reader still rings true for Gates: "Any writer who did not choose to write up . . . and adopt the tones and the

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[103] Louis Althusser believes that the ideology interpellates individuals as the subjects of the ideology. See Althusser 299-303.

values of gentlemanly society would find book publishers unwilling to publish, book sellers unwilling to sell, and bookbuyers unwilling to buy" (qtd. in Gates 51). As a reader of travel books, Gates finds it a tendency that travel writer flatters "both reader and self" with "the very intent to publish": the writer usually makes use of the alien setting to construct the self image of a brave adventurer and explorer that woos the genteel sensibility of domestic readers (Gates 51). The "good qualities" of the traveller, as Gates notices, are characterized as occasionally "nation- or gender-specific," but far more frequently they are the qualities "of a putative superiority of breeding and / or education—of class" (51).[104]

[104] Gates's findings about travel genre as a conventional construction of gentility of Western societies coincides with what David Scott has to say in his study of the history of Western travel writing. In *Semiologies of Travel: From Gautier to Baudrillard* (2004), D. Scott identifies a genealogy of travel writing predicated on "the early modern European sensibility"—the desire to quest the new and the exotic in order to quench the psychic thirst for a civilized European self superior to the non-European other (2). Other studies also chorus with Gates explicating this aspect of fictionality of travel writing. Jacinta Matos's analysis of postwar English travel writing, for instance, espouses its feature of keeping up the tradition of the "adventurer" or "explorer," searching for the "primitive" and the "exotic" and evoking the other worlds as "ephemeral utopias doomed to destruction" (217). Andrew Thacker's reading of Graham Greene's travel to Liberia recorded in the latter's *Journey without Maps* illustrates how "the notion of a journey 'without maps' is a convenient fiction" (14). Thacker argues that Greene utilizes this myth to construct his image of a trailblazer, an "explorer rather than traveller" (14), but in fact, he travels with a "cognitive map . . . of Europe and its other, of contemporary 'civilization' and the primeval quality of Liberia" (17). For more examples, see also Mary L. Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* (1992) and David Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire* (1993). As a scholar of travel writing myself, I agree with these critics with regard to the genre's construction of such hierarchy between the West and the non-West. This kind of travel books in contemporary period, to name just a few, include Joan Didion's *Salvador* (1983), V. S. Naipaul's *India: A Million Mutinies Now* and *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*, Jan Morris's *City to City* (1990) and *The World* (2003). The

Interestingly, despite the travel writers' concerted effort in constructing the superiority of gender, nation, and class, Gates identifies it a recurrent theme "the traveler's constantly lamented difficulty in maintaining a familiar social position in the midst of a forest of alien objects and symbols," and the "sharpest displacement is that of class" (Gates 51). This inherent contradiction Gates notices within the conventional discourse of travel testifies to what Dennis Porter calls the "literary cunning" of the genre (7): although travel writing contains a manifested effort in constructing gender, class, and nation superiority, the traveller's confusion about identity in the presence of otherness counteracts the egoistic and ethnocentric endeavour of the discourse.

Gates's disclosure of travel writing's fictionality explains the problematics of the genre of cultural translation caused by the traveller's—or the translator's—excessive reliance on the domestic audience in the process of translating the foreign culture.[105] Either maneuvering to interpellate the domestic readers into accepting what s/he says about the foreign place or striving to win favour from the

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anthologies of travel writing of similar kind include *Views from abroad* (1988) edited by Marsden-Smedley and *Travel Writing* (1984) edited by Bill Buford.

[105] I say "excessive" because I am aware that relying on the domestic audience when translating a foreign culture is inevitable and indeed necessary. In Kwame A. Appiah's essay "Thick Translation," he introduces the concept of "Gricean mechanism" by which the meaning of an utterance can be understood by the hearer: Grice suggests that "when a speaker communicates a belief by way of the utterance of a sentence, she does so by getting her hearers to recognize *both* that this is the beliefs she intends them to have and that she intends them to have that belief in part *because* they recognize that primary intention" (391). Despite the necessary shared grounding between the speaker and the listeners for a valid communication to take place, however, too much catering to the domestic listener's ears truncates the content of the foreign texts and results in a reductive translation which Appiah's theory of "thick translation" is meant to put into question.

imagined genteel home audience, the travel writer proves to be controlled by and for the receivers of the translation, and the translated text thus suffers a gross omission of the contexts of the foreign that jeopardizes the effectiveness of its translation. Venuti would critique what this kind of travel writing offers as a "domesticating translation" (*Translator's* 17), a translation Gates cannot come to terms with either.

Also disturbing to Gates is the adherence to rampant dichotomies she witnesses in both travel writers and their analyzers, "notably those of 'travel/home,' 'other/self,' 'foreign/domestic'" (53). As a traveller herself constantly moving back and forth between home and abroad, Gates provides a different vision where the boundaries are never easy to pinpoint:

> . . . travel is part of home, home is full of the traces of travel. My very body (the overstressed immune system, the biochemical instabilities, the weak right ankle that I repetitively sprain on bad roads) incarnates the interdigitation, the symbiosis, of both. "Other/self"??? My boundaries are far less sharp than this—I know what it feels like to be tired, love-blissed, anxious unto death for a child I cannot save from her difficulties. Doesn't everyone? And seriously entertaining the thought that "foreign and domestic" are separable—in this post-Columbian global economy!—should qualify the thinker for the Presidential Medal in Mindless Patriotism. These are dichotomies only from the perspective of an amazingly sheltered and class-homogeneous life. (53)

Through actual travel and living abroad, Gates is able to mediate successfully albeit never easily between the self and the other, the domestic and the foreign. She is capable of making connections to foreign peoples and places because she believes in the feelings and emotions shared by all humans. Dichotomies in a static, essentialized fashion exist only for those living a confined, "sheltered" life if such a life is at all possible in the contemporary age of globalization; travellers capable of translating between cultures envisages connections, and the boundaries between cultures are in their mind imaginary and artificial.

The concept of "culture" itself needs rethinking. Gates declares that she is one of the anthropologists who believe that culture is artificial, ideological, and mutable:

> We did not believe in "culture." That is to say, we did not assume ideas to be active agents, existing Platonically outside human selves, "causing" the events that make up societies. "Cultural" arguments were the stock-in-trade of the schoolteachers, clergymen, and patriots charged with explaining behavior and society to small-town Canadian youth: we go to war because we love our country; we give money to the church because we believe in God; and the like. In my family's bosom, another truth reigned: Fathers go to war because the alternative is prison; we attend church because our presence there enhances Father's professional credit. Simply by listening to Grandmother, we could learn that ideas changed when the old ways of living disappeared, and new ways promoted new values. When I entered university, I learned that anthropologists were as

> good at this sort of ideological deconstruction as my skeptical parents. Ethnographies extended my social horizons, offering elaborate and exotic evidence for the proposition that, if I were to find myself in the external circumstances of a Trobriander or a Nuer, I would come to think like one. As training took me, body and mind, into the Chinese world, I learned that the proposition was true. (229)

Culture, for Gates, is an invented, constructed entity loaded with ideologies that guarantee the benefits of social elites and therefore highly political. It is not something devoid completely of human agents as if it stood all on its own and remained free from human influences. Or, in John Tomlinson's words, culture itself cannot act as an agent: it "doesn't speak, doesn't act" even "in the rather abstract sense in which social institutions like government act," and therefore "can't be said to have autonomy"; cultures are "simply descriptions of *how people act* in communities in particular historical situations."[106] Here both Gates and Tomlinson speak of culture as existing only through human agents. It shapes our vision of the world, and this vision, habitually taken as "right," is nevertheless limited and biased because of the cultural lenses which only allow a single viewing perspective. Although under relatively stable circumstances our ideas may remain "intact for generations," they are only "shadows on a wall," and "in the run of time longer than an individual life, . . . ideas brighten, flicker, and

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[106] Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism*, 96-97 quoted in Appiah, *Ethics* 336-37. Appiah cites Tomlinson's critique of "cultural autonomy" to explicate his own perception of "culture" as a name invoked to segregate "us here and them there" (*Ethics* 254), which also echoes Gates's demystification of "culture" in her travel book.

disappear"; they are "reflections of a material reality that may change" regardless of whether we wish it or not (Gates 229-30). Both Gates's familial upbringing and professional training cultivate her critical attitude towards culture essentialism, leading her to question the idea that cultures are essentially different from one another and that communication across cultural boundaries is impossible. Her experience of living among the Chinese unexceptionally sheds light on the mutability of culture: by comparing and contrasting, she envisages the commonalities despite the differences between Chinese and home culture; by translating the differences of the foreign culture, she demonstrates that culture is translatable and undergoes changes through translation and that cross-cultural understanding is not only possible but also viable.

If we have to have "culture" in our vocabulary, then no culture is "simple," "primitive," or whatever it is as one easily imagines (Gates 176). Bronislaw Malinowski's four-year stay in the Trobriand Island leads Gates to accept the fact that "an intelligent, educated Westerner could work so long, so diligently as Malinowski did and still not exhaust the cultural mysteries and riches of a few thousand 'savages'" (Gates 176). As Malinowski piles up the evidence in book after book to prove that "there are no simple human beings" and that "even a small community could take a lifetime to know well," Gates acknowledges owing "a great debt" to this anthropologist for her own conviction in the dazzling complexity of any foreign culture that is mindlessly taken as "simple" or "primitive" (176).

Although a certain set of cultural values or ideas can appear to be immutably powerful and seemingly monolithic under certain conditions, Gates believes that "when literacy, travel, and a modicum of logic give us systematic comparisons of peoples over time and space," the easy assumption entailed by those values and ideas becomes "no longer tenable": "The lives and thoughts of Inuit and !Kung, Kazakh and Maasai, Chinese peasant and Mexican campesino show powerful parallels born of the fact that peoples in each pair get their livings in similar ways" (230-31). In other words, despite the materiality of cultural difference and apparent culture diversity, culture is imaginary; hinged on human agents, it may appear to be temporarily stable and superficially diverse, but actually it is constantly evolving and essentially comparable and translatable. For the traveller, we live in a global world where there is no essential difference, or, as D. Scott says, "there are only relative differences that can be accommodated by the relative samenesses of textual expression" (213). "Travel," along with "literacy" and "a modicum of logic," proves to be an avenue leading us to see the transforming nature of culture. Like the journey of learning to achieve literacy, travel is a journey also instructive in nature; while literacy disarms ignorance and refines human crudity, travel disrupts and problematizes parochialism resulting from a confined mode of living. They both challenge "small-town epistemology" and prove humanist universality (Gates 229).[107]

[107] The parallel of travel and literacy is also evident in Hessler's travel book, and it reappears in humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's works where the academic learning and his lifelong travel jointly lead to the conviction of cosmopolitanism and humanist universalism. See Chapter 3 and 5 of this thesis.

Untranslatablility of Culture and Self

Coexisting with the achievements of Gates's culture translation is the anthropological dilemma, one that she—and she believes all anthropologists—faces and faces with "perpetual uncertainty" (242). On the one hand, she has a strong belief that her journal "conveys not animosity, but truths that China's friends need to tell: truths about common humanity, about the individualism of Chinese (neither more nor less than ours), about the difficulties and successes of leaping a cultural gap" (Gates 242). On the other hand, she is not convinced that her Chinese colleagues would read her journal in the same way. Although she has always acknowledged her Chinese associates' great contribution to her research project, "listing individual colleagues as well as the Fulian as a unit—both responsible and deserving of credit" for the work they jointly accomplish, she is aware that, in the pages of *Looking for Chengdu* (1999),

> [her Chinese friends] are not observers *with* me, but observed *by* me, in ways none of us had assumed would be made public. Like any subject of anthropological inquiry, they have been included in a process for which it is extremely difficult to obtain fully informed consent. (Gates 242)

The culture translator's dilemma signals the limitation of her translated text. In spite of the linguistic and cultural expertise in interpreting a foreign culture, the translator's work may never gain complete consent from the people within that culture who are the objects of the translation. There exists a "domestic remainder" in her translation of China entailed by her role of an observer from outside the

culture she observes.[108] To be an observer from her unique position means to see, understand, and interpret from a perspective provided by her social and cultural upbringing. China is perceived through Gates's domestic cultural lenses and rewritten in registers and styles that are inevitably alien to her Chinese colleagues living in a different social, cultural, and historical context. The "domestic remainder," according to Venuti, does "not just inscribe a domestic set of linguistic and cultural differences in the foreign text, but supplies the loss of the foreign-language differences which constituted that text," which in turn entails the loss of the "historical dimension"—associated with the language of the original text ("Translation" 486). In the process of translating China, Gates needs to employ domestic representations and values in order to make sense of the foreignness she encounters there; she needs to subdue to certain extent the otherness of China in order for it to be understood and accepted by a home audience. This translating process results in "the production of textual effects that signify only in the history of the receiving language and culture," which she predicts her Chinese colleagues will find it hard to accept (Venuti, "Translation" 485).

The release of the "domestic remainder" finds abundant examples in Gates's travel narrative. In a journal dated December 20, 1987, she writes:

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[108] Lawrence Venuti's translation theory tells us that any communication through translating involves "the release of a domestic remainder"; as far as literature is concerned, the foreign text is "rewritten in domestic dialects and discourses, registers and styles, and this results in the production of textual effects that signify only in the history of the receiving language and culture" ("Translation" 485).

> On the basis of a Chinese map, which I have no reason to believe is a good analog of its territory, I have planned a month-long trip alone across southwest China to Chengdu. Friends look unhappy when I tell them this, but I, who cannot go to a movie by myself, pooh-pooh all difficulties. . . . I will take the slowest, most local forms of transport and one small bag. The famous Victorian traveller, Isabella Bird Bishop, did it in 1896 with no Chinese and a broken heart; I can, too. (Gates 11)

This passage, also quoted as a blurb on the back cover of her book for promotional purposes, strikes a conventional cord of the genre. The unpredictability of China—perhaps with an insinuation of the Chinese inscrutability, its revolutionary chaos and cartographical backwardness which sounds familiar to a Western audience—is coupled with a heroically strong-willed and adventurous female traveller who is to follow the steps of her predecessor in rediscovering this wrongly charted oriental territory. Mary L. Pratt may easily identify the writer's "anti-conquest" literary strategy, as the passage contains the representational mode conducive to domestic reception that antithesizes and hierarchizes the Western traveller and the non-Western space.[109]

Looking for Chengdu (1999) also incorporates vocabularies and registers that comply with other traditional renditions of China commonly seen in Western travel books. Like canonical travel writers such as Paul Theroux, Colin Thubron and the like who are always good at codifying an essentialized China, inventing terms such as "an indefinable but peculiarly Chinese smell," "a city seamlessly

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[109] For the concept of "anti-conquest" and its manifestation, see Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* 7, 38-110.

Chinese" (Thubron, *Behind* 9, 211), or in a reverse fashion, "There is nothing Chinese about . . ." (Theroux, *Riding* 71), Gates designates sleeping in the noise of "rattling, shockless van" as "the Chinese ability" (116) and participates in constructing what Appadurai calls the "topological stereotype" of China (46). As well, she occasionally leaves questions unanswered and—in spite of the intellectual prudence this may signal—easily elicits her home readers' stereotypical judgments about China. She asks, for instance, when noticing that the tombs in rural Yunnan are "plain, undecorated": "Is this austerity tradition, choice, or compulsion?" (Gates 54). On another occasion, informed by her knowledge that the form of folk religion in Taiwan may bear the community's subversive intention against authority, she is not able to make sense of the absence of religious signs in rural Yunnan province: "Without folk religion to fool with, how do the Yunnanese get a bit of their political own back? Has it all mouldered away, all but the dandruff of coins that litter images in official temples?" (Gates 54). In both cases, the traveller's questions fail to provide effective translation of China and, by leaving them unanswered, turn out to be a "domesticating translation" creating space for the domestic readers to imagine answers suitable to their common-sensical understanding of the country (Venuti, *Translator's* 17).[110]

While the travelling self is constantly in translation, the pronouncement of the traveller's Anglo-American subjectivity in the book denotes the untranslatable

[110] Venuti believes that the domestic inscription in translating "creates a domestic community of interest around the translated text, an audience to whom it is intelligible and who put it to various uses" ("Translation" 491).

part of the self when interacting with others. No matter how much she enjoys Chinese food and how well she learns the native way of living, she sticks to her own standard of healthy eating. She carries her water bottle and slurps from it wherever she goes, although her preference for water is more than once discussed by her Chinese companions "with amazement, amusement, some alarm" (Gates 119). She insists on her "hydraulic idiosyncrasy" and even speaks sharply to people who try to stop her from drinking cold water for breakfast (Gates 111). On a lunch occasion, she "rudely eat[s] most of the vegetables out of all the dishes" from the table (Gates 142). Experiences teach her to follow suit in Chinese company to make everybody comfortable and her experience enjoyable, but she cannot bring herself to compromising her health "simply in order to fit in" (Gates 112).

Other hardships and inconveniences of everyday life trumpet her uncompromised American persona in a foreign setting. She complains about the "slow, European-style washer and dryer for thirty-odd meticulous Canadians" in the guesthouse where she resides, for which her clothes "must sag in the fog on [the] balcony, drying and molding at non-too-competitive rates" (Gates 180).

> Hair care is especially hard, compounded by the bike riding that makes my mane a strainer for Chengdu's abundant air pollutants. Blow-dryers are inventions of the devil, intended to ruin a woman's crowning glory and force her into dependence on dangerous chemicals. I cannot wash my hair at night, leaving it wet and risking pneumonia and icicle formation. Ditto for washing it in cold water during the day. (Gates 180)

When “gritty enough,” she submits herself to local beauty parlors only to undergo “indignities and sufferings” in the process: “hair overshampooed to a consistency at once limp and strawlike by people whose hair, generally, is made of sterner stuff; peculiar trims by people who have never cut naturally curly hair before, but would rather like to try; styles more suitable for a princess bride than a middle-aged academic; and, of course, blow-dryers (Gates 180).” Sometimes, she has to “go greasy to a grand dinner because the electricity is off in the neighborhood of the beauty parlor” (Gates 180). This humorously delineated personal experience, with the contrast of “the great majority of Chinese women [living] with these difficulties without complaints,” enhances the image of an American living in China unable to have peace with its comparatively austere living conditions.

At the end of her first fieldtrip in Chengdu and just before the Christmas of 1988, she feels the pain of leaving the place and “the constant kindness” of her “warm-hearted, generous” Chinese friends, but her American self also urges her to leave China behind and to start her blissful holiday from Hong Kong: “I will buy silk shirts and eat steak tartare and play with a Canadian contingent who also cannot tear themselves away, go home, be normal, grow up again” (Gates 185-86). Although the traveller feels that she has had “a perfectly marvelous time,” and has worked productively with the Chinese colleagues (Gates 186), she longs to go home, resuming her familiar way of living and being her “normal” self again.

Good as the traveller is at making compromises to work cooperatively with her Chinese colleagues, she proves to be uncompromising from time to time,

sticking to her "American" way of handling certain situations. She cannot bear the new policy restricting Chinese access to foreigners in the guesthouse and speaks to the gatekeeper "a couple of times" about the rule which she regards as pointless requiring her Chinese visitors' registration to come in and her signature to come out. She does not expect to get leniency on this matter but she is "firm" and insists: "*my* guests at least should not have to register" (Gates 153). Not being able to get consent from the gatekeeper, she tracks down the functionary at *Waiban*—a unit administrating foreign affairs—to continue to express her point.[111] When the person tells her that the policy is designed to protect foreigners in China, she talks back saying that "none of us had requested such protection, or agreed to it" in her "best hyperdemocratic American style" (Gates 153). As the *Waiban* official's responses are always "snide and unhelpful," she

> turned up the volume. Soon we were both yelling at each other . . . When it seemed time to bring the discussion to a close, I informed him that his attitudes were those of the never-to-be-sufficiently-repudiated Gang of Four period, and stalked off to continue carving a Halloween pumpkin. (Gates 154)

This frustrated but unbending will to insist on her own way of meeting Chinese visitors in her residence results in an "unmanageable anger" that ultimately leads to her "bodily meltdown" (Gates 153).

Conclusion

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[111] "Waiban" (外办) literally means "Foreign Affairs Office." Gates seems to have misunderstood it as the name of the functionary working there.

The anthropologist traveller's encounter with China exemplifies a successful translation of a foreign culture, and her travel book proves to be one of those travel narratives "in the post-modern, post-colonial age [that] provides a perspective from which European ethnocentricity can be challenged" (D. Scott 214). With a commitment to understanding the context of the culture under translation, Gates's travel account offers not just a literal translation of China demonstrating its exotic cultural phenomena and social activities but makes an effort both at the theoretical and practical level in interpreting the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the culture at sight. This "thick translation" of China—to borrow Appiah's term ("Thick" 399)[112]—brings about the traveller's incisive understanding of not only the culture under study but also herself, the genre of travel writing, and culture in general. Core to the traveller's understanding is her disbelief in binarism where self and other, home and abroad, and East and West remain only divided, antithetical entities. What her travel book presents is her conviction in the dialogical, interactive, and mutually transformative nature of each side of the dichotomies, a conviction in culture and self that are always mutable and translatable.

At the same time, Gates's cultural translation is a communication through inscribing representations and values linked to her domestic culture. Her employment of literary devices that resonate the convention of travel writing and her manifested intimacy with her American self evidences the untranslatability of

[112] Appiah's "thick translation" may derive from Clifford Geertz's term "thick description." Geertz argues that the task of an anthropologist is to give thick descriptions of human behaviour, or to explain the context of the practices or discourse within a society. See Geertz 3-30.

culture and self where the communication through translation can only "be partial, both incomplete and inevitably slanted towards the domestic scene" (Venuti, "Translation" 487).

However, the translator's diligent attendance to the foreign context of her translation establishes a domestic readership that shares an interest in the foreign culture so that the "domestic remainder" within her translation—though registering protocols of the receiving culture—embodies "the hope for a consensus, a communication and recognition of the foreign text" (Venuti, "Translation" 499). The untranslatability, rather than an obstacle of communication, emblemizes the autonomy of both self and other and urges "the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others" (Appiah, "Thick" 399).[113] As Gates's domestic inscription is made through the articulation of the social and cultural context of the foreign culture, and vice versa, her translation of China creates a community that includes Chinese intelligibilities and interests and

[113] Appiah stresses the pedagogical significance of "thick translation," stating that "understanding the reasons characteristic of other cultures and . . . other times is part of what our teaching is about," and this is especially important because "in the easy atmosphere of relativism—in the world of 'that's just your opinion' that pervades the high schools that produce our students—one thing that can get entirely lost is the rich differences of human life in culture" ("Thick" 399). He opines that the concept and practice of "thick translation" challenges the dismissive nature of relativism and the easy or irresponsible tolerance of culture differences: "A thick description of the context of literary production, a translation that draws on and creates that sort of understanding, meets the need to challenge ourselves and our students to go further, to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for other" ("Thick" 399).

the Westerners' understanding in common with another culture, another tradition.[114]

[114] I benefit from Venuti's viewpoint about the utopian dimension in translation: "If the domestic inscription includes part of the social or historical context in which the foreign text first emerged, then a translation can also create a community that includes foreign intelligibilities and interests, an understanding in common with another culture, another tradition ("Translation" 491).

Chapter Five Locating "Cosmopolitan Hearth": Yi-Fu Tuan's Homecoming Travel and beyond

> Although we are all cosmopolitans, *Homo sapiens* has done rather poorly in interpreting this condition. We seem to have trouble with the balancing act, preferring to reify local identities or construct universal ones. We live in-between. (Rabinow 258)

Coming Home to China (2007) is the outcome of Yi-Fu Tuan's first visit to his ancestral country after sixty-four years of overseas experience elsewhere around the world. In this book, the narration of Tuan's actual travel experience in China incorporates intermittently the history of his other travels and his lecture notes on human geography with incisive thoughts on the questions of self, place, and culture. "The narrative of this trip," as he reveals in the preface, is a "journey into self and culture" (Tuan, *Coming* xi). The recording of his short visit from May 28 to June 15 of 2006 follows the traditional format of a travelogue by writing in a chronological order and arranging each section in accordance with his travel itinerary. Yet the inclusion of his other travels and his academic speeches makes his travel writing unique: it is not only a travel book about China but also one that unfolds the story of a lifelong traveller with his sophisticated understanding of culture and identity. Indeed, one reviewer considers it "the charm of the book: to wed the seemingly estranged worlds of academia and real life events" (Fan 124). Another holds the book as "a personal odyssey, not quite a

pilgrimage, but much more than an academic visit or indeed a dispassionate scholarly interpretation of place" (Ley 377). In this chapter, I showcase Tuan's travel as one that represents another modality of cross-cultural understanding where the writer's perception of culture and self reconfigures the question of cultural understanding into his version of cosmopolitanism.[115] Travel, for this seasoned international traveller and the founder of humanist geography,[116] refers to mobility both physically and conceptually; it signifies the necessity of perpetual movement toward self-fulfillment through constant interactions with otherness, which results in a cosmopolitan ideal that recognizes but transcends boundaries between self and other, and the familiar and the strange. The pursuit of the question of cross-cultural understanding leads to an exploration at a deeper level of the relationship between self and other—the other people, the other place, the other culture, the unknown sphere of knowledge, and the vast world in general—as represented in Tuan's travel book and his other works. Cross-cultural understanding, in Tuan's case, signifies the ability to live in-between places, cultures, selves, and disciplines; it embodies the conviction that an ethical life is anchored to both a strong sense of self and, perhaps more, to the willingness to remain open to otherness and the capability to communicate with it validly.

A Lifelong Traveller and the Question of Self and Belonging

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[115] For the variety of and a history of cosmopolitanism, see respectively Malcomson 233-45 and A. Anderson 265-89. See also Hannerz 237-51, Appiah, *Ethics* 213-339, Krupat 232-48 for their respective versions of cosmopolitanism.
[116] For the brief biographical note about Tuan, see Tuan, *Coming* 179. For Tuan's scholarly achievement as a humanist geographer, see Yi-Fu Tuan, "Publications," 4 March 2010 <http://www.yifutuan.org/publications.htm>.

Coming Home to China (2007) literally records the writer's trip to China; it also depicts Tuan's lifetime of travel around the world and his scholarly exploration in the realm of human geography. Tuan started travelling with his family when he was a little boy, first from Tianjin, his birthplace, to Shanghai where the family lived from August 1937 to July 1938, and then to Chongqing where he had three years of elementary schooling.[117] In 1941 when he was a boy of ten, the family left China, and since then, he started "living, studying, and then teaching in Australia, England, Canada, and the United States" (Tuan, *Coming* viii). After moving from Oxford University in England to North America, he first did his graduate study at the University of California at Berkeley and then became a professor successively in Bloomington (Indiana), Minneapolis, Toronto, and Madison. Tuan regards his interactions with all these places as pivotal:

> I left home for Australia, the Philippines, England, and the United States. As I grew older, my world opened up. I saw things and learned about things that I had not dreamed of. The move from home to world proved to be enormously enriching. (*Coming* 120-21)

For Tuan, travel does not happen only on a geographical plane; it involves conceptual development as he interacts with the places he visited. The conceptual travel, while for Peter Hessler resulting more from making actual contacts with the people and the culture he visited, as I explicate in an earlier chapter, seems for Tuan to be more of the consequence of voracious reading. Having decided to make America his permanent home, Tuan starts to read about American history:

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[117] See Tuan, *Coming* 139-40, 159. For a more elaborated account of his moving, see Tuan, *Who* 4.

> What I read in books—the transatlantic crossing of the Pilgrims, the slave trade, the Civil War, the settlement of the West, and such like—did not seem to me just other people's stories. I took them as my own because they impacted my sense of self, altering and generally enlarging it. (*Coming* 163)

Having established his career as a humanist geographer, Tuan achieves enormously in his own field: over a period of twenty-eight years of working at Minneapolis and Madison, he has completed his lifework of ten books on systematic humanist geography.[118] Reflecting on the formation of his self, Tuan summarizes it as "an unusual overall direction or movement in life" (*Who* 10).

Tuan's travel around the globe and in the field of humanist geography always brings him to confront the question of place, identity, and culture, as is accentuated in his travel book. "When are you going back to China for a visit?" (Tuan, *Coming* vii) Before going back to China, Tuan finds himself asking the same question again and again, especially in his later years. The question that opens the curtain of his travel narrative conveys a contradictory feeling—a melancholy sense of longing to visit his long-abandoned motherland coupled with a hesitation and uncertainty of what such a visit has to offer. Tuan mentions the physical reason for his hesitation of travelling at the age of seventy-four—"a nervous stomach" (*Coming* vii), as well as the imagined factors such as coughing caused by polluted air and "the demands of coping with frantic traffic in the city

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[118] Tuan, *Who* 118. See also the praise of Tuan's "intellectual vitality" by Philip Porter, Chair of the department of geography at the University of Minnesota, where Tuan taught in early 1970s (337).

and of the many steps, often slippery and without railings, in the country where tourist sites are located" (*Coming* viii). More important are his psychological reasons: staying away from China and living in the English-speaking places for sixty-four years, he no longer feels confident of his Mandarin. He thinks it ironic that his two brothers, "who as physicists needed only fluency in mathematics to rise to the top of their profession, are also competent in Chinese," while he himself, "a humanist whose working tool *is* language, *natural* language, [is] hobbled by an increasing lack of facility in the one language that ought to matter more to [him] than any other" (Tuan, *Coming* viii-ix).

The loss of competence in his mother tongue entails doubts about his identity and where he truly belongs, a feeling that runs through his travel account. He enjoys the warmth and pleasure of his homecoming trip but, at the same time, constantly feels the awkwardness of no longer belonging. Besides giving lectures and meeting with colleagues, Tuan both enjoys the cuisine that refreshes his fond memories of the past and is touched by the warm-heartedness of the Chinese people along the way. In Beijing, the traditional Chinese foods—the "cold dishes of preserved cabbage, cucumbers soaked in soy sauce, and thin slices of spiced beef"—still enhances his appetite; the hot meat buns squirt "delicious juice" into his mouth (Tuan, *Coming* 73). His driver eating the meat buns with raw garlic revives his memory of this familiar, pleasurable way of eating. Although in China one is not supposed to eat raw garlic on public occasions because of its offensive smell, the traveller asks to eat in this fashion, eager to recapture the sensory pleasure his homecoming trip offered. His two student guides, sitting by his sides

at the table, peel the garlic for him to go with the buns, and he regards this—being "fed hand-to-mouth by youngsters"—as "the sheerest luxury" he could enjoy (Tuan, *Coming* 73). Zhi Cheng, one of the student guides, is so thoughtful that he brings Tuan a bottle of water without asking and acts as his "water boy" when touring around the Forbidden City, carrying the bottle all the time and only giving it to the senior traveller for a drink from time to time (*Coming* 93). A-Xing, Tuan's Chinese colleague from Madison takes care of all the harassing details of travel and makes Tuan feel pampered as a child who wallowed in "pure happiness" (*Coming* 125-26). When the traveller is asked by his student audience at Nankai Elementary School what he found when he returned home, he immediately thinks of two words "anchorage" and "tenderness" (*Coming* 122). The paragraph at the end of the book best illustrates the contentment of his homecoming trip:

> I went to China expecting indifference or rejection because I abandoned it and took up citizenship elsewhere. Instead, I found a concern for my well-being that went beyond good manners, coming from people in all walks of life. That, rather than the large changes in landscape, was the shock I experienced first and foremost in China. Landscapes and cities, however beautiful or strikingly altered, will soon retreat to the back drawers of my mind. Not, however, the cab driver who, upon tourist guide who kept telling me to drink milk and stand up straight, and the student who said I could rest my head on his shoulder if I needed to take a nap. (Tuan, *Coming* 174)

Despite all the warmth of feeling brought about by his homecoming experience, Tuan feels himself an outsider in China and is acutely aware of his "non-Chineseness." He is embarrassed for not being able to speak Chinese competently in front of people who "looked like" him, having to have a translator when giving lectures to the Chinese students. When interviewed by a young reporter from a magazine, he "sat in gloomy embarrassment" for not being able to understand her enough to reply appropriately (Tuan, *Coming* 41). He thinks of himself as "a ballpoint pen" when speaking Chinese, "too little used, that must be pressed hard against the paper for the ink to flow" (Tuan, *Coming* 41). He enjoys the Chinese cuisine that revived his childhood memories, yet he also finds himself unable to appreciate "authentic Sichuan food" that sears his tongue and burns his throat in spite of the fact that Chongqing is located in the province of Sichuan, his childhood home (Tuan, *Coming* 108). As well, he is not used to the size of the servings, "each a bulging mound, whose sauces oozed to and beyond the edge of the plate," and, in addition, he feels "repelled by the local delicacy—fried eels, which had been blackened by being fried in a dark spicy sauce and came in coils, with heads and tails intact" (Tuan, *Coming* 108). For that evening, he pleaded to eat in a coffee shop near his hotel and ordered a piece of chocolate cake to go with his coffee. He also repetitively shows his distaste for toilets in China. Even before arriving, he reminds himself that toilets in China "are not the sort of place in which one wants to read a magazine" and that "it is the better part of valor to go there armed with a roll of toilet paper" (Tuan, *Coming* 3). At a good restaurant in Beijing, although he finds that the toilet "did not stink" and "did have toilet

paper," the standard of cleanliness, for him, "was far below that of any halfway decent restaurant in North America" (Tuan, *Coming* 14).

The way Tuan interacts with some Chinese people also denotes his outsider status. The dinner with four young architects at his hotel is not an easy one because of the traveller's acute consciousness of not being part of the group. He is first surprised by their willingness to take charge. Later, when realizing that more was expected of him, he

> struggled not to disappoint them. They listened politely. They too had to struggle to find the right words to loosen my tongue or, rather, to make it appear that I was not uttering inanities, that the things I said were worthy of their attention. (Tuan, *Coming* 44)

Tuan is also touched by their consideration when they, observing his weariness, offer to leave, and is "slightly taken aback by their style of speaking," which sound to him "cultivated, yet utterly sincere" (*Coming* 45). Such observations denote the traveller's sensibility to human goodness,[119] but they also show the distance between him and those he observed, which makes his outsider status distinct. Tuan distances himself even more when the visitors take for granted his Chinese identity: ". . . my young companions never doubted, despite my lack of facility in the language, that I was Chinese and that they themselves took great pride in being Chinese" (*Coming* 46).

Being a native Chinese yet not comfortable speaking his mother tongue and one who always longs to go back and visit his ancestral country but

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[119] Tuan does have a book titled *Human Goodness* (2008).

frequently feels himself an outsider, the traveller finds him constantly pondering the question of self and belonging. “I have doubts about my identity and where I truly belong,” as Tuan reveals in the preface (*Coming* ix). The same question rises again near the end: “. . . where do I belong? Am I a Chinese, an American-Chinese, a Chinese-American, or an American?” (Tuan, *Coming* 155). At the end of his trip, he has the feeling of coming back to the US as his home: when the airplane lands at Minneapolis, he feels that the immigration officer’s “welcome home still worked its magic”:

> The tension in my body started to ease only when the airplane finally touched down at one of the usual points of entry—New York, Chicago, or Minneapolis. I had come home, and I like to have that feeling officially confirmed. (Tuan, *Coming* 153)

Or is the US his home? As he doubts simultaneously: “ . . . is ‘returning’ the right word this time? And if I say that I have come back to the United States, is ‘back’ the right word? Shouldn’t I reserve them for China?” (Tuan, *Coming* 153)

Self and Place

These questions function only rhetorically, though, as Tuan’s travel book as well as his other works offer his profound thoughts on the relationship between identity and place. In the last section of his travel book, Tuan contemplates identity as rooted in history, geography, and language, and discloses what it is that makes place a useful but superficial label of identity. Identity, for him, is not something that can be marked by different jerseys in two opposing sport teams

but “a feeling or mode of being that rarely rises to surface consciousness and is the opposite of flag-waving” (Tuan, *Coming* 157-58). “The triune roots” of history, geography, and language out of which identity grows contain public and private aspects: “They are public in the sense that they are school subjects that can be formally taught,” but they “can also mean something deeper, taught but not in any standard or prescribed way” (Tuan, *Coming* 158). While the formal teaching of history, geography, and language may gradually firm up a collective sense of self, the informal learning regarding these three aspects plays an equally significant role in shaping one’s identity. As Tuan explicates:

> History is, then, stories and hearsay that one learns in passing in childhood and through eavesdropping on the conversation of adults; and it is routine participation in the historically grounded practices and rites of the tribe, not the mere putting on of a show, or the self-conscious mining and miming of the past to affirm one’s identity. Geography is an intimate bond with place, knowing it at the most basic level through one’s senses and movements, knowing it practically in the course of carrying out the daily necessities of life, and knowing it emotionally through the use of charged words and deferential gestures. Language can establish or sever a relationship, and in this capacity it complements facial expression and other bodily stances. But it is also the conceptualization and imaging of a world, an activity that is unique to the human species. Understood in both their public and private aspects, the triune of history, geography, and language undergirds a people’s strongest sense of self. It also undergirds

> an individual member's sense of self insofar as that individual is integrated into the group. (*Coming* 158-59)

Emphasizing the private experience of a place composed of countless, usually unnoticeable details of everyday life positions place as a determinant of identity at a superficial level, since such a perception views place as a backdrop against which a particular human experience takes place and puts the general assumptions about the place at a secondary position. One particular instance to illustrate the superficiality of place in relation to identity is that one's identity does not have to be related to one's birthplace or ancestral location. When people both in China and elsewhere ask him "What is your hometown?" Tuan answers as his father told him: "Yinshan, Anhui Province," but Yinshan is just "a place-name"; he has never been there and knows nothing about it (*Coming* 165). Instead, when conceiving China as a home, he assembles all those memorable experiences when he lived there as a child. Rather than a country with all possible assumptions its name can possibly conjure up, Tuan's home of China is the sum of all the details he could recall while residing there: it is the "silent wonder" that Tuan was stunned into by his wet nurse's ingenious creation of a sparkling ice sculpture out of an ashtray; it is his inconsolable cry out of fear of his father's death when the latter fell heavily against the ice while skating; it is "the dense fog that imparted a slightly menacing air to landscape" and "the greatest luxury" of biting into "a cool slice of watermelon" in those "sizzling summer days"; it is also the "drained rice fields carved on the hillside that became a gigantic stepped garden for children to clamber over" and the "abandoned grave mounds in the

midst of which [kids] enacted war games"; it is "racing down Ko Lo Mountain with Father" and "playing soccer in an alleyway at dusk before the clarion call for dinner" (*Coming* 167). Though the writer remembers that these incidents took place in Tianjin and Chongqing, it is the feelings and emotions associated with these incidents that give the places real meanings; the places as geographical entities or, to be exact, as those too often associated with nationality and ethnicity as handy flags of one's identity, recede to the background, functioning only as a backdrop against which his memories come into full play. Indeed, being constantly on the move, Tuan admits at one point that both his experience of Chinese and American cities is superficial (*Coming* 165).

Tuan also mentions two home-related memories that are not related to place at all but shared widely among human beings:

> One is recovering from sickness, wallowing in guileless sweet rest, playing with toys that threatened to disappear in the billows of one's quilt, under Mother's watchful and loving eyes. The other is the sheer joy of being alive, inhaling the scented air of early morning by the lungful, racing across an open field as though one's feet were treading on air. (*Coming* 167)

Rather than a specific geographical location, home proves to be a human entity; it is the memory of specific happenings at one place or many places. It is the feelings and emotions one has for those happenings—not the alleged, known-to-all features of a place—that shape one's self.

What the travel writer intends is to loosen the assumed connection between identity and locality. Place is often too easily loaded with meanings; it is too quickly suggestive of common understandings that are usually limited and biased and may be irrelevant to the concrete personal experience of the place that shapes one's identity. Arjun Appadurai analyzes how "places have been married to ideas and images" to form the "topological stereotypes" in the disciplinary discourses of anthropology, which has affected both writers of ethnography and nonspecialist readers (39, 46). He points out that, in such discourses, "some feature of a group is seen as quintessential to the group and as especially true of that group in contrast with other groups" (Appadurai 39-40). Tuan's experiential approach to identity and place contests the dominance of the "topological stereotypes" Appadurai critiques by giving significance to concrete human experience that generates the meanings of a place—meanings that are determined by the particularity of experience of each individual being instead of the generalizations seemingly applicable to anyone who has lived in the place.[120]

From a perspective different from Appadurai, Tuan also sees why place is too often thoughtlessly taken as a marker of identity:

> Places can be made visible by a number of means: rivalry or conflict with other places, visual prominence, and the evocative power of art, architecture, ceremonials and rites. Human places become vividly real

[120] Like Peter Hessler's experiential approach to China and his self, Tuan's as well as Appadurai's emphasis on experience highlights the concrete process of identity formations, a process that challenges the notion of experience as legitimate knowledge that naturalizes and essentializes difference critiqued by Joan Scott. See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

> through dramatization. Identity of place is achieved by dramatizing the aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms of personal and group life. (*Space* 178)

In other words, the meanings of a place are produced, constructed, and reinforced by the political, economical, and cultural activities taking place in it. While these meanings of a place, widely accessible in the public sphere, may have an effect on one's identity, they can also be irrelevant or only tangential. As Tuan argues: ". . . the value of place was borrowed from the intimacy of a particular human relationship; place itself offered little outside the human bond" (*Space* 140). For Tuan, it is the specific human interactions with a place that renders the place meaningful and makes it mould one's self.

Therefore, when Tuan mentions elsewhere that a place imprints on one's mind and moulds one's self, he means that a place does so through one's actual lived experience there. Residing in a place, one goes to its schools, works in its various units, and participates in various aspects of its social life, for which one becomes the historical and cultural subject of the place. These public aspects of one's experience with the place, as Tuan believes, form the collective self that is part of one's identity. Both in his travel book and autobiography, Tuan recalls vividly his experience in Nankai Elementary School in Chongqing where he learned "Isaac Newton and his apple, Benjamin Franklin and his kite, together with the doings of Chinese heroes," all offered to him "without distinction of nationality, as examples of what humans could achieve and therefore what [he], a Chinese child, could achieve" (*Coming* 163). Such an experience in Chongqing

not only cultivates in him a "civilizational pride" that nurtures him wherever he travels but also sows the seeds of cosmopolitanism that later become the foundation of his scholarly principle.[121]

In fact, childhood experience of a place is especially impressive and memorable, as the traveller shows later:

> A child's openness to his milieu's sensorial qualities greatly exceeds that of an adult, dulled by routine and the chores of practicality. Chinese cities have therefore left their mark on me in tactile, olfactory, and visceral ways that American cities have not quite been able to do, even though I have lived in them much longer. (Tuan, *Coming* 165-66)

The childhood experiences that sediment keener memories of home explain why, living most of his life overseas, Tuan still feels attached to his motherland.

For the same reason, as a citizen of the US having lived there for most of his life, Tuan feels his natural belonging there. The feeling of coming back home when the airplane lands at Minneapolis and the expectation of having his feeling

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[121] Tuan more than once denied encountering racial discrimination during his overseas experience and revealed that he drew strength from his "civilizational pride" (*Who* 15). In his travel book, he mentioned that he rarely encountered racial prejudice in person and that, even if a racial slur were directed at him, he probably wouldn't recognize it because—as he said—"so full was I of myself as the inheritor of a glorious civilization" (Tuan, *Coming* 122). In his autobiography, he had a more detailed account of his father's cosmopolitan world in which he participated as a child and from which he developed his "civilizational pride": "My social background and the cultural baggage I brought from China were . . . sources of strength. They made and continue to make me feel confident and central, even when American society, for its own larger political purposes, chooses to designate me as an ethnic, a minority person, more or less marginalized and so in need of succor" (Tuan, *Who* 15). Tuan differentiates this "civilizational pride" from patriotism, defining the former as a pride more in human than Chinese achievements and conceiving the latter as nationalistic and parochial in comparison. See *Who* 15-16.

officially confirmed by the immigration officer denotes his sense of belonging. Like China, a place where he had his first three years of schooling and where he accumulated many detailed memories of life, the US is the country where he completed his advanced study and built his successful career and a place he knew through his "senses and movements," "in the course of carrying out the daily necessities of life," and "through the use of charged words and deferential gestures" (Tuan, *Coming* 158). While his education and professional engagement constitutes the public aspect of his American identity, the countless details of life in the States—too trivial and too elusive to document, yet too significant to ignore—shape another aspect of Tuan's American self. While place does play a role in forming one's self, it does so not by the quintessential nature of the place constructed and circulated as well-known "topological stereotypes" but by the self's actual experience and concrete interactions with it (Appadurai 46).

When Tuan claims that his child's "openness to the milieu's sensorial qualities" makes Chinese cities impress him more than the American cities, he also discloses another mystique about place, namely, the too often taken-for-granted notion that the longer one stays in a place, the deeper the mark it leaves on one's identity. Tuan's feeling of the deeper imprint of his childhood memories of the Chinese cities with his first ten years of life there, compared to over fifty years of dwelling in the US as an adult, puts into question the presumed relation between the duration of dwelling in one place and its effect on one's identity.[122]

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[122] In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), James Clifford also emphasizes what I would call the residential nature of travel, advocating a critical attention to "specific histories, tactics, everyday practices of

In fact, Tuan warns us against this assumed connection in *Space and Place*: it is "a fact to bear in mind" that "[m]any years in one place may leave few memory traces that we can or would wish to recall [and that] an intense experience of short duration, on the other hand, can alter our lives" (185).

Despite that Chinese and American cities imprint on him differently, Tuan regards both China and the US as his home. Home is a place both anchored and unanchored to locality: anchored because it is a place where one dwells and accumulates living experiences; unanchored because the living experience in the place transforms home into memories saturated with emotions—something that is "portable" and thus potentially mobile, something that "we can take with us when travel" (McNeill 282). As a traveller having resided in various places, Tuan claims multiple attachments like so many other travellers.[123] His attachment to China, rather than a result of the biological fact of being a native Chinese, derives

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dwelling and traveling," which resembles Tuan's experiential approach (36). Yet, unlike Tuan, he did not loosen the assumed connection between the length of dwelling in a place and its effect upon identity formation. It seems to me that he does not theorize travel adequately on a conceptual plane, or he does not contemplate sufficiently what it is that makes dwelling significant in studying the question of travel.

[123] Mildred Cable and her two Christian sisters, for instance, found them rooted in places other than their original home, which they wrote about in *The Gobi Dessert* (1987) recording their travel in northern China in 1926:

> We often sat on the customer's bench at the shop doors and talked with the old residents . . . and many hours were spent with all sorts and conditions of women, sometimes in hovels, sometimes in back-shops or in private houses, as well as in official residences. Such talk was always interesting and we learnt a great deal from it; we all *enjoyed each other's company* so that when the time came to move on there was already *a root let down which it hurt to tear up*. (21, my emphasis)

As well, George N. Kates was attached to China after living in Peking from 1933 to 1940, feeling sad when compelled by American embassy to leave there because of the war. For discussions about multiple attachments, see also James Clifford's concept of "multiple affiliation" in "Mixed" 365 and Housee 137-54.

from the imprint of the Chinese cities "in tactile, olfactory, and visceral ways" (Tuan, *Coming* 165-66). His sense of belonging to the States, though its cities less impressive, similarly owes to all the minute details of his actual lived life there.

One's self, as a result of interacting with various places, can have multiple identities. The way Tuan defines himself in his travel book indicates his celebration of multiple belongings. He denounces the common-sense identification of himself as "a hyphenated American"—a term connoting the peripheral social status of an American, because he embraces his elite Chinese upbringing that does not make him feel like "a minority person at the margin of things" (Tuan, *Coming* 161).[124] He sees himself as "an unhypenated American," a term with which he claims his American identity, for the US in his eyes, instead of a homogeneous society, is a country "profoundly nonethnic, not a nation but many nations, not a people but many peoples able to come together" (Tuan, *Coming* 161).

In another book entitled *Place, Art, and Self* (2004), Tuan illustrates from a different perspective how a place functions in the development of one's self. He analogizes place to artwork and regards them both as places which "we pause before" and "rest in" and which nurture us (Tuan, *Place* 3); "our identity expands

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[124] It may be a surprise at the first sight that, being a scholar of society and culture, Tuan seemed to remain non-critical of class hierarchy, regarding his elite class background as a source of strength. But actually, the acknowledgement of his elite class status endorses his critique of "radical egalitarianism," which he believes tends to dismiss the social reality of the uneven distribution of knowledge "in a complex civilization." With his cosmopolitan conviction, he maintains an unflagging commitment to social equity, as I will explicate later in this chapter. For "radical egalitarianism," see Tuan, *Cosmos* 139-40. For his "middle-class" family background, see Tuan, *Who* 13, 22-25.

and is enriched as the places in which we feel at home—if only temporarily—are multiplied" (Tuan, *Place* 12).

Core to Tuan's understanding of place and self is human experience, or the discursive process of identity formation. We become who we are not because of a certain location, or to be exact, not because of the quintessential features of a place, but because of our actual experiencing of the place, either native or foreign. The lived experience is composed of both the more visible, public, and recordable ones and myriads of "miniacts" and even tinier "minihabitats" that are less noticeable and tend to escape our conscious awareness—the kind of experience such as "how it is to wake up in the middle of the night to the crash of hail on the roof and feel, because the blanket has migrated up to our shoulders, the chill of exposed feet" (Tuan, *Cosmos* 184). It is such an experience that gives meaning to a place; it stirs up our emotion, forms the well of our memories, and gels who we are. Place is a receptacle where human experiences take place; it shapes, transforms, and nurtures the self through the self's actual interactions with it. The self changes and grows experiencing places; it is "coherent and firm, yet capable of growth" (Tuan, *Place* 4).

The critical attention to the trivialities of life epitomizes Tuan's humanistic commitment. By attending to life in all its detail and density, the writer gives dignity to the particularity of human life and remains critical of the tendency to a totalizing representation of humanity. As he says, the amalgamation of every single details of human life is "a terra incognita that eludes scientific probing"; prioritizing the concrete details of life allows us "to protect the warm

core of living, so vulnerable in its inarticulateness, from aggressive rationality and modernism" (Tuan, *Cosmos* 184). This humanist commitment resonates with Kwame A. Appiah's respect for human life that is the foundation of the latter's philosophy of "rooted cosmopolitanism." Appiah believes that "[a] tenable cosmopolitanism, in the first instance, must take seriously the value of human life, and the value of particular human lives, the lives people have made for themselves, within the communities that help lend significance to those lives" (*Ethics* 222). Like Tuan, Appiah pays tribute to the value of human life, the value that is common and shareable and apprehensible for people in spite of their various ethnicities, nationalities, and cultural backgrounds.

Originating in his worldwide travel experience, Tuan's contemplation of place and self both engages with and transcends geographical, national, and cultural boundaries. Place, as a geographical entity but loaded with history and culture, is the other that is symbiotically related to the self. The self travels and dwells in its other and accumulates life experience that constantly shapes his/her being. Rather than an antithesis against which the self constructs its identity as absolutely oppositional and always different, as is represented in conventional transcultural travel narratives, the other—or in this case the place—becomes an entity intimately related to and constantly moulding the self. The geographical, national, and cultural borders exist between the traveller and the traveled place but become superficial when the travelling self collects memories of the lived experience in the places s/he travels—experiences of daily life, of human bonds, and of many other trivialities that make sense to all human beings.

Self and Other Selves and Other Cultures

While self relates to place through its actual experience of the latter, it relates to other selves by being in constant dialogue with them. In his autobiography, Tuan explores his self with many others in his mind. By "others," he means, first of all, the people he knows in daily life, "mostly American friends," and also "total strangers—people who live elsewhere in the world or have lived in earlier times": "Their sense of self, as recorded by ethnographers and historians, provides me with the broadest possible backdrop against which to raise the question of my own selfhood" (Tuan, *Who* 4-5). Unlike other contemporary travel writers such as Paul Theroux, Rosemary Mahoney, Sarah Lloyd, and Simon Winchester who do not often reflect on themselves when observing the other,[125] Tuan approaches the other in order to scrutinize his own self and seeks—and indeed is delighted—to see his self connected to others:

> I feel a reassuring oneness with other people when I find that even my most intimate, anguished, socially inadmissible emotions and desires are known to others. I am not alone. Stricken by a feeling that leaves me desolate, I say to myself, "Well, I bet I can find even that somewhere in Memorial Library." That confidence comes from experience. *Kindred souls—indeed, my selves otherwise costumed—turn up in books in most unexpected places*. Discovering them is one of the great rewards of a

[125] See for instance Theroux's *Riding the Iron Rooster* (1988) and *Sailing through China* (1984), Winchester's *The River at the Center of the World* (1996), Mahoney's *The Early Arrival of Dreams* (1990), and Lloyd's *Chinese Characters* (1987).

> liberal education. If I quote liberally, it is not to show off book learning, which at my stage of life can only invite ridicule, but rather *to bathe in this kinship of strangers*. (Tuan, *Who* 62, my emphasis)

Both the third and fourth chapters of his autobiography—"two chapters of increasing subjectivity"—are also about things "centrally human and widely shareable" (Tuan, *Who* 11, 32). As the author emphasizes in the introductory first chapter: "When I wrote earlier that even the ordinary life experiences of an ordinary individual should have general interest and import, I had this core section (meaning Chapter 3 and 4) of my autobiography in mind" (Tuan, *Who* 11). For Tuan, to understand his self is to see his connections to many other selves living in and have lived in this world. Living among his friends and colleagues and travelling in the world of books result in the discovery of himself in many others and the realization that he and the preconceived strangers can share so much in common.

The joy of finding commonalities between himself and others does not affect his strong sense of self but makes him value it more. Observing that so many people try to discover about their own identities through searching for ancestors and cultural heritage, Tuan feels skeptical, believing that this way of knowing one's self is predicated on the pursuit of an illusion, which, paradoxically, results in the loss of self. As he argues,

> . . . the identity and belonging so gained are effects of *present* activity, present research into and present reconstruction of the past, and not a reimmersion in the past, which of course is impossible. The idea that one

> is able to return to an earlier time, to feel again the communal bond that existed then, is an illusion. (Tuan, *Who* 5)

For the writer, to pursue an illusionary past to which one can by no means connect one's actual self except through the imaginary liaison based on ancestry and ethnicity, does not help very much with one's understanding of the self but ironically entails a loss of it.[126]

The loss of self is also evident in the world's abundant ethnographic literature. Tuan observes that the ethnographies are "so rich in strange habits and customs" that such an obsession with the other engenders a "virtually disappearance of the self in the group"; "the self is not so much a bounded entity as a concentration that gradually fades at the edges and gives way to other entities" (*Who* 5).

An intelligent way of learning one's self requires an identification of both one's differences from and similarities with other selves. Tuan perceives difference and commonality as a complementary dyad and espouses this point by drawing upon the relationships of friends and colleagues. Tuan observes that, to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship, friends and colleagues accept and welcome their difference and similarity and the "fruitful tension" in between:

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[126] Not coincidentally, Canadian writer Margaret Laurence had the same understanding of self:

> I am inclined to think that one's real roots do not extend very far back in time, nor very far forward. I can imagine and care about my possible grandchildren, and even (although in a weakened way) about my great-grandchildren. Going back, no one past my great-grandparents has any personal reality for me. I care about the ancestral past very much, but in a kind of mythical way. The ancestors, in the end, become everyone's ancestors. But the history that one can feel personally encompasses only a very few generations. (122)

See also Woodcock 136.

> When friends and colleagues meet, their purpose is not to seek oneness as in communal singing, or togetherness in social chitchat, but rather participation in the discovery of a deeper truth, a larger reality. Friends need to withdraw from each other periodically in order to be more themselves, in order that their individuality—their difference—can grow. The differences are, as it were, gifts that they bring to the meeting. . . . Friends and colleagues delight in their different experiences and experiments—in their temporary separation—because they can always look forward to coming together again, and because they do, after all, share a common purpose. (*Cosmos* 177)

When the self and the other self come together, each with a learner's attitude to discover "a deeper truth, a larger reality," the difference between them becomes an attraction, something that arouses one's curiosity and desire to know more about each other. Difference also becomes an asset, with which each contributes to the conversation in one's unique way. With the common purpose of learning, difference is not only accepted and welcomed but also expected and enjoyed.

Conversation, therefore, represents possibly an ideal relationship between one and the other self. For Tuan, it

> presupposes . . . a degree of sociopsychological independence from the group and its pressures, and a willingness to listen to another even though he may not come cloaked in formal authority. . . . It is typically something that appears between strangers who, as a result of such interaction, become friends. (*Cosmos* 175)

Conversation, in other words, represents the wish of an independent self to connect to the other by remaining receptive to different voices. The ideal corollary of strangers becoming friends gestures the productive engagement with the commonality and difference between one's self and the other and evidences the understanding between them despite their differences. This version of conversion echoes that of Appiah who uses the word "conversation" as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others. For the philosopher, the practice of conversation does not aim at "an agreement about what to think and feel"; it starts with a curiosity about others who are different from oneself and, more concretely, "with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own" (Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* 84, 85). "Cosmopolitanism can work because there can be common conversations," conversations that link us "powerfully to others, even strange others" and that become ways of living together across differences (Appiah, *Ethics* 257-58).

Tuan's contemplation of individualism further illustrates the interrelatedness of self and other because of their difference and commonality:

> Individualism, in recent decades, has taken on the almost wholly negative meaning of selfishness. But that is not its sole or even principal meaning. Individualism can and does also mean, benignly, a person's awareness of his or her own distinctive qualities, the desire to use them for his or her own delight, benefit, even salvation, as well as for the well-being of the group to which he or she belongs; an awareness of the wealth of human

> relationships that can be entered into freely, of the depth of the self and the wideness of the external world, and the possibility of joining the two. (*Cosmos* 155)

For Tuan individualism is more than about one's self. It is both about the understanding of the depth of the self and the necessity of reaching beyond the self to embrace the extensiveness of the world and the heterogeneity of others. To be oneself is to be able to join together the self and the other self with the vision that they are two entities inevitably indispensable to each other.[127]

It is also important for the self to maintain a certain degree of self-examination and a critical distance from itself. Tuan's travel book, in contrast with conventional travel writing, impresses me with the writer's conscious distancing from his self. At one point, the traveller observes that the concluding remarks of the forum in Beijing were not satisfactory and would have been better if he had done otherwise. But he then realizes that it is actually his weakness of "always wanting an event, an undertaking, a day, a week, to come to a satisfactory close"; he understands but often does not see immediately that "life just isn't like that, and maturity means accepting the loose ends, accepting the fact that conversations, more often than not, dribble to silence" (Tuan, *Coming* 44).[128] Travelling in various places in China at a senior age, he finds the presence of steps a nuisance wherever he went, yet he does not shower complaints and

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[127] Tuan's interpretation of individualism resonates with Gayatri Spivak's vision of alterity: "alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away" (*Death* 73).

[128] The same kind of critical reflection of his self is abundantly seen in his autobiography. Tuan, *Who* 62-89.

criticisms immediately but thinks instead about his own increasing frailty, which he believes is "undoubtedly a factor" (Tuan, *Coming* 134). As well, as an accomplished scholar, he refrains from the conceit of a sophisticated traveller and remains critical about the proud and vain traveller who tends to learn "against the innocence and humility of the ordinary tourist" (Tuan, *Coming* 127). In the section subtitled "Trying to Be a Tourist," he writes:

> The [traveller], equipped with detailed knowledge, may come to believe that he actually bestows meaning and importance to place. It could seem to him that place in itself is essentially inert and mute until he comes along and gives it life. The tourist's attitude is the reverse. He goes to see Shibao Pagoda, or some other famous site, because he believes that it can enrich him. The same humility may make him eager to stand next to a celebrity and, if possible, to have a photo taken with him. (Tuan, *Coming* 127)

In Tuan's eyes, the tourist, at a particular moment, is more able to "open to the richness of a new place"; they do this innocently and "like a child" (*Coming* 127). Tuan's critical consciousness of the weakness of his self enables him to see the goodness of others, to learn from them, and then to enrich himself.[129]

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[129] Tuan's attitude toward the tourists contrasts with that of Paul Theroux when the latter traveled by train to China. Before the train arrived at Helmstedt where it crossed the border into East Germany, Theroux observed contemptuously that those who traveled with him "had been talking like patients in a hospital": "The travel had frightened and tired them" (*Riding* 27). Later he showed his sense of superiority and sophistication by laughing at the ignorance of Malcolm Gurney who quoted with approval from Theroux's book and those who listened with interest and apparent agreement, asserting that Gurney seemed to be "the only person who didn't agree with the wild generalization" he made in his travel book (*Riding* 50). In another book, Theroux represents his American travel companions as "rather stupid, with their novels and their remarks about building

What Tuan argues for is a valid and productive self-other relationship based on equality, respect, and understanding. His travel narrative articulates this point when he reflects on the discipline of human geography. Instead of the superior stance of traditional human geographers and anthropologists who see themselves as "remote scientists" "looking down on the theatre of life," Tuan argues for a scientist's position that takes "the local people into his confidence," advocating a research methodology that designates the social scientist as a "participant observer" in dialogue with the people and culture under his/her study (*Coming* 84). He restates the point later, saying that "in a modern society, scientists who study its most dynamic arenas will no longer enjoy a theoretical advantage over the men and women who live and work there; outside experts and well-educated locals become, in effect, coworkers" (Tuan, *Coming* 90). He deems it inadequate that anthropologists and geographers seek to study the "slow-changing communities and peoples through an ecological model in which a root concept was the balance of nature or equilibrium," and suggests instead that those peoples and communities be approached as objects of study sharing much in common with the scientists themselves and the communities which they are from (Tuan, *Coming* 86). The key words of research, rather than being "adjustment, adaptation, and survival," should be "planning, experimenting, and inventing" (Tuan, *Coming* 86).

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condominiums near Hankow or Yichang and all the talk about Connecticut" (*Sail* 9). For the traveller's construction of the sense of superiority against the vulgarity of tourists, see my paper on Colin Thubron's *Behind the Wall* (1987), "Both" 8.

The dialogical mode between social scientists and "the locals" should also apply when the latter are those working in the "most innovative institutions such as the universities, the research centers, the great business corporations, or a whole region of creative vigor such as Silicon Valley" (Tuan, *Coming* 89). In this case, the human geographer has no intellectual advantage over the locals and that "the best he can do is to present certain kinds of specialized knowledge and technical skills that will add speed and precision to the projects the locals undertake" (Tuan, *Coming* 89). Tuan then rhetorically asks: "Is this loss of status a cause for regret, or for rejoicing as we foresee a society in which there is true equality—intellectual equality?" (*Coming* 89)[130] The traveller chooses the latter with the vision that intellectuals—each with one's own specialty contributing to the well-being of the society—are no better or worse than others.[131] By having a human geographer encounter "locals" more sophisticated than him/herself, at least in some aspects, Tuan questions the hierarchies between self and other, the scientists and their objects of study, and envisions the possibility that the self, though different from other selves, may work cooperatively with them to achieve a productive understanding of themselves and the society they live in.

Tuan's perception of individual difference and commonality helps to understand those between cultures and societies. "Difference contributes to self-

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[130] In his review of *Coming Home to China* (2007), Laurence J. C. Ma fails to catch the implied meaning of this question and loses track of Tuan's point as I explicate here. Ma 252.

[131] Tuan does critique "radical egalitarianism," though. While aspiring for equality, he is also mindful of the highly uneven distribution of knowledge "in a complex civilization." Negligence of this fact results in the "radical egalitarianism" which he denounces as one of the "most idealist sentiments" of "culturalism" patronized by intellectuals. See Tuan, *Cosmos* 139-40.

awareness," as he notices: "The unique personality of our small part of the earth is all the more real and precious when we can compare it with other climates, other topographies" (Tuan, *Cosmos* 183). At the same time, "awareness of commonality, rather than destroying local distinction, can subtly add to it by giving it greater weight" (Tuan *Cosmos* 184).

Being insensitive to the commonality between one's home culture and the foreign culture results in blindness to the general human condition. Tuan deems it problematic of the cultural approach to the question of how people attach meaning to space and place, pointing out that, by solely focusing on the uniqueness of a particular culture, this approach "overlooks the problems of shared traits that transcend cultural particularities and may therefore reflect the general human condition" (*Space* 5). Of course, due to that culture is "uniquely developed in human beings" and "strongly influences human behaviour and values," it can be a useful approach to the study of a place or society, but this approach should be combined with a comparative method to be productive, a method that engenders dialogues between two cultures and reveals their connections rather than absolute difference (Tuan, *Space* 5).

Cultural difference, though a material reality in many cases, may well be a human construct. Triggered by *Anna Karenina*'s famous opening sentence, "All happy families are like one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," Tuan reflects on the fact that "ways of showing common decency are limited, whereas ways of showing perversity are not only many but highly colorful, the stuff of popular ethnographies: infanticide, child bride, scarification,

bloody rites of animal and human sacrifice, foot binding, self-immolation of widows, demon possession, witch burning, and so on" (*Coming* 186).

Critical as he is of the ethnographical violence of promulgating cultural difference, Tuan does not avoid engaging with difference at a physical level. He contemplates the gradual going out of fashion and even disappearance of the previously listed cultural practices and maintains that, though threatening the world's cultural diversity, the demise of those practices marks the achievement of human liberation and the society's openness to the world. The places where cultural exotica are most likely to be found are the ones remaining closed to the outside. Therefore, he welcomes cultural diversity but objects to preserving it with deliberate human effort. Actually, Tuan critiques the practice of cultural preservationism that attempts "to preserve human culture as though it were a form of endangered wildlife," aligning it with "cultural-ethnic chauvinism," "religious fundamentalism," and "returning to an imagined rustic or small-town past," which are all he denounces (*Cosmos* 182).[132]

Just as places other than one's home—places that may first conjure up difficulty and inaccessibility—can actually nurture one's being and help one develop new roots, people different from oneself may not be as different as one imaged: an ideal relationship with other selves brings about a better understanding of both oneself and other people one is related to. As a seasoned traveller both in foreign cultures and in the spheres of knowledge about self and culture,[133] Tuan

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[132] See also Appiah's objection to cultural preservationalism in "Case" 3-4.
[133] Tuan is recognized by J. Nicholas Entrikin as "one of the best known geographers outside his home discipline" (176). Laurence J. C. Ma, too, praises

enjoys the contentment of basking in the kinship of strangers and imbibing new knowledge, his self growing with his interactions with things once alien to him. With his strong sense of self and conviction in individualism, he is able to see simultaneously how such a selfhood remains indispensable to other selves and to apprehend the necessity of dialogue *both* between selves *and* cultures.

"Cosmopolitan Hearth"

"Cosmopolitan hearth," a term from Tuan's book titled *Cosmos and Hearth: A Cosmopolite's View* (1996), signifies the author's cosmopolitan conviction and represents his learning of self and culture at a philosophical level, both infiltrating his travel writing about China and other works. The term contains a contradiction indicated by the combination of two seeming oppositions—cosmos and hearth—and argues for the reverence of the cosmos as both an intellectual requisite and an ethical commitment.

Hearth is a metaphor signifying home, community, and a particular culture. Tuan identifies it as

> the nurturing root of one's being. Attachment to it is built on the unexamined foundations of biological life, the intimacies of childhood experience, the warmth of familial communions, local customs and practices, the unique qualities of place. (*Cosmos* 16)

Tuan's contribution to not only geography but also other disciplines such as "architecture, planning, anthropology, literature, and religion" (250).

One feels naturally attached to hearth because that help firm up one's self—the actual lived experience that determines what a place means, which I discussed earlier.

Community is one form of hearth and is therefore a nurturing place. As Tuan says, it is "a good warm word" suggesting "a network of mutual support and sympathy" (*Cosmos* 144, 145). However, community is also confining and restrictive, as is shown by many unpleasant and negative meanings it connotes, including

> community's historical root in toil and struggle, in scarcity; its suspicion of the larger world, its psychological need to see outsiders and strangers in a hostile or dismissive light; its narrow and frankly egocentric conception of mutual help; its social immobility . . . its indifference to the uniqueness of the individual, to individual destiny as distinct from communal well-being (Tuan, *Cosmos* 145).[134]

Like community, culture, too, has its attractions and downsides. Tuan uses the metaphor of house to underline both the confining and protective roles of culture. As a house, culture protects people by "walls, the roof, and other boundaries from sensations that they do not want"; its enclosed spaces also "have a way of heightening sensations that people do want, such as warmth from a fire

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[134] Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) defines nation as "an imagined political community" (6), which from a different perspective discloses community's confining nature. Virginia Woolf's concept of "unreal loyalties" also explains why community can be restrictive, for which she advocates a liberation: "By freedom from unreal loyalties is meant that you must rid yourself of pride of nationality in the first place; also of religious pride, college pride, school pride, family pride, sex pride and those unreal loyalties that spring from them" (qtd. in Appiah, *Ethics* 222).

or in the more intimated human contacts, fragrance from cooked food or from a flowering tree in the gently stirred air of a courtyard" (Tuan, *Cosmos* 141). But culture has its moral codes that make it a confining thing; as "a collective convention," culture dictates similar human responses to certain circumstances that can contravene personal intention and butcher individual interest (Tuan, *Cosmos* 143). Tuan observes that the fundamental function of culture is "to define and delimit, to protect and nurture by means of confinement" (*Cosmos* 142). In fact, he believes that "the binding powers of culture are nearly inexorable," raising the example of the Bloomsbury literati who were—though highly educated—narrowly bound to the particular culture of English country house and afternoon teas to illustrate that human beings are "all more or less hearth-bound" (Tuan, *Cosmos* 183). Hence culture's ambivalence, one of walls and houses: "walls that attempt to keep all dangers out lock people in, and houses that are effective shelters risk becoming prisons" (Tuan, *Cosmos* 142). "All cultures," as Tuan believes, "are flawed blinders as well as the source of unique illuminations" (*Cosmos* 132).

Without a clear vision of the double-sidedness of culture and community, the danger of "culturalism" can emerge: "the dramatic efflorescence of fanatical pride, a deliberate narrowing of life to one's own culture and corner of the world," or the extreme obsession with one's own culture and patch of land that "easily catches fire" when "local leaders who, of both high-minded (though often misguided) and low-minded reasons, seek to exploit their people's feelings of

resentment and insecurity" (Tuan, *Cosmos* 140).[135] Therefore, for Tuan, a culture deserves "affection rather than idolatry"; it is "our first home rather than our last" (*Cosmos* 132).

"Cosmos" refers to the space outside the boundary of home and consists of other homes, other communities, and other cultures that one may make his/her new homes. Aspiring to the novelty and freedom of the cosmos constitutes the essential part of Tuan's cosmopolitan belief. His experiential approach to the study of place and culture articulated in his travel book, by emphasizing that the learning of a particular culture and place should include lived experience and not just impersonal facts, embodies a rationale out of his cosmopolitan aspiration for the cosmos:

> Experience is directed to the external world. Seeing and thinking clearly reach out beyond the self. . . .
>
> . . . Experience thus implies the ability to learn from what one has undergone. To experience is to learn . . .
>
> Experience is the overcoming of perils. . . . To experience in the active sense requires that one venture forth into the unfamiliar and experiment with the elusive and the uncertain. (*Space* 9-10)

In his travel narrative, Tuan defines "sophisticated" people as those who better represent his cosmopolitan conviction and who aspire to the knowledge of "the cosmos" and have "an awareness of a world beyond [their] own, a habit of

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[135] Tuan's warning of culturalism resonates with David Hollinger's political cosmopolitanism that—from a positive perspective—advocates political institutions that "promote cultural self-reflexivity, voluntary affiliation, and openness to diversity" (A. Anderson 279).

appraising that world, seeing opportunities there that can be used to improve [their] way of life" (*Coming* 87-88).

In addition to valuing the experience of the unknown, the defining characteristic of the cosmos is "diversity"—"the confluence of many hearths in one great place," and along with it the acknowledgement of the common, shareable human experiences and of the possibility of understanding across borders (*Cosmos* 138). A cosmopolite is supposed to embrace the diversity of the cosmos without losing sight of the commonality shared among different hearths and, because of the vision of commonality, to be able to apprehend and appreciate the differences existing among the hearths:

> Cosmopolites and cosmopolitans welcome pluralism, fearing it only when it threatens to become anarchic and destroy the very idea of cosmos—the notion that human beings have important common experiences, that in view of these experiences and in view, further, of the powers of the imagination, it is entirely possible for one person to stand in the shoes of another, for one people to understand and appreciate the worldview of others. (Tuan, *Cosmos* 138-39)

In other words, a cosmopolitan both appreciates the pluralism of the cosmos and is able to communicate across the boundaries between different hearths. With regard to a community or society, Tuan's cosmopolitan ideal requires that it enclose itself and retain its autonomy "to allow personal and local virtues to grow that can then be offered to the world" and that, simultaneously, it remain open to

the outside "so as to prevent sterility or the development of traits that are pathological or merely eccentric" (*Cosmos* 187).

The term "cosmopolitan hearth" expresses the coexistence of two seemingly oppositional but actually mutually containing entities. For Tuan, a cosmopolitan values self and home but is committed to liberation from their confinement, and is therefore willing to open toward the foreign and the unfamiliar. Tuan identifies the rootless nature of human beings that endorses his conviction in cosmopolitanism: although we are confined by various factors to a certain locality over a certain period of time, we are endowed at the same time with emotional and mental power that provides a great "source of instability and uprooting" (*Cosmos* 187). The traveller invites us to consider some "utterly commonplace experiences" to envision human being's emotional favour of things "out there":

> . . . while we live in the present, we can recall the past and envisage the future. Stay in the same place, and we will still have moved inexorably, for the place of adulthood is not the place of childhood even if nothing in it has materially changed. Stages of life are sometimes called a "journey," a figure of speech that again vividly captures the condition of human homelessness. (Tuan, *Cosmos* 187)

"Human homelessness" denotes the paradoxical state that human beings, with perpetual yearning for the safety and coziness of hearth, are constantly on the move. Tuan offers an example "peculiar to our time and to Americans especially," namely, people's "searching for roots," a commitment that "is intended to make

us (Americans) feel more rooted, can itself be uprooting, that is, done at the expense of intimate involvement with place": "Rather than immersion in the locality where we now live, our mind and emotion are ever ready to shift to other localities and times, across the Atlantic or Pacific, to ancestral lands remote from direct experience" (*Cosmos* 187-88). The longing for rootedness in one particular place is inevitably articulated through translocal and transtemporal mobility and entails the state of rootlessness.

At the mental level, human beings' capability of thinking isolates them from their "immediate group and home" and links them "both seriously and playfully to the cosmos—to strangers in other places and times" (Tuan, *Cosmos* 188). What Tuan calls "thinking" here refers on the one hand to imaginative and empathetic thinking and, on the other, to independent thinking, or critical thinking, a skill that enables one to retain a critical distance from common-sensical, group thinking habits, and a skill that can be acquired through constant learning. Independent or critical thinking, I argue, represents the journey of learning or travelling in the sphere of the unknown where one has to constantly confront, dialogue with, and apprehend new narratives of life, new ideas, new theories, and new systems of knowledge. It is the process of being lured by curiosity for the new and the different and feeling the contentment of enrichment by various kinds of knowledge despite the anxiety, humility, and frustrations along the way, a process that resembles a never-ending experience of homelessness. As Tuan says, thinking "enables us to accept a human condition that we have always been tempted by fear and anxiety to deny, namely, the

impermanence of our state wherever we are, our ultimate homelessness" (*Cosmos* 188).[136]

For the cosmopolitan traveller, home, or rootedness, is an illusion. Rootlessness turns out to be a theme threading many of Tuan's works. In his autobiography, he portrays himself as being "rootless in more than one sense" (Tuan, *Who* 4). His book *Place, Art, and Self* (2004) defines humanist geography as a discipline that "is mostly about how we strive to feel at home on Earth, rooted in place" and yet "never quite succeed" (Tuan, 44). The arts, too, with their power "to disturb or exalt," "remind us that we are fundamentally homeless" (Tuan, *Place* 44).[137] Owing to the endowed emotional and mental power, human beings' cosmopolitan state seems inevitable. A cosmopolite, though cherishing the warmth and the nourishment of the hearth, values more the broadness of the cosmos and the productivity of living in-between selves, places, and cultures: "Having seen something of the splendid spaces, he or she . . . will not want to

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[136] Homelessness as a result of critical thinking resembles Linda Alcoff's idea of "positionality" as a requisite of critical work. Alcoff regards "positionality" as "a strategy of self-conscious self-displacement within the epistemological and discursive frames any critic cannot help but inhabit" (Krupat 23). In other words, a critic needs to distance him/herself from the object of study in order to do critical work. The "distance" or the "self-conscious self-displacement" echoes what Tuan names—homelessness.

[137] Though named "rooted cosmopolitanism," Appiah's notion does not contradict Tuan's. The emphasis of the nurturing nature of hearth and the embracing of his Chinese identity evidences Tuan's sense of rootedness that Appiah articulates. When Tuan argues for the homelessness or rootlessness as a fundamental human condition, he is not against the rootedness of self or its anchorage to one's cultural heritage that Appiah's cosmopolitanism values. Rather, Tuan's homelessness espouses his perpetual aspiration for the cosmos as a way to overcome the narrowness of self and the confinement of home or, to quote him, to avoid "the twin banes of rootedness, ignorance and bigotry" (*Coming* 173).

return, permanently, to the ambiguous safeness of the hearth" (Tuan, *Cosmos* 188).

Obviously, Tuan's cosmopolitanism is both an intellectual requisite and an ethical commitment. When talking about communal bonding, Tuan admits that "bonding based on propinquity and kinship is natural to us," but he values more the "kindness to strangers who may not reciprocate and civility in impersonal transactions" (*Cosmos* 140). For him, this "kindness to strangers" is "a watermark achievement of civilization" (Tuan, *Cosmos* 140). Like Appiah who names the world "our shared hometown" (*Ethics* 217), Tuan promotes an ethical use of human beings' emotional and mental power in order to create and maintain a better world where every culture is appreciated and respected and each contributes to human civilization in its own way.[138]

Conclusion

As a humanist geographer and an experienced cross-cultural traveller, Tuan has produced a unique book of travel that contains not only his experience of visiting China—his long-abandoned native country—but also his travels elsewhere around the world and his insightful understanding of self and culture. Unlike other travel writing about China, *Coming Home to China* (2007) invites us to read the writer as both a traveller to different places and one who explores in various realms of knowledge about humanity, society, and culture. Travel in this book proves to be more distinctively a practice involving both physical movement

[138] This is also the main theme of Tuan's *The Good Life* (1986) and *Human Goodness* (2008).

and conceptual change; it promotes dialogue between the traveller and various places and cultures visited, which, productively, results in the traveller's multiple identities and attachment to different places he calls his home. Travel, for a lifelong traveller like Tuan, is a perpetual, unavoidable human condition of living in-between selves and cultures.

On the philosophical plane, travelling across cultural boundaries entails a tolerance of cultural difference, an attitude deriving from the understanding of the contradictory but interdependent relationship between the travelling self and other selves, other cultures, and other systems of knowledge with which the traveller finds himself constantly interacting. Cosmopolitanism embodies this attitude of tolerance, and the vision such an attitude rests upon is represented in the "cosmopolitan hearth"—a concept that recognizes the nurturing but confining nature of the hearth and argues for the embracement of the cosmos as a way of liberation from the restriction of the hearth's familiarity. Tuan, the traveller, is a cosmopolitan who values the distinctiveness of the self and a particular culture but who treasures more the diversity of other selves and cultures. His version of cosmopolitanism represents cross-cultural understanding as a necessary and inevitable corollary of physical and conceptual mobility that travel entails.

Conclusion

> Travel and travel discourse should not be reduced to the relatively recent tradition of literary travel, a narrowed conception which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (J. Clifford, *Routes* 65).

> Travel needs to be rethought in different traditions and historical predicaments. Moreover, when criticizing specific legacies of travel, one should not come to rest in an uncritical localism, the inverse of exoticism. There is truth in the cliché, "Travel broadens."(J. Clifford, *Routes* 91)

I still remember, when four years ago I read Hill Gates's *Looking for Chengdu* (1999) for the first time, I could not bring myself to finish the book. Already infuriated by volumes of China books by so-called professional travel writers, I found the familiar tone of a superior American anthropologist looking down at her Chinese other utterly distasteful. Even worse, my then limited understanding of postcolonialist theory justified my fury. Now near the end of the journey of thesis writing, I am amazed by how transformative it can be working through a project like this. Gates's blatant complaints about the "slow, European-style washer and dryer" in the guesthouse at Chengdu and the hairdresser who overshampooed and wrongly styled her hair, along with many other inconveniences of life she whines about no longer elicit my instant criticism. Instead, I find myself more sympathetic toward an intellectual traveller

courageous enough to abandon—however temporarily—the comfortable cocoon of home and come to China to embark on a task of tremendous difficulty studying its foreign culture. I found myself paying tribute to her determined ethical commitment to "learning what our natures truly need, so future solutions will be less flawed than those of this century" (Gates 179). Although I still cannot empathize with her throwing a banana peel "to drift with the rest" in Guangzhou's dirty suburbs (Gates 13), my initial shock and contempt for a supposedly well-educated traveller now gives way to a critical reflection about how the local social environment shapes our consciousness and behaviour.

Working through this project, which goes hand in hand with my own lived experience in Canada as a Chinese traveller, results in my transculturation and deep conviction of the in-between state of the human subject. My travelling experiences as a student of English literature and as a Chinese traveller in Canada have altered me and transformed me into a broad-minded being, just as travel has transculturated Wilson into embracing a broader humanism, Hessler into learning the wisdom of ambivalence, and Tuan into a theorist creating the idea of "cosmopolitan hearth."

This project is not simply narcissistic self-indulgence, though; it is also an answer to the call of the critical debate within the field of travel literature studies. This debate revolves around different approaches to the self-other binary in travel writing. On the one hand, it highlights and critiques the hierarchical power relations between the traveller and the native. And, on the other hand, it counteracts this very hierarchy by illustrating how the power relations can only be

symbolic and never remain stable. To enter into this scholarly conversation, my thesis acknowledges the contribution of both sides of the debate; while the first approach enhances our critical consciousness of the imperialist ideology of the genre, the second one reminds us of the complexity of the representation of the self-other interaction in the contact zone. The critical approach I propose is to attend to the contact zone as the *zone of transculturality*; instead of reading the travelling self and the native as two different, unrelated entities trapped within a power-based relationship, I examine the dynamics of their communication and the consequences of their cross-cultural contact. Not being unmindful of the unequal status of the traveller and the native at the moment of encounter, I read travel writing as the artifact of transcultural encounter and believe, as David Porter does, that

> . . . the experience of encounter, in the end, cannot be understood solely in terms of either of power and mastery or of reciprocal influence and projected fantasies. The processes by which one culture finds meaning in another, rather, entail adaptive strategies that are themselves potentially transformative. (56)

So, it is the process of cultural translation and the transformative nature of that very process that I investigate in this project. This critical approach brings to the forefront a complicated rapport between self and other, and home and abroad, a relationship that is not only different and oppositional but also interdependent and mutually transformative.

Exploring the zone of transculturality and investigating the question of cross-cultural understanding, my thesis also dialogues with travel writing scholarship pertaining particularly to China. Just as in travel literature studies in general, criticisms about China-related travel writing fall into the rubric of critiquing the Orientalist ideology of the narrative on the one hand while problematizing the hierarchical power relationship between the Occident and the Chinese on the other—usually by seeking the vulnerability and susceptibility of the traveller in the foreign land. What is different is the critical voice represented by Nicholas Clifford who demands trust from the readers in a certain degree of authenticity of travel writing. For N. Clifford, the genre consists of accounts of particular travels happening at specific historical and geographical moments. Although his approach is plausible with regard to its emphasis on the material and historical context in which travel takes place, I find it problematic that it also reinforces cultural essentialism proposing to seek the "true heart of the culture and people under observation" (N. Clifford xix-xx). My thesis, by perusing the travel books written by Canadian journalist Jan Wong and geophysicist Jock Tuzo Wilson, American Peace Corps volunteer Peter Hessler, anthropologist Hill Gates, and humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, foregrounds an alternative scenario of Western travellers in China whose representations dialogue with preceding travel narratives about the country. With a critical approach attending to the question of cross-cultural understanding, my work not only brings to light the legacy of the imperialist cross-cultural encounter most conspicuously evident in Jan Wong's journalistic account, but also, more significantly, it explicates how transcultural

contact sets in motion the travellers' reconceptualization of self and other, and home and abroad. At the practical level, my reading explores a barely charted scholarly territory of travel writing pertaining to contemporary China. Theoretically, by examining the nuances of cross-cultural interactions and theorizing the transformative and adaptive nature of transcultural contact, I mean to propose a general theoretical approach to the study of travel literature that both remains critical to and transcends power hierarchies in the contact zone.

This, of course, is an unfinished project. One thing that has been buzzing in my head is the question of gender. I include two female writers in this project to question travel writing as conventionally a male genre, but many questions are left unanswered. While Sara Mills, Inderpal Grewal, Sidonie Smith, Wendy Roy, and Kristi Siegel have conducted interesting and controversial studies on women's travel writing, I would anticipate more work to be done with regard to gender and travel.

It is my hope nevertheless that this project fills some major gaps of knowledge in contemporary scholarship so clearly demarcated by disciplinary and regional boundaries. To study travel writing is, by itself, to make an "anthropological turn in literary studies" (Schwab 10). This "anthropological turn" is not just for the sake of an interdisciplinary study but rather attempts "a reconfiguration of literary studies" by going back to a very fundamental question, namely, "What is the cultural function of literature?" or put another way, "How can literature be understood as a kind of 'writing culture'"? (Schwab 10). Also, studying the question of cross-cultural understanding is to examine the process of

knowing otherness largely at the ontological level, and this level necessitates the closest possible intimacy with the human experiential that all are able to share and comprehend regardless of the imposed identity labels of gender, class, nationality, and ethnicity among others. However, as I also believe that the ontological aspects of travel are inevitably subjected to the social, cultural, and historical, as my thesis also demonstrates, and as my project approaches to the practice of travel at both a physical and a conceptual plane, how do I avoid the jeopardy of employing travel as "a capacious signifier" that may lead to deflating its power as a critical concept (Simpson xvii)? How do I better conceptualize—in the case of the present study—the material and the ontological aspects of travel so that the two are not oppositional and unrelated but become complementary and meaningfully coexistent, just as "the copresence of cultures" (Budick 12)? That being said, it is my conviction that a critical focus on the interactive and conflictual process of cross-cultural communication falls through "the cracks of well-established disciplines of national histories and world history between East and West" (Liu 5). So I hope, in the present era of globalization and human migration, my study transgresses disciplinary and cultural boundaries and helps re-imagine a counter-hegemonic, cosmopolitan future.[139]

[139] See my paper on how the critical focus on the question of cross-cultural understanding informs a different approach to Canadian literature studies in general. "The Question" 112-17.

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