

Translation as Representation: Western Imagination of China from the Eighteenth Century to the Present

Yangyang Long
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

Introduction

Translation, or cross-cultural representation, has been playing a prominent role in the contemporary cultural exchange between China and the west (Europe and North America) since the beginning of the Deng Xiaoping's era in 1978 when the country opened up to the outside world. The influx of western knowledge and ideology into China has been accompanied by global capitalism and consumerism. This influx can be considered a result of the Socialist Camp's loss of the Cold War in 1989, which was marked by the collapse of the former USSR and the failure of the Warsaw Pact. China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 and hosting the Olympic Games in 2008 sent an unmistakable signal of the country's readiness for a full-scale integration into the global market. Yet, the second decade of the twenty-first century did not see a mutually beneficial geopolitical relation between China and the west. In the wave of globalization boosted by AI—and big data—oriented technology on the one hand and with the maximum pursuit of profits propelled by transnational capitalism on the other, the enduring China-US trade war since 2018 forced China to confront the rising tension with its western counterparts. For the west, China's rapidly consolidated economic and cultural power undoubtedly instigate a sense of anxiety and even fear in its political imagination. Writing about the NATO summit celebrating its seventieth anniversary in London in December 2019, Gideon Rachman, the *Financial Times's* chief foreign affairs commentator, considers the NATO Communiqué as containing “one significant departure” as it mentions China for the first time: Huawei's 5G networks and Beijing's growing influence pose challenges that “we [the EU] need to address together as an alliance” (Rachman). This led Rachman to observe that “America's allies are belatedly heeding its warnings about the Chinese technology threat” (Rachman). Evoking the ideological conflict in the Cold War but only metamorphosizing in a techno-war today, Rachman's interrogation of the solidarity among America's allies speaks to an apprehension that infiltrates deeply into the current international order, a crumbling order that has been governed by the Atlantic Charter since the end of the Second World War: the only winner from a breakdown of NATO would still be—ironically—China, even in this post-Cold War era.

This boiling unease is also evidenced by the emergence of debates in Anglophone elite institutes, debates that centre on themes like “China: friend or foe?” (“China: friend”) and “Will China's rise be peaceful?” (“Will China's”), as if China can only be either an ally or an enemy, an associate or a threat. This “either-or” mentality is of course problematic, but it is no less pervasive.

Book titles such as *China, Inc.: How the Rise of the Next Superpower Challenges America and the World* (Fishman), *China Shakes the World: The Rise of a Hungry Nation* (Kynge), *Will China Dominate the 21st Century?* (Fenby) and *China's Asian Dream: Empire Building along the New Silk Road* (Miller) demonstrate the western perception of China as a potentially dominant and therefore threatening shaping force on the global stage. However, this perception cannot overwrite China's impact on the world. Rather, it is duly recognized in cases such as Julia Lovell's winning the 2019 Cundill History Prize for her *Maoism: A Global History*. The work is acclaimed as a re-evaluation of Maoism "as a force that has influenced societies as different as Peru and Indonesia, Europe and the United States," and of "its enduring impact on our world today" ("Julia Lovell"). This love-and-hate relationship between the west and China in our time leads us to ponder the question: where does this gap between the world's current, fading powers and its ascendant one come from?

This article traces the possible origin of this China-west polarization in the literary and cultural representations of China in the west, and the evolvment of this polarization vis-à-vis how China has become the west's principal Other. It then addresses the way in which China's casting as a subordinate, but potentially fascinating Other is refashioned in the contemporary era. Examining the particular means of interpretation that developed around Chinese culture in both European and American literatures from the eighteenth century to the present, this article explores the efficacy of the power and politics of representation embodied through the process that brings Chinese culture to the mercy of its European and American counterparts. As a consequence, Chinese culture is translated and eventually transformed into a product of the west, forming an early reference to what Edward Said calls "Orientalism" (2003). To begin with, it must be noted that the term "translation" is used in a broader sense, not restricted linguistically or textually, but defined as a set of cross-cultural representations in forms such as literature, media and journalism that can be seen as a translation dynamic. The following discussion will centre around what I consider to be the two temporal categories of Orientalism: Enlightenment Europe and the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Both chronological periods will be examined through a particular set of examples: Daniel Defoe and Voltaire in Enlightenment Europe, and western popular culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In doing so, what was once vaguely described as western appropriation of China can be validated in stronger relief by examining the specific contexts of translation, representation, and imagination. This two-stage approach may be considered as broad-brush and the corpus eclectic, but it is inevitably so because it spans such a lengthy historical period. As a result, some historico-cultural granularity might be lost, such as how the western perception of China differs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or differs before and after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. However, this article is neither a study of a historiographical criticism of China in western perception, nor that of twentieth-century Chinese history or western representations of contemporary Chinese literature (topics in their own right, see for example Kitson; Lee), but an investigation of the politics of representing and imagining China in the Sino-western cultural history and the mechanics at work in framing China as the paramount Other for the west, more importantly, how this mechanism is still functioning today in generating baneful self-perpetuating representations. Resonating with Fredric Jameson's suggestion that all Third World literatures and cultural constructions are necessarily national allegories (1986), this article argues that historical representations of China exemplified

in the two stages are not *de facto* about China; they are instead allegorizations of Otherness for western domestic use. In view of this, today's western perception of China is perceptibly linked to all of the previous representations that have ventriloquized a discursively voiceless but ideologically threatening China.

China in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The Formation of the Binary Schema of Demonization and Romanticization

Eighteenth-century Britain was rapidly establishing itself as the biggest colonial power on earth; as a result, the evangelical zeal that had led missionaries to spread the Gospel in China—typically exemplified by Matteo Ricci in the sixteenth century—was, in the age of reason and colonial expansion, beginning to lose its hold (Zhang 121). Increasingly free from the interests of faith, the explorer who is able to travel to China shifts from being a missionary to a fictional character, a pragmatist like Robinson Crusoe in the British novelist Daniel Defoe's hugely influential work on China. Inextricably linked to the rise of the British Empire and as such, imbued with an imperialistic ideology, Defoe's 1719 novel *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* portrays China as a nation which generated tales not of wonder, but of ignorance and detestation. In the novel, Crusoe offers extremely negative comments on Chinese civilization as he journeys through Nanjing and Beijing. Constantly comparing the Chinese, whom he comes to call "the miserable people" (Defoe 151) with Europeans, Crusoe describes China in the following derogatory terms: "their Fabricks, their manner of Living, their Governments, their Religion, their Wealth, and their Glory (as some call it) I must confess, I do not so much as think it is worth naming, or worth my while to write of, or any that shall come after me to read" (Defoe 151). Sharpened by a contemporary sense of colonial militarism, Crusoe's deprecating remarks bespeak the imperialist and expansionist ideologies that are so characteristic of his time:

[...] nay, I do not boast, if I say that 30 000 *German* or *English* Foot, and 10 000 *French* horse, would fairly beat all the Forces of *China*: And so of our fortified Towns, and of the Art of our Engineers in assaulting and defending Towns; there's not a fortified Town in *China*, could hold out one Month against the Batteries and Attacks of an *European* Army; and at the same time, all the Armies of *China* could never take such a Town as *Dunkirk*. (Defoe 152-3, original emphasis)

Defoe's statement fully captures Britain's self-projection as the most powerful empire on the planet. The description of the weak military capability and the diminished morale of the Chinese demonstrates nothing but the relegation of the exotic to the mere role of the viewed object in Defoe's self-regarding literary creation, so that Britain becomes the dominant Self and China the dominated Other. This epitome of a more broadly conceived western dominance over the Orient later becomes the recurring theme of Orientalism and foreshadows Said's observation that "an Englishman in India or Egypt in the later nineteenth century took an interest in those countries that was never far from their status in his mind as British colonies" (Said 11). Such a patronizing colonial attitude comes to the fore when Crusoe describes the Chinese as "a contemptible Herd or Crowd of ignorant sordid Slaves, subjected to a government qualified only to rule such a People" (Defoe 153), a backwardness exacerbated by what Crusoe sees as the Chinese inability to

apprehend scientific knowledge, dwarfed by that of the enlightened nations of Europe:

They know nothing of the Motion of the Heavenly Bodies [...] when the sun is eclips'd, they think 'tis a great Dragon has assaulted, and run away with it, and they fail a clattering with all the Drums and Kettles in the Country to fright the Monster away, just as we do to hive a swarm of bees. (Defoe 154)

Conspicuous ignorance on the part of Chinese students is utterly unbearable for Crusoe. It is beyond his comprehension “to see such haughty, imperious, insolent People in the midst of the grossest Simplicity and Ignorance, for all their fam'd Ingenuity is no more” (Defoe 156). Given such perceived backwardness in science and technology, Crusoe argues, it would be unthinkable for the Chinese to be proud of their history, culture, and religion: “the Pride of these People is infinitely great, and exceeded by nothing but their Poverty, which adds to that which I call their Misery” (Defoe 155–6). For Crusoe, if Chinese science and technology can be considered on a par with those of the Europe, their people may be granted permission by the supreme ego of the colonial consciousness to be proud of their civilization; if not, their right to any celebration of their culture becomes inexplicable and therefore unwarranted. Obviously, Crusoe is using western standards here to measure a country, as if such standards were the only means of evaluating the achievements of a civilization. This, in a nutshell, is the imperialistic nature of Defoe's writing, the nub of its epistemological imperialism, both of which are achieved by means of the subjection of the perceived culture to the controlling mind of the writer. The global sweep of this imperialistic intention is manifested with ruthless clarity when Defoe compares the Chinese to the then-colonized Indigenous Americans: “and I must needs think the naked savages of America live much more happily” (Defoe 156), thereby justifying the civilizing impact of the colonial task. In an atmosphere of a surfeit of imperialistic ideology that tends to perceive ignorance and savages rising from China that demand to be civilized, Defoe depicts the nation as a “barbarous Nation of Pagans, little better than Savages” (Defoe 152). In that sense, Defoe's representation of China further instrumentalizes the ongoing discourse of the west, in which China was diagnosed as being in need of urgent salvation, whether religious or cultural, a discourse that had been gaining momentum and slowly evolving since Defoe's time, which this article will demonstrate in the following sections. In this particular case, Defoe's representation of China is circumscribed by ideological overtones and is complicit with British colonial expansion.

During the same period in Continental Europe, however, China was represented in a way that ran counter to Defoe's detestation; it was idealized by the textual practice of Enlightenment exoticism. As a movement with an explicit shift of emphasis from the Other to the Self, Enlightenment exoticism provided the pivotal point on which the colonialist fantasy of China turned from barbarism to civilization, from antipathy to awe. Along with the depiction of China in fantasies of romantic exoticism, the emergence of the style named “Chinoiserie” encapsulated the active imitation and incorporation of Chinese motifs. Resorting to a logic of the fantastic Chinese culture as the way to self-interrogation, European idealization of China underscored not an elevation of perceived Chinese supremacy, but an intense desire to demonstrate that their problems were well under control and only they themselves could resolve these problems.

When Voltaire's commonly recognized masterpiece *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756) was first published, Europe's romanticization of China reached its climax (Reichwein 23–74). Voltaire's statement that "China is better known than some provinces of Europe itself" (Voltaire 344, qtd. in Mason 1975, 3) fully captured the glamour of this trend. Revealingly, the Chinese political system, cultural heritage and philosophy were at that time considered as an ideal model for civilization, one seen as well organized and efficiently operated. The most celebrated twentieth-century Anglophone Chinese translator Lin Yutang (1895-1976) claimed that it was this Chinese social structure of an aristocracy of intellect believing in the supremacy of learning and reason, and conscious of its powers and responsibilities that "so aroused the enthusiasm of the eighteenth-century rationalists of Europe, like Leibnitz, Voltaire and Diderot" (Lin 103). Translating and Representing China as an equitable cultural Other for the Anglophone world (Long 2018, 344; 2019, 231), Lin's statement that "Voltaire, I think, imagined China to be better than she really was" (Lin 104) signified a tendency to privilege an embellished perception of Otherness over what the country might actually be. In *Essai sur les mœurs*, Voltaire devoted two chapters to China and maintained that "the Chinese empire was vaster than that of the Frankish emperor and had subsisted for 4000 years" (qtd. in Besterman 424). It is widely acknowledged that Voltaire's study of China was not restricted to geography or chronology but delved into ever expanding aspects of Chinese civilization (qtd. in Besterman 424).

Voltaire's extensive examination of Chinese civilization, however, could hardly conceal his concern for the European Self. This self-oriented, inward-looking writing about China is demonstrated in Voltaire's 1733 work *Lettres philosophiques*. Providing an account of Voltaire's experiences of living in England between 1726 and 1729, this work aimed to identify the drawbacks of the French political system and society. England, in Voltaire's interpretation, was often shown to be far superior to France, since it was a constitutional monarchy, rather than the absolute monarchy of France, that was associated with freedom and the thriving of the arts (Brewer 9). However, what is largely overlooked in the criticism of Voltaire's work is the fact that he used not only England, but also China and Turkey to underscore France's social problems. Haydn Mason declares that for Voltaire, it is the Chinese civilization, rather than the English or Turkish one, that promised the national strength and cultural supremacy long coveted by France:

And indeed, in the final paragraph he [Voltaire] reveals that the Chinese nation [...] ha[s] practised inoculation for a whole century [...] the Turks have discovered the usage through need, the English through rightminded thinking, and both are confirmed in their good sense by the ancient sagacity of the Chinese. (Mason 120)

China was used by Voltaire in a way which did not concern the country *per se*, but for the purpose of motivating his home nation to emulate the political and social systems of England and Turkey. Antedating Shu-Mei Shih's observation of reifying Chinese literature as a national allegory by western literary authority, namely "the allegorical" as one of what she calls western "technologies of recognition" (Shih 21), Voltaire's treatment of China was merely in the service of his concern with the Self. Interestingly, his imagination for Chinese philosophical erudition and supremacy invoked various writings in the form of "letters from a Chinese philosopher," all of which began to surface around 1760. These letters were, as a matter of fact, European writers' critique on

contemporary European social systems and modes of living qua a fictionalized cultural outsider, an imagined foreigner or an “othered” stranger, in this context, a Chinese. Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Citizen of the World* (1762) is one illuminating example. Depicting a Chinese philosopher by the name of Altangi as the narrator who travelled in England and composed a series of travel letters to his friends in China, Goldsmith fully exploited this opportunity for his fanciful evocation of Chinese mores in order to satirize English politics and mentalities—concomitant with the proliferation and expansion of the British Empire. Yet, Goldsmith’s appropriation of China had been filtered through European lenses through which he wielded his power to attribute thoughts to Altangi. That is to say, Goldsmith projected his own construction of China onto the thoughts of an invented Chinese native. Despite his presentation of China as an idealized Other whose perfect mores stood in stark contrast with those of England, the irony was that China was appreciated by the author and readers of his time not for what it was, but for the role it played as a tool of the author’s criticism of Britain as the strongest colonial power. Voltaire’s and Goldsmith’s images of China, while more positive than those of their predecessors, were also problematic in that sense. Their over emphasis on Confucianism for their own purpose—a process that may well be seen as a form of appropriation—projects China as nothing more than an exotic Oriental site in Europeans’ imagination. It is in this way that China remains an invented reality, an absent and silenced Other, whose existence only served as a convenient apparatus for European authors’ attack on home politics. In short, China is just an elaborate fabrication, a product of the imagination alone, still little more than a mere embodiment of the exotic Other.

For Voltaire as well as his contemporaries, China was portrayed shrouded in a sustained aura of romantic exoticism. These exotic representations of China were intended to function both in terms of cultural self-examination and as a source of resistance to the territorial expansion of the British Empire, but such functions are afflicted by the same condition that they claim to diagnose. Their belief in the inevitability of self-introspection resulted from the perceived Chinese supremacy as a catalyst for the empowerment of French and English cultural identities. Taking Chinese criticism about their societies as a narrative structure most intimate to themselves, the French and the British were able to use it productively for self-prosperity and self-regeneration. This overwhelmingly self-oriented tendency of conceiving the cultural Other serves to confine China to traditional western representations, for within such representations China emerges more as the product of fantasy than from any more meaningful assessment of what the country and its people might really be. It is in that sense that John Davis articulates his concern with the blurred line between the fantasized and the real in western writings about China: “Westerners gave too much credence to the statements of earlier authors who did not distinguish between what was considered mythical even in China and what was substantiated by authentic historical records” (Davis 217, qtd. in Mason 1973, 64). Reflecting on how Oriental exoticism can easily collude with what China is fashioned to be by the Europeans, Davis’s statement points to the tendency of the construction of images of China in accordance with Europeans’ desired visions. Peter Kitson indicates how this imposition of images of China abound in works of a diverse range of English poets, novelists, essayists, dramatists, and reviewers, including Jane Austen, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb and the Wordsworths (Kitson 2), evidenced by “surprising forgettings, avoidance, and evasions of Romantic-period writing when related to Chinese subjects” (Kitson

153).

The mid-nineteenth century witnessed China's loss of two Opium Wars, which were notoriously initiated by the British in order to prise open the doors of the Qing government. One of the most damaging effects of these losses for the Chinese are the "unequal treaties" forced upon them. In major ports along the Chinese east coast, foreign concessions appeared, beyond the reach of Chinese jurisdiction, so that effectively, if a foreigner was accused of beating or murdering a Chinese, he was guaranteed not to be tried in a Chinese court. The infamous sign that reportedly hung beside the gate of a Shanghai park—"No Dogs or Chinamen"—demonstrates how the cultural supremacy, to which these enlightened writers had, albeit unconvincingly, alluded, was being continuously eradicated. Consequently, China was coming to be perceived as weak and feminine. Indeed, it was the English essayist and poet Charles Lamb (1775–1834) who famously invented the trope of China as feminine, one that encompasses three related conceptions: that of the collector of passive beauty (linked, of course, with the cultural capital of possessing items of Chinoiserie), subservience and service (see Lamb's words immediately below) and the erotic, the fascination with the exotic. Lamb wrote that "I have an almost feminine partiality for old China. When I go to see any great house I inquire for the china closet" (Lamb 118). As Stacey Sloboda notes, Lamb's claim was "grounded in an established discourse on the gendered and aristocratic practices of collecting in Britain" (Sloboda 22). As a form of possession, the collection of china, a material exemplification of the mysterious Other, bespeaks a tendency to subjugate the collected to the collector, a tendency that fully mirrors the idea of China as domestic subservience (so that Chinese house-servants became hugely fashionable). The practice of collecting the beautiful and the control and ownership implied in domestic subservience share one key characteristic: they are imbued with a sense of implicit eroticism. At the time the product china excited its greatest admiration in British aristocratic practices of collecting, China was characterized by its corrupted late Qing government, weak economy and powerless military. And it became most accessible to the possessive greed of the western gaze. As the ultimate embodiment of the enigmatic Oriental site onto which the striving white, male, imperialist westerners might be expected to act out their erotic fantasies, Lamb's metaphor bears out the statement that "the exotic is also erotic" (Bem 320). As a result, the feminine China was sexually objectified within the western male gaze. It is an objectification that finds its embodiment enacted in the translation and representation of China in the western popular culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries when, like the image of woman, the representation assumes its own powers of reprisal.

China in Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries: Metamorphosizing from a Ventriloquized Ideological Other to an Ascending Menacing Superpower

Viewed through a series of discursive misrepresentations—underpinned by the writings of, among others, Defoe, Voltaire, Goldsmith and Lamb—China's casting as a subordinate but potentially fascinating culture, as most vividly embodied in Lamb's feminine metaphor, was to be re-fashioned in the contemporary era. China remains to be translated and represented as relentlessly Other, but a growing sense of hostility develops that is at most only partially explicable in terms of racial difference.

In the early twentieth century, both racial difference and a growing sense of geopolitical unease coalesce into the epithet of “yellow peril,” an obvious manifestation of a perceived menace from the East in general and the Chinese in particular. Originating in the wars between Ancient Greece and the Persian Empire (499–449 BC) and consolidated by the European fear that Genghis Khan (1162–1227) would initiate the Mongol invasion, “yellow peril” was famously used by the German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1895 to refer to an awakened China (Lyman 688). Empowered by its racist connotations, it characterizes China as a formidable and inscrutable military threat to Europe and America. Prior to the Second World War, the Chinese, among other Asians, were viewed as the “yellow peril” in the United States (Zhou 5). After the Second World War, the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 posed a direct ideological threat to the west. This “communism vs. capitalism” opposition lasted through the Cold War period, reinforcing China as an intimidating “yellow peril” for the United States who took on the role of “the global defender of Western democracy” (Lyman 711). After 1989 when the Cold War ended with the victory of the Capitalist Camp, China was neither weakened nor contained. Rather, it gradually became an economically strong world power, coupled with the handover of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom in 1997, Macao from Portugal in 1999. Throughout the twentieth century, China continued to be viewed by the west as the hostile “yellow peril” militarily, ideologically, and economically.

Inspired by the lure of menace, the game “Chinese whispers” (Ben) suggests a belief that the Chinese language itself, as the linguistic Other, is incomprehensible to westerners, inducing the fear that too often arises from the unknown. It signifies not only how facts tend to be twisted in the process of transmission over time and space, but also how the Chinese language is elected as a symbol of a completely unfathomable culture, and thus belongs to the realm of peril. It might only be a game, but it speaks volumes of the play of perception, as it again sets out the framed fundamental polarity between the sensible western culture and its impenetrable and fearful Chinese counterpart.

In many ways, therefore, today’s western perception of China is perceptibly linked to all of the previous representations that have ventriloquized a voiceless China, subsumed in radical difference, the object of fantasy, of loathing and, ultimately, perhaps of fear. This cultural alienation has had, in turn, significant bearing on the process of Chinese modernity, hampered by an internal fear that modern China was vacuous and mediocre, and an external apprehension that the country was intolerant and nationalistic. In the context of globalization and internationalization, for that reason, Chinese modernization often stirs a debate over whether China will be integrated into the present world order dominated by the western hegemony or will seek to transform it. This “either-or” choice is undoubtedly problematic, but also foreseeable in terms of the process of reification of China from which it emerges. It means that, as Martin Jacques argues in his book *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (2012), as China becomes a major global player, the west still hopes that the country will “westernize” itself. In his tracing of a path of Chinese modernity which has not followed that of the west, Jacques concludes that the rise of China will challenge the global

dominance of the western nation states—because China is modernizing in its own way, not following a western model, and its alternative model of modernity has the potential to destabilize the western model. In that sense, the way the contemporary west views Chinese modernity can be read as a renewed statement of the “yellow peril,” inciting a fear that infiltrates deep within the western cultural and political imagination. It is a fear that stems, as we have seen, from a sustained process of misrecognition. This misrecognition has generated an elaborately constructed set of suspicions that, in the contemporary moment, translate themselves into an anxiety that China’s economic and cultural power, characterized by its government’s trade policy of the “Belt and Road Initiative”¹ (interestingly, deliberately presented as a “Silk Road” in reverse), will surpass that of the west. This is, undoubtedly, a potent mirror to westerners’ anxiety over the ideological Otherness of China—an alternative path to modernity, a different vision of world order, and therefore, a potentially imminent hegemony. This rationalized Chinese hegemony, characterized by its ideological and racial Otherness, can be viewed as an exemplification of western developed countries’ self-induced struggle for survival against what they see as the substantial threat posed by a rapidly modernizing China. This perceived threat is no less evident in the realm of contemporary western popular culture.

The Otherness of China characterized by the “yellow peril” explains how the country continues to be viewed in western popular culture today. In mass media, the notion of “yellow peril,” with its prospect of the substantiation of China’s own promise of self-fulfilment, can be counteracted by envisioning the country’s weakness. In the process, this racial discourse brings into relief the perceived image of a threat from the “yellow race,” by casting the latter into a role of either purely profit-driven or meekly submitting to oppression. In two hugely successful recent American TV series, *Ally McBeal* and *Desperate Housewives*, China was accordingly framed as either a competitive “Dragon Lady” or a tamed “China doll,” mimicking Defoe’s scornful depiction and Voltaire’s romanticizing representation. The “Dragon Lady” stereotype exemplified by Ling Woo, a female Chinese character in the comedy-drama *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002), illustrates an extraordinarily reductionist portrayal of Chinese women. These Chinese “Dragon Ladies” are often characterized by belligerence, utilitarianism, and the manipulation of others, taking advantage of their femininity to gain greater economic capital in the west. They are undoubtedly the result of enforced economic migration, demonstrating their willingness to compete for even the most menial employment. The competing stereotype is that of the image of the “China doll,” which depicts Chinese women as obedient slaves characterized by their feminine submissiveness. This is the place where Lamb’s feminine metaphor comes into full play—a perception of China as the hallmark of a porcelain culture. This portrayal of Chinese women is epitomized by Xiaomei, the Chinese smuggled alien who is imprisoned by one of the housewives to make desserts for her dinner parties in *Desperate Housewives* (2004–2012). China, or to be more accurate Chinese women,

¹ The “Belt and Road Initiative” (B&R, 一带一路) was launched by the Chinese government in 2013; it has two components: the “Silk Road Economic Belt” (丝绸之路经济带) and the “21st-century Maritime Silk Road” (21世纪海上丝绸之路) (https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/info/iList.jsp?tm_id=540). It aims to “build connectivity and co-operation across six main economic corridors encompassing China and: Mongolia and Russia; Eurasian countries; Central and West Asia; Pakistan; other countries of the Indian sub-continent; and Indochina” (<https://www.oecd.org/finance/Chinas-Belt-and-Road-Initiative-in-the-global-trade-investment-and-finance-landscape.pdf>). The initiative covers investment in 70 economies (excluding China), with projects “estimated to amount to US\$575 billion” (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>).

remain strung out along the Defoe-Voltaire axis. The construction of images of China from popular culture derives from and simultaneously reinforces the discursive representation of wondrous delicacy on the one hand, and a contemptuous desire for mere economic advantage and power on the other.

The idea that China might reverse the unequal relationships of history (symbolized, of course, in the reversal of the Silk Road), to the detriment of the western powers, has offered an attractive and bankable vision for writers of fiction. This is particularly true in the Cold War period. Most notably, and perhaps most influentially, the British author Sax Rohmer's fictional creation, Dr. Fu Manchu, has attained a status in western cultural consciousness that we might compare with national allegories such as Uncle Sam or John Bull, because as an archetype of the malicious criminal genius and infuriated scientist, Fu Manchu embodies a wholly negative image that speaks of an entire nation. As the central character in a series of books published over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from Rohmer's *The Insidious Dr Fu Manchu* (1913) to William Maynard's *The Destiny of Fu Manchu* (2012), Fu Manchu also appears in non-Fu Manchu books, films, TV series, music, radio and comic strips. In his book *The Yellow Peril: Dr. Fu Manchu and the Rise of Chinaphobia* (2014), British writer Christopher Frayling claims that, as one of the most memorable fictional personifications of western perceptions of the Chinese, Fu Manchu marked a watershed in representations of the Chinese in western popular culture; the image of the Chinese shifted from victims of western dominance to perpetrators and threats to western culture. Providing the vehicle through which western technology and Chinese dominance can become one, the genre of science fiction complements the previously discussed Enlightenment writers' romanticization of China's spiritual supremacy. The depiction of Fu Manchu in the Anglophone world can in that sense be viewed as a personification of westerners' fantasy of the threat that lurks within exoticism and mysticism as still unknown quantities. But, of course, the fact that westerners use their own norms as a yardstick by which to measure the progress of China (trade, science, cultural expansion) remains problematic as, in its mimicking of Voltaire, it presupposes an ultimate commonality of being and purpose. It is within the fertile ground of this sort of fearful misinterpretation that significant caricatures of the Other as monster, represented by Dr Fu Manchu, take root.

This is a hugely reductionist vision of China, a nation represented in the metonymic fictions "Dragon Lady," "China doll" and Dr Fu Manchu. Such racial, ethnic, and cultural stereotypes become iconic as a result of the extended reach of the western film industry; namely, how Hollywood's exotic fantasies forge the cultural stereotypes to which millions of people are exposed. In this instance, China remains translated—and *translatable* only from the perspective of the west's own ambitions and fears. In other words, so much remains unknown. This impression is, of course, as noted earlier, reinforced by the physical forms of a language that, apparently, ill conceals a chaotic and misinformed sense of the world. At this point China becomes the target for fun. An article in the *Daily Telegraph* is symptomatic. This newspaper—generally heralded as offering the best foreign coverage of any mainstream British paper—discussed Chinese translations of the titles of western films through the dubious practice of back-translation on the 9th of October 2014. These Chinese titles became easy targets for satire in a piece entitled: "The funniest Chinese film title translations" (Stolworthy and Jones). The article, however, chose not to post the original

translations in Chinese, which, in fact, makes absolute sense in the Chinese language. Rather, this highly influential outlet chose to back-translate in a “word for word” approach rather than undertaking the more honest—and less saleable—task of rendering the meaning of the Chinese translation. Such a practice denies the reader’s capacity to make sense of Chinese language and culture, reinforcing the stereotype of a country torn senselessly between its effete exotic nature and its dark inscrutable ambitions, again nakedly recalling the Voltaire-Defoe axis. Such an incomplete representation can only be interpreted as the deliberate distortion of the Chinese language and, of course, of the realities that it constructs.

Apart from film translation, technology and trade are fields where westerners have frequently tended to assess their own performance and international presence through the role that China has played in the world. In terms of technology, American government officials and global companies worry about Beijing’s vision of “Made in China 2025”—the ambitious state-driven plan unveiled in 2015 to reorient China’s industries to compete in areas like automation, microchips, and self-driving cars—could give China a firmer grip on the technology of the future. Their increasing anxiety and competing concern over China’s technological rise are best captured in the last line of a *New York Times* article: “The best Washington can do is to make sure its policies help American companies stay ahead of the game” (Yuan 2018). In the face of China’s expeditious modernization and its economic boom, Britain shares the same apprehension with the United States. In her article “The scramble for Africa has moved on, but Britain hasn’t” (Hirsch), the political journalist Afua Hirsch considers China’s investment in Africa as a measuring stick of Britain’s visibility in the area. She claims that “All eyes are on China because the nation currently exports eight times more goods to Africa than the UK and is the continent’s major investor in infrastructure” (Hirsch). That Britain’s investment in natural resources in Africa stands in stark contrast to China’s in construction and infrastructure, the so-called “key to real growth here” (Hirsch), prompts Hirsch to criticize Britain’s lagging behind China who is fiercely competing for the access. Economic and technological competitions between China and USA/Britain are only two sources out of many of western trepidation. For many westerners today, China has become a major power that can no longer be simply subjected to traditional representations. Martin Kettle’s call for paying urgent attention to China’s rise to global power in his article “We are obsessed with Brexit and Trump: We should be thinking about China” (2017) in *The Guardian* manifests his vigilance of the cultural consciousness of the western public: the irrelevance of China to their daily lives. His statement that “If even a quarter of the media attention that is lavished on Trump’s America could be trained on Xi’s China, our part of the world would be better for it” implores readers to confront the clear failure to address the way in which China has been overlooked. Western concerns over China have come twinned with panic about its endangerment and decline, its very capitalism, democracy and multiculturalism rendering it vulnerable to a more powerful, scrupulous and centralized state and communist opponent. China, as we have seen, has long played the role of a highly significant Other for the west.

Conclusion

If it is true that culture may replace ideology as the principal cause of conflict in the twenty-first

century (Huntington 1996), it is crucial to note that in such a context Chinese culture has often been translated and represented as an inscrutable Other in western imagination. From this perspective, the polarized tools of demeaning representation and exotic romanticization pose powerful threats to the understanding of cultural relatedness. Examples drawn from the two key periods discussed in this article have clearly demonstrated the harmful effect of the Orientalist tradition. Defoe's depiction of China as depraved largely exposes his exploitation of the nation in order to bolster the colonial militarism of the British Empire, while Voltaire's romanticized exoticism shows his indifference towards what China truly is and his concern with self-examination and self-affirmation; contemporary popular culture, and in particular mainstream media, makes the portrayal of China fit into this binary schema—demonization and exoticization—so as to fix China as a feminine Other that can remain under the purview and control of the west. The resonances throughout these cases are evident; they combine to create and validate the dominant narrative: China has enduringly existed as one of the west's principal—and largely self-selected—significant Others. It is a narrative that makes it difficult for alternative voices to emerge; indeed, as a recent *Guardian* article puts in its title: “The West Sees China as a ‘Threat’, Not as a Real Place, with Real People” (Cheng). In the third decade of the twenty-first century, we no longer can afford to deflate the place of China, or the platform it provides, on the global stage where the country's growing participation and increasing stakes should be pragmatically considered in its varied social, political, and cultural dimensions. In this complex process through which China has sought to rejuvenate itself in an unfamiliar world capitalist order, Chinese interests in becoming a sensible global player should be properly explored, rather than speculated about why it does not act the way Europe and the United States have long expected it to act.

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