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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Asian and Near Eastern Languages and Literatures

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CHINESE SPIRIT, RUSSIAN SOUL, AND AMERICAN MATERIALISM: IMAGES  
OF AMERICA IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINESE AND RUSSIAN  
TRAVELOGUES

by

Rumyana Cholakova

A dissertation presented to the  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

### **Chinese Spirit, Russian Soul, and American Materialism: Images of America in Twentieth-Century Chinese and Russian Travelogues**

This study is concerned with the process of understanding and representation of the Other in travel narratives and the role of the traveler's cultural tradition and ideological beliefs in this process. I explore the images of the United States in some of the most influential twentieth-century Chinese and Russian travelogues. There are deep cultural differences between China and Russia, yet their relationships with the West show certain similarities. The first important parallel is that the contacts with the West was a catalyst in the modernization of both countries. The second is that the West in general and the United States in particular is portrayed in comparable ways. The West is perceived to be a land of technology and materialism, whereas China and Russia are both depicted as old civilizations of superior spiritual, moral, and artistic achievements. The third important similarity is that at the beginning of China and Russia's links with the United States, it was seen as different from the other Western countries. With the development of their relations, the United States gradually became the country symbolizing the West, and the paradigm of Materialistic West versus Spiritual China and Russia was used in describing America in China, Russia, and the Soviet Union.

The Chinese travelogues I consider are Fei Xiaotong's *First Visit to America* (*Chufang Meiguo* 初访美国 1945) and *Glimpses of America* (*Fang Mei lüeying* 访美掠影 1980), Wang Zuomin's *The American Kaleidoscope: Society, Landscape, People* (*Meiguo Wanhuatong: Shehui, fengguang, renwu* 美国万花筒: 社会, 风光, 人物

1985), Liu Zongren's *Two Years in the Melting Pot* (*Da rong lu liang nian* 大熔炉两年 1987), and Ding Ling's *Random Notes from a Visit to America* (*Fang Mei sanji* 访美散记 1984). My central Russian travelogues are Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov's *One-storey America* (*Oдноetazhnaia Amerika* 1937), Vassily Aksyonov's *In Search of Melancholy Baby* (*V poiskakh grustnogo beiby* 1987) and *Non-Stop Round the Clock: Impressions, Meditations, Adventures* (*Kruglie sutki non-stop: vpechatlenia, razmishlenia, prikliuchenia* 1975). Fei Xiaotong, Ding Ling, Ilf and Petrov, and Vassily Aksyonov are among the most popular twentieth-century authors in their countries. Liu Zongren and Wang Zuomin are journalists whose travelogues about the United States became bestsellers in China. Therefore, all these books played a substantial role in creating images of the United States in China and the Soviet Union. The travelogues were written before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 when socialism was seen as a viable alternative to capitalism, and the American cultural Otherness was reinforced by the ideological antagonism between capitalism and communism. I analyze how the Marxist paradigm molded the travelogues and to what extent it is embraced, circumvented or vehemently negated by their authors. The communist writers tend to represent the United States as an aggressive imperialist state using democratic demagogy to cover its greed and exploitative practices, whereas the anticommunist writers see it as a democratic stronghold and the freest country on Earth. In addition to examining the ideological beliefs through which the authors of the travel books filtered their impressions of the United States, I concentrate on the influence of the most popular paradigm in the East-West exchange, namely, the "Spiritual East" and the "Materialistic West." The idea of

spiritual, cultural, and ethical superiority of China and Russia in contrast to the material affluence of the United States is traceable in all travelogues.

The theoretical framework of my thesis is based on the ideas of the relations between the Self and the Other and cross-cultural communication created by Tzvetan Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. I utilize Todorov's suggestion of three levels on which the problematics of alterity can be located. The axiological plane includes value judgments, the praxiological permits rapprochement to or distancing from the Other, and the epistemic is the level of an endless process of better understanding. My goal in analyzing these books is to discover whether these authors are capable of associating with alterity on the epistemic level, that is, of listening attentively to the otherness they encounter, and of creating an image of the American Other that is relatively free from ideological projections and inherited concepts. Both Gadamer and Bakhtin's principles of communication exclude the rigidly constructed image as an epistemological tool. Instead, they think that the Self should constantly check and change its images of the Other in order to open a space for a true dialogue. Approaching the Other on axiological or praxiological levels excludes the implementation of Gadamerian hermeneutics because on these levels Others are manipulated or controlled by the Self.

The images of America in the travel books are complex, controversial, and multilayered, yet there are some common characteristics among them. First, ambivalence is a common stance in both Chinese and Russian travelogues. Both Chinese and Russian authors vacillate between admiration for American people on the one hand, and criticism of American political system on the other. Moreover, the fascination with American technological and economic power is paired with indignation over the social problems

plaguing the richest country in the world. Second, all writers underscore the natural beauty of the United States and the innovative genius of its people. Third, ideology plays equally significant roles in both Chinese and Russian books. Yet there are differences among the travelogues that determine the prevalence of the epistemic or the axiological level in their presentations of the United States. Although the concept of Materialistic West versus Spiritual China and Russia has been used to describe America in both China and Russia, its influence is more visible in the Russian books. The continuity with the long tradition of presenting America as a land devoid of culture and spiritual life revealed in the Russian travelogues determines the dominance of the axiological level in approaching alterity in these books. The axiological level of presentation is less prominent in the Chinese travel books. With the exception of Ding Ling all other Chinese writers demonstrated a desire to understand the foundation of American wealth and power, and to use this understanding as a model for the amelioration of China. This genuine drive to learn undergirds the predominance of the epistemic level of presenting the American Other in the Chinese travelogues.

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Here, now, oh Wellingborough, thought I, learnt a lesson, and never forget it. This world, my boy, is a moving world...as your father's guide-book is no guide for you, neither would yours be a true to those who come after you. Guide books, Wellingborough, are the least reliable books in all literature; and nearly all literature, in one sense, is made up of guide-books...Every age makes its own guide books, and the old ones are used for waste paper.

Herman Melville, *Redburn* (1849),  
published ten years after the first of Karl  
Baedeker's famous series of guidebooks.

## Travel Literature and the Question of the Other

At his embarking let him have a special care not to carry *Himselfe* abroad with Himselfe in traveling. Many man, sayeth Seneca, return home no better than they went out, they take themselves along with themselves in traveling.

Richard Lassels, a traveling tutor of young English gentlemen on their European tours

Some of us have been forced in times of famine to eat babies—and even this must be humanly rare—but, thank God, we do not eat them raw as the English eat their beef!

Lin Yutang

Perhaps the most important task of all would be to undertake studies in contemporary alternatives to Orientalism, to ask how one can study other cultures and other people from a libertarian, or a nonrepressive and nonmanipulative perspective.

Edward Said

Human beings have always traveled, and have traveled much. Merchants, worriers, pilgrims, scientists, missionaries, colonizers, explorers, and adventurers or the lovers of travel for the sake of travel have produced an enormous quantity of narratives that defies strict classification. Moreover, the journey has been a central theme of Western narratives, and plots constructed around pilgrimages, explorations, picaresque adventures, exiles, and quests can be found in many genres. Traveling has never been easy. Yet classifying writing about traveling is even more difficult because travel literature appears in a variety of forms: travel notes, travel letters, travel diaries, a simple narrative written in the first or in the third person or in atypical forms like poetry,

autobiography or biography, or even in dialogue<sup>1</sup>. Some scholars of travel writing think that any definition of travel literature is historically inaccurate. Percy Adams tries to outline its realm by negatives, that is, by delineating what it is not. By pointing out many contradictory aspects of travel narratives, he draws the conclusion that travel literature cannot be a literary genre with a fixed definition because it includes many types by both form and content. Moreover, like other similarly amorphous forms, it evolves and it will continue to evolve (Adams 43-44; 280-82). Some critics think travel writing should be regarded as a genre in its own right, while others argue against the possibility of strict definition. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs define travel writing as “a broad and ever shifting genre, with a complex history which has yet to be properly studied” (10). To define a genre as “broad and ever shifting” is to undermine the possibility for a stable definition, especially, if the lack of knowledge about the history of this genre is underscored. Discussing the variety of labels applied to travel writing in recent years, Jan Borm argues that travel writing is not a genre, but a collective term for a range of texts both fictional and non-fictional whose major theme is travel (13). He suggests that there should be a distinction between travel book and travel writing or travel literature (the literature of travel). Travel book (travelogue) is: “[A]ny narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality, while assuming or presupposing that author, narrator and principal character are but one or identical” (Borm 17). The non-fictional dominant is a major characteristic of a travel book, whereas travel literature is an overall heading for all texts whose main theme is travel. Paul Fussell also emphasizes

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<sup>1</sup> For different arguments on the scope and the definition of travel literature see Adams 1-80; Hulme and Youngs; Borm; Campbell, *Travel* 261-27; Siegel, *Issues* 1-9; and Kowalewski.

travel books' relatedness to the actual experience of the traveler/author, and defines them as "subspecies of memoir in which autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker's encounter with distant or unfamiliar data and in which the narrative—unlike that in a novel or romance—claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality" (203).

Critics usually do not dispute the hybrid nature of travel writing and its ability to absorb different narrative styles and genres. Mary B. Campbell defines it as "a genre composed of other genres" with an important contribution to the genesis of the modern novel and the renaissance of autobiography (*The Witness* 6).

If the amorphousness and hybridity of travel writing is its first most distinctive characteristic, the contact with Otherness is the second most typical one. Travel generally entails going to another culture and the dialectical relationship between two places—that designated by the traveler as "home" and that occupied by the cultural Other—characterizes that type of narratives, fictional and non-fictional alike. Moreover, the history of travel suggests that cross-cultural contacts generate a new kind of cultural self-consciousness, and the association with the Other redefines the understanding of the Self. In the processes of travel and migration collective and individual identities arise from and are transformed by mutual reflection and recognition. Individuals and collectives become conscious of their uniqueness and difference as well as their sameness and humanity. The distance from both place and habit may turn into an epistemological advantage and one may come to see one's native culture as a describable phenomenon which can be understood without the interference of the lenses and meanings through which one previously looked upon the world (Leed 45). If the association with Otherness is a process of gradual liberation from the existing unfounded preconception about the Other,

then it will lead to more profound understanding of both the Self and the Other. Before I outline the particular objectives of my study, a historical detour is necessary to sketch the connections of travel literature with the perceptions and representations of alterity, first in “the West”, Europe, then in Russia and China.

The awareness of cultural relativism and attempts to define the parameters of one’s own culture by comparing it to other cultures appeared very early in the descriptions of foreign lands and people. In the fifth century BCE, Herodotus mapped the worlds of the Scythians, the Persians, the Egyptians, and others in order to define Greekness by contrast with them. Herodotus’s discussion of the nomadic Scythians provides a fine example of constructing alterity in ways transparent for the reader: the Other is presented as the opposite of the Self. Thucydides was exiled in 424 BCE and traveled for twenty years viewing famous battle sites and collecting eyewitness accounts. He was the first to declare something repeated by many travelers after him: “I have described nothing but what I either saw myself or learned from others of whom I made the most careful and particular inquiry” (qtd. in Adams 46). By the second century CE, the ancient travelers had at their disposal all kinds of local guidebooks, although the manuscripts were too bulky for long trips. Among the most renowned travel writers of the Roman empire were Polybius (c.205-123 BCE) who traveled the entire Mediterranean area; Strabo (d. 21), a geographer and historian who visited many places in Asia, Asia Minor, Africa, and Mediterranean Europe; Pausanias, the author of the only early guidebook to come to us, who journeyed through Greece in the 150s and 170s; and Lucian (c.120-190), who described his pilgrimages to the Syrian sanctuaries. In his satirical novel, *True Story*, Lucian questions the status of a traveler as a source of reliable

information by declaring that all travelers are liars, and adding a witty remark: “but my lying is more honest than theirs, for though I tell the truth in nothing else, I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar” (qtd. in Elsner and Rubiés 11). Evidently, from the very early times some writers pondered the questions of subjectivity and reliability of claims to truth and objectivity in travel narratives.

Travel played a central role in pagan hagiography. The allegory of travel as a path to salvation antedates the adoption of Christianity as the dominant religion of the Roman Empire. In the writings of some ancient philosophers as well as some early Christian writers, Odysseus’s journey is interpreted as the difficult path of wisdom striving for virtue. The pilgrimage model of travel as spiritual fulfillment emerged in the early Middle Ages, and Palestine became a territory where landscape was meaningful only in relation to scripture. Egeria, a noblewoman from Spain, visited Palestine in the 380s, and left one of the most vivid travel accounts of this epoch. With the development of the Christian world, ascetic travel was replaced by travel for conquest and pilgrimage evolved into crusade. Both crusaders and pilgrims were not interested in the Other encountered in their travels. The first signs of curiosity for Otherness in travel writings appeared in the twelfth century after the establishment of Christianity as a dominant religion, as the dialogue with Muslims and pagans became an important problem for the Christian world. The crisis of feudal institutions which started in the fourteenth century brought about the growing importance of empiricism in intellectual life.

A new kind of traveler emerged with the establishment of regular contacts among many different parts of the world—the empirical traveler who sought knowledge about nature and mankind. The *Book of Sir John Mandeville* (c.1356) introduced a purely

fictional kind of traveler, Sir John Mandeville, invented to render a compilation of preexisting travel accounts more convincing. This compilation was the most successful medieval travel text after Marco Polo's *Description of the World* (1298). Marco Polo epitomized the new myth of the modern traveler as a curious observer capable of exploring human cultural diversity through geography. The paradigm of travel shifted from the ideal of pilgrimage to ethnography, empirical curiosity, and practical science. Even the traditional religious missions resulted in a multitude of empirical reports because the analysis of human cultural diversity was understood as a precondition for effective evangelization. The writings of the Jesuits from Asia, Africa, and Canada started as a missionary endeavor, but turned out to be a vehicle for empirical research as well. The increase of trade and colonization during the Age of Exploration led to the appearance of even more factual and plausible accounts describing different cultures and landscapes. In the sixteenth century, collections of travel narratives were first published, and enjoyed enormous popularity in many European countries.

Humanism generated a view of travel as education, and made the empirical traveler an authoritative and admirable figure. The aristocratic ritual of Grand Tour was based on this Humanist idea of travel as education. It implied an interest in cultural diversity, and contributed to make the theme of human diversity central in travel narratives.<sup>2</sup> Travel writing was an important instrument in the cultural aspects of the process of expansion of European colonial empires as well. Imperialism and empiricism

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<sup>2</sup> The Grand Tour designates the travel for education and improvement turned into an institution and philosophy by the British. The travels started as early as the sixteenth century, but the heyday of the Grand Tour was the eighteenth century. The classic Tour was to Paris and through France to Italy. The return journey usually took in Germany and the Low Countries. The purpose of the trip was educational—to broaden the young gentlemen's mind, to develop their linguistic abilities, and to acquaint them with foreign manners, laws, and government.



were two common threads in the history of European travel throughout the modern period. The growing importance of individual consciousness led to the appearance of the accounts exploring both the unknown places and the Self's transformation in the process of the journey. In the eighteenth century, the picaresque novel became an established literary form. The increasing popularity of travel writing brought about the overlapping of factual and fictional journeys. Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768) freely merged fact and fiction. Fictional travel accounts, such as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) borrowed themes and plots from actual travelers. The Romantic fascination with cultural difference expressed not only a desire for an unattainable Other, but also an understanding of what Europeans had lost by becoming civilized.

The increasing awareness of the problems in the modern epoch led to a new shift in travel narratives. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a fictional recreation of the author's journey in the Congo, conveys the twentieth-century travel writers' anxiety caused by their discovery of the futility of the idea of progress. Analyzing British travel writing between the two World Wars, Fussell notes that the travel writers of that period turned their journeys into interior explorations and parables of their times, making landscape and incident to play the role of symbol and myth (214-15). The transformation of the Self in the process of communication with the Other became as important, if not more important, topic of exploration as the Other himself. In the second half of the twentieth century, imperial, scientific, and romantic aspirations of modernity were proclaimed mere illusions by postmodernism. The failure of utopian dreams called into question the concepts of purposeful travel, of discovery, and of progress. The

development of mass tourism was seen as the end of the “real” travel, and travel writing was declared an exhausted literary form. The postmodern condition with its emphasis on interpretation and its condescension toward empirical experience goes together with a sense of the ultimate futility of travel. Travel writing, however, proved to be more resilient, and some recent travel books delight in the discovery that the distance between minds holding different world views has not narrowed with the shrinking of the world brought about by technology. One of the most popular contemporary travel writers, Jonathan Raban, emphasizes (and obviously enjoys) travel writing’s elasticity and hybridity: “[...] travel writing is a notoriously raffish open house where different genres are likely to end up in the same bed. It accommodates the private diary, the essays, the short story, the prose poem, the rough note and polished talk with indiscriminate hospitality” (253). Contemporary travel writers deliberate the artificial and constructed nature of cultural, geographic, and textual boundaries as well as the social and political implications of these boundaries. Acknowledging the subjectivity of written accounts and deliberately emphasizing that subjectivity characterizes most postmodern travel writing (Russell 11-23).<sup>3</sup>

Descriptions of the Other and the relationships between the Self and the Other are essential elements in Russian travel writing as well. The first Russian travel writers were pilgrims visiting the saintly places of Eastern Christianity, usually Jerusalem, Palestine, or Constantinople. During the reign of Peter the Great (r.1682- 1725) when contacts with Europe intensified, Russians started to travel to the West for various reasons, and secular travel narratives appeared in large numbers. Yet most of the travelers of that time were

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<sup>3</sup> For more on history of travel literature in the West see Adams 38-80; Elsner and Rubiés 1-56; and Hulme and Youngs.

prisoners of the old, pre-Petrine mentality who turned their journeys into pilgrimages of sorts. They did not show curiosity about Western European science because they did not know anything about it. What they were truly interested in were Western European holy objects (Schönle 2). The situation changed in the eighteenth century, when the process of westernization started by Peter the Great brought about the intensification of intellectual life in the country. Russian writers used the travelogue both to transmit information about distant places and to comment on domestic issues. The inherent capacity of this genre to furnish comparisons turned travel writing into an important vehicle for expressing the growing sense of nationhood among the Russian educated elite. The most innovative and influential travel works in the eighteenth century, Denis Fonvizin's (1744-1792), *Letters from France* and Nikolai Karamzin's (1766-1826) *Letters of a Russian Traveler*<sup>4</sup>, reveal a deep interest in the Western Other and betray simultaneous feelings of inferiority and superiority vis-à-vis the West. The comparison of Russia with the Western world in travel writing was instrumental in formulating new notions of national identity. Dostoevsky's *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (1863), an account of his trip to Europe, rejects modern bourgeois life as an embodiment of materialism and self-interest, and proclaims as characteristically Russian such opposite qualities as an instinctive propensity to brotherhood and a self-abnegating nature. Most of the modern Russian travelogues, fictional and non-fictional alike, are concerned with Russian perceptions of Otherness and their notions of identity. Utilizing the ideas of Thomas Eriksen about the phenomenon of stereotyping, Derek Offord argues that the stereotypes Russian writers

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<sup>4</sup> Karamzin testifies to the importance of travel literature noting that the King's library in Paris contained seven thousand travel books. Describing his meeting with Immanuel Kant, he writes that they discussed travels, China, and the discovery of new lands (Wilson ix).

use to characterize Others often informed “the individual of the virtues of his or her own group and the vices of the others,” contributed “to defining one’s own group in relation to others by providing a ‘tidy’ map of the social work,” or even functioned as a “symbolic revenge of the downtrodden” (Offord 23). Travel books, occupying the liminal space between the knowledge of the Other and defining the Self in relation to the Other, represent an ideal vehicle for both spreading and destroying stereotypes.

While modern Chinese travel literature is engaged with the question of the Other, the travel literature of imperial China shows different preoccupations. One indisputable similarity between Chinese travel writing and its Western counterpart is that it is also voluminous and formally diverse, defying simple classification. Nonetheless, Richard Strassberg argues that the mainstream of travel literature in the West developed “as a means of facilitating the desires of writers and readers for a more liberated, autonomous existence,” and in forms and concerns it was rather different from the travel writing of imperial China (Strassberg, *Inscribed* 3). Western readers were first introduced to translations of records by Buddhist monks of their pilgrimages to India.<sup>5</sup> The translations of the texts about travel to the periphery of China and beyond suggest similarities between Chinese travel writing and its Western parallel. Yet the main concern of the travel writing of Imperial China seemed far removed from the historical and intellectual foundations of the West, and the mainstream of travel writing was devoted to travel in China itself. Both the writers and their reading audience were mostly degree-holding

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<sup>5</sup> The two most famous Buddhist travelers are Faxian 法顯 (337-422) and Xuanzang 玄奘 (c.600-664). Faxian’s *Report on the Buddhist Kingdoms* (*Foguo ji* 佛國記) contains accurate information about the places he visited verified by later travelers. Xuanzang’s *A Record of the Western Regions of the Great Tang* (*Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記) concentrates on description of the countries he traveled to and provides information about climate and local products as well as legends and traditions.

literati, and their itineraries were primarily internal. Moreover, the journey was never central to Chinese cultural experience and travel writing was marginal within the Chinese literary cannon. When included in important anthologies, it was generically subdivided and subordinated to other categories (Strassberg, *Inscribed* 3-9)<sup>6</sup>. Julian Ward finds the emphasis on place or movement in Nature, as opposed to anthropocentric style of most Western travel writing, the most distinguishing feature of Chinese travel accounts (2).

Travel writing was classified in two principal categories in the traditional Chinese classification of literature. In the Four Libraries *si bu* 四部 system, the works that documented geographical features were classified under the geography *di li* 地理 subsection of the history *shi* 史 category. More personal and shorter pieces such as the lyric travel account *you ji* 遊記 and the related travel diary *ri ji* 日記 were included within the collected works of literati in the belles letters *ji* 集 category. In their travel accounts, writers described the factual, aesthetic, intellectual, and moral dimensions of their journeys in first-person narratives. Strassberg defines the travel diary as “strings of shorter travel accounts arranged chronologically” (Strassberg, *China* 246). Ma Dibo’s 馬第伯 description of the visit of Han Emperor Guangwu 光武 (r.25-67) to Mount Tai 泰山 in 56 AD is considered the first extant travel account written by the traveler himself about a real journey.

Although a few other antecedents exist in early Chinese literature, the set of conventions characterizing travel writing was established around mid-eight century. Liu Zongyuan’s 柳宗元 (773-819) travel account “Eight Pieces from Yongzhou” (*Yongzhou*

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<sup>6</sup> The engraving of travel notes at the original sites of their inspiration is a form of transmission of travel writing unique to China. The traveler sought to participate enduringly in the scene and hoped that the future travelers reading the inscription would understand and appreciate the writer’s Self (Strassberg, *Inscribed* 5).

*baji* 永州八记, 809-812) was later canonized as the *locus classicus* of the travel account. The earliest travel diary written is Li Ao's 李翱 (772-841) *Diary of Coming South* (*Lai nan lu* 來南錄). The travel account and the travel diary began to flourish during the Song (960-1279). From this dynasty onward, a number of travel accounts gained widespread prominence (Strassberg, *Inscribed* 4-5). The most famous Song travel accounts' writers were Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989-1052), Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086) and Shen Kuo 沈括 (1031-1095). The major travel diaries of the same period were Lu You's 陸游 (1125-1210) *A Journey into Shu* (*Rushuji* 入蜀記 c. 1170) and Fan Chengda's 范成大 (1126-1193) *Diary of a Boat Trip to Wu* (*Wuchuanlu* 吳船錄 c.1177). In both works historical, ethnographical, and geographical details are mixed with personal reflections.

Travel writing entered a new, expansionary phase during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Ming scholars wrote travel accounts to express subjective, autobiographical sentiments and to champion an individual sensibility in literature (Strassberg, *China* 246). The heroic voyages of admiral Zheng He 鄭和 (1371-1435) to South Asia and Africa in 1404-1431 were documented in secret official reports that were later lost, and only the accounts of some of his subordinates were preserved. Yet the greatest number of journeys were within the boundaries of the Chinese empire. The growing interest in exploration accompanied by the desire for the exact depictions of details led to unprecedented development for the travel diary. Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559), Li Yuanyang 李元陽 (1497-1580), and Wang Shixing 王士性 (1547-1598) wrote travel diaries which

influenced the most notable figure in Chinese travel writing, Xu Hongzu 徐宏祖 (Xiake 霞客, 1586-1641). In his writings the travel diary reached its pre-modern Chinese peak.

By the end of Ming dynasty, travel diary is an important form of literature, “a vehicle for the expression of the quest for personal enlightenment and of a growing desire for accurate geographical information” (Ward xiii). During the Qing dynasty, every major literary figure wrote a travel diary; among the most significant writers were Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664), Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709), and Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1798) (Hargett 938). The aggression of the European imperial powers during the Qing dynasty forced China to engage in more intense communication with foreign countries. Classical Chinese travel writing continued during the Qing and into the modern period but it was gradually displaced by modern Chinese travel literature. Chinese travelers began to visit Japan, Europe, and America, and sent home reports reflecting their views of the outside world. The traditional preoccupation with the description of places or movement in Nature was gradually replaced by an increasing interest in other cultures, although this interest was always subjected to the desire to find new ways for China’s modernization and strengthening. Similarly to Russians, Chinese studied and stereotyped the Other in order to define and characterize the Chinese Self.

Two important characteristic of travel writing are evident in this brief historical overview: narratives of travel and exploration are usually concerned with the construction of an Other, and their syncretic nature makes impossible a strict genre definition of these texts. Travel literature absorbs different narrative styles, overlaps with a number of other genres, and moves freely between objectivity and subjectivity, between fact and fiction. The heterogeneous character of travel writing and the enormity of its corpus are probably

the main reasons behind the traditional lack of critical attention towards it. Travel literature was insufficiently recognized and in some cases openly despised as not sufficiently “literary” (Kowalewski 7-9). The reluctance to take travel writing seriously has been overcome recently with the result that the amount of scholarly work on travel and travel literature has reached unprecedented levels. Although the sudden burgeoning of travel writing and travel studies is noted by many with surprise, Kristi Siegel points out that its emergence is logical because it “follows on the heels of critical interest in autobiography (a genre close aligned to travel literature); commentary on multiculturalism, nationalism, colonialism, and postcolonialism; an interest in spectacle and visual culture” (Siegel, *Issues* 2). The contemporary surge of interest in travel literature is also connected with the application of new theoretical models to analyze these works. The development of new theoretical models help to launch revealing readings of texts once considered “subliterary,” of mainly archival use, or just tedious (Campbell, *Travel* 261).

Edward Said’s reinterpretation of Foucault’s concept of “discourse” as a key to understanding of the problems of Western imperial domination of “the East” initiated this epistemological shift. The study of what we know, how we know it, and how this knowledge is related to representations of places that are foreign or exotic has attracted many scholars. Said applied sophisticated hermeneutic methods to non-poetic and non-fictional works. His *Orientalism* is the first work of contemporary criticism which takes travel writing as a major part of its corpus, interpreting it as offering a convincing insight into the operation of colonial discourses. Most of the subsequent theoretically informed writing on travel and travel literature deals with imperial periods of later eighteenth,



nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. Many critics apply Marxist and postcolonial theories to analyze the world of venture capitalism and imperial expansion. Feminism provided another impulse behind recent work in travel studies. The profile of the “Western oppressor” and the master-slave paradigm embodied in the idea of “the West versus the Rest” are shattered in the works that study the writings of displaced women-travelers; they do so by interrogating the position of women travelers vis-à-vis colonialism and the relationship between women as observers and observed. Through applying to travel writing principles developed in women’s literary studies, scholars have rescued the works of some women travelers from obscurity and analyzed more insightfully the reasons for the popularity of others. Translation studies have added another dimension to travel. Michael Cronin writes about one fundamental aspect of traveling, namely, the relationship of the traveler to language. In *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*, he studies the role of language in the construction of both the traveler and the Other. The better understanding of narrative conventions and the exploration of subjectivity have brought about the appearance of a number of sophisticated textual readings of travel narratives. The association with Otherness and relationships between the Self and the Other in the process of cross-cultural communication attract scholarly attention as well. The post-modern concept of “displacement” brought about amplified critical and theoretical attention to the problems of representing the Other. Trinh T. Minh-ha points out that “Identity is largely constituted through the process of othering” (15). Scholars adopted cross-disciplinary approaches in their research on constructing both the Self and the Other in travel narratives. Travel theory’s lexicon testifies to the centrality of cross-cultural communication: transculturation, contact zones,

border crossing, nationalism/multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism/localism, identity, hybridity, margin, displacement, and, of course, translation.<sup>7</sup>

My study is concerned with the process of understanding and representation of the Other in travel narratives and the role of the traveler's cultural tradition and ideological beliefs in this process. To this end I explore the images of the United States in some of the most influential twentieth-century Chinese and Russian travelogues. Critical attention in travel writing has predominantly been directed to the experiences and attitudes of Western colonial and post colonial explorers of the last few hundred years. Here I offer an analysis of the works of Eastern travelers visiting a major Western power. Russians themselves have long debated how "Eastern" Russia (or the Soviet Union) really is. Their country is placed between the West and the East not only geographically but also culturally. There are deep cultural differences between China and Russia, yet their relationships with the West show certain similarities. The first important parallel is that the contacts with the West was a catalyst in the modernization of both countries. The second is that the West in general and the United States in particular is portrayed in comparable ways by Russian and Chinese travelers. The West is perceived to be a land of technology and materialism, whereas China and Russia are both depicted as old civilizations of superior spiritual, moral, and artistic achievements. The third important similarity is that at the beginning of China and Russia's links with the United States, it was seen as different from the other Western countries. With the development of their relations, the United States gradually became the country symbolizing the West, and the paradigm of Materialistic West versus Spiritual China and Russia was used in describing

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<sup>7</sup> For more on literary theory and travel writing see Campbell, *Travel* 261-273; Hulme and Youngs 1-13; Siegel, *Gender* 1-11; and Lawrence 1-27.

America in China, Russia, and the Soviet Union. This representation exemplifies the famous Chinese principle: “Chinese studies for the fundamentals; foreign studies for practical use” (*Zhongxue wei ti, xi xue wei yong*). I am particularly interested in the representations of the American spirit as opposed to the Chinese (supposedly superior) spirit and the American *pustodushie* (empty soul) as opposed to the talented Russian soul. As elusive as the categories of spirit and soul may seem from a contemporary perspective, they were taken very seriously by Chinese and Russian thinkers during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Here the Chinese travelogues I consider will be Fei Xiaotong’s *First Visit to America* (*Chufang Meiguo* 初访美国 1945) and *Glimpses of America* (*Fang Mei lüeying* 访美掠影 1980), Wang Zuomin’s *The American Kaleidoscope: Society, Landscape, People* (*Meiguo Wanhuatong: Shehui, fengguang, renwu* 美国万花筒：社会，风光，人物 1985), Liu Zongren’s *Two Years in the Melting Pot* (*Da rong lu liang nian* 大熔炉两年 1987), and Ding Ling’s *Random Notes from a Visit to America* (*Fang Mei sanji* 访美散记 1984). My central Russian travelogues are Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov’s *One-storey America* (*Oдноэтажная Америка* 1937), Vassily Aksyonov’s *Non-Stop Round the Clock: Impressions, Meditations, Adventures* (*Kruglie sutki non-stop: vpechatlenia, razmishlenia, prikliuchenia* 1975) and *In Search of Melancholy Baby* (*V poiskakh grustnogo beiby* 1987). Fei Xiaotong, Ding Ling, Ilf and Petrov, and Vassily Aksyonov are among the most popular twentieth-century authors in their countries. Liu Zongren and Wang Zuomin are journalists whose travelogues about the United States became bestsellers in China. Therefore, all these books played a substantial role in creating images of the United States in China and the Soviet Union. Most of the primary materials I write about

here correspond to Borm's definition of travel books. Three of the texts I analyze in detail, however, namely Liu Zongren's book about America and Aksyonov's two books, have a larger scope, and combine travel writing, essay, memoir, and some fictional elements.

All of these books were written in the period when socialism was perceived to be a viable alternative to capitalism, and the American cultural Otherness was reinforced by the ideological antagonism between capitalism and socialism. With the exception of Fei Xiaotong's first book, all the travelogues were created during the time when in the two leading communist countries, China and Russia, the United States was interpreted through the dominant ideological paradigm of Marxism. I analyze how this paradigm molded the travelogues and to what extent it is embraced, circumvented or vehemently negated by their authors. In addition to the ideological distortions of the images of America, I explore to what extent these image have been shaped by prevalent ideas about the West in general and the United States in particular in modern Chinese and Russian intellectual history. I focus on the influence of the most popular paradigm in the East-West exchange, namely, the "Spiritual East" and the "Materialistic West." In China and Russia's interactions with the United States, this paradigm has been translated as Materialistic America and Spiritual/Ethical/Cultured China or Russia. In analyzing each book, I focus on the author's characterization of American people, his/her perceptions of American political system and democracy, and the presentation of American materialism as reflected in the description of American capitalism. The questions I ask are to what extent these perceptions are shaped under the influence of ideas about Chinese/Russian spiritual superiority, and how they reflect the dominant ideology of the day.

The first epigraph to this chapter points out the *sine qua non* of a successful epistemic travel—the traveler should leave his/her cultural baggage in order to perceive the visited place in its alterity, and avoid the confusion of representing the Other as a different version of the Self (See Leed 46). If the traveling writer is heavily loaded with what his/her culture has bestowed on him/her, then the perceptions of both the Self and the Other can be as grotesquely distorted as in Lin Yutang’s humorous statement in the second epigraph—*we* may sometimes act inhumane, but at least *we* know how to do it, and even *our* cannibalism is more civilized than *your* eating habits (Lin 337)! Said in the third epigraph (24) points out the urgency of searching for a “way out of cultural solipsism” (Porter, *Haunted Journeys* 5). Is the knowledge of the Other possible or are our perceptions and presentations of Otherness always disfigured via the Procrustean bed of ideology? The chapter “Know Thyself through Knowing the Other” is concerned with important theoretical ideas about the process of dialogical engagement with the Other and the possibility of self-transformation in this process. The nature of communication with alterity does not allow a strict methodological approach. It requires openness and ability to contain the propensity of the Self to project his/her own ideas onto Others. Seminal modern thinkers as Mikhail Bakhtin, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Claude Lévi-Strauss pondered the question of the Other, the human potential to understand and communicate with Otherness, and the value of this communication for expanding the participants’ horizon. I outline some of their ideas constituting the foundation of my approach to the travelogues. To interpret the books by relying on a narrowly defined theoretical model would be to perpetrate on a different level the sin of maiming the Other with ideological weapons, which many travel writers commit even if they do so unwittingly. I utilize

Tzvetan Todorov's suggestion of three levels on which the problematics of alterity can be located. The axiological level is the one that includes value judgments, the praxiological level permits rapprochement to or distancing from the Other, and the epistemic level is the level of an endless process of better understanding. My goal in analyzing the books is to discover to what extent these authors are capable of associating with alterity on epistemic level, that is, of listening attentively to the otherness they encounter, and of creating an image of the American Other that is relatively free from ideological projections and inherited concepts. Gadamer and Bakhtin consider the rigidly constructed image an obstruction in the process of communication. According to them, the Self should constantly check and change the images of the Other in order to open a space for a true dialogue. Approaching the Other on axiological or praxiological levels excludes the implementation of Gadamerian hermeneutics because on these levels Others are manipulated or controlled by the Self. The epistemological value of alterity is realized only when the engagement with the Other leads to reconsideration of preconceptions, and the existing images are replaced by new, more truthful versions.

Chapter 3, "Friend and Foe: Chinese, Russian, and Soviet Images of America," outlines the most important stages of the development of the images of the United States in China, Russia, and the Soviet Union based on the ideas about and the descriptions of America in the writings of influential intellectuals in these countries as well as in the most popular travel books published there. The extent to which the travelers' perceptions are shaped by preconceptions can be decided against the historical backdrop provided by this chapter. It begins with a short overview of the importance of the concept of "the West" in Chinese and Russian intellectual debate of the second half of the nineteenth and

the beginning of the twentieth century. This debate exemplifies the dialectic of knowing the Self through better understanding of the Other because, while describing the West, both China and Russia have explored their own problems and defined the parameters of their own cultures. The images of the United States are best understood against the background of more general perceptions of the West. Initially, America was perceived as different from the other Western countries in both China and Russia. With the development of their relations, however, the United States gradually became the country considered the epitome of the West. Consequently, the notions of the West as materialistic and spiritless were transposed over the United States, and the paradigm of Materialistic West versus Spiritual China/Russia came to be used in describing America in China, Russia, and the Soviet Union. The socialist project was also perceived to be ethically superior to capitalism. Both Chinese and Russian communist writers claimed moral superiority for their countries based on socialism's more humane concern for all persons as opposed to capitalism's inhumane exploitation of most people.

Chapter 4, "Fei Xiaotong's America," is devoted to the two travel books about the United States written by China's prominent social scientist and popular essayist Fei Xiaotong. His reputation as a mediator between the West and China and his literary skills are large factors in the popularity of these travelogues. In his books the constant shifting between axiological, praxiological, and epistemic levels of presentation produces rich images of the United States. Fei's America is complex and controversial, multilayered and sophisticated. His first book, *First Visit to America*, is a fine example of a realization of the epistemological value of alterity. Fei's approach to America shows that he is well aware of the problems of cross-cultural communication. The effort to avoid seeing a

foreign land through the lenses of cultural clichés and to realize better comprehension of the American Other is the primary drive in this travel narrative. Fei's readiness to reconsider his previous ideas about America, his openness and attentiveness resulted in better understanding of both the American Other and the Chinese Self. His second book, *Glimpses of America*, however, shows a picture of America that is closer to the dominant Marxist interpretation of this country as a financial oligarchy in democratic garb.

Chapter 5, "This Beautiful, Friendly, and Exploitative Country: The Image of America in Liu Zongren, Wang Zuomin, and Ding Ling's Works," analyzes three of the most popular travel books about America published in 1980s. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1949, America was represented in accordance to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine as a dangerous imperialist power and an enemy of all struggling Third World countries. With the normalization of Sino-American relations in the early 1970s more pluralistic presentations of the United States appeared along with the officially promoted anti-American images. Liu's and Wang's travelogues demonstrate the appearance of new, less ideological images of America, whereas Ding Ling's book illustrates the ongoing strength of dogmatic Marxist perceptions of this country. Close reading of these travelogues reveals how every traveler's perceptions are determined by his/her personal partialities, ideological convictions, and the preconceptions inherited from the culture s/he was brought up in. Like most of the visitors from the People's Republic of China in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the three authors here are concerned with the social problems of the United States. Yet their discussions of these problems take different directions. Wang and Liu admit that American controversies and complexities make the description and analysis of this



country an overwhelming undertaking. Both of them approach the subject of their exploration mostly on epistemic level, led by a genuine desire to understand and learn. Liu's understanding of American materialism is close to the traditional one, but his rejection of American materialistic mentality is moderated by a self-ironic dissection of Chinese materialism. Wang Zuomin is the only author among those presented in this thesis who does not discuss American materialism as the most prominent characteristic of the United States. She sees the unequal distribution of wealth, not materialism, as the major problem of American society. In Ding Ling's book the axiological level takes precedence over the epistemic one, and the perception of the American Other is filtered through the lenses of the ideologically superior Socialist Chinese Self. Paradoxically, the traditional paradigm Spiritual China versus Materialistic America is reincarnated in the book of the former iconoclast and long-time political prisoner Ding Ling as Ethical Socialism versus Corrupt Capitalism.

What distinguishes the two books in the center of Chapter 6, "Country Is in the Eye of the Beholder: The Image of America in Ilf and Petrov's *One-storey America* and Vassily Aksyonov's *In Search of Melancholy Baby*," is the ideological stance of their authors. Ilf and Petrov's belief in the Soviet socialism is as passionate as Aksyonov's hatred for this same socialism expressed fifty years later. All three authors' approach makes the realization of the epistemological value of alterity impossible. The authors' intense engagement with American reality does not alter substantially their preconceptions about this country. In *One-storey America*, the image of America is filtered through the authors' conviction that socialism is more a humane social order than capitalism. Everything they see in this country is evaluated with the Marxist yardstick of

class struggle and capitalist exploitation. Aksyonov's beliefs are the opposite: in the last chapter of *In Search of Melancholy Baby*, he declares that life in capitalist America is more humane than life in the Soviet Union. Yet in these ideologically antagonistic Russian books the perceptions and representations of America show similarities that are grounded in traditional Russian ideas about the West in general and America in particular. Compared to the Chinese travelogues analyzed in the preceding two chapters, the discussion of American cultural life in the Russian books is very pronounced. Ilf and Petrov's criticism of American preoccupation with the material and their lament over man's position in the process of mass production indicate the continuity with some major ideas of the Slavophile school of thought. The paradigm of Materialistic West versus Spiritual Russia, which was an important pillar of Slavophile teachings, is evident in Aksyonov's works as well, despite his political commitment to Western values. The way in which Americans' and Russians' attitudes towards art and literature are portrayed confirms the persistent influence of the notion of Russian spiritual superiority.

Despite these authors' different (or even antagonistic) political agendas, the images of America created in their travelogues are less ideologically-ridden than the officially promoted images in China and the Soviet Union. One of the popular travel books in the Soviet Union, *Meeting with California* (*Svidanie s Kaliforniei* 1975), sold one hundred thousand copies. When the author, Stanislav Kondrashov, was asked why travel books flourished as the most popular genre of Soviet American studies, he answered: "In a travel account one is not obliged to reach any final conclusions" (qtd. in Starr 117). The ideological flexibility of travel writing is pointed out by David Shambaugh as well. He notes that travelogues are "an easily digestible genre for average

citizens” because the readers are able to relate to the experiential descriptions better than interpret abstract scholarly analyses (161). This non-dogmatic nature of travelogues makes them a powerful tool in shaping the images of a foreign country and another culture.

The images of America in the travel books I analyze are complex, controversial, and multilayered, yet there are some common characteristics among these descriptions. First, ambivalence is a common stance in both Chinese and Russian travelogues. Both Chinese and Russian writers vacillate between admiration for American people on the one hand and criticism of American political system on the other; the fascination with American technological and economic power is paired with indignation over the many social problems still plaguing the richest country in the world; the desire to discover the secret of American achievements goes hand in hand with criticism of American social structure. Second, all writers underscore the natural beauty of the country they visit and the innovative genius of its people. Third, ideology plays equally distorting role in both Chinese and Russian books, and the influence of the paradigm of Materialistic West versus Spiritual East is traceable in all of these travel accounts.

Yet there are differences among these travelogues that determine the prevalence of epistemic or axiological level in their presentations of the United States. Although the paradigm of Materialistic West versus Spiritual China/Russia has been used to describe America in both China and Russia, its influence is more visible in the Russian books. The ambivalence toward materialism characterizing most of the Chinese books is absent in the Russian travelogues. The Russian writers generally perceive materialism as a destructive force, particularly with respect to high culture. The continuity with the long

tradition of presenting America as a land devoid of culture and spiritual life revealed in the Russian travelogues determines the prevalence of an axiological level in approaching alterity in these books. Even in Aksyonov's second book characterized by a vehement rejection of the Soviet regime, the Soviet Self is superior to the American Other with respect to appreciation of the fine arts. The axiological level of presentation is less prominent in the Chinese travel books. With the exception of Ding Ling's political pamphlet, all other Chinese books are marked by a desire to understand the bases for American wealth and power, and to use this understanding as a model for the amelioration of China's problems. This genuine drive to learn undergirds the prevalence of epistemic level of presenting the American Other in the Chinese books. It should be noted that the loyalty toward China and Chinese culture displayed by the Chinese writers is remarkable because it is unexpected: all four Chinese authors were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, and all endured tremendous hardships as a consequence of the Maoist regime. This experience, however, did not change their commitment to work for the betterment of their country. Chinese intellectuals' preoccupation with China's weaknesses and their desire to discover how to overcome these shortcomings is the reason behind their ambivalence toward American materialism and their admiration for material affluence and technology of the United States.

In his *The Search for the Picturesque*, Malcolm Andrews writes about one curious device that was *de rigueur* for the English Picturesque tourist in the eighteenth century. The so-called "Claude glass" was a pocket mirror that a traveler pointed over his or her shoulder to miniaturize and enjoy a reflected landscape. Using a Claude glass, the tourists were able to control their visual experiences (Andrews 67-73). The only problem with the

usage of a Claude glass was that to view the reflected landscape properly, they had to turn their backs on it. My quest here is to determine whether these authors turned their backs on the country they explored, while gazing in the double Claude glass of ideology and tradition.

## **Know Thyself through Knowing the Other**

There is no foreign land; it is only the traveller that is foreign.

Robert Louis Stevenson

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.

Corinthians I, 14: 10-11

For Gadamer, the otherness of the other person's horizon serves to enrich one's own horizon. It is not a threat.

Richard E. Palmer

The three epigraphs to this chapter point out some important parameters of the contact with Otherness. Stevenson captures the paradox of the unity of the human race and the diversity of human populations: we all inhabit a common home, we are all citizens of the Earth, yet when a traveler leaves the borders of his/her country, s/he becomes foreign. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul points out the root of all misunderstanding: ignorance. All voices are significant, but because we do not know their meaning, each of us is a barbarian in our neighbor's eyes. Gadamer's insight into the epistemological advantage of the contact with the Other for enriching one's own horizon shows the importance of alterity for self-understanding. Self-knowledge can develop only through the knowledge of the Other. What would the Self learn in a world filled with his/her exact replicas? The paradox of association with Otherness is that it is

an endless reciprocal cognitive process. If the Self decides that the Other is sufficiently understood and can be described in terms familiar to the Self, then the Other does not exist anymore as the Other. The difference between the Self and the Other should exist in order to make the acquisition of knowledge possible. If this difference is essentialized into an unmitigated dichotomy, however, then the process of better understanding of both the Self and the Other is impossible because communication is blocked by the ideological clichés constructing the dichotomy. The illusion of complete understanding leading to the transformation of the Other into a better or a worse version of the Self as well as the postulation of a dichotomy between the Self and the Other are the two main obstacles on the path to better understanding. The epistemological value of alterity may be realized only if Otherness is recognized for what it is: it can be revealing, if approached with openness, attention, and a desire to learn, and it can close itself, if subjected to the Self's imposition of ideological constructs. One of the most prominent contemporary Russian thinkers, Yu. M. Lotman, defines the contact with the Other as a "*trudnaya nauka*" "difficult science." Studying this science, the Self not only recognizes the right of the Other to be different, but also sees an advantage in communication with Otherness—learning to associate with a different world leads to the enrichment of the Self. The understanding that in the microcosm of a family and the macrocosm of the world we are different, and we need both to be different and to learn to understand each other, is "*osnovnoi pozitivny stimul kul'tury*," a "fundamental positive stimulus of culture" (Lotman 464).

Narratives of travel and exploration are always concerned with the construction of the Other. By its nature travel writing crosses boundaries exposing the Self to a

constantly shifting Otherness. The author of a travel book interprets a foreign culture for his readers in a way that reminds one of the difficult task of a translator. An alien reality must be made intelligible for the readers without obviously distorting the object of interpretation. As with a translation, the most challenging part of this process is captured in the famous Italian saying “*traduttore traditore*” “the translator is a traitor.” Every traveler wears at least two pairs of invisible eyeglasses coloring the observed land—one pair inherited from the culture s/he was brought up in and one built up of personal partialities. The image of the Other is refracted through these glasses, and often a travel narrative reveals more about the narrator than about the land in question. The ideal interpreter of the Otherness should be free of any partiality, completely open to surrounding alterity, and capable of listening attentively to various voices.

The different approaches to the problematics of alterity and the possibilities of a dialogue with the Other are connected with the question of values: are all values relative or there is a universal scale of values? The universalist answer to this question often takes the form of ethnocentrism consisting in the claim that the specific values of one’s own society are universal values. Even when one is aware of one’s unconscious tendency to project oneself onto others, the temptation to judge the Others’ values on the basis of one’s own is difficult to resist (Todorov, *On Human Diversity* 10). Examples of ethnocentrism abound in the history of thought.

Rousseau was one of the first systematic critics of ethnocentrism. His dissertation *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (*Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*) is devoted to knowledge of other cultures. In a long note in



this dissertation, he criticizes travelers' descriptions of different cultures because instead of encountering the Other, the traveler usually encounters a distorted image of himself:

For the three or four hundred years since the inhabitants of Europe have inundated the other parts of the world, and continually published new collections of voyages and reports, I am persuaded that we know no other men except the Europeans; furthermore, it appears, from the ridiculous prejudices which have not died out even among Men of Letters, that under the pompous name of the study of man everyone does hardly anything except study the men of his country (Rousseau 84).

Rousseau advocates exploration of the features that characterize a given people and make them different from an observer who is free of ethnocentrism. He dreams of a new natural, moral, and political history written by men who have traveled the world. He is convinced that a new world would come from their pens, a world that will help us to know our own (Rousseau 86). He is well aware that knowing Others and self-knowledge are inseparably connected. Only after establishing the differences, one must return to the universal idea of man, basing it on empirical knowledge, not on purely metaphysical speculations. He proposes universalism that begins by thoroughly knowing the particular. The comparative method is the only road to knowledge of both the Self and the Other, and to know one's own community, one must study Others.

The rival doctrine to universalism is relativism. According to the proponents of relativism, there is no common ground behind the variety of cultures. The problem with the relativist doctrines is that the absolute relativism of cultural and historical values makes cross-cultural communication seem impossible. Moreover, the idea that every

society is imperfect and no society is better than any other leads to an ethical relativism which makes the condemnation of tyranny, for instance, impossible. Each culture is a model of the world, and establishing a hierarchy of cultures is no less absurd than establishing a hierarchy of languages. In order to communicate with Others, we have to imagine a frame of reference that is broad enough to include our and their universe (Todorov, *On Human Diversity* 63-74). Any dialogue requires both a shared frame of reference and some unknown territory that can be mapped with the help of this shared frame. The destruction of self-projections and the assimilation of what is new and valuable move the Self and the Other to real understanding.

The proper relation between universalism and relativism is a question connected with one of the prevalent themes of postmodernism, namely, the disgrace of metanarratives. The postmodern thinkers see all major metanarratives of modernity—the Enlightenment grand narrative of endless progress through knowledge as liberation from ignorance, the Hegelian freeing of mind from self-alienation through dialectics, the Marxist emancipation from exploitation through revolutionary struggle, the capitalist story of overcoming poverty through the market—as equally mythical, yet secularized versions of the Christian paradigm of final redemption from original sin. The credibility of all grand narratives is lost in postmodernity, and they are replaced by a multitude of “small stories.” The “weak thought,” a prevalent postmodern mode of reflection, has replaced the domineering, imposing, universalistic, atemporal, self-centered, and intolerant “strong thought” of modernity (Calinescu 272-75). Only in the realm of “small stories” and “weak thought,” the real understanding of the Other is possible. Only here the Other is perceived as a subject with his/her own story and voice, and not as a potential

convert to the “only one true metanarrative.” This is an area where utmost attention is required—the disgrace of grand narratives should not lead to abandonment of all universal values. The postmodernist aversion to domineering “strong thought” brings about the existence of a mix of varied and contending “small stories.” The postmodernist rejection of all universal values, however, is a tacit capitulation before metanarratives. If there are no universal values whatsoever, then on what ground can we reject the domineering grand narrative? Todorov’s idea that the dialogue with Others requires the postulation of a universal horizon for our search for understanding, even if it is clear that in practice we will never encounter universal categories *per se*, only categories that are *more* universal, suggests a way of communication sensitive to alterity and preserving that universal horizon of values. The endless process of better understanding of both the Self and the Other does not exclude the existence of universal values; it precludes the imposition of values.

The clash of universalism and relativism is a common occurrence in the exploration of the East-West encounter. According to Zhang Longxi, the predominant influence of relativism in Asian studies today is a major problem in achieving understanding across the cultural differences between the East and the West (Zhang 8). The relativist view that cultures are different from one another to the point of incommensurability is a reaction to old Eurocentric prejudices and the imposition of Western views on non-Western cultures. The paradox of this position, however, consists in the fact that Eurocentrism and racism are also based on emphasizing exaggerated racial, ethnic, and cultural differences. The postulating of an unmitigated dichotomy between the East and the West puts in question the possibility of cross-cultural understanding

itself. Zhang argues that when the cultural differences between China and the West are overlooked, it is important to point out the danger of such oversight. But when they are set up in a mutually exclusive dichotomy, then it is important to point out many similarities that are shared between the cultures and literatures of the East and the West (Zhang 13). The stubborn tendency to postulate a dichotomy between the East and the West is expressed in one of the basic stereotypes of each other shared by both sides: the East is spiritual, the West is material. The absurdity of situating spirituality geographically is ignored in this persistent cliché and it played an important role at the beginning of the East/West intellectual encounter.

Analyzing the myths of the Other in the East-West exchange and the large variety of misconceptions on both sides, Zhang poses a crucial question “Can we ever know the Other as the truly Other?” (45). He argues that the knowledge of the Other begins with a set of historical givens. Yet the effort to go beyond stereotypes of the past and, most importantly, the engagement with Otherness enables the gradual development of an awareness of our own preconceptions and limitations. The myth of the Other which played an important role in the intellectual discourse of China, Russia, and the West must be replaced with the realization that the Other is not a phantom constructed by our self-projections for purely ideological purposes, but has a presence of its own. There is something that exists outside of our desires to project ourselves and the ideological games of the past. No matter how many ideas we construct and superimpose on Others, what we try to understand serves as a corrective for our comprehension. When the Other is recognized as a subject with characteristics independent of our mental constructions, a dialogue of cultures becomes possible and a dialogue in which no one has the last word

may begin. To better understand the Other is not to become self-alienated and to adopt alien values, but to enrich the Self with rewarding experiences (Zhang 53). The East/West dichotomy annihilates alterity because it substitutes an ideological construct for the Other: that is, Otherness is not recognized as Otherness but constructed in ideological terms that serve the Self. To recognize the Other as something independent of our ideas and projections is the beginning of realization of the epistemological potential of alterity. In the final analysis, to understand the Other as the truly Other means never *to know* what exactly the Other is. It means to start a process of an endless attentive approaching that cannot have an end result, but nonetheless leads to a better understanding of both the Self and the Other.

The epistemological value of Otherness can be realized only if the differences between the Self and the Other are preserved. If the experience of alterity is grounded in egocentrism and the identification of one's own values with values in general, the better understanding of both the Self and the Other in the process of communication is impossible. The cognitive value of preserving the differences between the Self and the Other is recognized by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Structural Anthropology (Anthropologie structurale)*. He sees the real contributions of cultures not in their particular inventions but in the *contrastive features* which exist between them. In his understanding, a world civilization can be only a coalition of cultures, each preserving its originality. The more diversified the cultures are, the more fruitful the coalition will be. Lévi-Strauss argues that although ethnology appears to be a new science, it is neither new, nor a separate one. What seems to be a result of the inquisitiveness of modern man is "the most ancient, most general form of what we designate by the name of humanism" (Lévi-Strauss 2:271). The

Renaissance rediscovery of forgotten notions and methods in ancient literature was in fact putting its own culture into prospective, comparing contemporary concepts with those of other times and other places. Knowledge of others is the only path toward self-knowledge because a civilization can define itself only if it has at its disposal some other civilizations for comparison and “no fraction of humanity could aspire to understand itself without reference to all the other human beings” (Lévi-Strauss 2: 272). Lévi-Strauss examines one of the paradoxes of cross-cultural communication—if communication accelerates, the universalization of culture and the disappearance of differences takes place. He finds the perspective of the homogenization of cultures similar to one-party rule and argues for preservation of the diversity of cultures (Lévi-Strauss 2:358-9). Better knowledge of the Other makes possible improvement of the Self and that is why differences are precious and must be preserved.<sup>8</sup>

The propensity of the Self to project his/her own ideas onto Others represents the biggest obstacle on the way to perceiving alterity for what it is. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that an identification with the Other or empathy may be the first step toward understanding. Yet the realization of the epistemological potential of Otherness requires that each of the two identities remains distinct so that the dialogue of the Self and the Other is a dialogue between equal but different entities. The truly creative understanding requires distancing of the Self because the exotopy (Tzvetan Todorov’s translation of the Russian *vnenakhodimost*, lit. “finding oneself outside”) of the one who does the

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<sup>8</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin considers alterity a powerful instrument of understanding in the realm of culture. In his *Rabelais and His World*, he describes the cognitive value of otherness in a process he calls “mutual clarification” between Latin and the vernacular language: “An intense interorientation, interaction, and mutual clarification of languages took place during that period. The two languages frankly and intensely peered into each other’s faces, and each became more aware of itself, of its potentialities and limitations, in the face of the other” (465). Here the face of the Other is the source of self-awareness and alterity that makes the cognitive process possible.

understanding is of paramount importance. Exotopy implies that the lucidity of observation depends on the position of the observer and the more distant s/he is from the situation observed, the clearer the picture is. Bakhtin's exotopy implies that a foreigner is privileged precisely because of his distance (in time, space, or culture) from the studied subject, that is, only to the eyes of Others does an alien culture reveal itself.<sup>9</sup> The ideas concerning Otherness hold the key to Bakhtin's whole work. To designate the core of Bakhtin's thought, Michael Holquist uses the term "dialogism." Self is never a self-sufficient construct—it is dialogic, a *relation*, which means that the Other plays a decisive role in the accomplishment of individual consciousness because it is impossible to conceive of any being outside of the relations that link it to the other (Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin* 94-99; Holquist 14-19).

The role of exotopy is central to travel narratives because the narrator is intensely engaged with Otherness. In our time of overemphasis on discourse and textuality, the importance of lived experience in shaping our world view is often overlooked. In the past, however, the educational value of traveling was widely accepted. Montaigne considers travel to be the best form of education. The experiences of a traveler are valuable instructions because

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<sup>9</sup> Being a foreigner visiting an unknown land offers an epistemological privilege explored by Montesquieu in *Persian Letters*. There are two conditions for successful understanding a foreign land. The first one is the distance between the visitor and the object of his/her exploration which clarifies the perspective, and offers an opportunity for critical examination. The local citizens' perceptions of their own country are dimmed by associations and habits, while the foreigner's perceptions are always fresh: "I find everything interesting, everything astonishing." Moreover, the distance between him and the local inhabitants provides the time and space for exploration: "Being a stranger, I had nothing better to do than to study, as is my custom, this crowd of people who kept arriving, and whose characters never failed to offer me something fresh" (letter 46, 59). But one can be a foreigner in a country and still not know it, so the second condition as important as the first one, is the passion for knowledge. The epistemological privilege of the foreigner can be realized only if s/he is driven by a genuine thirst for knowledge. An astute observer of a foreign world may be blind to the realities of his own life, and the association with alterity is the cure for this blindness. The eye cannot see itself, as the old Chan Buddhist saying goes.

It keeps our souls constantly exercised by confronting them with things new and unknown; and (as I have often said) I know no better school for forming our life than ceaselessly to set before it the variety found in so many other lives, concepts and customs, and to give it a taste of the perpetual diversity of the forms of human nature (Montaigne 1101).

The most important obstacle on the way of getting to know the Other, however, is the traveler himself because of our common propensity to project our ideas and ourselves onto Others. One typical case of projection is revealed in Columbus's perceptions of his great discovery.

Todorov argues that Columbus's discovery of America and the ensuing Spaniards' conquest, colonization, and destruction of pre-Columbian cultures in Mexico and the Caribbean are an exemplary case of dealing with Otherness. Columbus's first voyage to America is usually considered a new beginning for travel writing. His writings illustrate how the traveler's beliefs influence the interpretation of his discoveries. Columbus believed not only in Christian dogma, but also in Cyclopes and mermaids, in Amazons and men with tails. The power of his belief permitted him to see mermaids, and he was very disappointed that they were not as beautiful as described. What he saw did not convince him that mermaids were fictional; he simply corrected one prejudice by another, and concluded that they were not as pretty as painted. This kind of interpretative strategy is best described as "finalist" because Columbus was not seeking for truth but for confirmations of a truth known in advance; his conviction was always anterior to the experience (Todorov, *The Conquest* 15-20). The fact that Columbus discovered America while looking for Asia shows the cognitive absurdity of the "finalist" strategy.



The near extermination of Mesoamerica's Indian population exemplifies a dreadful paradox: understanding does not always go hand in hand with sympathy and it can be used for destruction. Cortés understood the Indians better than they understood him, he admired Aztec craftsmanship, but he never perceived the makers of these superb products as *subjects* that existed on the same level as him. For Columbus, the Indians were reduced to exotic *objects* to be collected and viewed alongside plants and animals. Cortés was highly interested in Aztec civilization, but for him the Indians were not individuals comparable to the Self who studied them (Todorov, *The Conquest* 127-30). Four centuries later, in 1936, another European visited Mexico for completely different reasons. Antonin Artaud's own version of the Spiritual East versus the Material West is the geographically displaced but ideologically similar Magical Mexican culture vs. Rationalist France. In Mexico, Artaud wanted to get rid of Christianity and embrace a culture uncontaminated by rational spirit. He was not interested in this country as an unknown world waiting to be explored; all he wanted was a negation of European civilization (Todorov, *On Human Diversity* 339-41). Cortés's and Artaud's experiences show that, while the motivation of travelers and their attitude toward the people they visit may differ widely, the end result with respect to the Others may be the same. Cortés's and Artaud's ideologies were antagonistic, yet their approach to the Other was similar. Cortés was the assimilator striving to impose the Christian religion on the indigenous population. Artaud was the allegorist using this population to illustrate his convictions formed before the visit and not influenced by it. In both cases, the identity of the Other was not important. In both cases, the epistemological value of alterity was squandered and the advantage of exotopy was not realized. Neither the Other nor the Self were better

understood after the encounters because of the ideological blindness of the observers. The openness necessary to see the Other as both equal and different was blocked by convictions preceding the experiences and not altered by them.

If the ideological beliefs are so powerful in distorting the image of the Other, how can a traveler get rid of them and thus realize the epistemological value of alterity? What is the approach to the Other that will help him/her develop the potential for better understanding? Todorov distinguishes three levels, on which the problematics of alterity can be located. The axiological level includes a value judgment: the Other is good or bad, loved or hated, and perceived as equal or inferior to the Self. On the praxiological level, a rapprochement to or distancing from the Other is possible. On this level, the Self can embrace the Other's values, submit to the Other, attempt the Other's submission, or be indifferent to the Other. And, finally, on the third, epistemic level, the Self realizes his ignorance of the Other's identity, and thus makes an endless process of better understanding possible (Todorov, *The Conquest* 185). Only on this level the epistemological value of alterity can be realized. Here understanding should be thought of as a never ending dialogue: an exchange of answers and questions between the Self and the Other that moves them beyond preconceived notions and toward better comprehension.

It is on this epistemic level that the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer is developed. The genuine desire to listen and understand the voice of other person or a text and the attempt to go beyond our own "fore-meaning" in order to establish communication that leads to better understanding are at the core of his thought. In *Truth and Method (Wahrheit und Methode)*, Gadamer postulates that a correct interpretation

“must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought” (266). The interpreter must be guided by the things themselves. How can we break the spell of our own fore-meanings and protect ourselves from misunderstanding? The answer is to remain open to the meaning of the other person or text. If we are aware of our own biases and sensitive to a text’s alterity, then the text (or a person) can present itself in all its Otherness, and assert its own truth against our fore-meanings (Gadamer 269). As Richard Palmer notes, the keys for understanding in Gadamer’s hermeneutics are not manipulation and control but participation and openness, not knowledge but experience, not methodology but dialectic (Palmer 215). A true dialogue cannot be an argument because, as in Plato’s dialogues, the partners do not try to defeat each other argumentatively, but test each other’s assertions by means of a common immersion in the matter under discussion (Palmer 199). The Gadamerian principle of communication excludes the rigidly constructed image as a tool for acquiring knowledge. The Self should constantly check and change his/her images of the Other in order to open a space for a true dialogue. This process is difficult by default because it is a process of constant disillusionment. Approaching the Other on axiological or praxiological levels excludes the implementation of Gadamerian hermeneutics because on these levels Others are manipulated or controlled by the Self. No matter how good the intentions of the Self are, once the Other is subjected to the Self’s ideas, the cognitive value of alterity is squandered.

To approach the Other with an open mind, to listen and understand in order to find the truth—these are the conditions for dealings with Others, proposed not only by Gadamer but by Bakhtin as well. This engaged approach to the Other and the ability to

question, listen, and understand alterity define what Bakhtin calls the “dialogical” attitude. It is antagonistic to the “monological” attitude turning the Other into an object, and his ideas into means to strengthen one’s own position or sanction ready-made concepts. For Bakhtin, life is dialogical by its very nature: “To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end” (Bakhtin *Problems* 252). The realization of Gadamer and Bakhtin’s ideas about the dialogue with the Other is possible only in the postmodern situation. Dialogical communication with and creative understanding of Others can happen only in the absence of monological metanarratives that tend to suppress the multiplicity of voices. The epistemological value of Otherness can be realized only when the variety of voices is not smothered by a domineering one and when the existing voices listen attentively to each other in order to eliminate self-projections and fore-meanings.

Therefore, the author of a travel narrative can represent Otherness for what it is, only if s/he is engaged with the Others in a way conducive to the elimination of the existing fore-meanings. Any preconceived ideas block the possibility of achieving Bakhtin’s creative understanding. The creation of a more truthful image of the Other means a reconsideration of all existing images. The author creating the new image should be aware that in the future this image will be replaced by a more truthful one, achieved in the endless process of mutual understanding. The self-projections of the author represent the second stumbling block in the process of association with alterity. The author’s partialities are usually determined by his/her ideology. If s/he is aware of the detrimental effects of “strong thought” on the Others’ voices, then the cognitive trap of metanarratives could be avoided.

The travelers' perceptions are determined to a large extent by the forms of interaction with the Others in which travelers engage in the course of their journeys. This is another line of analysis I consider important because the role that a traveler assumes in approaching the Other influences their experience and moulds the narratives. A journey to a foreign land can be undertaken for many different reasons. The primary motivation of a traveler determines the way s/he deals with Otherness. Todorov offers a portrait gallery of ten different types of travelers.

1. *The assimilator*. Theoretically, his figure should be rare in our times characterized by the crash of the great narratives. The assimilator wants to modify Others so they will be like his ideal, and he interprets them in terms of a lack with regard to this ideal. This type of traveler is usually endowed with a crusading or Messianic spirit—the classic figure of the assimilator is the Christian missionary. In the nineteenth century, the idea of European civilization was exported instead of Christianity.
2. *The profiteer*. The typical profiteer is a non-ideological figure adapting well to all environments. He sees the Other only in the context of expected gain or loss. The Otherness is interesting only as long as it permits using the Others for the profiteer's own benefit. The Other is never the goal of the relation; his only function is purely pragmatic.
3. *The tourist*. The tourist's experience is necessarily superficial. The contact with the Other requires effort, and the communication with Otherness can be intimidating for the Self's identity. That is why the tourist prefers objects to human beings and images to language. Although the tourist's search for local

flavor influences local inhabitants, he is not very interested in them. Yet a touristic visit could spark interest, and thereby lead to a deeper association with another culture.

4. *The impressionist.* The impressionist has more time than the tourist, and his horizon includes human beings, but they are subjects of his interest as long as they provide new impressions for *him*. He may be very tolerant to Others, yet he is not interested in the people themselves. The Others matter to the extent they play a role in his own project, and their images are often superficial.
5. *The assimilated.* This figure is the opposite of the assimilator: instead of trying to make the Others like himself, he wants to be like them. The immigrant is the most typical representative—he reaches out toward the Others to identify with them. When this process is successful, it ends with assimilation and the Self becomes like the Other.
6. *The exote.* The exote strives for Otherness because for him this is the way to escape from the familiarity and the automatism of life in his daily existence. The better the exote understands the Other, the more threatened his positions is. His experience has common characteristic with an artistic device: what Chekhov calls *otsrtanenie* (distancing, estrangement) and Brecht *Verfremdung* (defamiliarization).
7. *The exile.* Like the assimilated, the exile settles down in a country that is not his own; but like the exote, he does not want to be assimilated. What he cherishes is the feeling of non-belonging and for him the status of foreigner is permanent. The exile's contacts with the Other are almost non-existent. Many

writers choose to live in exile because they feel freer to produce their creative work in a foreign environment.

8. *The allegorist.* The allegorists tend to use the Other in a way similar to the profiteer's, but his capital functions on a symbolic level. His image of the Other does not come from communication and observation, and it is usually an inverted picture of what the allegorist wants to criticize at home. The Others are subjected to the author's needs. The perception of the East as the opposite of the West and the respective usage of this antagonistic couple as well as the projection of the Golden Age onto foreign people are examples of allegorical interpretation of Otherness.
9. *The disenchanted.* The disenchanted is a traveler renouncing travel. He either discovers that he carries what he is looking for in his heart or decides that interaction with his own people can go further than that with the Others. In a statement that reminds one of the Daoist, Buddhist, and Stoic traditions, Chateaubriand declares that "Man does need to travel in order to grow; he bears immensity within himself" (qtd. in Todorov, *On Human Diversity* 350). After his trip to Arabia, Nizan realized that he heeded the company of his compatriots: "There is only one valid kind of travel, and that is the journey toward men... We can give joy only to someone we know, and love is the perfection of knowing" (qtd. in Todorov, *On Human Diversity* 351). The paradoxical flavor of these insightful conclusions comes from the fact that they are results of extensive travel experience and a better understanding of the Self that comes from familiarity with the non-Self.

10. *The philosopher*. The philosophical journey may never take place in reality.

What is important here is the philosophical quest to observe differences in order to discover properties. As Montaigne puts it, the educational value of travel lies in the opportunity to rub and polish our brains by contact with those of others (172). Travel is indispensable for self-knowledge: “This great world of ours [...] is the looking-glass in which we must gaze to come to know ourselves from the right slant [...] I want it to be the book which our pupil studies” (Montaigne 177). In the philosophical journey, the contact with Otherness gives the philosopher a chance to discover universal horizons (Todorov, *On Human Diversity* 341-52). The universalism of philosophers is a universalism that knows at least two particulars, and establishes a dialogue between them.

Only two types of travelers in this gallery, the exote and the philosopher, approach Otherness without the desire to manipulate it in the interest of the Self. Yet the exote is interested in preserving alterity as an antithesis of what he tries to escape from, and is not interested in engaging in an endless process of mutual comprehension. The philosopher is the only one approaching alterity on epistemic level. He explores Otherness in order to discover universal horizons, but keeps differences in mind because alterity is his/her cognitive tool.

In approaching the American Other, the authors of the travel narratives I analyze here do not belong entirely within any of the types described by Todorov; instead they often assume one or the other of the roles in the portrait gallery. Like the tourist, they usually travel fast but, unlike him, their interest in local people is as pronounced as their



interest in monuments and landscape. Like the impressionist, they are very particular about their impressions but, unlike him, they approach Otherness as something to be explored, and the Others are not subjected to their projects. Like the philosopher, they analyze the foreign culture they are in contact with in order to discover something important about their own cultures and the values they consider universal. During their time in the United States they have the opportunity to see themselves in a variety of roles. For instance, when Fei Xiaotong was enthusiastic about and happy with his experience in America, he tended to feel like the assimilated: “I am in fact more American than Chinese. In China such [a] personality... is too disturbing” (qtd. in Arkush 109). However, when he felt exhausted and depressed, he assumed the role of an exile, complained about the pace of life in the United States, and dreamt of a lonely mountain monastery in western Yunnan (Arkush 118). Fei enjoyed playing the role of a tourist, but the most important goal of his visit was to observe and learn in order to help China’s development. His travel experience was most of all a road to a better understanding of China and to self-understanding, and his deepening awareness of American problems and achievements taught him that he was truly Chinese (Fei, *First Visit* 287-8). Liu Zongren played the roles of the tourist, the exile (after an unsuccessful initial attempt to approach the role of the assimilated), and the philosopher. In the final analysis, his experiences taught him as much about America as about his deep sense of belonging to Chinese culture and the numerous ways in which this culture had formed him. Wang Zuoming played three roles very well: the tourist, the impressionist, and the philosopher. Her extensive travel in the USA and broad knowledge of American culture and history make her travel book an “all-embracing encyclopedia of American society.” Ding Ling

approached America as a special type of non-aggressive assimilator. What she perceived in this country was sifted through her religious belief in socialism. Ilf and Petrov were the impressionists, the philosophers, and peaceful assimilators as well because their conviction in the superiority of socialism over capitalism often colored their tourist eyeglasses red. During his first trip, Aksyonov was the tourist, the impressionist, and the philosopher. His second book, however, shows him as the tourist, the exile, the assimilated, and the philosopher. Wearing ideological glasses was not alien to him either, but contrary to Ilf and Petrov's, his beliefs were fiercely anti-Soviet. The variety of roles they played exposed them to different levels of contact with Otherness and contributed to the richness and attractiveness of their work.

The focus of my analysis of the travel narratives in the following chapters is to explore the extent to which the epistemological value of alterity is realized. In other words, in these travel writings is the American Other represented as truly Other or as a better or worse version of the Self? Are these authors on guard against their own imperceptible habits of thought? To what extent is the picture of America they paint influenced by the intellectual tradition they were brought up in? That is, are their ideas of American materialism a reflection of fore-meanings inherited from their own cultural tradition?

## Friend and Foe: Chinese, Russian, and Soviet Images of America

Father, Mother, and Me,  
Sister and Auntie say  
All the people like us are We,  
And everyone else is They.  
And They live over the sea,  
While we live over the way,  
But — would you believe it —  
They look upon We  
As only sort of They!

Rudyard Kipling

The term “image” is used here in a very general sense to denote the assumptions, predispositions, and mental pictures people may have about themselves or others.

Although the images are based on perceptions formed through “a time-specific conglomeration of understanding, values, and emotions,” (Hao and Su 76) they play an important role in determining people’s behavior. The images of the United States in China, Russia, and the Soviet Union are marked by contradictions. The so called “love-hate component” in Sino-American relations is almost a cliché, but nonetheless true, and since the beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the pendulum of Chinese images has been swinging from respect to hostility. Russo-American and Soviet-American relations are also characterized by recurring cycles of amity and enmity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Fairbank, Hunt, McGiffert, Allen, Bailey, Sorokin, Sivachev and Yakovlev, and Popova.

This chapter delineates the development of the images of the United States in China, Russia, and the Soviet Union. I focus on the ideas about and the descriptions of America in the writings of influential intellectuals in these countries as well as in the most popular travel books published there. While the ideological clichés are transcended in most of the best travelogues, the authors’ questions about the United States are deeply rooted in rich intellectual traditions created by some of the most prominent thinkers of China and Russia. The chapter is divided into four parts: the first two describing the most important moments in China’s and Russia’s relations with the West, and the last two tracing the development of the images of the United States in China and Russia (and for a short spell of time, the Soviet Union). The dynamic of this development cannot be understood without grasping the importance of the notion of “the West” in the modern intellectual history of these countries.

The constructed and contrived nature of concepts like Orient/the East and Occident/the West has been an object of intense academic attention in recent decades especially. Many scholars have analyzed the political ramifications of the orientalist/occidental discourse, the complacency of local elites in the production of orientalism in Asian societies, and the fallacy of the idea of an Occident and an Orient having unified cultures.<sup>11</sup> Without disputing the constructed nature of “the West,” I analyze the foremost importance of this category in Chinese and Russian intellectual debate of the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century because the Chinese, Russian, and Soviet images of America can be properly understood only within the context of this debate. While discussing the West, both China and Russia

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<sup>11</sup> See Said, Dirlik, Chen Xiaomei, Federici, and Go Gwilt.

have discussed their own problems, defined the parameters of their own cultures, and created plans for their own future. The dialectic of knowing the Self through better understanding of the Other has been exemplified in this debate. What is important for my analysis is that both China and Russia claimed spiritual/cultural superiority with respect to the West. To what extent this claim is a compensatory reaction to the overwhelming display of Western power and to what extent it is based on the actual richness of both cultures is a problem that is worth exploring.<sup>12</sup> The problem of the West has a long history in both China and Russia, and the detailed analysis of its significance and ramifications might require many volumes. I focus here on prevalent themes within intellectual debates about the West, especially the development of the notion of the spiritual/cultural superiority of China and Russia to Western materialism, starting from the time when the problem of the West became a central topic in intellectual debates and engaged the best minds in both countries.

### *China and the West*

China's relationship to the West is one of the primary problems confronting the Chinese state and its people since the time of Lin Zexu 林則徐 (1785-1850). The importance of both Western imperialism forcing China to change and the exploration of Western thought in searching for models for this change is indisputable. Yet the West's role should not be overvalued because in the notion of "the response to the West" there is

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<sup>12</sup> Orlando Figes argues that young nations like Germany and Russia, lagging behind the rapidly industrializing West, turned to the ideal of national soul and spiritual virtues to make up for what they lacked in economic progress (Figes 313). This type of reaction is common when a group of people feels inferior with respect to another group. Social psychologists have discovered that the people who perceive themselves as inferior will try to shift the ground of comparison (Neumann 55).

a danger of imagining a linear substitution of Western ideas for Chinese ones and accepting the assumption that the process of Westernization made impossible for the Chinese the commitment to traditional values (Furth 15; Cohen *Discovering History* 9-55). The process of assimilation of Western ideas and the realization of political reforms based on Western models shows a constant swinging of the pendulum between admiration for the West and its achievements and a deep conviction in the superiority of Chinese culture—the two not being mutually exclusive to some thinkers.

The adaptation of China to the modern state system founded on competition and coexistence among sovereign and ostensibly equal states was a slow and painful process because, before its defeat in the Opium war of 1839-1842, China would not recognize any other state as equal to itself. At the root of the Chinese empire's foreign policy was the assumption that China was the "Middle (Central) Kingdom" and all other countries were culturally peripheral. According to Y. C. Wang, there are three types of attitude toward the West among Chinese intellectuals in the modern epoch: rejection, a mixed feeling of rejection and admiration, and a reversal of traditional ethnocentrism and a desire to admit Western superiority. He notes that infinite adjustments are possible in each individual case but, generally, the first type of reaction dominated Chinese thinking during the period of 1840-60, the second one during the years 1870-85, and the third, from 1895 to 1925 (Wang, Y.C. 234). The disputes over the number and the substance of the stages of the Western impact on China, and whether this impact was the main reason for Chinese modernization, will probably never reach a conclusion.<sup>13</sup> What is significant is that the first clashes with the West showed China's vulnerability, and subjected the

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<sup>13</sup> For different arguments on this topic see Teng Ssu-yu, Fairbank et al., Swisher, Ch'en, Chow, and Cohen.

Middle Kingdom to a new treaty system forcing China to agree to a direct formula for negotiating on equal terms with foreign officials. Yet in official Chinese documents, foreigners were still referred to as “barbarians,” and in official contacts with foreigners there was a strenuous effort to avoid equality in all matters not mentioned in treaty clauses (Banno 143).<sup>14</sup>

Chinese intellectuals were not prepared to give up their conviction in Chinese cultural superiority when confronted with the technological power of the West.<sup>15</sup> When China realized the urgent need to reform in order to survive in a rapidly changing modern world, one of the reformers, Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837-1909), formulated the famous principle: 中學爲體 西學爲用—“Chinese studies for the fundamentals; foreign studies for practical use.”<sup>16</sup> China’s nineteenth-century reformers who created the Self-Strengthening Movement—Feng Guifen 馮桂芬 (1809-1874), Zeng Guofan 曾國藩

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<sup>14</sup> Lydia H. Liu argues that the translation of *yi* 夷 as “barbarian” suggests “a strange, masochistic self-image of the ‘barbarian’ that the British insisted on projecting onto themselves by fantasizing a sinocentric worldview” (Liu 133). I do not dispute Liu’s ideas about translation, yet an unbiased reading of Emperor Qianlong’s letter to King George III in 1793 shows that, no matter how we translate *yi*, sinocentric view is not a mere fantasy, and in the minds of Chinese rulers and officials, China was the primary center of civilization. For more on sinocentrism see Zhang 41, Mungello 3-4, Franke 22-7, Fairbank 158-61.

<sup>15</sup> To understand the complexity of Chinese intellectuals adaptation to the new situation, one should consider the repercussions of one statement of Guo Songdao 郭嵩燾 (1818-1891) and Wei Yuan’s 魏源 (1794-1856) explanation of European cultural achievements. Guo Songdao, China’s first envoy to England, noted that the Western civilization was two-thousand-years old, i.e. almost as old as the Chinese, and this statement provoked such hostility toward him that he did not dare to go to the capital when he returned in 1878. Li Hongzhang, one of the most powerful officials in shaping China’s foreign policy in the late nineteenth century, regarded Guo Songdao highly, but this did not help the latter, so after the political gaffe he had to retire. Wei Yuan, author of the famous *Illustrated Gazetteer of Maritime Countries* (*Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志) of 1844, admitted that Europe also had literature and education. He “proved” this assertion by pointing out that Jesus had read the Confucian classics in Latin, and some Confucian ideas found a place in Christianity. Wei Yuan did not produce a shred of evidence in support of his thesis, but his idea marked the beginning of a school of thought that believed that Chinese civilization provided the material for the origin of all other civilizations (Ch’en 65; Cohen 30).

<sup>16</sup> The logical inconsistency of this notion is demonstrated by Joseph Levenson who notes that Chinese learning has always been praised as substance precisely because of its *yong* [function]. The neat *ti-yong* formula neglects the fact that when Western learning is applied as *yong*, it would not supplement Chinese learning as desired, but it would supplant it (Levenson, *Confucian China* 1: 61).

(1811-1872), and Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901)—understood Western technological superiority as gadgetry that could transform China into the image of the Golden age created by Chinese political philosophers. They did not consider the intellectual and cultural bases of Western progress: the Western concept of human nature, the importance of Roman law, the implementation of curiosity in the scientific method, or the theory of progress (Swisher 36-7).<sup>17</sup>

The first Chinese intellectual who understood well the role of the spiritual-intellectual component in the West was Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854-1921). Initially Yan Fu's ideas represented a new vision of reality, rejecting the values lying in the heart of Confucian culture, but the outbreak of World War I had a profound influence on him. He condemned Western civilization, declared the way of Confucius and Mencius supreme, and came to the conclusion that Western progress had only led to selfishness and corruption. Yet his preoccupation with wealth and power and his positive response to the Faustian element in Western civilization “have remained fundamental features of the consciousness of the Chinese intelligentsia [...] whether they have been labeled socialist, liberal, or even neo-traditionalist” (Schwartz 242).

Despite the failures of the Self-strengthening movement, the famous “Memorial of ten thousand words” presented to the throne in 1895, urging resistance to Japan and a wide range of reforms, echoed Zhang Zhidong's general *ti-yong* stance. The Memorial

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<sup>17</sup> Bertrand Russell's understanding of Eastern and Western civilizations shows a striking similarity with the *ti-yong* formula. According to Russell, what the Westerners “have to teach the Chinese is not morals, or ethical maxims about government, but science and technical skill”; moreover, the Westerners should learn from the Chinese “a just conception of the ends of life.” He defines the most important problem for Chinese intellectuals as acquiring Western knowledge without the mechanistic outlook, which for him was “the habit of regarding mankind as raw material, to be moulded by our scientific manipulation into whatever form may happen to suit our fancy.” He considered Imperialism, Bolshevism, and the Y. M. C. A equal in possessing this habit, in contrast to the traditional Chinese outlook (Russell *The Problem* 81-2, 199-213).



was written by Confucian scholars of a younger generation, gathered together in Beijing for the 1895 *jinshi* examinations, and coordinated by Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929). Some scholars argue that the 1898 Reform Movement was a continuation of self-strengthening efforts, while others see it as the highest point of an unprecedented campaign for reform (Wong 514). Kang was the first Chinese intellectual to propose to the emperor that the traditional Chinese state be replaced with a modern state modeled on the West. Chang Hao points out that although there are traces of Western scientific thinking in Kang's works, the influence of Western sciences is superficial rather than substantial, and Kang holds the traditional teleological mentality, "which saw moral-spiritual values inherent in the structure of the universe"(32).

Liang Qichao, Kang's most influential disciple, was a brilliant scholar and journalist. Joseph R. Levenson distinguishes three phases of Liang's ideas concerning Western and Chinese civilizations. In the beginning, Liang discovered within Chinese tradition what he valued in the West. Then he rejected "the West" and "China" as valid terms for comparison, and shifted his attention to the building and defense of the nation. During the third period, Liang reintroduced "the West" and "China," and reinterpreted their relationship using the dichotomy of the "Materialistic West" and the "Spiritual East." After returning from the Paris Peace Conference which violated China's national rights, Liang condemned contemporary Western civilization. The advancement of science and the conquest of nature, once deeply admired, were now seen as the main reasons for Western spiritual bankruptcy. Levenson notes the substantial similarities between Liang's ideas during the last phase and Zhang Zhidong *ti-yong* formula. The crucial difference

caused by the passage of time is that Zhang begged the literati to see that Western learning could be used, while Liang begged the younger generation to go back to the classics and see that Chinese spirit existed (Levenson, *Liang* 1-11).

Economical, political, and social pressures in China around the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century brought about the emergence of a new force—nationalism. While other ideologies and movements waned and waxed during the twentieth century, nationalism was pivotal for all Chinese political leaders. The desire to blot out China's humiliation and to restore its political grandeur shaped their policies (Zhao 3-7). Contact with the West not only brought new values and ideas to China, but also had the effect of a cultural catalyst, intensifying the internal tensions within Chinese traditions. The crises of order, provoked by the collapse of tradition, forced the Chinese intelligentsia to search for meaning and order in both modern ideologies and traditional thought. Chang argues that the tremendous appeal of political religions such as nationalism and communism is due to the quest for solving this “crisis of faith” (189).

Neo-traditional thinkers searched for solutions for the spiritual crisis in traditional thought. There were three neo-traditional movements between the 1898 reform and the May Fourth Movement, namely, the National Essence (*guo cui* 国粹) Movement, Liang Qichao's movement defining and defending a historically rooted “national character” (*guo xing* 国性), and the movement based on Kang Youwei's proposal for turning Confucianism into a state cult and establishing Confucianism as a modern belief system. These trends of neo-traditional thought shared animosity toward dominant Western values: competitive individualism, profit seeking, and utilitarianism, while

defending the opposite core Chinese values. “Spiritual East” and “Materialistic West” were commonplace in neo-traditionalist rhetoric suggesting that spiritual values can exist apart from socio-political reality. The “national essence” critique of Westernization and its model of national history emphasizing a unique Chinese culture were carried on by the Guomindang scholars. The Neo-traditionalists’ opposition to Westernization of culture made a considerable contribution to anti-imperialism and nationalism (Furth 43-4). The most influential neo-traditionalist during the May Fourth era was Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893-1988). He believed that the Western way should be accepted, but the Western attitude toward life should be changed. According to him, Chinese tradition had much to offer to the modern world to facilitate a careful and “fundamental transformation” “*genben gaiguo* 根本改过” of Western culture. Liang contended that the basic principles of Confucianism—moderation, happiness in self-contentedness, benevolent love, and disinterested action—can transform Western civilization.<sup>18</sup>

After World War I, there were three basic groups of intellectuals in China, representing different schools of thought: first, those disillusioned with the application of Western institutions to China, who were turning back to traditional values; second, those like Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), who continued to believe in Western liberalism; and, third, the more radical intellectuals like Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879-1942) and Li Dazhao 李大釗 (1888-1927) who began to introduce Marxism (Teng and Fairbank 251-52).<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>18</sup> Hu Shi criticized Liang’s characterization of Chinese civilization stating that self-contentedness is not uniquely Chinese and it is known to other civilizations too, but three years later he wrote that the most significant characteristic of Eastern civilization is self-contentedness (*zhi zu* 知足), and that of Western one non-self-contentedness (*bu zhi zu* 不知足) (See Chow 332).

<sup>19</sup> Teng and Fairbank define the period from 1912 to 1923 as “one of the great germinal periods in the realm of Chinese thought” (231). The Republican Revolution of 1911 neither brought about national unity

Marxist perspective permitted a release from national humiliation because the balance shifted back toward belief that external forces were responsible for many of China's problems. The growing interest in Marxism in China in 1919 and 1920 was stimulated by the same disillusionment with Western liberal democracies that prompted the post-war critique of the "Materialistic West." Marxism was seen as the carrier of Western scientific and democratic heritage: therefore, Chinese faith in democracy and science could be saved by uprooting them from the soil of contemporary Europe and America and projecting them in the future (Furth 93-5). Many intellectuals turned to Marxism because it allowed them to be iconoclastic and nationalistic at the same time. The Leninist theory of imperialism and his critique of the Western world were accepted not only by communists but also by intellectuals and politicians connected with the Guomindang. Despite the problematic application of some Marxist concepts like "Asiatic mode of production" or categories such as "feudalism" and "capitalism" to the analysis of Chinese reality, the influence of the Chinese Communist Party was growing.

In 1959, Mao stated that things such as trains, airplanes, and big guns do not need to have national style, but politics and art should have national style. In the early years of the People's Republic, Mao still saw Marxism as the foundation that would ensure the reformation of China. However, by the late 1950s there was a growing emphasis on the ideas derived from China's past. Mao's emphasis on the political relevance of ethical values and on the educational mission of the state shows an unmistakable Chinese

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nor averted foreign aggression. After this failed attempt to establish a parliamentary democracy, China plunged into a ten-year period of political fragmentation usually referred to as the Warlord era (1916-27). The government submission to the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference ignited a protest of unprecedented scale and energy. It is commonly known as the May Fourth Movement because protests began with students demonstrations against the Versailles Treaty on May 4, 1919.

national style. He moved from the rejection of Zhang Zhidong's formula to its acceptance, and in 1956 declared: "We cannot adopt Western learning as the substance... We can only use Western technology" (qtd. in Schram 496). Mao's call for "sinification" of the most radical of Western philosophies, Marxism-Leninism, is a new reflection of the swinging of the pendulum from the violent rejection of traditional values in favor of Western ideas and a return to the reaffirmation of the dignity of Chinese culture in modern Chinese history. Stuart Schram's conclusion that the process of cross-cultural borrowing which started in China more than a century ago has still not produced any clear-cut results is the best description of the complexities of the process of China's communication with the Western world (348). Russia's relations with the West reveal similar complexities.

### ***Russia and the West***

After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Moscow became the center of Orthodox Christianity and the doctrine of Moscow as the "Third Rome"—the last and greatest center of Christianity—was created. The creation of this doctrine marked both the beginning of the belief that Russia had a holy mission and the birth of Russian messianism. While China's efforts to define itself with respect to the West were due to Western political, economic, and military aggression, Russia's problems with the West intensified with Westernization reforms initiated by one of the country's most controversial and powerful leaders—Peter the Great (1672-1725). Although interest in the West can be traced back both to the Kievan period of Russian history and to the period of the State of Moscow, it was Peter the Great who brought Western culture to

Russia. The reforms of Peter the Great were met with resistance that made the acceptance of Western culture in Russia problematic. According to the prominent Russian historian Nikolai Karamzin (1766-1826), who was terrified by the French Revolution, Russia stood for true Christianity, for the established order, and for enlightened autocracy, while the West represented atheism, chaos, and revolution.

The defeat of Napoleon in 1812 was interpreted by Russian thinkers as a sign for Russia's holy mission to oppose the Antichrist and bring about a rebirth of Christianity. After the triumph over Napoleon, the notion of the virtuous soul of Russian peasants began to be linked to the Russian mission of being the savior of an old and corrupted Europe. The victorious military campaign in Europe, however, brought about the increased awareness that Russia needed to follow the more advanced social and political patterns of Europe, and led to the Decembrist Uprising in 1825. The Decembrists demonstrated the crucial importance of Western influence in Russian political life. The Russian state saw them as the "enemy within" embodying the spirit of the new, revolutionary Europe which betrayed the ideals of true Christianity. In reaction to their failure and under the influence of German Romanticism<sup>20</sup>, Russian Romantic nationalism emerged. Prince Vladimir Odoevsky (1803-69) believed that Russia's lofty mission in the world was to breathe a new life into the fossilized European culture. In his famous novel *Russian Nights* (*Ruskie nochii* 1844), he wrote that the European soul has turned into a steam engine in which he saw screws and wheels but not life (Odoevsky 37-8).

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<sup>20</sup> Robert C. Williams explores the complex interrelationship of Russian and European thought, especially German romanticism, in shaping the idea of "Russian soul" (*Ruskaia dusha*). Russian thinkers borrowed the idea of national soul to express a very Russian idea. The idea of "Russian soul" provided a way to acculturation to Europe without losing the sense of national superiority (See Williams 573-88).

Odoevsky's German mentors shared most of his ideas. In 1842, Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) told him that Russia "was destined for something great" (qtd. in Walicki 79).

Petr Chaadaev (1794-1856) is the author of eight *Philosophical Letters* (written in French from 1828 to 1831). The publication of the first letter proclaiming that Russia had been overlooked by Providence and did not belong to the moral sphere ignited an intellectual storm with long-lasting ramifications. He was the first to suggest that Russia might never be like Europe, and the problems formulated by him were at the center of Russian intellectual debate during the nineteenth century. Chaadaev subsequently changed his views and declared that Russia's "lack of history" can offer a possibility for promising future developments. This idea that Russian backwardness might be a special advantage often appeared in the intellectual debate over the West (Walicki 85-91).

The originality of Russian intellectual life in the nineteenth century is due to the cross-pollination of ideas and influences in a country forced to modernize within a compressed span of time. The rapid influx of Western ideas and influences into Russian culture was combined with resistance to them, and a rediscovery of Russia's traditions. Two large intellectual movements began to take shape: one in favor of Westernization, called "Westernism" (*zapadnichestvo*) and the other underscoring the Russian contribution to humanity, called "Slavophilism" (*slavyanofil'stvo*, etymologically meaning "Love of Slavs). The controversy between them was at the center of intellectual life after 1840.

The most prominent representatives of Slavophilism were Ivan Kireevsky (1806-56), Aleksei Khomiakov (1804-60), Konstantin Aksakov (1817-60), his brother Ivan Aksakov (1823-86) and Yuri Samarin (1819-76). In the teachings of the Slavophiles, the

problem of Russia and the West had numerous religious, political, philosophical, and personal aspects. The most important theme was that Russian civilization was organic, Orthodox, and harmonious, and the West was materialistic and rationalistic. The Slavophiles created a conservative utopia based on their belief in the uniqueness of Russian historical development. They idealized the Ancient Rus' by representing it as a place of perfect harmony populated by people lacking aggressive and possessive impulses and preserving the true message of Christianity as opposed to rationalized Catholicism. The idyllic state of Ancient Rus' was disrupted by the introduction of foreign tendencies to destroy the organic life of the Russian people. Western civilization was seen as "logico-technical," soulless, and subjugated to industrial production. This is how Kireevsky described man's slavery to mechanical production:

Only one serious thing was left to man, and that was industry. For him the reality of being survived only in his physical person. Industry rules the world without faith or poetry. In our times it unites and divides people. It determines one's fatherland, it delineates classes, it lies at the base of state structures, it moves nations, it declares war, makes peace, changes mores, gives direction to science, and determines the character of culture. Men bow down before it and erect temples to it. It is the real deity in which people sincerely believe and to which they submit. Unselfish activity has become unconceivable; it has acquired the same significance in the contemporary world as chivalry had in the time of Cervantes. (qtd. in Walicki 95)



What Kireevsky criticizes here is not the West *per se* but industrialization and its ramifications, therefore, the conservative utopianism of the Slavophiles can be interpreted as preliminary criticism of future Russian modernization. The Slavophiles pronounced European rationalism, materialism, and egoism worthless. They believed that the Slavs “[...] had always been distinguished by their peaceful occupation of agriculture, their strong family ties, and their organization into communes. The idea of force, compulsion, law was foreign to them” (Riasanovsky 75). The faith in Russia’s holy historical mission became central to Dostoevsky. His belief was that a genuine Russian is a universal man, and Russia’s mission is to save humanity. Like Dostoevsky, Vladimir Solov’ev (1853-1900), the son of a leading Westernizer-historian Sergei Solov’ev and one of the most influential Russian philosophers at the end of the nineteenth century, believed that Russia had the potential to initiate a new spiritual beginning in the world.

Westernism (*zapadnichestvo*) was not a homogeneous movement with a single ideology. The most important figures in Westernism were Vissarion Belinsky (1811-48), Aleksandr Herzen (1812-70), and so-called liberal Westernizers like Timofei Granovsky (1813-55) and Konstantin Kavelin (1818-85) who rejected Herzen and Belinsky’s atheism and proposed moderate reforms preserving the privileged position of the gentry. The thinkers associated with this movement pointed out the positive role of the West in Russian modernization and looked to the West for political and economic models. They defended the autonomy of personality and argued that Europe provided a model for the emancipation of the individual from authority and oppressive traditions. The debate among the Westernizers was focused on what and how much Russia should accept from the West.

As with many of his contemporaries, prominent literary critic Belinsky started as a disciple of Hegel.<sup>21</sup> His dialectical view of history formed under Hegel's influence was combined with his inability to accept the Hegelian thesis about the rationality of the real. In a letter written in 1841, he formulated the reason for his estrangement from Hegelian thought: "I do not want happiness, even as a gift, if I cannot be easy about the fate of all my brethren, my own flesh and blood" (qtd. in Walicki 124). The deep ethical anxiety captured in this quote was to become the most important concern of Russian literature created at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Belinsky rejected Slavophiles' ideas about the future of Russia and advocated the progress of civilization, education, and humanitarian values. His outlook was a combination of a belief in a bourgeois democracy yet a dislike of the bourgeoisie itself. The criticism of capitalism and the disgust with bourgeois vulgarity in the writings of the Westernizers were paired with the realization that capitalist societies were superior compared to the autocratic semi-feudal Russia in terms of economic and political development.

Herzen's belief in the "idea of personality" and the emancipation of the individual as a reality in Western countries was shattered after his personal contacts with Western Europe. His observations of the life in Europe convinced him that Russia should look for its own way of development and gave rise to his doctrine of "Russian socialism"—an obvious departure from Westernism. He borrowed from the Slavophiles the view that collectivism was a native feature of Russians and that Russian village communes offered

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<sup>21</sup> The enormous influence of Hegel's ideas on educated Russians is partly due to the common conviction, derived from his thought, that the Spirit's manifestation in Europe had reached its apogee and was coming to an end. The new incarnation of Spirit was expected to take place in Russia, not in North America, because of the Russian people's proximity to Europe, their lack of identification with only one part of Europe, and mainly because of their greater spiritual depth (Ward 21-2; Billington 10-15).

a possibility for the development of a new and higher social form. Having rejected the belief in the guidance of historical events by a rational spirit, he used his conviction of the importance of human choices and actions to argue in favor of Russian socialism. Like Chaadaev and Odoevsky before him, he believed that there is a “true” pre-industrial and a “false” capitalist Europe (Neumann 48). The Russians’ “lack of history” gave them the chance to preserve the best of pre-industrial Europe and build on the institution of the village commune. The doctrine of Russian socialism was very influential among the representatives of Russian populists.

Populism (*Narodnichestvo*) is a broad term designating all revolutionary and reformist democratic ideologies of the 1870s. It advocated the view that Russia could skip the capitalist stage of development. Populists were concerned with Russian problems specifically and their main goal was to avoid the development of capitalism in Russia—a goal based on careful reading of Karl Marx’s *Capital*. Populists did not notice the discrepancy between Marx’s theory of historical necessity and their notion of Russia’s unique development. Lenin’s older brother, Aleksandr Ulianov (1866-87), believed that ideologically developed countries, even if they were historically backward, could skip some phases of their “natural” development. The disillusionment with populist methods of struggle against czarism led to an increasing popularity of Marxism. The Marxist movement broke into Mensheviks and Bolsheviks over the issue of how thoroughly Russia should follow Western models. Menshevism was firmly rooted in Western thought, whereas Bolsheviks were sometimes called “Slavophile Marxists” (Neumann 93).

Lenin refused to accept Marxism as a rigid system of ready-made truths and argued that the lessons of capitalist economic relations and class struggle can be learned even in autocratic Russia. He opposed the ideas of Georgy Plekhanov (1856-1918), who believed that the mission of the proletariat is to complete the Westernization of Russia initiated by Peter the Great. Lenin led the country to an ambitious experiment to achieve a direct transition from the dethroning of an autocrat to the building of socialism. Russian exceptionalism and messianism found another embodiment in the theory of “socialism in one country.” Stalin’s battles with his opponents were often fought along the lines of a Russia versus Europe debate. Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938) attacked Stalin’s program of super-industrialization as “Asiatic” and privately referred to him as “Genghis Khan.” While Bukharin branded him as an Oriental despot reverting to czarist ways to transform the country, Stalin emphasized the need for industrialization in order to “to catch up and overtake” (*dognat’ i peregnat’*) Europe and America economically. After World War II, the nationalist sentiment tried to expand the idea of Russia’s moral superiority over Europe even further. At the beginning of Cold War, Europe’s position as the supreme Other was challenged by the dominant role of the United States in the world (Neumann 121-130; Shlapentokh 158).<sup>22</sup> The East-West dichotomy was gradually displaced by an opposition that was at the center of ideological and political controversies in the twentieth century—the dichotomy between socialism and capitalism. As we will see in the following chapters, some of the travel books’ writers acknowledged the advanced level of

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<sup>22</sup> Before the end of World War II, “the West,” “Western Europe,” and “Europe” were interchangeable terms in the Russian intellectual debate. North America was perceived as somehow different. The end of the war, however, marked the beginning of a period during which the United States was the dominant power in the West and often symbolized the West (Shlapentokh).

material culture in the West, yet perceived the socialist project in both the Soviet Union and China as ethically superior to capitalism.

Even this brief summary of attitudes toward the West in China, Russia, and the Soviet Union shows that the idea of the “Materialistic West” as opposed to the “spiritual” Chinese or Russian culture had often been argued in the modern intellectual history of both countries. The voluntarist notion that the fruits of capitalist production can be achieved while rejecting its *modus operandi* led to ambitious social experimentations in both countries. While China’s concern with wealth and power moderates the criticism of material progress and its consequences, the Slavophile idea that the material progress of Europe came at the cost of its spiritual death has many different incarnations in Russia. Let us now see how the United States is seen in both countries against the background of the prevalent ideas about the West.

### ***Chinese Images of the United States***

The beginning of Sino-American relations was characterized by relatively positive images of America as the least aggressive of the Western “barbarian” countries. This was the only country strong enough to resist Britain and it was believed that it differed from Western Europe in many ways, in part due to the lack of imperial ambitions, dedication to liberty, and successful elimination of class and racial discrimination (Ch’en 75). Summarizing the similarities and differences in Chinese images of America and American images of China, R. David Arkush and Leo O. Lee use Warren Cohen’s schema of American attitudes, paralleled by their schema of Chinese attitudes:

## Chinese images of the United States

## American images of China

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1841-1900 exotic wonderment; fear	contempt; discrimination
1900-1950 admiration of model America, criticism of flaws in values	paternalism for a weak China, charity toward its good people
1950-1971 rampant anti-Americanism on the mainland; friendly familiarity with Taiwan	Cold War fear of Chinese aggression and Communist yellow peril
1971- rediscovery and respect	recognition and respect (302)

The early Chinese views of the United States are characterized by Chang-fang Chen as the “chimera of paradise” (31). The descriptions from the eighteenth century were idealized and colored by romantic fantasies. In a compilation sponsored by Lin Zexu—*Sizhou zhi* 四洲志 (*Gazetteer of the Four Continents* 1840)—two prominent images which would recur in the later writings appeared for the first time: America as a paragon of democracy and as a cornucopia. Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857) is the author of *Haiguo Tuzhi* 海國圖志 (*Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Countries* 1844), a work permeated with strong ethnocentrism. He developed the famous strategy of “using barbarians to control barbarians” “*yi yi zhi yi* 以夷治夷” in which the United States was regarded as one country that China might use to limit the penetration of other Western “barbarians.” This sympathetic image of the United States is the result of his conviction that the wealthy and powerful America was not arrogant toward China and did not bully

small countries (Hunt 46). According to Yang Yusheng, the development of independent Chinese views on the United States begins with Wei Yuan (13).

Liang Tingnan 梁廷柅 (1796-1861) is the author of *Heshen guo shuo* 合省國說 (*An Account of the United "Provinces"*). His enthusiastic support of American democracy shows that for him, the virtue of appealing to the voice of the people still rang true (Yang 15-7). Xu Jiyu 徐繼畲 (1795-1873) collected all the available materials concerning the United States and added his personal commentaries in *Yinghuan zhilüe* 瀛環志略 (*Brief Description of the Countries beyond the Oceans*). He emphasized the success of the American rebellion against the British. As Michael Hunt points out, Xu's description of American President George Washington seemed more Chinese than foreign (49). Xu's translation of "the United States of America" "*Milijian hezhongguo* 米利坚合众国" is almost identical with the contemporary standard "*Meilijian hezhongguo* 美利坚合众国" (Yang 14). Among the intellectuals of that time Wang Tao 王韜 (1828-1897) was the first one who actually met and worked with Western "barbarians." His well-informed opinions of the United States were dispersed in a collection of random notes discussing wide-ranging topics (Cohen *Wang T'ao*).

The earliest account of a journey overseas that mentions America, *Hai lu* 海錄 (*Record of the Seas*), appeared in Canton in the 1830s and was dictated by an old blind man, Xie Qinggao 謝清高 (1765-1821) to a young scribe, Yang Bingnan 楊炳南 (fl.1820-1839). It contained details about the location, shape, and local products of the country that the local Cantonese customarily called "the Flowery Flag Country 花旗國" and mentioned that people of *Milijian* (another transliteration of America) "have an

uncanny talent for turning out exquisite products” (qtd. in Chen 34-5). Lin Zhen 林鍼 (1824-?) visited America in 1847 and after his return published several works about his travels abroad reflecting his fascination with Americans’ highly developed technology, abundant natural resources, and the democratic political system (Yang 21-3).

One important characteristic of early Chinese books on America is already evident in the aforementioned works: the dual (both internal and external) angle of vision, that is, the outside world is explored mainly to provide models for improving China. This approach is typical of the reform-minded Chinese intellectuals of 1840s who produced seminal works that tried to elucidate the world beyond the confines of Chinese culture. Chinese materials and documents written before the 1850s create an image of the United States as a paradise. Its vast territory, fertile soil, and bountiful water resources provided ideal conditions for rapid agricultural development. As early as the 1850s, in the Chinese writings about America the myth of a democratic cornucopia is paralleled by the myth of the United States as a “melting pot.” The authorial comments in *Sizhou zhi* were focused on the possible birth of a new race of sturdy and self-reliant people who were capable of creating a New World, free from the injustices of the Old World. The efficacy of democratic institutions also provoked excitement and admiration. As the knowledge of the United States increased, Chinese intellectuals “became surprised at the possibility that a Chinese ideal of the remote past could actually be realized” (Chen 52). Washington was seen by Chinese intellectuals as the embodiment of cardinal virtues embraced by the Chinese sages. His personal integrity, military prowess, and selfless “abdication of his throne” became a source of inspiration. Washington’s “abdication” was compared to the abdication of three sage-rulers in the Golden Age of China (Chen 62-63; Yang 18-20).



During the Self-Strengthening Period China sent its first ministers to Washington and many accounts of visits to the Western countries and travel impressions appeared. The first visitors, officials and diplomats of the Qing empire, sent home detailed descriptions of American buildings, factories, trains, ships and military installations. The diary-form accounts of the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century were characterized by meticulously recorded factual information. However, there was an ambivalence hidden behind the lavish praise of technological advances, best summarized in a memorial about the mission of Anson Burlingame (1820-1870) written by a senior tutor to the emperor: “Their customs are nothing but lasciviousness and cunning, while their inclinations are simply fiendish and malignant” (qtd. in Chen 93-4).

During the Opium War (1839-1842), the United States followed the British gunboats, violating China’s sovereignty, which sent a message to the Chinese that they must also be vigilant against the land of freedom and democracy. The Burlingame mission was a watershed event in the history of cultural and diplomatic contacts between the United States and China. Chen argues that the Burlingame mission expanded the horizons of Chinese intellectuals’ views of the world, and the deeply rooted conviction of cultural superiority was gradually replaced by a more realistic assessment of Western cultures. The travelogues written by the high-ranking Manchu official Zhi Gang 志剛 and one of the English interpreters of the mission, Zhang Deyi 張德彝 (1847-1919), differ from previous accounts in terms of their objectivity and authenticity. Zhi Gang paid a high price for his account of American technological marvels; his career ended because writing favorably about foreign matters was dangerous during that time. Zhang Deyi’s relatively obscure official position allowed him to express his true feelings, and he openly

criticized the egocentric pursuit of political interests he observed during the presidential election campaign of 1868. Chen notes that Zhang's attitude toward Western civilization is dubious: admiration for democracy and the civility of Western people on the one hand, and belief in the superiority of Chinese civilization, on the other (125).

For the first time China was officially represented in an international exhibition of agriculture and industry during the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876. The Chinese envoy Li Gui 李圭 (1842-1903), who wrote an account of the exhibition, expressed not only his admiration for the technological triumphs displayed at the exhibition but also his criticism toward the traditional Chinese contempt for machinery as corrosive elements that could defile the human mind. He argued that these misconceptions were responsible for China's backwardness. Li found the Americans more open-minded about foreign ways than others he met at the exhibition and had a great appreciation for American social institutions. He openly expressed his admiration for the achievements of American women and argued that Chinese women should be educated as well (Desnoyers 1-71).

The overall tone of admiration in the writings of the Chinese envoys in the United States gradually changed because of the xenophobic reaction against Chinese immigration. Bigotry, hostility, and violence against Chinese workers were spreading across America and the Chinese were subjected to increasing number of prohibitions. The worst single act of racial hatred occurred in 1885 at Rock Springs, Wyoming, when twenty-eight Chinese workers were killed. Moreover, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 seriously damaged the relationship between China and the United States and Chinese images of America deteriorated. The picture of a paradise on earth had been radically

changed and the United States began to be described as a hell for Chinese people (Yang 38-40).

China's changed perceptions of the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century are best exemplified in the works of three leading intellectuals: Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848-1905), who was China's Consul General in San Francisco from 1882 to 1885, Kang Youwei, and Liang Qichao. All three were committed reformers and gifted men of letters. They visited many American cities; inspected steel mills, shipyards, and arsenals; admired libraries and universities. In the end, they all changed their favorable opinions of the United States to unfavorable. Huang Zunxian and Kang Youwei wrote several narrative poems to express their thoughts and feelings, while Liang Qichao published a diary-form travel account entitled *Journey to the New Continent* (*Xin dalu youji* 新大陸遊記), which was remarkably influential and shaped the views of many twentieth-century Chinese (Arkush and Lee 82; Yang 52).

As China's Consul General in San Francisco Huang Zunxian came into direct confrontation with racial discrimination against the Chinese living in America and expressed his doubts about the myth of America as a political and economic utopia. After arriving in San Francisco, Huang realized that to be a Chinese in the United States was to be an object of contempt and the concept of the great "Celestial Empire" was a laughing-stock. He noted that it would be easier to be a black slave without a sense of history than a Mandarin in California. However, he continued to consider the United States the most advanced nation in the world and preserved his faith in the ideals of Washington and Thomas Jefferson (Kamachi 239-260). This ambivalence is shared by Huang's prominent contemporary, Kang Youwei. Although a believer in the Confucian canon, Kang

acknowledged the merits of Western technology and political institutions. But his journey showed him the dark side of democracy and party politics. He also feared that industrial production would increase disparities between poor and rich. The Chinese Exclusion Act, which singled out the Chinese for discrimination, shattered Kang's optimistic views of Americans. In 1905, he met President Theodore Roosevelt and asked him to use his power to modify the Exclusion Act (Chen 162-69).

Liang Qichao's initial enthusiasm for the United States' unique political institutions was also affected by the question of immigration. In addition, Liang's critical evaluations of the United States were influenced by his mounting fear of America's imperialistic policies. During his trip in 1903, he pondered whether the Western political system could be transplanted into China. His contacts with the overseas Chinese community in San Francisco convinced him that China was not yet ripe for democracy because of some shortcomings of national character. Moreover, the centrifugal tendencies of republicanism and liberalism made him very cautious about their possible implementation in China and reaffirmed his preferences for so-called enlightened absolutism. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 forced him to question the concept of the "melting pot" and to suggest that what Americans had always had in mind was not a melting pot but a scalding pot, in which immigrants were cleansed of their alien lifestyle. Liang considered President Roosevelt's expansionist policies dangerous for the future of the world and especially for the weak China. Another treat for China was the colossal business organizations, called economic trusts "*tuolasi* 托辣斯." Liang explored the origins and development of these gigantic economic machines and expressed his anxiety that their tendency toward expansion and exploitation of the world as a potentially

limitless market spells disaster for China. The images he used to depict the trusts were eloquent enough: “the demons” “*guaiwu* 怪物,” “the monster kings” “*mowang* 魔王,” and “the Twentieth-Century Mammoth” “*ershi shiji zhe juling* 二十世紀之巨靈.” After analyzing a trust’s power and ability to expand, he concluded that their power would make them the sole sovereign of the entire world in the twentieth century (Chen 256-57; Yang 62-3). Liang Qichao, just like Kang Youwei and Huang Zunxian, experienced bitter disappointment comparing his ideas of the United States as a potential model for China’s modernization and the actual country he visited. The idyllic pictures presented in the writings from the end of nineteenth century were strongly tainted with the evils of racism and discrimination.

Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙 (1866-1925) and his fellow revolutionaries believed that the United States could offer a model for their quest to establish a republic and create a powerful and independent China. Sun was deeply interested in American constitutional principles. He pronounced the United States “the most civilized, rich, and powerful country” “*shijie zui wenming, zui fuqiang zhi guojia* 世界最文明, 最富强之国” and believed it would welcome a new democratic regime in China (Yang 65). After 1911, when the Republic of China was established, Chinese people placed great hopes in President Woodrow Wilson’s fourteen points and Chen Duxiu expressed his high regard for President Wilson. The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 shattered the hopes of the Chinese. The positive image of the United States created by Hu Shi and other intellectuals who had studied in the United States and admired its values was now paired with the evolving Marxist-Leninist image of America as an imperialist power. Chen Duxiu warned: “Don’t be cheated by the U.S. imperialists,” and “Don’t lead a part of the

people or young students to be friendly with the U.S. imperialism unconsciously” (qtd. in Hu 6).

During the Nationalist period, however, American influence in China was substantial. Around 20,000 Chinese studied at American colleges and then returned to China. American missionaries played a leading role in establishing the modern Chinese educational and health systems, supported by American foundations and philanthropists. Peking Union Medical College, the Geological Survey of China, Academia Sinica, and a dozen Jesuit universities including Nanjing University, Yanjing and Qinghua in Beijing, Nankai in Tianjin, St. Johns in Shanghai, and Lingnan in Guangzhou were all established due to those efforts. An estimated 6,500 students graduated from these universities (Fairbank 327-35). President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal policy gave rise to an animated discussion on the content and ramifications of this policy. Much Chinese ink was devoted to the evaluation of his efforts to revive the American economy, and the assessments ranged from “fascist type dictatorship” to “communist economic policies” (Yang 107-33). There were different voices, however, embodying a more ambivalent attitude toward the growing power of America.

Chinese writers in the first decade of the twentieth century created a corpus of anti-American literature expressing anger at the humiliation of Chinese people in the United States and the incapability of the Manchu regime to protect its citizens. The works conjuring negative images of America and the anti-American goods boycott of 1905 manifest the awakening of nationalist consciousness in China. Chinese newspapers and magazines published numerous articles exposing the hypocrisy of the United States government and protesting against the persecution of Chinese immigrants. At the same

time, the images of America created by Chinese students who came to study at American universities still carried the idyllic flavor of the initial notions of the United States as a democratic cornucopia. Hu Shi, the Chinese intellectual most closely associated with the United States in the public mind, had known America for half a century, during which time he described the country as an advanced, classless society without disparity between rich and poor. Hu's diary of his seven years as a student in the United States shows a Chinese who felt at home in American culture and society (Arkush and Lee, 107-08; Yang 98-103). The letters and diaries of other students studying in America during the same period reveal preoccupation with the introduction of democracy *De xiansheng* 德先生 and science *Sai xiansheng* 赛先生 as the only possible salvation for China. Not all Chinese students in the United States of that time shared the same enthusiasm about American institutions and values. Wen Yiduo 闻一多 (1899-1946) expressed his indignation and bitterness toward racial injustice in the United States, and during his stay in America (1922-1925) described the life of "a young Chinese of principles" in this country as intolerable (Ch'en 160).

The highly visible American military, economic, and political presence in China after World War II led to confrontations between American servicemen and the local Chinese. The infamous Shen Chong rape case revived memories of "American insensitivity and racial arrogance" and the humiliation from the "unequal treaty" era (Hong 176; Yang 198). The Chinese Communist Party effectively mobilized general hostility and popularized the idea that national unification and economic modernization required a fervent denunciation of American imperialism. In an interview in 1946, Mao Zedong for the first time declared that the American reactionaries are "a paper tiger" "*zhi*

*laohu* 纸老虎” without real power, and that the real strength of America belongs to the American people (Yang 231). After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1949, the Marxist-Leninist image of America triumphed over the liberal one. The culmination of hostile attitudes occurred during the Korean War in 1950 when the United States Army and the People’s Liberation Army met head-on. During the Korean War, the prominent Chinese journalist, Yang Gang, who spent four years in the United States in the late 1940s, published her book *Meiguo zaji* 美国杂记 (*Notes on America*). She condemned the aggressive nature of American imperialism and concluded that “[e]xcept [for a] very few progressive Americans, the large majority in that country is still living in ignorance. They don’t know the significance of their lives” (qtd. in Yuan 648). Until the normalization of Sino-American relations in 1970s, America was vilified as a dangerous imperialist power, an enemy of struggling Third World countries. Anti-American images became *de rigueur* in the official media and academic circles. The Nixon-Mao meeting in 1972, however, indicated the beginning of the decline of anti-Americanism at all measurable levels, and America was no longer vilified in public.

Despite the lifting of ideological pressure, the images of America produced in the period after normalization show the ambivalence characterizing most of the previous works. Yuan Ming points out that the first group of students studying in the United States consisted of 125 young Chinese men, but from 1979 to 1988, about 56,000 mainland Chinese students and scholars visited the United States. Nonetheless, according to him, contemporary mainland Chinese intellectuals still saw the United States as a place of mystery and fascination where “the lives of many Chinese workers were taken away without mercy on the one hand, while on the other, generations of Chinese elites have



been nurtured” (Yuan 646). According to David Shambaugh, post-1972 travelogue writing can be divided in two large groups: articles published in newspapers and in journals and books. Works in both groups are marked by “the general preference for the experiential over the intellectual,” and they provide “a random yet integrated view” of the United States. Shambaugh also notes the dual (both internal and external) angle of vision Chen writes about; that is, the United States is explored mainly to provide models for strengthening China (151-52).

The post-1972 travelogues about the United States represent an image of a country “difficult to summarize,” in the words of Liang Qichao. The real encounter with a country as rich in contradictions as China itself both baffled and inspired Chinese writers. Some writers choose to follow the official line of presenting America as a corrupt capitalist country in which democratic demagoguery conceals actual plutocratic rule. The condemnation of New York’s crime and vice in Zhang Jie 张洁(b. 1937)’s “I Do Not Regret Having Gone to New York” ( *Wo bu houhui dao Niuyue qu* 我不后悔到纽约去), published in 1984, is comparable only to Gorky’s literary assault on this city written in 1906 (Zhang Jie 54-61; Gorky *City* 237-50). Yet travel books containing more sophisticated views taking into account American pluralism and democratic institutions began to appear. In Fei Xiaotong’s *Glimpses of America*, the author’s analysis of a “crisis of confidence” gripping society is moderated by an open admiration for the progress made after the war and the wonders of electronics. The two most popular travel books about America in the 1980s, Wang Zuomin’s *The American Kaleidoscope: Society, Landscape, People* and Liu Zongren’s *Two Years in the Melting Pot*, created a new, multilayered, and often controversial image of America. Nevertheless, analyzing the

images of the United States created after 1972, Yang points out that the theme of spiritual superiority appears in many books: “美国在物质上是富翁，在精神上却是乞丐” “With respect to the material, America is very rich, but when the spiritual is concerned, it is a beggar” (Yang 269).

In the variety of opinions about America in these travel books, there are still several common characteristics. The first one is the fascination with American economic and technological power. Feng Youlan summarizes this attitude in his memoir: “I arrived in the U.S. in 1919 and had direct contact with Western culture. A question always lingered in my mind. Why is the U.S. so rich? Why is China so poor?” (qtd. in Yuan 651). His second question shows the second typical trait—America is perceived and analyzed as a potential model for China’s amelioration. Ambivalence, which is the third common characteristic of travelogues, is a result not only of the discrepancy between the idealistic images of the United States as a paragon of democracy and the real country. It is rooted in the special vulnerability of Chinese intellectuals in modern times, created by a profound sense of national humiliation. Against this background, the overall moderate tone of most of the travelogues is admirable. Arkush and Lee argue that throughout the process of the interaction between China and the United States, the Chinese have shown a much greater degree of rational understanding than have the Americans (Arkush and Lee 302).

### ***Russian and Soviet Images of the United States***

The history of Russian-American relations begins with the establishment of the United States in 1776. Catherine the Great (r.1762-96) refused to recognize the United

States because of her complex relationships with Great Britain. Dealings with the young state were subordinated to the requirements of the larger geopolitical game with Western European nations. Alexander I (r.1801-25) was called “half an American” because of his correspondence with Thomas Jefferson and his interest in the United States Constitution. He established official diplomatic relations with the United States and, in 1809, John Quincy Adams became the first U.S. minister to Russia. Russia’s political attitude toward the United States was characterized by ambivalence—America was seen as a potential ally against the most powerful European nations and, at the same time, as a competitor and possible treat. The Russian intelligentsia’s ideas about America were also ambivalent.

The American War of Independence inspired thinkers as Aleksandr Radishchev (1749-1802) and the Decembrists. Radishchev wrote *Ode to Liberty (Vol’nost’*, 1781-1783) expressing his admiration for the ideas and causes of the American Revolutionary War.<sup>23</sup> The Decembrists studied the United States Constitution as a model for future reforms in Russia. The discussion of the injustices of slavery in America was used by the intelligentsia to oppose indirectly Russian serfdom. The Russian translation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was widely read. American literature played an important role in shaping the Russian view of America. Poe, Emerson, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Whitman, and Twain were very popular in the second half of the nineteenth century (Hasty and Fusso 8). In the 1830s, the preoccupation with Russia’s destiny and Russia’s problem with the West were reflected in the Russian images of America. The United States was approached differently by the Slavophiles and the Westernizers.

The Slavophiles showed a considerable interest in the United States. As early as 1830, in his “Review of Russian Letters for the Year 1829,” Kireevsky observed that only

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<sup>23</sup> For an English translation of a part of the ode see Grebenshikov 53.

two nations did not participate in “the general slumber” and only these two nations, Russia and the United States, promised hope for the future. The one-sided character of English culture of America, however, transferred all hopes to Russia. Gradually the Slavophiles came to occupy an emphatically hostile position toward America. The United States represented rationalism, legalism, and materialism in their most outrageous form. Kireevsky defines the American way of life as entirely devoted to personal profit and material comfort, egoistic and empty. In 1865, Ivan Aksakov published an article entitled “Concerning the Absence of Spiritual Content in the American People.” In this article, he argued that America’s contribution to humanity had no real value because the United States invented only mechanical things and lacked true art, science, and philosophy (Riazanovsky 111-14).

Westernizers’ view of America was considerably different. Herzen believed that, despite the fundamental institutional differences, Russia and the United States shared some common traits. In his *Letters to a Traveler (Pis'ma k puteshetvenniku)*, he declared that the two were the countries “of the immediate future” “*stranami blizhaishego budushtego*” (Herzen 349). He admired the American democratic political institutions but considered them limited by the infatuation with private property, which characterized bourgeois civilizations. The main psychological difference between Russian and American mentalities, according to Herzen, was in the attitude toward private property; there was a lack of reverence toward private property as an institution within Russian society. Nonetheless, he regarded the future roles of the United States and Russia in world history as mutually complementary and based on collaboration and fruitful exchange (Kucherov 38-47). Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-89), one of the most

important Russian radicals, zealously studied American political life and literature, and used his knowledge of the United States to criticize the deadly conformist atmosphere of Russia (Hecht 78-141). The idea of America as a laboratory for social experimentation inspired some young populists to establish communes in the American Midwest with hopes of transplanting them back to Russia at a later date. Leo Tolstoy's meetings with one of the founders of a commune in Kansas, Vladimir Konstantinovich Geins (1839-1888), influenced his opinion of the United States as a surrogate for Utopia. The works of social critic and economic reformer Henry George (1839-1897) made a deep impression on Tolstoy, and he used George's ideas to criticize the system of private land ownership. (Allen 34-62). The opinions of aforementioned Russian thinkers were based on their extensive readings. Eyewitness accounts of America began to appear at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The earliest account was written by one of the members of Russia's first diplomatic mission to the United States, Pavel Svin'in, the author of *The Experience of a Picturesque Journey through North America (Opyt zhivopisnogo putesthestviia po Severnoi Amerike* 1816) (Yarmolinsky 3-46). The fascination with American technology and the criticism of the young nation's absorption in materialism are the two most prominent themes in Svin'in's book. Another Russian diplomat in America, Petr Poletika (1778-1849), wrote a book in 1821 openly defending constitutional government. The book was published in London, in French, because of the reactionary political atmosphere in the last few years of Alexander I's rule. In 1830, after returning to Russia, Poletika published an influential essay on the United States. Aleksandr Borisovich Lakier (1825-1870) was the first private Russian who traveled widely through most of the United

States; he visited farms, factories, and mines, and went to plantations in the South. He published two detailed and highly factual volumes welcomed by the Russian readers as a source of practical information on America (Schrier xvii-xli).

The populists' communes in America attracted the attention of many Russian liberals. Grigorij Machtet's (1852-1901) realistic account of his visit to one Russian-founded commune in Kansas furthered the development of travel literature about America in Russia. His *Travel Vignettes (Putevye kartinki 1874-75)* included realistic detail and sympathy for the American character, and served as a source for information on America for many prominent Russian writers—notably Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. At the end of the nineteenth century, negative reports of disappointed émigrés describing America as a country without culture and ideas did not substantially affect the faith in the United States as a land of unlimited opportunity, thus, a steady stream of immigrants continued to flow (Hasty and Fusso 10).

Prominent writer Vladimir Korolenko (1843-1921) visited America in 1893 hoping to find solutions to some of Russia's economic and social problems. His unfinished travel notes, published in 1923, also emphasized the dichotomy between the spiritual and material. The author's conversations with Russian immigrants in the United States define the difference between Russian and American cultures as follows: "Zdes' vse formalism... A u nas liubov' ... Ruskaia dusha dvizhetsia liubov'iu... A liubov' vyshe vsego." "Here everything is formal...But we have love... the Russian soul is moved by love... And love is higher than anything" (Korolenko, *Journey* 107)<sup>24</sup>. Even the immigrants well established in their new home insisted that "Rossia, batiushka moi,

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<sup>24</sup> If there is an English translation of the text, I quote the translation noted in the Works Cited list. In all other cases, I quote the original and provide my translation. If I find the existing translation unsatisfactory, I also provide my translation.

stoit na liubvi... Evropa i America na raschete..." "Russia, brother, is based on love... Europe and America on calculations..." (Korolenko, *Journey* 110). His notes also show the pro-Western Russian reformer's disappointment after seeing the unsolved Western social problems. Korolenko writes about "the special sickness" of a Russian traveler discovering poverty, hunger, and vice in the land of freedom, constitution, and parliament (*Journey* 116-17). The idealistic image of the young republic shared by many Westernizers is the main reason why many travel books read like chronicles of disappointment. Korolenko's description of America's harsh realities in "Factory of Death" ("Fabrika smerti" 1896) and Maxim Gorky's (1868-1936) *In America* (*V Amerike* 1906), turned into a canonical text by the Soviet state, laid the foundation for the negative images of the United States promoted after the Revolution in 1917.

*In America* consists of three sketches with eloquent titles: "City of the Yellow Devil" ("Gorod Zhelтого diavola"), "The Kingdom of Boredom" ("Tsarstvo skuki"), "Mob" (the title is in English) (Gorky 6: 237-73). Gorky's work is a fine example of a political pamphlet permeated with ideological clichés. New York, the City of the Yellow Devil, is represented as an enormous meat-mincer, which grinds up people attracted to gold—the gravity center of the city. The imagery is naturalistic and oppressive: the city is a "jaw," a "glutton," a "stomach" that "swallows up," "grinds and digests," "sucks blood and brains," and "devours muscles and nerves" (*City* 237-50). In the first variant of this work, "The City of Mammon: My Impressions of America," Gorky develops the theme of American spiritual poverty more explicitly by pointing out that the idolatry of money leads to the lack of desire for beauty. Yet he hopes that in the future America will develop a disdain for money and "will turn her energy to the quest of liberty of the spirit"

(6: 431). This hopeful mood is entirely absent from the final version included in *In America*. The two other sketches, “The Kingdom of Boredom” about Coney Island and “Mob,” reflect Gorky’s fear of perceived inhumane essence of the American way of life. The crowds of people looking for amusement are described as empty and senselessly cruel. The Americans in Gorky’s description are enslaved by capitalism: people believe that they are masters of their own fate, while they are actually only “bricks in the hands of an invisible mason” who builds a cramped prison (*City 6*: 241). Gorky’s authority as the “father of social realism” contributed to the popularity of *In America*, which influenced most of subsequent Russian writings on the United States. During the Cold War, Gorky’s work was raised by the Soviet government to “the status of official statements on the United States” (Rougle 17).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia recognized the significance of industrialization. In the young Soviet state “Americanization” became a synonym for modernization because of the dramatic economic and industrial rise of the United States. Two of the most influential and beloved Soviet poets, Sergej Esenin (1895-1925) and Vladimir Mayakovsky (1894-1930), wrote about their travels to America. Esenin visited the United States in 1922, and in 1923 he published his travel notes under the title *An Iron Mirgorod (Zhelezny Mirgorod)*, clearly indicating the author’s dislike of American culture.<sup>25</sup> Esenin did not know English and his American trip was rather short, yet he declared Americans “very primitive people when it comes to their own inner culture,” because the “rule of the dollar has devoured any strivings they might have had toward complex questions” (*An Iron Mirgorod* 153). Mayakovsky echoed Esenin in emphasizing

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<sup>25</sup> *Mirgorod* (1835) is a collection of satiric short stories by Nikolai Gogol named after a small Ukrainian town, which became a symbol of provincialism and banality in Russian literature.



the opposition between the poor but spiritually dynamic Soviet Union and the rich but spiritually poor United States (Rougle 139-40). He wrote a twenty-two poem cycle *Poems about America (Stihi ob Amerike)* and a prose sketch “My Discovery of America” (“Moe otkrytie Ameriki”). Mayakovsky was a major figure in the Russian Futurist movement. His devotion to Futurist esthetics is evident in his enthusiasm for the miracles of technology in the United States. However, as Hasty and Fusso note, his “unqualified delight in technology gives way to concern for the human condition” (162). The squalid living conditions in the urban centers he visited convinced him of the superiority of the communist alternative. At the end of the poem “Broadway,” Mayakovsky declares that he is in rapture over New York, yet he keeps his special Soviet pride and looks down upon the bourgeoisie (*Stihi* 57). Anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist rhetoric characterizes the few Soviet books about America published before and shortly after World War II. Ilf and Petrov’s *One-storey America* published in 1937 was the only source of information about America for nearly twenty years.

In the 1960s, these simplistic notions gradually began to change, and together with the officially promoted anti-American writings appeared some books presenting a more multifaceted, modern, and elusive America. Victor Nekrasov (1911-87), who received the Stalin prize for literature in 1947 for his first book *In the Trenches of Stalingrad (V okopakh Stalingrada 1946)*, visited the United States in 1960 for two weeks. In 1962, he published *Both Sides of the Ocean (Po obe storony okeana)* describing his travels to Italy and America. Nekrasov’s refusal to submit to ideological requirements and the balanced image of America in his book led to his expulsion from the Party. Despite the political pressure, the images of America in the works of many

Soviet writers visiting the United States gradually changed and became less ideologically-ridden (Reilly 205-8). Vassily Peskov and Boris Strelnikov's *A Land Beyond the Ocean (Zemlia za Okeanom, 1975)* is remarkably friendly toward American people and openly admires American economic achievements. Aksyonov's first book on America, *Non-Stop Round the Clock: Impressions, Ruminations, Adventures (Kruglie sutki non-stop: vpechatlenia, razmishlenia, prikliuchenia, 1976)*, represents a country complex and difficult to grasp. However, the official party line is followed in many works. The collection of articles *Soviet Writers Look at America* published in 1977 in English describes the citizens of the United States as living under the totalitarian domination of the financial oligarchy. The average American is portrayed as a person absorbed with the accumulation of wealth. The Russian superiority over Americans manifests itself in different attitudes of the two peoples toward culture. Americans, preoccupied with consumerism, are indifferent to science, literature, and art (Gerasimov 66). The vitality and popularity of the belief in the dichotomy between Western materialism and Russian spirituality can be seen in the works of the archenemy of the Soviet regime, Alexander Solzhenitsin. In his Harvard address, he argues that life's journey must become "above all an experience of moral growth," not "the search for the best ways to obtain material goods and then their carefree consumption"—the later way of life Solzhenitsyn associates with the contemporary West (Solzhenitsin 70). With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia plunged into a crisis whose dimensions and consequences are difficult to grasp. What national ideology would appear in the future is impossible to predict, but one may guess that the conviction in the Russian spiritual/cultural superiority might reappear in new incarnations.

Despite the cultural differences between China and Russia, the West in general and America in particular are portrayed in similar ways in both countries. The paradigm of Materialistic West versus Spiritual China/Russia has proved very viable in the intellectual debate over the West in both countries. At the beginning of China's and Russia's relations with the United States, it was perceived as different from the other Western countries. With the development of these relations, the United States gradually became the country symbolizing the West, and the paradigm of Materialistic West versus Spiritual China/Russia was used in describing America in China, Russia, and the Soviet Union. The building of socialism in China and the Soviet Union was also represented as ethically superior to the practices in the exploitative capitalist America. Before the 1970s when change in the ideological climate in China and the Soviet Union allowed for more sophisticated images of the United States, the American Other was approached mainly on the axiological level, that is, the American Other was perceived as either inferior or superior to the Self. America was vilified, exoticized, and idealized, admired and feared. Despite the requirements of the official ideology, the images of America after the end of the Cold War show the country as "a complicated miasma of idealism and cynicism at once" (Foran 179). In Russia, the intellectual trend to perceive materialism as destructive to cultural life is more prominent than in China. This perception of the United States as an epitome of Western materialism leads to the prevalence of the axiological level in the Russian representations of the American Other. Chinese thinkers do not establish a direct connection between materialism and the quality of culture. Their descriptions of America's affluence remind the reader of Schwartz's argument about Yan Fu's preoccupation with wealth and power as an important characteristic of the Chinese

intellectuals. The desire to discover the secret of American wealth brings about an intricate play of the epistemic and the axiological level in the Chinese images of America.

## Fei Xiaotong's America

The main purpose, the sole aim of my whole life, has in fact been to understand China, the Chinese people.

Fei Xiaotong

Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005) is an important figure in modern Chinese intellectual history. The rich and eventful story of his life can be studied as a textbook of China's turbulent twentieth century.<sup>26</sup> He was persecuted by both Guomindang and Communist authorities, endured life-threatening hardships during the Cultural Revolution when sociology was proscribed in the People's Republic of China, and was actively engaged in restoring anthropology and sociology's academic status after his rehabilitation. Fei was China's most prominent social scientist and his anthropological research on Chinese village life was well known in both China and the West. He held a variety of important administrative positions connected with the establishment and the development of China's sociology and anthropology as well as China's state formation after 1949. Yet his popularity is due mainly to his numerous non-scholarly articles and essays which had a substantial impact on public opinion. His limpid style and ability to develop an interesting point on a significant matter often using anecdotes from his own experience made him one of the most popular modern Chinese essayists. Fei Xiaotong was actively

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<sup>26</sup> For more information on Fei Xiaotong's life see Arkush, McGough, Pasternak, Zhang Guansheng, and Fang Lili. Fang, 131-155, has a chronological table of important events in Fei Xiaotong's life.

engaged in cultural mediation between China and the West, translating, traveling, and interpreting Chinese culture for the West and Western culture for China. It was his reputation as a mediator between the West and China that brought about the popularity of his travel writing.

In 1942, the US State Department's Division of Cultural Relations invited six Chinese universities to send one professor each for a year of studying, lecturing on China, and establishing institutional contacts in the United States. Fei Xiaotong was sent by Yunnan University. He visited America for the first time in June 1943 and stayed till July 1944. Here he worked on the English editions of his books on China's rural life, made a number of trips to various places on the East Coast and in the upper Midwest, and tried to establish what he hoped would be the basis of a long-term academic cooperation with his American friends. The letters from America he published in the Kunming weekly newspaper *Shenghuo dao-bao* 生活导报 (See 旅美寄信/Letters from America/ Fei 3: 113-42) were later used to compose his first American travelogue *First Visit to America* (*Chufang Meiguo* 初访美国). *First Visit to America* was first published in 1945 by the US Office of War Information in Chongqing. In 1946 it was published by Shenghuo shudian 生活书店 in Shanghai. Fei revisited America in April and May 1979. His second travel book about America was also published first in a newspaper, Shanghai's *Wenhui bao* 文汇报, in twenty seven daily installments from January 9 to February 4 1980, and later reprinted as the booklet *Glimpses of America* (*Fang Mei lüeying* 访美掠影). The popularity of both travel books led to the publication of *America and American People* (*Meiguo yu Meiguoren* 美国与美国人) published by Sanlian shudian 三联书店 in Beijing, 1985. In *America and American People*, the two travel books are compiled

together with Fei's free translation of Margaret Mead's *And Keep Your Powder Dry: An Anthropologist Looks at America*, in Chinese as *The American Character (Meiguoren de xingge 美国人的性格)*. In the preface of this edition, Fei notes that this is not a translation *per se* but rather his notes on Mead's book: “〈性格〉是我的读书札记，读了一本美国作者写的分析美国人性格的书，按原书的论点加上我的发挥而写成的。‘Character’ consists of my reading notes. I read an American scholar's book analyzing the character of her people and composed my book by expanding on her original arguments.” (Fei, *America II*).

Fei's American travelogues have been very popular and influential. Parts of the two American travel narratives are included in the collections *Notes from Traveling Abroad (Wai fang zaxie 外访杂写)* and *Fragrant Flowers from Remote Places: A Collection of Fei Xiaotong's Travel Notes (Fangcao tianya: Fei Xiaotong wai fang zawen xuanji 芳草天涯：费孝通外访杂文选集)*.<sup>27</sup> The most recent edition of these books was in 2007, when Beijing's Dongfang chubanshe republished the two books together with another travelogue, *Revisiting England (Chong fang Yinglun 重访英伦)*, under the title *Fei Xiaotong's Travelogues: First Visit to America, Glimpses of America, Revisiting England (Fei Xiaotong youji: Chu fang Meiguo, Meiguo lueying, Chong fang Yinglun 费孝通游记：初访美国，美国掠影，重访影伦)*. Fei's reputation as a mediator between China and the West and his popularity as a writer as well as the many editions of his

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<sup>27</sup> Fei, Xiaotong. *Wai fang zaxie 外访杂写 (Notes from Traveling Abroad)*. Beijing: Zhongguo Zhanwang chubanshe, 1988, 1-55, 98-121; Fei, Xiaotong. *Fangcao tianya: Fei Xiaotong wai fang zawen xuanji 芳草天涯：费孝通外访杂文选集 (Fragrant Flowers from Remote Places: A Collection of Fei Xiaotong's Travel Notes)*. Suzhou: Suzhou daxue chubanshe, 1994, 47-143, 300-68.

travel books contribute to the important role of his works in forming current Chinese visions of America.

In this chapter I analyze the image of America in *First Visit to America* and *Glimpses of America*. Fei Xiaotong's travelogues show some of the common characteristics of the travel books about the United States in China: a fascination with American economic and technological power, the dual (both internal and external) angle of vision which explores America mainly to provide models for improving China, and the ambivalence coming from the vacillation between admiration for America and its achievements and a deep conviction in the superiority of Chinese culture. What distinguishes Fei's writing is the well-informed analytical approach he applies to some of the prevalent concepts about the United States and the intricate play between axiological, praxiological, and epistemic level in his presentation of alterity. This chapter is divided into six parts. Three of them— "The Complexity of Cross-cultural Communication," "The East and the West in Fei's Understanding," and "Attitudes toward Age and Aging, Family Relationships, and Religion"—are concerned with the author's notions about the fundamental differences between Chinese and American culture and the way in which they affect cross-cultural communication. Two sections, "The American Spirit and American Democracy" and "Fei's Ambivalence toward Economic Policies in the United States," are devoted to Fei's reconsideration of several concepts about the United States: American wealth and power and the myth of America as a paradise, America as a paragon of democracy, and the national narrative of the "melting pot." The impressions from more than a year of travel and contacts with Americans forced Fei to question many of his previous notions of these phenomena, and he left the country with a more complex



understanding of them. “Glimpses of America” shows the central themes in the second travelogue and analyzes the way in which it differs from the first one. While discussing Fei’s image of America, I ask the following questions: How is the image of America he created connected with the fore-meanings he inherited from Chinese tradition? Does his better knowledge of the American Other affect his knowledge of the Chinese Self, that is, to what extent is the epistemological value of alterity realized?

### ***The Complexity of Cross-cultural Communication***

Fei Xiaotong is well aware of the epistemological value of alterity: “我常说，到外国去，才知道自己真的是中国人。 I often say that it is only in a foreign country that I realize how truly Chinese I am” (Fei, *First Visit* 287-8). The problems accompanying the clash of basic cultural habits are one of the main topics in the first travelogue. This is how the author describes the human propensity to project ourselves onto the Others. “这里我所要读者记着的，就是一个人和文化不同的人相处时就不免有这类困难发生；不知不觉之间，用了自己文化中养成已经不很自觉的标准，来推测另一文化生长出来的人的行为。愈是和不同文化的人来往密切了，这种困难也愈多。 What I want the reader to remember is that when two persons whose habits are formed by different cultures are in contact, they unconsciously tend to use the standards of their respective cultures to judge the other’s behavior. With the intensification of intercultural contacts, these problems will be more and more numerous” (Fei, *First Visit* 285). During his first visit to America, Fei constantly considered the possibilities of intercultural communications. He writes about his discussions with an American friend about a seemingly simple question: how we address other people. The difficulties he experienced

when he tried to call a close friend by her first name showed him the force of cultural habits. His conversations with both Chinese and Americans concerning this topic convinced him that something as basic as forms of addressing other people can be a source of misunderstanding and wrongful stereotyping. The Chinese visiting America unconsciously use the more formal way in which they address each other. The American way being very informal, Chinese behavior is interpreted as an expression of aloofness. When Fei asked a professor of sociology at Harvard what his impressions of the Chinese were, the answer was: “中国朋友似乎是很拘谨，很不易亲热。[...] 譬如来往很密的中国朋友，见了我总是称我作 XX 教授。这样称呼，我们怎能觉得有亲密的友谊呢？ Our Chinese friends seem very reserved, having trouble to achieve intimacy. [...] For instance, even very close friends always call me Professor XX. If they address me this way, how can we be considered close friends?” (Fei, *First Visit* 282). On the other hand, the Chinese exposed to the informal American way tend to see Americans as “arrogant” “*aoman* 傲慢” because calling a respected professor by his first name is at best impolite.

The discrimination against Chinese labor is analyzed in the book as a tragic case exemplifying the problems in cross-cultural communication and the differences between Chinese and American culture. Fei Xiaotong’s attitude toward the discrimination against Chinese workers in the United States differs markedly from the typical indignation provoked by limitations on Chinese immigration imposed by the government of the United States. He notes that the people who fled from China to escape poverty were uneducated, but they showed diligence and tenacity that astonished Americans. Paradoxically, this provoked the hostility of the other laborers—they felt threatened by

the Chinese workers' willingness to accept hard work for low wages. The author's attitude toward the aggression against Chinese workers is surprisingly tolerant.

我们讨论这个问题时必需要能设身处地地替人想一想，人都是人，我们自己容易犯的过失不应当希望别人不容易犯。若是在我们的社会中有一群言语和我们不同，生活程度比我们低，教育水准又落后的人和我们一起住，我们会有什么感觉？ To discuss this question we should put ourselves in others' shoes and then consider it. Humans are humans everywhere, and we cannot hope that the others will not make the mistakes we often make. If in our society there is a group of people who are less educated than we, have a lower standard of life, and speak a language we do not understand—how are we going to react to these people, if we have to live together? (Fei, *First Visit* 277)

The development of the American West required a labor force capable of enduring difficulties. When this process ended, however, Chinese workers became competitors threatening the established positions of American laborers. Seen in this light, the opposition against Chinese workers was economic, not racial. Moreover, the low education and the linguistic incapability of Chinese workers to establish contacts with Americans contributed to the complexity of this problem. America is a great melting pot, and the variety of cultures and life styles mixed here requires the development of tolerance and acceptance. Although there are still substantial difficulties for the Chinese to fully integrate themselves in American society, Fei Xiaotong sees the developments after the beginning of World War II as very positive, and hopes that the allied countries will find a way to leave all tragic misunderstandings in the past (Fei, *First Visit* 280).

The concluding remarks in the *First Visit to America* are also devoted to the importance of cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding in an ever-increasingly interconnected world. The intercultural contacts in our world require constant efforts to understand different cultures and to nurture tolerance toward others' behavior. In the atmosphere of tolerance and understanding we can learn from each other. The world is getting smaller very fast, but people are not psychologically prepared for this change. Discussing the lack of mutual understanding between the Americans and the Chinese, the author describes his book as the first, although unsystematic and insufficient attempt, to begin the work for better understanding (Fei, *First Visit* 346). In contrast to Lévi-Strauss, who argues for preservation of the diversity of cultures, Fei hopes that some day the world will be unified, and the universal culture will be established. However, if there is no mutual understanding and tolerance in the process of unification, humanity may pay a bitter price (Fei, *First Visit* 286). This awareness of the force of cultural habit is necessary for guarding against the imperceptible habits of thought Gadamer writes about. Fei's effort to move beyond preconceived notions and toward better comprehension of the American Other is the fundamental drive in his travel narratives. The better understanding of the American Other leads to the deepening awareness of the characteristics of the Chinese Self.

### ***The East and the West in Fei's Understanding***

*First Visit to America* begins with a letter Fei received from a friend, Yang Qingkun<sup>28</sup>, who had visited America more than ten years before him. This letter defines

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<sup>28</sup>Yang Qingkun is C. K. Yang (1911-1999), a professor of sociology at the University of Pittsburg and a lifelong friend of Fei Xiaotong.

the most basic difference between Chinese and American culture as experienced by the author. What is particularly significant is that from the very beginning American culture is presented on the epistemic level—the axiological judgments in this text are subjected to the desire to understand alterity. Because of its importance to my analysis I translate the whole letter:

“我已从西岸到了东岸，走了有一星期多得路程，一路我并不觉得生疏。在香港，上海生长的，在未名湖畔（燕京大学）住惯的人，不会觉得这是个异邦天地。不过，我真希望你来看一次。在这相当单调缺乏地方性旅行中，（你能说不单调？每个城市都是一般的建筑，一般的布局；连小镇也都是都市的缩形），你会觉得人类创造力的伟大。你只要想一想；这只有三四百年历史，不，从每个都市小镇说，三四百年在美国还算是远古洪荒的时代。在这样短的时间中，人类会造出这一个神工鬼斧所不易完成的巨业。什么巨业？在这万里草原上造下千百个大上海，小上海。你尽管可以不承认这是个艺术品，其实你若不被嫉妒蔽了眼，清洁的街道，没有臭气的路角，平凡但实用的小住宅，沿街大玻璃窗里的彩色和棱角，晚上，你不用提心吊胆脚下的污泥和路边的扒手... ..这一切也有它的美。即使你不承认这些，你也绝不能忽略了在这千百个大上海，小上海的成就中所表现出来的人类的创造力！

我们小的时候，伏在屋角里看蚂蚁搬家，看它们忙忙碌碌地衔泥筑窝。引诱着我们童心的岂不就是这宇宙里含着的那股创造力。我们有

时故意地用了我们超越蚂蚁的力量，给这些小生命来一个无妄之灾；一投足，一举手之间，把它们所创造下的一切捣乱成稀烂的一堆；我们觉得高兴了。这高兴也不就是出于我们在和蚂蚁的较量比力之下，所发现自己超越的力量？我现在刚被蜿蜒疾驰像一条长蛇似的火车载到了这世界最大的都市中心；在摩天高楼的顶上，俯视着细长的街面上来往如小甲虫的汽车，童时的情绪又在心头复生。这时，可是，我开始了解蚂蚁在孩子手下时所具的慌张和惊骇了。我认识了一个超越的力量，我确有一点慌张和惊骇；但不仅如此，当我记起目前的一切不过是人类的创造时，一种骄傲和自大安慰着我，我也是人类的一个，不是么？这些不过启示了我自己潜在的力量，这又怎能不使我兴奋和高兴呢？

我真愿意你在这里，我怕你在乡下住久了会忘记这种潜在于我们人类里的创造力。我记得你有一次从乡下调查回来，曾经很得意地和我谈，你好象发现了什么新鲜的真理一般。夜深了，洋烛都点完了，还不肯住口。你说；每一个人重要地是在知足。文化是客，人生是主；人生若是在追求快乐，你必须要在手边所有的文化设备中去充分地求满足。满足是一种心理状态，是内在的。像我们的老乡，一筒旱烟，半天旷野里的阳光，同样地能得到心理上的平静和恬适。你说你并不一定反对‘开末尔’来代旱烟，太阳灯来代旷野里的阳光，可是若是为了要去创造‘开末尔’和太阳灯而整天要关在大厂房里听烦人的机器声，满心存了阶级斗争，人家在剥削自己的心理，那才未免太苦

了，未免主客倒置，未免对不起人生了。你说，做人是一种艺术，这艺术的基本是在迁就外在的文化，充实内在的平衡。你发挥了‘知足常乐’的文化观。我当时似乎给你说动了，可是当我经过了这次旅行，我不能不希望你也赶快来一趟。这世界会告诉你人生的另一道路。若容我最简单地就是在动里，在创造里，在理想的外形化的过程里，在永远不会厌足的追求里一样是有人生的乐趣。若再容我说一句：你的说法，应当再推进一步，连旱烟，连旷野的阳光都不必，死才是最平静，最恬适的境界。我不敢反对你，也许死后我会同意你。可是你不致否认我这样说吧：假使死是最高艺术的完成，这是不必追求的，因为很快我们总是会得到的。何必愁？可是既然我们在死之前有几十年时间，在这个世界里，这个世界是属于还没死的人的，不是么？则何必不利用这短短的时间，在生里，在动里，在不厌里，在追求里去体会另一种死后决不能再得的乐趣和境界呢？我也许不能在字里行间传达这另一种乐趣和境界给你，所以我只有希望你早一些来这个世界，这个在地球另一面的世界里，我相信会给你看见人生的另一道路。

I have already traveled from the West coast to the East coast—it took me more than a week. I didn't experience strong cultural shock; probably because for someone who grew up in Hong Kong and Shanghai and lived by Weiming Lake on the Beijing University campus, this place cannot seem particularly exotic. I really hope you will visit this country one day.

If you embark on this monotonous trip, you will pass through many places lacking in special local flavor. Nonetheless, you will realize the greatness of human creativity. (Why do I call it monotonous? Well, every city has the same architecture, the same layout; even the smallest towns are miniatures of the capital.) It strikes me how short American history is—only three or four hundred years. Actually, if we talk about cities and towns, three or four hundred years can be considered primeval times in America. And in this short period, American people, displaying uncanny workmanship, have created this enormous enterprise which is so difficult to realize. What do I call enormous enterprise? The building of thousands of small and big Shanghais in the vast prairie. You might be unwilling to admit that this is a kind of art. Yet I believe that unless envy clouds your vision, the clean and nice smelling streets and street corners, ordinary but practical houses, the shining window displays, safety in the evenings when you are not afraid of pickpockets or the mud on the street—all this possesses a beauty that cannot be rejected. Even if you don't want to accept this type of beauty, it is impossible to deny that the thousands of big and small Shanghais embody the greatness of human creativity.

When we were kids, we loved to bend down in the corner of the house and watch how busy the ants were carrying mud to build their new ant-hill. Don't you think that what attracted our innocent hearts to this picture was the universal creative power we saw in their tireless work? We knew that our strength was many times bigger than the strength of the ants, and



occasionally—a smack of the hand, a stamp of the foot—we would destroy their little world turning the ants’ creations into a pile of dirt. We felt happy because of our awareness of superb strength, our awareness that we had more power than the ants. I just arrived at the center of the biggest American city traveling on a fast, serpent-like train, moving in zigzags. I am standing at the top of a skyscraper looking down at the beetle-like cars on the street, and the feeling from our childhood years is filling my heart once again. This time, however, I can also empathize with the confusion and panic of the ants. Sensing the presence of a superb power, I actually feel like a confused and panic-stricken ant. Yet remembering that everything in front of my eyes is human creation, I feel consoled by pride and confidence because I also belong to the human race, don’t I? I realize the potential of my creative power and this makes me feel elated and happy.

I really want you to come here. I am afraid that if you live in the countryside for a long time, you may forget about the potential of human creativity. I still remember one of our conversations after your return from a research trip in the countryside. You looked very content, as if you had discovered a new truth. We could not stop talking until very late in the night. You said: “The most fundamental thing for a man is to know contentment. Culture is a passing phenomenon but human life is the essence. If people strive for happiness, they should be able to find it in their own cultural surroundings. Contentment is a psychological

phenomenon; it is a state of mind. Like our peasants enjoying a pipe of tobacco and the sunlight in the vast fields, we also can attain peace of mind and harmony.” You said you didn’t object to smoking “Camels” instead of pipe and tobacco and a sunlight lamp instead of sunlight. But in order to produce “Camels” and sunlight lamps, one should lock himself in a factory listening to the annoying noise of machines. Moreover, he won’t be able to think of anything but class struggle and exploitation. Therefore, there is no way to escape suffering and the thought that the order of things is reversed and there is no respect for human life whatsoever. You said: “To be a human being is an art. The foundation of this art lies outside culture; it is in the realization of internal harmony.” You simply elaborated the traditional view that contentment brings happiness. Back then your words touched me, but after my journey to America, I can only hope that you will come here soon. This world will show you another way of life. Simply put, its essence consists in being active and creative, in the process of materializing all ideals, and in constant striving. And this is also a joyful and happy way of life. Or, to use your example, tobacco and sunlight in the prairie are not essential, and the only realm of peace and quiet is the one you enter after death. I do not dare to argue with you or maybe I will agree with you after I die. But you will also probably agree with what I am going to say. Even if death is the highest form of art, we should not strive for it because we all will die sooner or later—so why worry? Yet in these several decades before death, this world belongs to the

living, doesn't it? Then why not use this short time to live, to strive for something, to take the initiative, and to be discontented, in short, to carve a realm of happiness unattainable after death. I probably cannot describe this realm and render this joy by words alone. That is why I can only hope that you will visit this world as soon as possible, and in that other part of the globe you will see a different path of human life. (Fei, *First Visit* 219-221)

The author's choice to begin his first American travelogue with this letter is based on the importance of the main problem outlined in it, namely, the comparison of two different approaches to human life. In Fei's understanding, the basic difference between American and Chinese culture is the contrast between ceaseless creativity in striving for wealth versus contentment with poverty, that is, their attitude toward the material side of life.<sup>29</sup> The main themes of the letter: the greatness of human creativity, the stifling effects of agrarian culture on human potential, the ability of Chinese people to find contentment even in a difficult economic environment, the disruptive effects of industrial production on natural rhythms of life are explored throughout the book. Chinese and American cultures in this text represent two different alternatives in the search for meaning in human existence. America stands for creativity, for the efforts to create a better material world here and now, for the ability to achieve concrete results. China stands for the ability to find contentment regardless of the material conditions one lives in and to look for this contentment in proximity with nature. A particularly significant feature is the

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<sup>29</sup> This idea is connected with the Chinese intellectual debate on the differences between Chinese and Western culture. As we saw in the previous chapter, the neo-traditional thinker Liang Shuming was not the only one to argue that the most significant characteristic of the Eastern civilization was self-contentedness (知足), and that of the Western one non-self-contentedness (不知足); the Chinese Westernizer Hu Shi came to the same conclusion after an initial disagreement with Liang.

avoidance of axiological judgments in the letter. Both cultures are presented as complex and controversial phenomena. America is creative and exuberant, but its creation is marked by monotony and lack of special flavor; it can produce lamps to substitute for sunlight, but the process of production is marked by exploitation and abuse of human life. China has the wisdom to find contentment despite economic hardships, but the lack of striving stifles creativity and human potential. C. K. Yang does not assert the supremacy of one culture over the other; he simply tries to convince his friend to learn more about another path of human development. Both Fei and his friend have their likes and dislikes, but American and Chinese cultures are described on the level of alterity, that is, they are first and foremost different.

The chapter containing the letter is entitled “A different path for human life” (*Renshengde lingyi daolu* 人生的另一道路). Fei explains the differences between Western and Chinese culture as he had understood them before visiting the United States. He writes that the question of the transformation of Chinese culture under Western influence is a question tormenting every thinking person in China of his time. Should the Chinese preserve Eastern traditions or should they adopt Western ways? Are the West and the East as different as they seem to be? Is it possible for these two civilizations that have never been prosperous at one and the same time to find a common prosperous future? Is this bright future going to lead to Westernization or Easternization? Trying to find answers to these questions, Fei returns to a story from his *Letters from America*: on their way to the United States, he and the other Chinese professors visited an American military base in North Africa. The visitors were impressed by the order, the comfort, and the cleanliness at the base as well as the high spirit of American soldiers. In the evening,

they had a long discussion whether it was possible to accept what was good in the West, while avoiding the problems accompanying Western achievements. The author believes that sooner or later even the most remote places in China will face this question (Fei, *First Visit* 222-3). The questions Fei asks himself discussing what the East should borrow from the West are connected with one of the important concepts in China's modern intellectual history, namely, the voluntarist notion that the fruits of capitalist production can be achieved while rejecting its *modus operandi*. The utopian dream that Western technological progress can be realized in a society where cooperative relationships prevail over the competitive ones had many adherents in both China and Russia. Before leaving China, Fei wrote articles expressing his disappointment with the conservatism of Chinese culture and urged China to learn from the West.<sup>30</sup> At the beginning of his trip, American alterity is approached on epistemic and praxiological levels. The desire to understand the United States and its achievements better is combined with the desire to embrace the Other's values, that is, to accept the American model as a possible solution to the problems in China. The fascination with the American achievements, however, goes hand in hand with the author's attachment to Chinese tradition. The most significant feature of Fei's attitude toward America is his conflict of loyalties: he constantly vacillates between commitment to Chinese culture and admiration for American progress.

Fei confesses that his thinking is still very close to that outlined in the letter he received more than ten years earlier: he sees himself as someone who shares the traditional system of values and is not attracted to the modern life in Shanghai and Hong

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<sup>30</sup> See Fei Xiaotong. *Kuangzhe jinqu* 狂者进取 (“The Reckless Will Make Progress”), *Fei Xiaotong wenji. Fei Xiaotong Collected Works*. Vol.3: 1941-1946. Beijing: Qunyan chubanshe, 1999, 84-6 and *Guonian, guo rizi yu guodu xinli* 过年过日子与过度心理 (“Passing New Year's, Passing Time, and the Psychology of Just Enduring Life”), *Fei Xiaotong wenji. Fei Xiaotong Collected Works*. Vol.3: 1941-1946. Beijing: Qunyan chubanshe, 1999, 50-53.

Kong. He connects his fears of modern culture with the desperate conditions Chinese intellectuals have to live in. During World War II, the superb strength mentioned in the letter of his friend seemed to be but cruel power in the hands of an ignorant child playing with human destiny. Yet Fei and many of his contemporaries feel that the old “Contentment brings happiness” attitude is not enough in the changing world, and they need new beliefs: “这信念也就在童时的情绪里复生；对创造、对动、对生的积极的爱好。也就是我们要能‘不惮烦’。These new beliefs should revive the attitude from childhood, namely, an active love for creativity, for movement, and for life. In other words, we should learn to get rid of ‘fear of trouble’ (Fei, *First Visit* 225-6).” Fei begins his journey with a hope to find out more about the way America has dealt with its “fear of trouble,” because for his generation American modern life is the embodiment of audacity: “美国所代表的现代生活岂不是从这‘不惮烦’三个字里产生出来的？Isn’t the modern life represented by America born out of these three words ‘not fear trouble’?” (Fei, *First Visit* 226). The first chapter ends with a letter he wrote to Yang Qingkun notifying his friend about his coming to America and expressing his hope to learn more about the “different path of human life” there.

### ***The American Spirit and American Democracy***

The real description of the United States begins in the chapter “*Pinkunde zaonian* 贫困的早年 Early Years in Poverty” with the author’s arrival in New York. Fei took a train from Washington D.C. to New Jersey and then a ferryboat to New York. The first impression from the deck of the ferry is depicted as “一个文化下马威 a culture’s show of strength at first contact” (Fei, *First Visit* 226-7). The large factories of New Jersey

covered in smoke, the beautiful Statue of Liberty, and the towering buildings of Manhattan are seen by the author as “美国文化最简单的‘文摘’ the most simple ‘abstract’ of American culture” (Fei, *First Visit* 226). Fei’s first impressions reflect the Chinese admiration for the material affluence and technology of the United States. The usage of the idiom *xiamawei* 下马威 with connotations as “severity shown by an official on assuming office” or “dealing someone a head-on blow at the first encounter” reinforces the feeling of grandiose might or “the presence of a superb power” mentioned by Yang in the letter. This depiction of America is in harmony with the well-established notions of American wealth and power. In this chapter, however, Fei attacks one stereotype about America: the “chimera of paradise.” The critique of this notion leads to the deconstruction of the myths about the supposedly inferior American spirit.

Despite his open admiration for the American cities, the author argues that “都市没有创造美国，是美国人的性格造出了都市. The cities have not created America; it is the American national character that created the cities.” (Fei, *First Visit* 227). Fei Xiaotong notes that the big cities are relatively new phenomena in America—one hundred and fifty years before his visit, four out of five Americans lived in the countryside. Yet three hundred years before his visit, for the Europeans, America represented a New World. Trying to find out what was truly new in this world, Fei goes to the process of colonization of the new continent arguing that the unique American character was created during that time. The big enterprises, the great industries, and the imposing cities are “[...] 只是皮肤和肌肉，并不是骨骼 only the skin and the muscles of America, not its skeleton.” The skeleton, according to Fei, was formed when the immigrants opened the new land. The hardships they suffered and the difficulties they

overcame formed this “[...] 独来独往，不卑不亢，自负自骄，能吃苦耐劳的性格。这性格归结于它们崇尚平等，爱好自由的精神 fiercely independent, neither humble, nor disrespectful, proud yet responsible, tenacious and industrious character. The essence of this character is a freedom-loving spirit devoted to equality” (Fei, *First Visit* 230). This description of the American spirit indirectly questions the assumption of spiritual supremacy of China. In addition, it undermines the neat formula “Chinese studies for the fundamentals; foreign studies for practical use” by showing that all practical achievements are sustained by a fundamental spirit, and that this spirit has created the great industries and the magnificent cities.

In the author’s contemporary China, America was still considered a paradise, and this chimera is attacked in Fei’s work. He repeatedly underscores the challenges that the pioneers faced. Describing the hostile environment in which the first immigrants fought to survive, the author writes: “假定现在已近于天堂，那是从地狱里升上去的。If we suppose that today’s America is near paradise, we should know that this paradise was achieved by crawling up out of hell” (Fei, *First Visit* 231). Fei translates a passage of Bertrand Russell’s *Freedom and Organization 1814-1914* depicting the early life of Abraham Lincoln and the poverty and hardship his family faced when moved to Indiana.<sup>31</sup> This story is connected with Fei’s first celebration of Thanksgiving with

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<sup>31</sup> The translated passage reads as follows: “Lincoln’s father, after Kentucky had ceased to be on the frontier, removed in 1816 to Indiana, for which purpose he built a raft and loaded it with all his possessions, consisting of his kit of tools and four hundred gallons of whisky. The raft capsized, but he recovered most of his goods. From the house of the last settler, he hewed a way through the forest to a site which pleased him, deposited there the whisky and tools, and was joined by his wife and two children with a little bedding and some pots and pans. For a year they lived in a three-sided shelter, open to the wind and rain and snow on the fourth side. During this time he cleared some ground for cultivation and built a proper log cabin, without, however, thinking it necessary to provide it with doors or windows or floor. ‘His cabin,’ say Nicolay and Hay, ‘was like that of other pioneers. A few three-legged stools; a bedstead made of poles stuck between the logs in the angle of the cabin, the outside corner supported by a crotched stick driven into the ground; the table, a huge hewed log standing on four legs; a pot, kettle and skillet, and a few tin



friends at Harvard where his host told him stories about the pilgrims' struggle for survival. The culmination of his impressions of America's early years of poverty was a play he saw on Broadway—a theatrical adaptation of Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*. He interprets the play and its popularity as a symbol of the American attitude toward hard times in the early American history. In his opinion, the Americans are not ashamed of remembering poverty because they believe that through hard work they can achieve success. The most significant trait in American character is self-reliance, and the people of the East observing the United States should not forget that “[...] 它们人民生活程度的提高是他们努力劳动的报酬、不是天、也不是人、送给他们的礼物 the raising of their standard of life was the reward for diligent work, not a gift from Heaven or other men” (Fei, *First Visit* 235). Fei's rather free interpretation of Caldwell's play shows the importance he ascribes to the yearly years of American history. Throughout the book he argues for the formative power of this time: the hardships the new immigrants had to overcome steeled the character of the early settlers and endowed them with audacity and creativity.

Most of the people who colonized America fled from poverty in Europe. Yet the formative element in creating the unique American spirit was provided by those who could not tolerate the limitations of the old world and set off for the new one looking for freedom. They had to start from scratch to establish a self-sufficient economy. They relied only on themselves to survive, to protect their lives, and to break up the land. Thus, the American peasantry's mentality is the opposite of the feudal peasantry's mentality of

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and pewter dishes were all the furniture. The boy Abraham climbed at night to his bed of leaves in the loft, by a ladder of wooden pins driven into the logs.' Here Abraham's mother died of fever, along with many other settlers of the region” (Russell, *Freedom* 282).

always relaying on tradition and abiding by the established rules. American democracy was born because the new way of life required free people. Feudal power could not find a home in the new world because the people living under such conditions could not tolerate the feudal fetters. Fei sees the spirit cultivated in the time of opening up and colonizing North America as the basis of American democracy (Fei, *First Visit* 238-240). The adjectives used most often to describe the spirit on the people populating the new world are “independent” and “self-reliant.” The nature of American democracy is defined by the spirit of American people cultivating qualities like hard work, equality, love for freedom, dislike of interference, distrust of government, and self-reliance.

What distinguishes American democracy, according to Fei, is its “negativity,” that is, people understand democracy as imposing limitations on the ability of government to interfere with their lives. He compares his impressions from English, German, and American police forces, and draws the conclusion that the status of police in the United States shows the Americans’ dislike of power. “厌恶权力和干涉是美国的传统精神。Dislike of power and interference is the traditional spirit of America” (Fei, *First Visit* 241). The principles of division of powers and checks and balances demonstrate the same distrust of power and the powerful. Thomas Jefferson is characterized as “一个反对权力的人 a man who opposed power,” and the harsh climate in Washington is seen as proof that Americans disliked their politicians and deliberately chose an unpleasant place for them to work. The beginning of “The Declaration of Independence” is interpreted so as to show that in this fundamental document power is considered as a negative force that limits individual rights. This negative democracy is typical for the United States because

the American spirit born during the process of opening up the virgin land and colonization of North America is still alive (Fei, *First Visit* 242).

Fei writes that the most fundamental tendency in one hundred and fifty years of American history is the struggle between two forces: the wealthy class and the ordinary people. In one of the last chapters in the book, entitled “The Sleeping Democracy” (*Minzhude chenshui* 民主的沉睡), Fei analyzes the controlling role of the rich in American political life: “所谓财阀政治不过是政府庇护财阀的利益罢了。财阀门并不热心做官，他们花钱来帮政客们上台，然后要政客们保护他们的利益. The so-called plutocratic policy is simply a policy protecting the interests of the wealthy class. The wealthy class is not interested in direct participation in government. They give their money to help politicians to get elected and then expect these politicians to protect their interests for them” (Fei, *First Visit* 318). In the past, politics in America were mostly plutocratic because of the concentration of enormous economic power in the hands of a few and the low level of political consciousness among the ordinary people. Although the few enjoying special privileges may be tempted to protect their privileged position while violating the principles of democracy, in Anglo-American countries the abandonment of democratic principles of government is impossible. “他们虽然不会痛痛快快地自动的抛弃特权，可是只要他们在民主原则下斗争，他们至多只能利用平民的弱点，延迟平民世纪的实现，决不能改变这世界迈进的方向. They will never willingly abandon their privileges. The only thing they could achieve in the democratic struggle for power is to use the weaknesses of ordinary people in order to delay the coming of the future era of common people. Yet it is impossible to change the direction of the world advancing with big strides toward this era” (Fei, *First Visit* 324). The irreversibility of this movement is

guaranteed by the work of organizations of working people like the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations). One chapter in the book is devoted to the structure and activities of CIO and CIO-PAC (Political Action Committee). These organizations represent the power of ordinary people in political life. According to Fei, today's world is already interconnected, and the increasing participation of the ordinary people in the American political life will lead to similar developments all over the world (Fei, *First Visit* 332). Another reason for optimism is an American project Fei describes in the last chapter of the book, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), showing the way to solve many economic and social problems. Fei did not visit the TVA while he was in the United States but he read many publications about the project sent to him by his American friends. He discusses the achievements of TVA with great enthusiasm, and argues that it shows the path of economic development that will provide a model for the future (Fei, *First Visit* 339). History does not move backwards, and to expect the slowing down of technological progress is unrealistic. The only feasible solution is to speed up the development of democracy, and to transform the negative understanding of democracy typical for America into a positive one. While the negative view understands democracy as a lack of interference and small government, the positive view sees democracy as a process of full integration of every individual in society: “积极的民主是注重个人的社会性，个人幸福的兑现不但是生活所赖的物资的丰富，而且是要在精神上觉得个人活动的社会意义。Positive democracy emphasizes a person's integration into society. The realization of individual happiness depends not only on the abundance of goods and material affluence, but also on the satisfaction of the spiritual need of an individual to see the social meaning of his activity” (Fei, *First Visit* 268).

The concept of America as a paragon of democracy and as a paradise is subjected to careful scrutiny. The chimera of paradise is rejected, but the theme of American democracy as the most significant characteristic of the United States is introduced from the first chapter as one of the most important themes in *First Visit to America*. American democracy is presented as a triumph of the spirit of the Americans. The concept of American spiritual poverty is replaced by the notion that the ingenious and indomitable American spirit created a rich and powerful country despite the original conditions of actual material poverty. Fei's understanding of American democracy at the end of the book is considerably more complex than at the beginning. The author first deconstructs the notion of American democracy as the unhampered rule of the people, and then reconstructs the idea of democracy as a constant struggle between the ruling class and the people. He sees recent developments in labor movement and the New Deal policies as proof that American democracy functions. His understanding of the problems of democratic rule shows how his understanding of American democracy begins with a set of historical givens: the understanding of American democracy as an embodiment of the virtue of appealing to the voice of the people. Yet his efforts to go beyond the stereotypes of the past and, most importantly, the intense engagement with American reality enabled the development of a new concept of the way democracy functions in the United States.

### ***Fei's Ambivalence toward Economic Policies in the United States***

The first cracks in the attractive American image appear with Fei's analysis of American problems in a chapter entitled "The discord of the two wheels of the vehicle to happiness" (*Xingfu danchede tuojie* 幸福单车的脱节). The two wheels are science and democracy—the two forces that should bring happiness to the lives of ordinary people.

The discord between them appeared because the American democracy is negative, and the government is seen as a mere instrument for defending the rights of the individual. The development of science and technology, however, led to production processes that required forms of collective cooperation. “消极的个人主义在这集体生产中无法保持，可是为了生产的效率和技术进步，人们没法拒绝这新时代的集体生活，个人和社会在这里好像是处于对立的地位了，也因之形成了美国文化中的一个裂痕。

There was no way to preserve negative individualism in these collective forms of production. The technological progress and production efficiency made the maintenance of this new collective life impossible. It seemed that the individual and society were in an antagonistic situation, and the first rift in American culture appeared” (Fei, *First Visit* 251). Fei argues that democracy has two components: equality and freedom. Equality was the most important quality for the people colonizing North America, but for the people in the big cities where the American industrial development began, economic freedom was of paramount importance. “制定宪法的时候，民主的解释，由平等观念一变而成自由观念。 When the American constitution was created, the concept of democracy as equality was replaced by the concept of democracy as freedom” (Fei, *First Visit* 252). Freedom as the nineteenth century understood it was mostly freedom for unlimited economic development. Fei summarizes the principles of economic libertarianism and argues that, despite the outside similarity with the traditional individualism, economic libertarianism deprives the ordinary people of their competitive power. “[...] 在自由竞争之中，若不含有平等的事实，财力雄厚的资产阶级所享受的自由却消灭了平民向他们竞争的可能。 If there is no actual equality, free competition gives opportunity to the

rich capitalist class to destroy the ability of ordinary people to compete” (Fei, *First Visit* 253). Economic libertarianism is nothing else but Darwin’s struggle for survival in the realm of economics, and the application of this concept to human society leads to many personal tragedies. The problem inherent in this application is that the abstract idea of economic freedom does not reflect the complexity of human society and leads to actual inequality.

[...] 在平等观念中，最主要的是对人的尊视，没有人应当比别人低卑，而经济自由竞争主义不但事实上造下了富者愈富，高高在上，享受社会的机会和尊荣，而且观念上承认这些富有者是超越的人才，他们的享受是合理和必需的。因之，美国早年民主中包含的平等和自由的两种解释，在基本上是矛盾的了。The idea of equality requires respect for people to be central and no one to be considered inferior.

Economic libertarianism, however, not only brings about further enrichment and ever increasing prosperity of the rich, but also considers them persons of superior talent deserving all their rewards and privileges. This is why the two interpretations of democracy in early America, freedom and equality, are contradictory in the main (Fei, *First Visit* 254).

Fei analyzes the policies of Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804) as an exemplary expression of economic libertarianism. Hamilton’s plutocratic policies concentrated enormous wealth in the hands of a few. Describing the merciless battles during the period of the initial accumulation of economic power, Fei writes about some of the most famous American tycoons: Rockefeller, Ford, Carnegie. Their humble origins proves that during that time “每个人赤手空拳都有出人头地的机会 every man had the opportunity to rise

above others by relaying on his own bare hands” (Fei, *First Visit* 256). Yet this opportunity existed for only a short time. The accumulation of wealth in the hand of few leads to the limitations of economic freedom. Although the competition still exists nominally, in fact competing against “托拉斯 trusts” is impossible. Paradoxically, “经济自由的结果是能享受自由的人数愈来愈少。The end result of unlimited economic freedom is that the number of people enjoying economic freedom decreases constantly” (Fei, *First Visit* 257). In Fei’s opinion, the refusal of government to restrict economic freedom leads to the birth of economic monopolies, and the existence of monopolies threatens the realization of human rights proclaimed in “The Declaration of Independence.” The conclusion is that “[...]可是独占的兴起，在经济帝国的独裁下，科学和民主似乎是成了矛盾的对立了。这幸福的单车的双轮暂时在美国的历史上脱了节。 [...] the rise of monopolies leads to imperialistic economic dictatorship and it seemed that science and democracy occupied contradictory and antagonistic positions. Thus, in American history appeared a temporary misalignment between the two wheels of the vehicle to happiness” (Fei, *First Visit* 258).

Fei’s ambivalence toward economic policies in the United States is revealed in the next chapter “Machinery and Fatigue” (*Jiqi he pifa* 机器和疲乏), where he argues the opposite: “工业的独占是限制了经济自由主义所规定的自由竞争，可是它并没有剥夺人民的职业和生活，也没有直接剥夺了〈独立宣言〉中所举出的人权。The monopolization of industry limited the possibilities of free competition required by economic libertarianism, but neither deprived people of their jobs, nor directly affected the rights proclaimed in “The Declaration of Independence” (Fei, *First Visit* 260-1). On



the one hand, Fei criticizes the limitations of economic freedom resulting from the monopolization of the economy. On the other hand, he writes that what ordinary people need most is a stable job, and monopolistic industries are capable of providing it. A large number of people who came to America to escape poverty and oppression in Europe were able to find jobs and earn a decent living. His intense dislike of the conditions imposed on the people in big factories is moderated by the realization that mass production provides a way out of poverty.

American industry was created under the negative understanding of democracy, which naturally privileges big business. Although American industry created enormous wealth, the distribution of this wealth is uneven and brings about the alienation of workers from the production process. This is how “the wide chasm between labor and capital” “*laozi de honggou* 劳资的鸿沟” appeared. Fei notes that, while legislation intended to curb the monopolizing tendency of trusts did not have the expected results, legislation against labor organizations was very efficient. Laws considered conservative in England are called “communist” in the United States. The author ascribes the relative backwardness of the American labor movement to the fact that the new continent offered opportunities that the newly arrived immigrants were not willing to risk in conflict with their employers. Another decisive factor is the negative aspect of democracy because it prevents the organization of labor (Fei, *First Visit* 270-72). Fei concludes the chapter on capital and labor in America with a short description of two labor organizations he finds very promising: American Federation of Labor and Noble Order of the Knights of Labor. Although both organizations were involved in conflicts with the Chinese labor force, he

thinks that their programs and goals offer hope for the development of positive democracy.

Fei's ambivalence toward industrialization is connected with the deeply ambivalent way in which the materialism of Americans is analyzed. According to Fei, the most important contrast between Chinese and American cultures is on the plane of material life and the attitude toward material possessions, or as Arkush puts it, "the contrast between ceaseless productive energy and leisurely contentment with poverty" (Arkush 118). Fei compares the acquisitive society<sup>32</sup> established in America with the traditional ideal of "Contentment brings happiness," and draws the conclusion that these two attitudes toward life are mutually antagonistic. On the one hand, Fei is afraid that American expansionism driven by acquisitiveness can bring misery to the rest of the world. On the other hand, he quotes a conversation with a Yale professor who argues that the American drive for never-ending improvement of material standards can lead to progress all over the world (Fei, *First Visit* 249-50). He finds Thomas Jefferson's ideas about the enslavement of people in the big cities very close to his own. Despite his admiration for the technological miracles realized in America and the developed Western European countries, Fei declares that, if he had to choose between a very well paid and secure job in the industry of New York and teaching in Kunming, he will choose to go home. To explain this decision, he analyzes once again the discord between the two wheels of the cart to happiness from the standpoint of labor.

People do not simply work; they make things. If they cannot see the meaning in what they do, then they can lose their energy and interest in work. The problem with

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<sup>32</sup> The term is borrowed from R. H. Tawney (1880-1962), a prominent English economist, social critic, and an advocate of Christian socialism. R. H. Tawney is the author of *The Acquisitive Society*.

modern mass production is that it can turn a human being into a part of machinery. The reduction of a human being to a servant of machinery deprives him/her of knowing and feeling the meaning of his/her activity. Fei believes that “[...] 若是一个人没有这个综合的意义托得住他所有的各种事，他会对人生失去认真和爱好。If a person’s activity is not sustained by an integral feeling of meaning that connects everything in his life, he can lose his love of and interest in life” (Fei, *First Visit* 264). Man cannot produce only for the sake of production. When labor becomes a commodity, the laborer loses the integral sense of meaning. “所以我并不能说劳动者的“人”参与了生产过程，而只是他的劳力加入了生产而已。I cannot say that what participates in the process of production is “Man;” it is only his labor engaged in production activities” (Fei, *First Visit* 265).

Fei cannot accept the commodification of labor and the transformation of a complex human being into “an economic man.” He spent two months at the Harvard Business School discussing laborers’ fatigue with mechanized production with the professors there. The energy of a laborer entirely depends on his attitude toward work. When he cannot see the meaning of his work, fatigue appears and the efficiency of labor decreases. “那些想把个人动作机械化以求提高生产效率的人，终于会发现人性无法完全加以单纯化，硬要这样做时，生产效率也会达到一个限度，无法再加以提高了。 Those who want to mechanize labor completely in order to achieve higher productivity may finally discover that a human being cannot be reduced to simple efficient parts. If it is absolutely necessary to do this, then efficiency will be limited to a certain extent and pushing it further will be impossible” (Fei, *First Visit* 266). That is why the author does not want to work in New York—the discord between a person’s

activities and the realization of the meaning of his/her labor is the main cause of fatigue and exhaustion. The energy Fei puts in his writing comes from the deep feeling of the meaningfulness of his work, not from the expectation of financial rewards. Only when a person feels connected with the meaning of his work in such a way, the discord between the development of science and technology and the development of democracy can be resolved.<sup>33</sup> Fei's discussion of alienation and the consequences of industrialization shows the author's conflict of loyalties toward Chinese culture, on the one hand, and American progress, on the other. This conflict is most visible in his interpretation of the cultural differences between the two countries.

### ***Attitudes toward Age and Aging, Family Relationships, and Religion***

Fei thinks that these differences are most visible in the attitude toward age and aging in China and America. Describing the American attitude toward age and old people, Fei declares “我在美国住了一年，暗地里不免庆幸自己是中国人。After living one year in America, I cannot help secretly rejoicing that I am Chinese” (Fei, *First Visit* 286). He remembers his father's friends celebrating the fact that they are approaching fifty and compares their joy to the American fear of aging. The atmosphere in America forcing people to hide their age and simulate youthful vigor repels the author. “他们实在怕老。在他们社会里，年老了实在太苦。 They are really afraid of getting old. In their society old age is a painful time indeed” (Fei, *First Visit* 288). The young American culture does not appreciate experience because it is focused on ready-made formulas and underestimates the complexity of human life. However, if a society collectively fears old

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<sup>33</sup> Fei's thoughts about the alienation of a working man in the industrial society show similarity with Marx's theory of alienation. See Mészáros.

age, this creates enormous pressure for its members: “一个人若把老年看成不幸，我觉得，他决不能真正安心过日子的。I think that, if one considers old age synonym of unhappiness, he cannot leave a peaceful life in the true sense of the word” (Fei, *First Visit* 290).

The importance of seniority in Chinese culture, however, also has negative influences. China is an overpopulated country with limited resources, and an individual is forced to rely on his father and elder brothers to make a living. The economic power of elders naturally leads to emphasizing the respect for them in social relations. The negative side of this development is stagnation: “有父兄荫庇的人，固然有安全，可是因为生活有安全，他也就不会受新机会的引诱，肯冒险尝试新的企业；安分使不能有发展，他至多不过能守成罢了。The individual enjoying the protection of elders naturally feels safe. However, because of this safety he is not lured by new opportunities, and he is not willing to risk starting new business. He must know and keep his place, which in effect hinders his development. The best he can achieve in this situation is to maintain the achievements of his predecessors” (Fei, *First Visit* 291). Fei argues that the difference between Chinese and American attitudes toward age is based on economic developments: the agricultural economy of the East blocked the opportunities for development, while the industrialization of the West eliminated the blockage. An agricultural economy fosters obedient people because their survival depends on their respect for the existing order. In the pages devoted to the problems of age and aging the axiological level of presenting alterity prevails. Fei’s conflicting loyalties bring about alternation of admiration and criticism. In the final analysis the problem of age is seen in a very balanced way pointing out the strong and weak points in both countries. The

discussion of two other topics in this book is permeated with axiological judgments, namely, the relationships between men and women in China and America and the religious feelings in both countries.

In the chapter “The Relationships between Men and Women” (*Nannüzhijian* 男女之间), the author openly expresses his envy of the relationships between men and women in America. The most intimate relationships in Chinese society are those between parents and children. Their importance is imposed by a social order that neglects the spontaneous feelings between a man and a woman. According to Fei Xiaotong, the most incomprehensible part of a foreign culture is the emotional life of the Others. As far as the relationships between the two sexes are concerned, Fei considers himself a very traditional man. The analysis of the emotional life of Chinese people compared to the emotional life of Americans once again begins with the different mentalities nurtured by the agricultural and the industrial societies. The low standard of life and scanty resources of China brought about the lack of generosity among people. Envy was established as a fundamental factor in human relationships because one man’s success usually meant another man’s loss. The display of positive feelings was not encouraged in this atmosphere. Only in a society where the success of Others opens new opportunities for every individual one can celebrate the Others’ achievements (Fei, *First Visit* 303). If a society does not allow the free expression of positive emotions, the natural development of feelings is blocked: “我们是这样实际，利害，权衡，过虑，斤斤计较，使我们失去了感情畅泄时的满足和爽快。因之我们对于感情成了外行。我们不容易明白爱字，因为爱的前题是无我忘记。Because we are so practical, so concerned with our gains and loses, so balanced and overcautious, so calculating, we have lost the

contentment and comfort coming from the uninhibited release of emotions. Consequently, we have turned into outsiders to our own emotions. We have problems understanding the concept of love because love requires self-abandonment” (Fei, *First Visit* 304).

Once again, Fei connects the American freedom to marry for love with the development of human relationships in industrial society. The independence of working women allows them to establish relationships with the opposite sex without feeling compelled to find a husband. For Chinese women the question of marriage is extremely important because the choice of spouse determines the quality of their life, and this makes romantic feelings to seem luxuries that can be lived without. “我们的公式是先结婚，再讲爱，能爱固然好，不能爱也是活该。Our formula is: marry first and only then think about love. If there is love, this naturally is very good, if there is no love, this also serves the married couple right” (Fei, *First Visit* 309). Only the liberation from this “serves them right” mentality can bring about the existence of marriages based on love. Describing the relationships between sexes in America as much better than those in China, Fei attacks another stereotype, namely, the notion that, while Westerners in general and Americans in particular understand technology and material life, Chinese are experts in the realm of human relationships (See Lin 322-364).

It is difficult for the Chinese to understand the relationships between men and women in America, but it is even more difficult to understand their religious feelings. Yet the understanding of these feelings provides a clue for the understanding of the way the Americans think. Fei compares the Chinese beliefs in spirits and gods and the Christian beliefs. Christianity is “西洋文化中重要的一个柱石 an important pillar of Western culture” (Fei, *First Visit* 310), and the American capacity for of selfless devotion to

something bigger than oneself is based on Christian idealism. Fei thinks that the lack of religious ideals in China is the reason for the lack of compassion among people. America, like all other countries, has its good and bad sides. What distinguishes Americans, however, is their idealism. “我所能了解的美国人的基督精神就在承认不完全而不放弃完全的理想。 The Christian spirit of the Americans, as far as I understand it, is demonstrated in their recognition of American imperfection and, at the same time, their unwillingness to abandon the ideal of perfection” (Fei, *First Visit* 313-4)

Confucius's teaching that the rich should give their wealth to others is something Chinese love to say, but never do. Chinese fear, bribe, and beg from their gods. They do not have the American idealistic drive to contribute generously to colleges, hospitals, and social work. “鬼神在我们是权力，不是理想；是财源，不是公道。 Our gods represent power, not ideals; they represent wealth, not justice” (Fei, *First Visit* 311). In contrast, the contribution of Christian teaching is in creating “一个完善补缺的理想，广被深入到每一个老百姓的心中 an ideal of perfection, deeply rooted in each man's heart” (Fei, *First Visit* 315). This drive to create a more perfect world is the reason behind the progress of the Western world. Most of the scholars the author knows have a religious devotion to searching for truth. In this chapter Fei shows his attitude toward Zhang Zhidong's famous formula: “若是西学只是为用，我怕的是我们永远不会使科学成为我们社会进步的动力。 I'm afraid that, if the Western knowledge is only for practical use, in our society science will never be the propelling force behind progress” (Fei, *First Visit* 316). The illogicality of the famous formula is shown by pointing out the spiritual drive behind the Western science—what determines the scientific progress is the search for truth, not the profits possible in the future. What is really enviable in America is not



the material wealth but the creative energy of Americans and their process of creation. What Chinese people should learn from Americans is the Christian ideal of a world of love and compassion (Fei, *First Visit* 317). Here the idea of Chinese spiritual superiority is turned upside-down, and the *ti-yong* formula is completely rejected. Fei suggests that China should learn the spirit of America in order to advance in the future.

In another chapter of *First Visit to America*, however, Fei proclaims the spiritual superiority of the Chinese tradition. In “A World without Ghosts,”<sup>34</sup> Fei admits that tradition has its bad sides, but insists that the ties of kinship between the old and the new should be preserved because the feeling of history makes the world richer. “People do not live only in the here and now; life is not just a string of moments. We need history, for it is a wellspring of inspiration” (Fei, “A World” 176)<sup>35</sup>. He notes that Americans cherish their history, yet argues that their regard for tradition is intellectual and artificial. Chinese tradition is a sacred part of life, something loved and feared, and that is why it takes the form of ghosts. Fei remembers a story from his childhood that happened shortly after his grandmother died. He saw the ghost of his grandmother going to the kitchen to check the preparations for lunch as she usually did when she was alive. This event provoked thoughts and feelings which are described in one of the most poetic passages of the book. I quote it at length because of its importance for understanding Fei Xiaotong’s attitude toward tradition:

I also seemed to realize that a beautiful scene, once it had existed, would always be. The present loss was just a matter of separation in time, and

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<sup>34</sup> The literal translation is “The Disappearance of Ghosts” (*Guide xiaomie* 鬼的消灭).

<sup>35</sup> The quotations from this chapter only are from Arkush and Lee’s translation in Fei Xiaotong. “A World without Ghosts.” Arkush and Lee, 175-181.

this separation I felt could be overcome. An inextinguishable revelation had struck; the universe showed a different structure. In this structure our lives do not pass through time in such a way that a moment in time or a station in life once past is lost. Life in its creativity changes the absolute nature of time: it makes past into present—no, it melts past, present, and future into one inextinguishable, multilayered scene, a three-dimensional body. This is what ghosts are, and not only did I not fear them, I even began to yearn for them.

I cannot get used to people today who know only the present moment. To take this moment as [the sum of existence] is a delusion. Our every act contains within it all the accumulated history from the beginning of the universe right down to the present, and this very act will determine the destiny of endless future generations. If the present moment, fragmentary, abstract, false, is taken for life, this life will necessarily be shallow and base and even empty—since the moment cannot last, one might as well indulge oneself and revel, for when the instant is gone what is left (Fei, “A World” 178-9)?

The value of tradition in this passage is not only historical, it is meta-historical, and, in essence, metaphysical. Ghosts (which stand for tradition) provide the connection between past, present, and future. This connection transforms the whole universe. Seemingly linear movement of time is disrupted, and everything is interconnected in a way that gives new significance to every moment. If one fails to see how all past, present, and future phenomena are joined, he is doomed to live a wasteful and meaningless life.

This is the only chapter in *First Visit to America* showing the influence of the concept of Chinese spiritual superiority. It is admitted that tradition hinders material progress, yet its positive role as shaping the mental universe of an individual is described with veneration. The chapter “A World without Ghosts” ends with the affirmation of Chinese tradition: “In a world without ghosts, life is free and easy. American eyes can gaze straight ahead. But still I think they lack something and I do not envy their lives (Fei, “A World” 181).

The overall image of America in *First Visit to America* is multifaceted and sophisticated. Fei’s openness and vigilance against the force of cultural habits results in better understanding of the United States. One year in America made him more cautious with respect to the adaptation of Western models in China. His initial enthusiasm for American science and democracy diminished with the realization that the advance of science and consequent industrialization could destroy the traditional values close to his heart: respect for old people and a sense of history and continuity with the past. In the first book, Fei proclaims both the superiority of Christianity and the superiority of the Chinese tradition. This conflict of loyalties exemplified in the discussion of cultural differences is absent from *Glimpses of America*. Fei’s second travel narrative about America represents one step further toward better understanding of this country.

### ***Glimpses of America***

Fei Xiaotong visited the United States for the second time in May 1979. The trip lasted one month only, and when his friends urged him to write “*Revisiting America*” (*Chongfang Meiguo* 重访美国), he answered that “*Glimpses of America*” is a more

appropriate title. The epistemic level of presentation is dominant in this work. In the thirty five years since the author's first visit America has changed dramatically. In "An Explanation of the Title in Place of a Preface" (*Shiti daixu* 释题代序), Fei writes that this change attracts his attention in a way that may impede his observations of the unchangeable characteristics of this country and cause problems in his understanding of American society. Nonetheless, in the same introductory chapter he uses a medical metaphor to summarize his overall impression of this trip. During this visit, most of the members of the Chinese delegation were people taking pills to prevent a possible heart attack. According to Fei, America seems to apply similar methods to deal with its problems: "美国这样的社会对危机的一系列办法，并没解决这种社会的基本矛盾，而是头痛医头，脚痛医脚带病延年，维持着它表面的繁荣。The methods American society uses to deal with crises do not solve the fundamental contradictions in this country; they only treat the symptoms and preserve the appearance of prosperity while dragging the illness" (Fei, *Glimpses* 315). The most basic conflict remains the one between science and democracy, that is, the conflict between the admirable scientific and technological achievements and the way these achievements are used to establish a society of equality and freedom.

As in the previous travelogue, the technological advancements attract a great deal of the author's attention. The first several chapters are concerned with the advantages of air-travel, the building of American highways, and the accessibility of cars in America. Fei analyzes the process of movement from the city centers to the suburbs, and describes his visit to a house in the suburbs. The pleasure with which Fei Xiaotong describes the fast and convenient way to do house chores in this house is comparable with the joy of a

child discovering wonderful toys. The wife of his suburban friend invited him to see how the local grocery store served its costumers, and he was amazed by the opportunity offered by credit cards. However, because his generation considered starving better than being in debt, he expresses his fear that the people in debt are “[信用] ‘巨灵’王国的俘虏 captives in the kingdom of the phantom of credit” (Fei, *Glimpses* 339).

Another problem that worries him is the way in which the scientific and technological knowledge accumulated by the American people is applied in the world. The fuel crisis he observed in the United States prompted reflections tinted by pessimism atypical for Fei Xiaotong:

科技知识的飞跃发展使人类具备了空前巨大的制服自然的力量。这个力量正在被用来作什么呢？谁掌握着和使用着这股力量呢？这股力量可以为人类造福，也可以造祸。是祸是福显然不是决定于科技的本身，而是决定于谁掌握科技所给人的这种力量。对这种日益在增长中的力量发生畏惧和反感是开倒车，是没有出息；但是听任这种力量被少数人用来把人类引向毁灭自己的道路也是不负责的，不应该的。

The fast development of science and technology gave humankind unprecedented power to master nature. How do we use that power today? Who is in control of its usage? This power can bring happiness to people, but it can bring catastrophe, too. Science and technology cannot decide what they will bring to the world; this decision is made by the people who control the force obtained from science and technology. To fear and oppose this constantly developing power is to try to turn back the wheel of history, but to leave this power in the hands of the few who lead humanity

to self-destruction is irresponsible and should not be allowed (Fei, *Glimpses* 341-42).

Fei's description of the clean and convenient environment in the suburbs is followed by a discussion of the still unresolved social tensions in American society. While visiting Columbia University, Fei insisted on using the subway, and the realization that the ticket cost ten times more than thirty five years earlier led to an analysis of the process of inflation and the way it affects both the capitalist class and working people. What impressed him most in the metro was the graffiti. He admits that his observations of this interesting phenomenon are fleeting and insufficient for complete understanding, but suggests that the graffiti covering the trains are an expression of suppressed anger caused by the increasing polarization between the haves and have-nots (Fei, *Glimpses* 330).

Many pages of the book are devoted to the ramifications of the increasing usage of computers. The complexity and the pace of life of the American society require computers to ensure the proper functioning of the social system. Fei sees the possible future of the world in the United States—the enhancing of opportunities for development offered by computers and electronic devices will turn the world into one big closely interconnected society (Fei, *Glimpses* 345). The analysis of the changes brought about the post-industrial revolution leads the author to the conclusion that the most important fight in the contemporary world is the battle of wits. He points out that the saying “Knowledge is power” has never been more true, and in order to survive China needs to raise the cultural level of its citizens (Fei, *Glimpses* 345).

Fei's enthusiasm about the numerous implementations of computers and electronic control devices in air-travel, communication, and research is mixed with

anxiety about the commodification of science facilitated by computers. The new methods of sociology, according to him, threaten to transform this science into a service trade. In a chapter entitled “Applications Overpower Theory” (*Yingyong yadao lilun* 应用压倒理论), he writes that when scientific research is entirely oriented toward practical results, science imposes limits upon itself: “当前美国社会科学的特点，也许可以说是见树不见林，重资料而轻理论，好”微观”而避”宏观”，搞具体实际问题而不接触全面，系统的根本问题。这些在我看来和知识商品化是有密切联系的。It is probably safe to say that what distinguishes American sociology today is seeing the trees but not seeing the forest. It emphasizes data and neglects theory, favors the “microscopic” at the expense of the “macroscopic,” and deals with concrete practical problems while avoiding comprehensive and systemic fundamental problems (Fei, *Glimpses* 359). In *Glimpses of America* the enthusiasm of the first travelogue with respect to technological progress is moderated by discussions of the price paid for it and the negative consequences of its application. In the second travelogue, the attention of the author is focused mainly on social problems.

The notion of America as a “melting pot” is affirmed in the first travelogue and rejected in the second. In contrast to Liang Qichao, who rejected this notion and replaced it with “a scalding pot,” in which immigrants were cleansed of their alien lifestyle, in *First Visit to America* Fei accepts the “melting pot” concept. He describes the American “melting pot” as assimilation that paradoxically preserves diversity. American cultural climate is based on pluralism, and America is a multiethnic society that permits the interdependent cohesion of distinct cultures (Fei, *First Visit* 243-6). In the second travelogue, Fei questions the concept of a “melting pot” or as he calls it here “the myth of

a melting pot.” “美国也是一个多民族国家，不是民族熔炉而是民族拼盘。America is not a melting pot but a mosaic of nationalities; it is also a multinational country” (Fei, *Glimpses* 366). He notes the progress in racial relationships—during his first visit, the South was still segregated, but only thirty five years later he observes black people freely moving at all social levels. A visit to Harlem and a poor area in Boston, however, shows him that the racial problem is solved only for the black people who belong to the upper class. In the concluding paragraph of the chapter “The Problems of Black People” (*Heiren wenti* 黑人问题), he uses the medical metaphor again: by solving the problem only for the affluent part of the black population, the ruling class in the United States once again took the medicine to cure the symptoms but not the sickness (Fei, *Glimpses* 365). Fei argues that the same approach is adopted in dealing with the high crime rate and drug problems: “[...],吸毒，不问为什么有人吸；犯罪，不问为什么有人犯—这是美国对付社会问题的特点。 [dealing with] drug problems, nobody asks why people take drugs; [fighting] crime, nobody asks why people commit crimes—this is the way America deals with social problems” (Fei, *Glimpses* 376). One interesting detail in *Glimpses of America* is that an episode causing the members of the Chinese delegation to feel particularly uncomfortable, namely, listening to the lecture of a university professor on the old Chinese novel *Jin Ping Mei*, is included in the chapter discussing crime, drugs, and the shockingly high divorce rate.

The last chapter of the second travelogue, entitled “The Crisis of Confidence” “*Xinxin weiji* 信心危机,” is the only one devoted to the American spirit. Fei wrote this chapter two months after his return to China. He has heard about President Carter’s speech concerned with the crisis of confidence in America. He has not read the speech,



but expresses agreement with the idea that people in the United States have lost confidence in their political system and have doubts about their traditional system of values. Fei sees hope in Carter's statement because it shows that the president realizes the inefficiency of treating the symptoms instead of sickness. According to Fei, the main reason behind the crisis of confidence is the ever increasing contradictions between the advancing productive force and the attempts of the ruling class to keep the old production relations (Fei, *Glimpses* 379). The author analyzes the increasing popularity of religion and the appearance of many new religious movements as symptoms of the crisis: "[...] 一个人在现实社会里心理上得不到安身立命的保证时，有宗教传统的国家里，很自然地会心向上帝，求个依靠，求个着落。 In the countries where there are religious traditions, if a society does not provide an individual with a psychological assurance that he can get on with his life, he naturally turns toward God in search of security and something to rely on" (Fei, *Glimpses* 379-80). The admiration for the Christian spirit in the first travelogue is absent from this book. The popularity of religion is interpreted as a sign that society is not capable of providing secure lives for its citizens. The standard Marxist concept of religion as an instrument used by the ruling class to manipulate people is combined here with the Chinese intellectuals' skepticism about religion: "美国的科学技术正在使神话变成现实，而美国的社会却在使其成员心上帝，厌弃人间。 Today American science and technology are capable of turning myths into reality, but American society pushes his members toward rejection of human world and believing in God" (Fei, *Glimpses* 381).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> David R. Arkush points out that like most educated Chinese, Fei Xiaotong has never felt attracted to religion. In a conversation with his sister, he argued that God and afterlife were illusions which sooner or later would be dispelled (Arkush 20).

Compared to *First Visit to America*, where Fei Xiaotong is either positively impressed or impressively positive, the overall tone in *Glimpses of America* is somber. The descriptions of technological marvels are followed by discussions of social problems and unsolved social tensions. The discussions of cultural differences or comparisons between Chinese and American people are conspicuously absent. The most notable differences from *First Visit to America* are the lack of affirmation of American democracy with which the first book ends, and the changed assessment of religion in the United States. While in the first travelogue the Christian spirit of America is praised as worthy of respect and necessary for the betterment of Chinese society, in the second book the proliferation of religious sects and the popularity of religion are interpreted as symptoms of social tensions. The conviction in the strength of American democracy and its ability to revive itself despite the attempts of the ruling class to manipulate society is replaced by focusing on the contradictions in the United States and the diagnosis that the problems in America are systemic and cannot be solved by treating the symptoms only. The image of America in *Glimpses of America* is closer to the official line in Communist China presenting America as a corrupt capitalist country in which democratic demagoguery conceals the actual rule of the rich and powerful.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Fei Xiaotong visited America for a second time after thirty years of ideological pressure to conform to the Marxist model of the world. In 1949, he decided to stay in China hoping that he could work effectively with the Communists for the development of Chinese industry and agriculture. Fei devoted himself to work for the New China with characteristic energy, but his critical views of some Party policies and advocacy of more independent intellectual thought made him one of the first victims of the antirightist campaign of 1957. The years of persecutions following 1957 led to a considerable change of his views on the “red” versus “expert” debate. In 1972 during the meeting with Hong Kong students, Fei declared that “if everyone reads the works of Chairman Mao they will understand where his own errors lie” (Liu Hsiao-hsiao 156). In an interview with Gene Cooper in 1973, Fei said that sociology and anthropology had no role to play in China. It is tempting to see this change as a direct consequence of the pressure imposed on the author, but in an interview with Burton Pasternak in 1988, Fei shared that the aforementioned statements represented his views at that time. In the same interview he argued that Mao initiated the Cultural Revolution trying to achieve something deep and then it got out of control. He also stated that “the

The image of America created in Fei's travelogues is dense and multilayered. The author's approach is characterized by a genuine desire to understand and by his vigilance against the force of cultural habits that can dim perceptions. The axiological judgments in the first travelogue are very controversial: the praise of the American youthful and innovative spirit is followed by a rejection of the American attitude toward the old; the criticism of stagnation and lack of generosity and altruism in China is followed by an affirmation of the metaphysical beauty of Chinese tradition. The final result of these contradictions is that neither culture is considered better than the other, and the American Other is presented as neither superior, nor inferior to the Chinese Self, just different, that is, truly Other. The American materialism is presented in a deeply ambivalent way: it is both a threat to the future of the world and an engine of progress. Fei's conflict of loyalties is visible in his discussion of the endless striving to improve material life in America. On the one hand, he confesses his personal attachment to the "contentment brings happiness" attitude. On the other hand, he thinks that this attitude is the main reason for China's backwardness and constantly expresses admiration for American progress. According to Bakhtin's theory of creative understanding, approaching a more truthful image of the Other means a reconsideration of all existing images. Fei's choice and interpretation of topics in his travelogues were influenced by the debate on the West in Chinese modern intellectual history. His works, however, show careful reconsideration of the existing ideas about America based on rich observations. Fei was an enthusiastic champion of the American model before his visit to the United States, but the celebration

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Cultural Revolution itself was not entirely wrong" (Pasternak 653). This inconsistency in Fei's thought makes impossible to distinguish to what extent the Marxist image of America in the second travelogue is a result of ideological pressure exercised over its author or whether it reflects Fei's views during his visit.

of Chinese tradition in *First Visit to America* indicates a change in his thinking. The better understanding of the American Other results in a better understanding of the Chinese Self, and the epistemological value of alterity is realized.

**This Beautiful, Friendly, and Exploitative Country: The Image of America in Liu  
Zongren, Wang Zuomin, and Ding Ling's Works**

I look at the slums of New York and think with a sigh  
that socialism cannot be avoided.

Liang Qichao, 1903

The Japanese learned both electronic computers and striptease  
from America, but we will study the good points of advanced  
capitalist nations while resisting everything that is rotten. [...] We  
have a superior socialist system and should be able to avoid capitalist  
corruption.

Wang Ruoshui, 1978

The Europeans visiting America during the nineteenth century often emphasized American egalitarianism. The self-confidence and sense of dignity of ordinary working people and almost universal education impressed them to the extent of concluding that America was a classless society<sup>38</sup>. The Chinese visitors, however, were more apt to underline the inequalities in American society, particularly the abyss dividing rich and poor. The fascination with American technology did not prevent them from seeing the racial discrimination or the selective treatment of new immigrants in this country. Visitors from the People's Republic of China in the late 1970s and early 1980s also focused on the social problems of the United States. To people coming from a socialist country providing considerable economic and social stability the rates of crime and

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<sup>38</sup>In the 1870s the Polish writer Henry Sienkiewicz wrote: "Here the people of various walks of life [...] are truly each other's equals [...] They do not stand on different rungs of the social ladder, for the simple reason that there is no ladder here at all. Everybody stands on the same level" (Sienkiewicz 18).

unemployment and the cost of medical care seemed an exorbitant price paid for the nation's affluence (Arkush and Lee 5-9). The officially promoted image of the United States in the early 1980s was based on the standard Marxist depiction of the country as a financial oligarchy. At the same time more and more atheoretical, descriptive, and pluralistic analyses of the United States appeared, forming the base of a school on interpretation defined by David Shambaugh as "non-Marxist" (Shambaugh 281). The travel books from that time played an important role in creating a more multifaceted and complex image of America.

The three books I analyze in this chapter were written in the 1980s. Liu Zongren's *Two Years in the Melting Pot* ( *Daronglu liangnian* 大熔炉两年 ) and Wang Zuomin's *The American Kaleidoscope: Society, Landscape, People* ( *Meiguo wanhuatong: shehui, fengguang, renwu* 美国万花筒: 社会、风光、人物) are described by Shambaugh as "the most popular" and "the finest examples" of Chinese travel writing about America of that time (Shambaugh 159). Yang Yusheng considers Wang's travel book one of "the representative works" "*daibiaoxing zuopin* 代表性作品" (Yang 295n). While the popularity of their works is due to their non-ideological approach and their extensive first-hand experience in communicating with Americans, the influence of the third book, Ding Ling's *Random Notes from a Visit to America* ( *Fang Mei sanji* 访美散记), comes mainly from the fame of its author—one of China's most distinguished twentieth-century writers. Liu's and Wang's works demonstrate the advance of more pluralistic understanding of the United States. The discussion of poverty, crime, and racial problems still occupies a significant place in their books, but the emphasis is on the achievement of American people. Ding Ling's book, however, is a fine example of ideological writing. In

Todorov's portrait gallery of travelers, she would be a special type of assimilator, one who lacks aggressive impulses. The assimilator wants to modify Others so they will be like his ideal, and s/he interprets them in terms of a lack with regard to this ideal. Ding Ling interprets America in terms of a lack with regard to the communist ideal. Her belief in the superiority of the socialist system is similar to that expressed by Wang Ruoshui in the epigraph to this chapter. To what extent her conviction in the moral strength of socialist China is connected with the traditional concept of moral supremacy of Chinese civilization is a question that deserves attention. What is important for my analysis here is that in *Random Notes from a Visit to America* these two themes are intertwined. The passionate defense of China's socialist choice is accompanied by portraits of Chinese-Americans in whom ethical behavior is explained by their Chinese origin. This chapter is divided into three parts, each one providing information about the author and analyzing how the image of America is created in the respective travel book. While discussing the images of America created in these books, I ask the following questions: How is the image of America connected with the fore-meanings inherited from Chinese tradition? What are the differences in their approach to the American Other? Does the better knowledge of the American Other affect the knowledge of the Chinese Self, that is, to what extent is the epistemological value of alterity realized?

### ***Two Years in the Melting Pot***

Liu Zongren was born in 1940. After graduating junior high school in 1959 he joined the army for six years. In 1965 he was selected by the Foreign Languages Publishing Bureau to receive foreign language training. In 1968, he was given a job at

*China Reconstructs*, a magazine published in six languages and designed to introduce Chinese culture, arts, and current events to the outside world. He tried to avoid any involvement in factional fighting during the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, but an attempt to defend his colleagues in an argument with a senior official ended up with a three-year sentence in a remote labor reformation center. The sentence was reduced by six months for good behavior, he returned to his job at *China Reconstructs*, and was finally rehabilitated in October 1978. In May 1980 he passed the government examination for a scholarship for two-year study abroad given by the Ministry of Education. Despite the lack of formal training and college diploma, he came out on top in the examination.<sup>39</sup>

In the United States, Liu was expected to take a Master's degree in journalism, but after studying for a while at Northwestern University in Chicago, he discovered that the difference between the management of the press in China and the United States would make his diploma a useless achievement. He decided that the best way to realize his desire to understand America and the American people better was to travel, to get involved in various activities, and to communicate with the people he met. His impressions are summarized in *Two Years in the Melting Pot* written in English and published by China Books & Periodicals in 1984. The positive response to the book encouraged him to translate it into Chinese, and the first Chinese edition appeared in 1987. The success of this first book gave him confidence to continue writing, and he published two more books.<sup>40</sup> In the postscript to the first Chinese edition of *Two Years in*

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<sup>39</sup> The information about Liu Zongren's biography is based on the autobiographical entries in the books he has published.



*the Melting Pot*, Liu writes that the differences between the American and Chinese editions are due to the added explanations of Chinese customs to the American audience and vice versa (Liu CE 383). There are some discrepancies, however, that are more than descriptions of local mores. The Chinese first edition is published after Liu's second visit to the United States in 1985 and contains some new thoughts about America later included in the first revised American edition of the book published in 1988. In this chapter, I refer to the first Chinese edition and the first revised American edition.

Liu arrived in the United States in November 1980. His first impressions are summed up in a letter he sent to his wife and son from the Chinese embassy in Washington, D.C.: "The temperature is much the same here as in Beijing. The difference is that everywhere there is green grass. There are no crowds of people on the street. [. . .] Our son would like this place; there are squirrels everywhere!" Liu also mentions the abundance of food offered to the embassy visitors, and complains that he has little appetite because "I don't feel comfortable here" (Liu AE 13-14, CE 14).<sup>41</sup> In this letter the author delineates two important themes that engage him during his stay in the United States: admiration for the natural beauty of the places he visits and the discomfort he experiences dealing with the abundance in the United States. In contrast to Fei Xiaotong's first impressions, the emphasis here is on the spaciousness and beauty of the American landscape. Admiration for the American technological progress, typical for many Chinese travelogues about America, does not occupy a significant place in *Two*

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<sup>40</sup> *6 Tanyin Alley*. San Francisco: China Books & Periodicals, 1989; *Hard Time: 30 Months in a Chinese Labor Camp*. San Francisco: China Books & Periodicals, 1995.

<sup>41</sup> The quotes from the American and the Chinese edition are marked in the brackets with the number of the page and AE (American Edition) and CE (Chinese Edition) respectively. If there is no discrepancy between the American and the Chinese edition, I give the page numbers in both. If there is a discrepancy, I provide my own translation. The pages of discrepancies and omissions in the respective editions are pointed with "Cf." preceding them.

*Years in the Melting Pot*. The author describes in detail how the high level of technological development facilitates the life of ordinary Americans, but the pages concerned with technology lack the enthusiasm and admiration characterizing the pages devoted to the natural beauty in this country. Time and again, Liu Zongren returns to the spaciousness and splendor of the American landscape. When an American friend asks him what he admires most about America, he responds without any hesitation that the most admirable thing is the spaciousness of this land—this statement is missing in the American edition (Liu CE 193, Cf. AE 83-85). While Fei Xiaotong emphasizes the role of hard work of American people in the creation of American wealth, Liu puts more stress on the large quantity of fertile soil and the scarcity of population compared to China (Liu AE 100, CE 221). The chapter devoted to his experience in an American farm is the only one where nostalgia and Liu's worries about misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication are not mentioned. During his second visit to the United States in 1985, the author spent ten days in New York mostly locked in his room watching television, which he regards as a proof that his heart belongs to the countryside (Liu CE 331, Cf. AE 210-12). The descriptions of Liu's visits to some small American towns or farms as well as his walks in the country show a person attached to a simple life in proximity with nature. He is well aware of his love for both Chinese and American countryside and openly declares it in the book. Only during his stay in America, however, the paramount importance of Chinese cultural tradition in his life is revealed to him.

Liu Zongren's travel narrative convincingly manifests the importance of Todorov's idea that the dialogue with Others requires the postulation of a universal horizon for our search for understanding, even if it is clear that in practice we will never

encounter universal categories *per se*, only categories that are *more* universal. The most significant characteristic of Liu's experiences in the United States is the lack of a universal horizon against which America and China can be compared. Either America is compared to China or China to America. Thus, the American affluence is a source of tension because it constantly reminds the author of the Chinese poverty. An American journalist, Ron Dorfman, Liu's colleague in China, has arranged for him to stay at the home of Professor McKnight from Northwestern University. The professor and his wife tried to provide everything necessary for their guest, but Liu's stay in the affluent Chicago suburb turned into self-inflicted torture. This is how the author experiences his first contact with American suburbia:

Such a huge room for one person! [...] This would be the first time for me to sleep in such an elegant bedroom. I thought of Fengyun [Liu's wife], how often she complained that our hard, board-bottomed bed was painful for her bad back. If at home we could have had such a bed with a spring mattress, she would surely have felt better. [...] I counted six lights in the room—table lights, wall lights, even a bed light. Why would one person need so many lights? At home we had only one small light in each of our two bedrooms, and we didn't turn either one on until it was needed. (Liu AE 15, CE18 )

Liu's inability to see Chinese economic problems in a larger historical context and his propensity to immediately compare the affluent life of the American middle class with his family's standard of life or the life of Chinese population in general is the source of the psychological discomfort he experiences throughout his stay in the United States.

Moreover, the author discovers that he reacts with resentment when somebody criticizes China, even if the criticism is milder than the critical things he and his colleagues used to say about the Chinese government in their Beijing office. Even innocent jokes about China hurt his feelings: “I was very sensitive on such matters, and viewed any disparaging remark about China as a personal affront” (Liu AE 24, CE 36). The heightened sensitivity about China’s problems and how China compares to the United States is the main reason for Liu’s problems in communicating with his American hosts. According to the original plan, he was supposed to stay at the McKnights’ home in Evanston and to study at Northwestern University in Chicago. The privileges this arrangement offers, however, are a source of frustration. Liu Zongren cannot get rid of the feeling that he is a stranger in this place and does not belong there.

The first celebration of Christmas in America turned into another occasion to compare the frugal life of his family in China with the conspicuous consumption of a consumerist society. During the first Christmas party he visited, a simple misunderstanding provoked a painful reaction. He tries to attract the attention of a maid serving sea food:

I turned and stretched out my hand, but the maid didn’t notice me and moved on. One of the guests saw this and laughed. I must have looked somewhat silly, not catching the maid’s attention. Yet, I was not there to be laughed at and anger swelled inside me. Yes, I had come from a poor country, had never dealt with maids and had never experienced so-called society. But that was no reason to make me a laughing stock. I had to restrain myself from leaving (Liu AE 29, CE 47).

It did not occur to the author that he was simply laughed at as a “somewhat silly” looking human being. The innocent and insensitive laughter of a guest seeing a funny situation is immediately translated as an insult and connected to Chinese poverty. Paradoxically, the author sees the joyous Christmas parties as a labor necessary to understand American society: “I felt I was being looked down upon, humbled, and yet, I had to go in order to learn” (Liu AE 31, CE 48).

It seems that the author understands that his own disposition is the main reason for his problems: “在很大程度上，我的‘不平等’的感觉出自我的自卑感. The feeling that I am not equal to these people is largely due to my own inferiority complex” (Liu CE 48, Cf. AE 29-30). The deep sincerity of this confession characterizes most of the Liu’s descriptions of the embarrassing situations created by his lack of confidence and his concern about “face-saving.” Yet the confession quoted above is missing from the American edition—a truly “save-facing” omission! Most of the textual discrepancies between the Chinese and the American editions are in fact due to the author’s explanation of some Chinese customs to his American readers and vice versa. But certain omissions in the first several chapters show that the author understands the American concept of political correctness. Critical remarks on religion or the weight of the people Liu describes appear only in the Chinese edition. His attitude toward the grace his hosts in Evanston say before meal is downright ironic: “这位美国知名的社会学教授，每顿饭前都要向上帝表示感谢。可是，他要是挣不来钱，他夫人就买不来牛肉。我想笑，但没敢笑，也跟着他们低声说了一句‘阿门!’ This noted sociology professor expresses his gratitude toward God before every meal. But if he does not make any money, his wife could not afford to buy beef. I wanted to laugh but did not dare, just joined them and in a

low voice said: 'Amen!' (Liu CE 23, Cf. AE 16-19). These glimpses of humor, however, do not provide psychological relief. Most of his fears and worries seem unreal, yet he experiences "the terrible feeling of isolation and loneliness." Liu sees the irony in his situation: the people he knows in Beijing are probably sure he is enjoying himself in the richest country in the world, while he suffers because the Americans do not understand him and do not seem to care how he feels, and because he does not understand them. One small detail convincingly shows the real anxiety caused by his imaginary uncertainties: the author enjoys the midnight visit of a mouse in his room, because this ugly little creature is the only friend visiting his lonely room (Liu AE 46, CE 106).

The beginning of the classes at Medill School of Journalism at Chicago's Northwestern University only exacerbates this situation. From the beginning Liu Zongren feels this is not a place for him because he is the only Chinese, at least a decade older than most of the students, and very self-conscious about his English. Liu's misinterpretation of the reactions of people around him makes the development of friendly and fruitful communication impossible. He feels increasingly frustrated in his studies and his attempts to adjust to suburban life. After more than two months of futile efforts to integrate, he decides to move to another university and share a house with Chinese friends. Liu feels more comfortable living in Chicago's West side and studying at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle because he is liberated from the feeling of non-belonging that tormented him in Evanston. After one year in the United States, Liu feels more accustomed to the people and the American ways. His contacts with American and international students intensify, and he begins to enjoy the opportunity to meet people from different countries.

Liu Zongren's travel book is primarily concerned with the problems of cross-cultural understanding. The author's remarks about the American political system, democracy, and social problems are always connected with stories about his interaction with people in America. His predicaments and worries in the process of learning to associate with a different world are described with remarkable honesty<sup>42</sup>. At the beginning of his visit, the American Other is perceived mostly on axiological level, that is, the Chinese Self is often seen as inferior to the American Other with respect to the material circumstances of life. Liu realizes that his problems with adjustment to the American way of life come not only from the antagonism between the political and economic systems in China and the United States but also from cultural differences and habits. His cultural heritage is the main obstacle to his adjustment to American society (Liu AE 55, CE 128-9). According to him, the main virtue parents try to instill in their children in China is obedience because it guarantees a unified country and a harmonious family life. Thus, harmony is synonymous with social conformity. American individualism requires the development of the opposite traits. Liu tries to be more "aggressive" and self-assertive. He explains to his Chinese readers that the standard Chinese translation of "aggressive" as "*qinlüexing* 侵略性" (aggression) creates a wrong impression about this important American quality. The better translation would be "vigorous" or "with plenty of dash." (Liu CE 84, Cf. AE 39-40). He sees his decision to move from the "too quiet and too upper-middle class" Evanston as a sign that he has finally learned to be more aggressive, to say "no," and to make his own choices, that is, to behave in a way that is more American than Chinese (Liu AE 57, CE 128-9). The

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<sup>42</sup> In a review published in *Dushu*, the sincerity of the author is pointed as one of the qualities of the book. See Fengzi 104-5.

problems the author experiences in his communication with American people show him the importance of his cultural values. The adjustment to American society is easier for a European than it is for a Chinese, no matter whether s/he comes from the mainland or Taiwan. The reasons for this difficult adaptation are mostly cultural, because for the Chinese upholding their cultural values is of paramount importance (Liu AE 196, CE 372).

Liu's thoughts on the differences between Chinese and American cultures are connected with the question "How much could the West change China?"—the question that, according to Fei Xiaotong, every Chinese faces sooner or later. The answer is not optimistic: history has already proved the strength of Chinese tradition. The Western lifestyle is very appealing to many young Chinese, but they will discover their cultural identity soon after trying to adopt the Western ways: "A billion people are like an immense ocean which can easily accommodate a few drops of foreign pigment without changing color" (Liu AE 127, CE 270-1). While discussing Chinese problems, Liu warns against the temptation to judge the Others' values on the basis of one's own. For instance, discussing the concept of freedom on a night talk-show about China on one of Chicago's radio stations, Liu says that "to plunk down the American type of freedom in the middle of China" is impossible because the Chinese cultural background is entirely different. Americans should avoid passing judgments on China based on their own culture and their prejudice against communism (Liu AE 127, CE 272-3). He repeatedly writes about the necessity to avoid measuring Chinese realities by the American yardstick, but nonetheless applies traditional Chinese values while discussing the contemporary family life in America. He accuses the divorced Americans of narcissism and irresponsibility because,



unlike many Chinese couples, they do not stay together for the sake of their children (Liu AE 131, CE 277-8).

The high divorce rate and the gap between rich and poor in a wealthy country are two themes that attract attention of the authors coming from socialist China in the 1980s. Liu's analysis of the problems in the United States, however, reveals the influence of the traditional paradigm of Spiritual China versus Materialistic America. After twenty months of observing American life, Liu declares his hope that China would never become a country where money is of first importance (Liu AE 197, CE 372). In a talk to a Christian group meeting on the Northwestern campus in Evanston, he says:

Americans have set a bad example for the world to follow. Because of their standards, people in other countries are learning to evaluate life only in terms of material possessions. They want to make more money and buy more things, as if life were nothing more than lust for personal pleasure. Overindustrialization everywhere may be detrimental to any genuine enjoyment in people's lives. It makes society function with a pace and sensitivity of a machine (Liu AE 145, CE 298).

In the discussion following this speech, Liu says that the high degree of mechanization in America brought about alienation and weakening of interpersonal contacts. He expresses his doubts whether the world is heading in the right direction. The author's observations about American materialism, however, are followed by a self-ironic confession that he himself wants to take back from the United States a color TV set and a stereo. He also notes that in Beijing his lofty arguments about the dangers of consumerism would not find many adherents (Liu AE146, CE 298-9). Moreover, the author writes about many

people in America who are well aware of the dangers of consumerism. It should be noted that in all the books I analyze, the criticism of the American political and economic system, and the rejection of arrogant American foreign policy are combined with the portraits of many wonderful American people. Liu compares his American friends with the kids in the movie *E.T.* he saw in San Francisco on his way back home. This metaphor suggests both the loneliness he felt in the United States and the kindness of his American friends who have helped him overcome the barriers to better understanding and adjustment to their world.

After overcoming the initial period of insecurity and confusion, Liu's approach to American realities becomes more confident and the epistemic level in his narrative appears as prominent as the axiological one. There is one problem, however, that is a source of constant confusion for the author. Here is what Liu writes about his experience with the racial problem in the United States: “‘美国黑人’是个难题，我不知道回国后该怎么说 ‘Black people in America’ is such a difficult problem that I do not know what to say about it when I go back home” (Liu CE 375, Cf. AE 198-99). On the one hand, he believes that this is a problem created by the social system, but on the other hand, he cannot accept the way black leaders put the blame exclusively on other people. He is disturbed by the problems plaguing the West Chicago neighborhood he moved in to: poverty, crime, and an inefficient police force. Coming from an egalitarian society, Liu finds the contrast between rich and poor in Chicago striking. Yet several episodes in the book betray deeply inculcated hierarchical impulses sleeping under the egalitarian ideology. During his first summer in America Liu decided to volunteer working as a tutor to children in a poor black area. His very short visit to the tutorial center ended with a

decision to quit, explained in the following way: “到美国后，我一直生活在中产阶层的白人，可能受了他们的影响，对穷苦的黑人产生了恐惧心理. After I came to the United States, I have lived only among the white representatives of the middle class. Probably under their influence I have developed a fear of poor black people” (Liu CE 154, Cf. AE 67-68). This passage is omitted from the American edition which shows that Liu is well aware that his “fear of poor black people” is unacceptable not only to the Marxist internationalists, but probably also to the white representatives of the middle class themselves. He confesses that the friendly feelings for the oppressed black brothers in America instilled by socialist internationalism were gradually replaced by anxiety. In an interview Liu says that social welfare took away the dignity of poor people and that it seems his black neighbors hate Chinese. Seeing his statement in print, he realizes it sounds racist. The author tries to explain his views to his black American friends: he sympathizes with both the inner-city poor blacks who lack an opportunity for better education and with the middle class people who pay the taxes to support welfare system yet live in fear of crime. He does not approve of the welfare system, not because of its price, but because it deprives its recipients of appreciating the value of education and work (Liu AE 63-5, CE 143-5).

His controversial discussion of the race problem in America demonstrates both the difficulty to grasp a country as large and exuberant as America and the educational value of traveling. When he explains the concept of “cultural shock” to his Chinese readers, Liu confirms Montaigne’s idea that there is “no better school” than traveling: after years of reading about America, he discovers that the large amount of bookish knowledge he has acquired is not very useful in the real country he lives in (Liu CE 124,

Cf. 55-57). Liu is well aware of the impossibility to capture a country in a book, and notes that he was able to write only because his limited knowledge of the United States made generalizations and stereotypes easy: “I had in a way perched far above American society, and looking down had thought I detected clear-cut shapes and colors” (Liu AE 214, Cf. CE 275). With the accumulation of first-hand experience, however, the clear-cut shapes and colors fade away and writing about the United States seems increasingly difficult (Liu CE 275, AE 214). Paradoxically, this difficulty testifies to his better understanding of the United States: the author realizes that association with Otherness is an endless cognitive process that excludes fixed images. Nonetheless, this cognitive process yields results—the epistemological value of alterity is realized in Liu’s travel experience. The celebration of the simpler life in China as opposed to the American affluence in his book betrays the influence of another traditional concept about China and the West, that the most significant characteristic of the Eastern civilization was self-contentedness (*zhizu* 知足), and that of the Western one non-self-contentedness (*buzhizu* 不知足). In his communication with the American Other, Liu realized that his roots are in Chinese culture and the Chinese way of life: “I felt at home only when I was in China. I had learned this from my stay in the United States” (Liu AE 215, CE 380). The experiences in America helped him to see the formative role of Chinese culture in his way of life and system of values.

### ***The American Kaleidoscope***

Wang Zuomin (1916-2005) did not receive a proper early education because her family was constantly on the move during the turbulent Warlord Era. Despite the lack of

formal training, the intelligent girl was accepted at Zhejiang University when she was sixteen years old. Soon she was expelled from this school for joining a protest against the chancellor and spent a year in Japan. Upon returning from Japan, she became involved in the activities of the Communist Party. In 1944, Wang attended the Chongqing Post-Graduate School of Journalism (sponsored by Columbia University) and graduated with honors. She earned her second bachelor's degree in 1948 at the School of Journalism of the University of Missouri, Columbia. After returning to China, she began working for Foreign Languages Press in Beijing. During the Cultural Revolution, Wang Zuomin was sentenced to five years in prison because of her connections with some persecuted old Party cadres. She regained her freedom in 1973 and, although she had passed the retirement age, returned to her work in Beijing Foreign Languages Press.<sup>43</sup> When the Chinese Academy of Social Science asked this publishing house to recommend a writer to travel and write a book about America, Wang was selected as the best candidate. She re-visited the United States in 1982-1983, traveled extensively from May 1982 to May 1983, and published *The American Kaleidoscope* in Chinese in 1985. An edition in English, translated and edited by Wang Zuomin's husband, Duan Liangchen, was published in 1986 by New World Press in Beijing. In this chapter I refer to these two editions.

In the foreword to the English edition, Wang Zuomin declares that her approach is “seeking truth from facts” “*shishi qiushi* 实事求是” and her goal is to promote genuine understanding between the Chinese and the American people (Wang EE 14).<sup>44</sup> Similarly

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<sup>43</sup> See Duan Dongping.

<sup>44</sup> I use the first edition of the book in China, marked as CE (Chinese Edition) and the first edition in English, marked as EE (Edition in English). If there is no discrepancy between the American and the

to Liu Zongren, she creates an image of America that is an impressive patchwork of numerous meetings and conversations with individual American people. The author obviously enjoys the communication, and writes that many Americans are open and free-thinking people, or as she puts it, belong to “the freedom party” “*ziyoupai* 自由派” or “the enlightened party” “*kaimingpai* 开明派” (Wang CE 16, EE 31). What distinguishes Wang Zuomin’s book is the confident way in which she approaches and describes American realities. In her contacts with affluent Americans, there is no trace of Liu’s feeling of inequality and inferiority. With a few negligible exceptions, critical remarks about Chinese people and the Chinese national character peppering Fei Xiaotong’s travelogues are nearly absent from her narrative. Wang’s approach is reminiscent of Todorov’s ideal of respecting another culture while remaining committed to her own. This epistemic level is prevalent in her book. All the axiological judgments are cautiously balanced with detailed explanations of the criticized phenomena.

Wang’s tour starts in Boston where she spends three months actively seeking contacts and studying the city and its problems. She tries to find a proper definition of “middle class” using the book written by an American scholar<sup>45</sup> and discussing the term with her host, the MIT Professor Richard Robinson and his wife, Carol. Wang visits a high school, a public library, a home for senior citizens, and joins a town meeting to protest against the nuclear arms race. Led by her desire to meet people of all walks of life, she visits the home of the domestic employee of the Robinsons and talks to an unemployed teacher. What attracts her attention is the polarization of American society.

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Chinese edition, I give the page numbers in both. If there is a discrepancy, I provide my own translation. The pages of discrepancies and omissions in the respective editions are pointed with “Cf.” preceding them.

<sup>45</sup> Robertson, Yan. *Sociology*. New York: Worth Publishers, Inc., 1981.

She uses a study by the Brookings Institute entitled “Urban Decline and the Future of American Cities” to summarize her impressions of the “two-faced Boston.” Boston is usually associated with the prestigious universities, the magnificent buildings in the Back Bay area, and its excellent cultural life. However, the city has another, less attractive face. One of Wang’s friends defines the southern areas of the city where the poor population lives as a separate world, entirely different from the MIT-Harvard area, Cambridge, that the author is familiar with. Wang notes that during her travels she discovers that this type of duality characterizes all big American cities (Wang CE 55-7, EE 68-70). New York is described as at once affluent and destitute, elegant and dilapidated, glittering and glaring. In the Chinese edition, a “Dog Hospital” is mentioned as the strangest thing in this city. In the English edition the author adds a sentence clarifying her position for the foreign readers: “I love dogs but feel miserable at the thought that so many humans around the world, Americans not entirely excluded, are languishing in poverty and disease” (Wang EE 154, Cf. CE 146).<sup>46</sup>

Wang Zuomin’s main concern is not American materialism, but the unequal distribution of American wealth. While the Americans she associates with are described as hard-working, generous, and caring people, she criticizes the system they live in as unjust. In a chapter called “Polarization” (*Liangji fenhua* 两极分化) she uses data from American sociology textbooks to attack the myth of equal opportunities. Like Fei Xiaotong, Wang argues that the “rags-to-riches” stories that happened relatively often during the early periods of American history, are rare in the second half of the twentieth century. She finds particularly disturbing the statistics that the upper one fifth of the

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<sup>46</sup> The attention Americans lavish on pets is often interpreted by the Chinese visitors as a sign of alienation and the shallowness of emotional ties with other people (Arkush and Lee 11).

American population possesses 76% of the wealth, while the bottom two fifths possess 2.2%.<sup>47</sup> The high standard of living in the United States is indisputable, but the popular American ideas of equal opportunity and free competition disguise a reality in which the rich get richer and the poor poorer. The author also notes the glaring disparity between public and private schools resulting in a much better education for the wealthy (Wang CE 363-66, EE 370-3). However, Wang distances herself from both the dominant Marxist view that the United States is a financial oligarchy and the view that America is a country dominated by the middle class. American society is very complex, and only Americans have the authority to define it, she says (Wang CE 395, EE 404). Nevertheless, she risks one generalization: “America on the whole has a rich natural endowment but lacks social harmony” (Wang CE 416, EE 426). The discussion of disparity in distribution of wealth in America is connected with the author’s thoughts on the democracy in America.

American political life, the birth of the New Right, the election of the president and the Congress, and the role of money in American politics are all discussed in her book. The author notes that many Americans admit that the dollar controls the White House and the Congress to a great extent, yet she adds that the American people are not powerless and can influence their government to a significant degree (Wang CE 208-12, EE 207-14). The American people’s democratic tradition is one of the most impressive phenomena in the United States. Like Fei Xiaotong, Wang traces it to the democratic rules established by the early immigrants disgusted with the feudal order of Europe. The democratic tradition manifests itself in many different ways: Americans are capable of

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<sup>47</sup> Liang Qichao feared the inevitability of socialism because seventy percent of America’s wealth was in the hands of one-fourth of one percent of the population while thousands of immigrants lived and died in abject poverty (Arkush and Lee 7).



accommodating differing and opposing opinions, they are more frank and outspoken than the Chinese, and at least nominally they treat each other as equals. Yet Wang's views on democracy show a great degree of ambivalence. On the one hand, she thinks that the power of money undercuts the American democratic tradition and the ostensible equality among people cannot hide the inequality of wealth. The democracy in America is confined to debates and decisions on minor and local issues, while major national and international issues are subjected to a different order. As an example she points out that almost a million people demonstrated in New York against the nuclear arms race, but military expenditures continue to rise astronomically. Moreover, the government is not active enough in dealing with poverty and unemployment. On the other hand, the end of the Vietnam War shows that the American people can force the government to follow their will. Wang's conclusion of her analysis of American democracy is as follows:

Regardless of how one tries to assess the American political and social system, I believe the American people do have a solid democratic tradition. They cherish democracy and abhor anything they have come to realize as being anti-democratic. The fact that the civil rights movements in the 1960s had such a mass following of both blacks and whites was a recent proof (Wang CE 447, EE 457).

She also comments on the notion of America as a melting pot, but she accepts it only to a certain extent. In the English edition, the author adds a joke missing in the Chinese edition: "I often joke that what's in the 'pot' may be a beef stew, the WASPs being the choicest pieces" (Wang, EE 76, Cf. CE 63).

Like Fei Xiaotong, Wang notes the great improvement of the status of black people compared to their situation during her first visit in the 1940s. Many pages are devoted to the history of the struggle for emancipation, the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights movement. She describes the election of Harold Washington for a mayor of Chicago on 12 April 1983 and notes that he is not the only black mayor in the United States. But race in America is not as important as class. While segregation and discrimination have been abolished, two-thirds of America's blacks still live in financial difficulties and this is the real problem of black people. To express her understanding of the race problem, she quotes an American professor: "What's the use of the right to dine with the whites if you don't have the money to foot the bill?" (Wang CE 274, EE 275).

The focus in Wang's book is on her impressions from the people she meets everywhere in the country. Americans are described with warmth and sympathy. The author underscores her conviction that ordinary Americans represent the true America, and that they are good people (Wang CE 141, EE 149). The visits to small towns convince her that "美国人真是友好的人民，尤其在小地方，越发亲切热忱。 Americans are truly friendly people, and the inhabitants of smaller places are even more warm and affectionate" (Wang, CE 69). Negative comments on Chinese phenomena are scarce in the book, but describing the work of American customer service people, the author cannot avoid a comparison with China. While in China cold or even rude treatment of customers in places of public service remains a constant problem, for the American librarians, for instance, "the reader is always right" (Wang CE 219, EE 219). She returns to the quality of American service many times throughout the book. American service personnel are described as well trained, competent, efficient, and

courteous; moreover, their experience deserves to be studied in China (Wang CE 116, EE 124). Not only the service staff but all Americans are always ready to lend a helping hand. One of the paradoxes in the American life is that fierce competition, individualism, and even selfishness go hand in hand with a readiness to help others. The most probable explanation of this paradox is that in the early periods of American history both individualistic and collective efforts were needed for survival and the pattern of helping others yet defending one's own was established at that time (Wang CE 449-53, EE 460-64). Throughout the book the author narrates about her countless observations of "good people and good deeds" in the United States and the numerous volunteer activities the Americans enthusiastically engage in. To describe this trait in the American character, she uses the Chinese idiom "delight in helping others" "*zhuren weile* 助人为乐". At the end of her journey, when her host in Boston asks her whether she has met any unfriendly or provocative people, her negative reply is not only a courteous response, but truthfully describes her year-long experience.

Like Fei Xiaotong, Wang underscores American industriousness: "If there is anything that can be called an American trait, hard work is certainly a most prominent one. It impressed me deeply in the forties and remains unchanged now in the eighties" (Wang CE 193, EE 196). The rapid development of the United States is due to the hard-work and courage of its people, its rich natural endowment, and the caliber of some of the leaders who have guided the country (Wang CE 186, EE 189). The title of one chapter reminds some of Fei's conclusions about America's wealth "No Windfall Wealth" (*Xingfu bushi tianshanglai* 幸福不是天上来). When discussing American development, many Chinese mention the country's rich natural endowments, but they should take into

full account the American people's efforts (Wang CE 327, EE 332). The innovative spirit of Americans is also mentioned with admiration. Fei Xiaotong was worried that the American drive to open new frontiers could bring misery to the world. Wang notes that the American people have channeled their vigor into opening new frontiers in the field of science, technology, and material production. However, the expressions of admiration for material progress in the book are invariably followed by criticism of the lack of social progress.

Wang Zuomin's confident approach toward American realities helps her see some of the problems Chinese travelers usually write about in a new light. For instance, like many others, she mentions the loneliness of old people living apart from their families, but unlike the others, she interprets this phenomenon as an expression of the independent American spirit: “突出的印象是美国老人十分珍惜自己的独立自由，十分不愿成为子女的负担。那种顽强不屈的面对生活的精神给我印象至深。The most powerful impression is that the old people in the United States fiercely cherish their independence and freedom, and always try to avoid being a burden for their children. The indomitable spirit with which they face life made a deep impression on me” (Wang, CE 35, Cf. AE 45-46). She notes with admiration that even disabled people she meets try to be independent, and are treated by others with utmost respect (Wang CE 190, EE 193). The American spirit of independence is also traced back to the early immigrants. The author approvingly comments on the way independence is cultivated in children. On the other hand, if pushed to the extreme this spirit can yield negative results like the wide-spread private ownership of guns (Wang CE 447-8, EE 458-9).

Like Liu Zongren, Wang Zuomin tries to understand why the crime rate is very high in a country as rich as the United States. In explaining or criticizing American phenomena, Wang uses exclusively American books or journalistic reports. She points out two explanations of this phenomenon. First, an American journalist has argued that the crime wave in America is due to the unsolved social problems: unemployment, drugs, poverty, ethnic friction as well as the problems of the justice system itself. Second, President Reagan has explained the high crime rate with the idea that the “nature of man” is the root of crime and “Some men are prone to evil.” She rejects this idea and points out that the crime rate is higher in America than in some Western European countries and Japan, which does not mean that human nature varies by national boundaries, but that some societies deal with crime more successfully (Wang CE 265-6, EE 266-7). In her opinion, the disturbingly high crime rate is due to the fact that in this affluent American society, one out of every seven people lives below the poverty line. Yet she expresses confidence that the ever-searching and vigorous American spirit will sooner or later find a solution for the social problems in the country. She quotes Alexis de Tocqueville’s observation that Americans consider their society to be a changing scene, in which everything that seems to be good today may be superseded by something better tomorrow as summarizing her impression that the Americans are a people who “know no last frontier” (Wang CE 456-7, EE 467-8).

Both Liu Zongren and Wang Zuomin end their books with remarks on the complexity and changeability of the United States. Another similarity in their approach is the focus on the interactions and conversations with American people. The fact that both of them speak English makes communication possible. Let us now see how an image of

the United States created by a writer who does not speak English and spends a relatively short time in the United States differs from theirs.

### ***Random Notes from a Visit to America***

If Ding Ling (1904-1986)'s life were turned into a novel, its readers would find the plot tortuous to the point of implausibility and that the sufferings of the main female protagonist seem highly exaggerated. The main source of problems in her life is the conflict between her devotion to the communist ideal and her belief in artistic freedom. Ding Ling was born into a rich family in Linli county, Hunan. The decline of the family and her father's death when she was four years old forced her mother to begin working as a teacher. Ding Ling embraced her mother's anti-traditional views and came under the influence of the leading intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement. She began writing in the late 1920's, and her second short story, *The Diary of Miss Sophie* (*Shafei nüshi de riji* 莎菲女士的日记), established her reputation as an iconoclastic writer. She joined the Communist Party in 1932 and went to Yan'an in the early 1940, after being released from several years of imprisonment under the Guomindang (Nationalist) Party for her political stand. At the Communist base camp, Ding Ling was involved in a controversy over the proper political role of art and literature, which ended with self-criticism and the acceptance of the idea that art should be subordinated to revolutionary needs. Her major novel, *The Sun Shines on the Sanggan River* (*Taiyang zhao zai Sangganhe shang* 太阳照在桑干河上), published in 1948, won her the Stalin prize in 1951, but was to be her last published work of fiction for nearly thirty years. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Ding Ling held some leading positions in the country's cultural

hierarchy. She herself played an active role in the early political campaigns against “ideologically disoriented” writers, but in 1957 she was denounced as a “rightist,” expelled from the party, and deprived of her rights as a writer and citizen. Her works were prohibited and she was sent to do labor reform on a large state farm in the Great Northern Wilderness where she remained for twelve years. Yet the most tragic part of Ding Ling’s life began with the Cultural Revolution. Her manuscripts were destroyed, she suffered much physical abuse, and was confined in a “cowshed” (*niupeng*) for ten months. In 1970, she was taken to Beijing and held in solitary confinement for five years in the notorious Qincheng prison. It should be noted, that when she was allowed reading materials, she read through the works of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. She was released in 1975, and officially rehabilitated in 1979. The ban on her works was lifted, and she resumed her career as a writer.<sup>48</sup>

Ding Ling visited the United States in 1981 at the invitation of the International Writing Program at Iowa University. She and her husband Chen Ming were allocated space in the Mayflower apartments where they enjoyed the multinational company of writers gathered from more than twenty countries. They visited New York, Chicago, Ann Arbor, San Francisco, Washington and spent ten days in Canada before going back home. The impressions from this trip were published in 1984 under the title *Random Notes from a Visit to America*. The book also contains the text of the two lectures she gave in the United States and the one in Canada.

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<sup>48</sup> For more information on Ding Ling’s biography see Alber, Feuerwerker Mei Yi-tsi, Ding Yanzhao, and Yang Guixin.

The most significant feature of Ding Ling's travel narrative is its ideological agenda. She is fascinated with the beauty and spaciousness of American landscape no less than Liu Zongren or Wang Zuomin. The hard work, good organization, and creativity of American people are also mentioned on several other occasions in the book. Writing about a trip on Mississippi River, Ding Ling compares America to a blank page on which the immigrants from Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia as well as the Native Americans drew a beautiful picture of abundance (Ding 41). Yet the author of this book came to an imperialistic and exploitative country and after four months of intense engagement with American reality, departed from an identically imperialistic and exploitative country. Any epistemological advantage of the contact with the Other was not realized because her communication with the American Other is blocked by the ideological clichés. Only once does the author write against the stereotypes but at the end of the book she refutes her own statement. In *Random Notes from a Visit to America* the Spiritual China versus Materialistic America paradigm is reincarnated as Ethical Socialism versus Corrupt Capitalism.

In the first chapter of the book, even before landing on American soil, the ideological frame of the book is set: America is the land of plenty, but its material achievements are empty, while China stands for the only true wealth: human relationships. On the plane to the United States Ding Ling meets an American-Chinese, who is trying to establish business connections with China's tourist industry. In their conversation about the differences between China and America, one familiar theme appears: “我问他愿意住在美国，还是在中国？他有点为难的样子。我便说：‘生活可能是美国方便，条件好些。’他自然地笑了。我又问‘人情呢？’他不等我说下去，



赶忙道：‘还是中国，还是中国人嘛！I asked him where he preferred to live: in China or in the United States? He seemed to be at a loss for an answer. I added: ‘Probably life in America is more convenient and the living conditions are better.’ He smiled in agreement. Then I asked again: ‘What about human relationships?’ He didn’t let me finish speaking, answering quickly: ‘In China, Chinese people understand human feelings better!’” (Ding 3). Another passenger, a Chinese-American computer specialist, described the busy life in the United States as a process of endless frustration: the pace of life is very fast, everybody is very busy, yet the only result of all this intense activity is making more money and having a better standard of life—an achievement that he defines as “utterly void” “*yipian kongxu* 一片空虚” (Ding 4). After landing in San Francisco and visiting Chinatown there, the author further develops this theme, writing about the struggle of Chinese immigrants to defend their culture against “[...] 西方近代的一些腐朽的，空虚的精神生活 the decadent and empty spiritual life of the contemporary West” (Ding 8).

The ethical superiority of Chinese people is suggested in the characterization of the Chinese-Americans Ding Ling meets in the United States. For instance, the Director of the International Writing Program in Iowa, Nie Hualing 聂华苓 (Hualing Nieh Engle) is an American citizen and a professor at Iowa University, yet she is “[...] 一个非常中国式的中国人，一个讲究人情，殷勤能干，贤惠好客的中国妇女 A pronounced Chinese type of person—cherishing human relationships, thoughtful and capable, genial and hospitable Chinese woman” (Ding 23). Another Chinese-American writer, Yu Lihua 於梨华, is portrayed in similar terms. During one interview with Ding Ling, when she hears that the famous writer had to raise poultry in the Great Northern Wilderness, Yu

Lihua cannot suppress her tears. Seeing this, Ding Ling thinks: “这哪里象是一个外国作家? 简直就是一个纯朴, 善良, 热情的中国女孩子。How can this person be a foreign writer? This is simply one honest and simple, warm, and kind-hearted Chinese girl” (Ding 103). The traditional idea of the ethical superiority of Chinese civilization is never explicitly mentioned in the book. Moreover, the author is primarily interested in defending the socialist choice for China and the policies of the Communist Party, not Chinese culture *per se*. Nevertheless, the ethical superiority of Chinese people is implied in all characterizations of the compatriots Ding Ling meets in the United States.

Only when discussing the young students with whom the author shared a dormitory in Iowa, the influence of the traditional formula of Chinese spiritual superiority is surmounted:

我不完全相信一些人对他们的传说, 说美国青年人没有信仰, 没有理想, 只知道玩乐, 吸大麻。我想, 这可能吗? 如果真的都是这样, 美国的物质生活是从哪里来的? 难道不是美国人民, 美国的青年人的劳动创造而全是掠夺与剥削得来的吗? 在五月花公寓我常看见的那群青年人, 总是高兴地和善地对待我们, 给我留下可爱的印象。I do not fully accept what some people say, that the young people in the United States do not believe in anything and have no ideals—they just want to have fun and smoke marihuana. It is difficult for me to accept this because it seems impossible. If it is true, then how was this highly developed material culture created? The high American standards are hardly a result of plunder and exploitation only, they are obviously created by the hard

work of the American people, young people included. I find the happy and genial students I met at the Mayflower Apartments very likable (Ding 27).

In the last chapter of her book, however, the author repeats the clichés she rejects in the above quoted passage: “我到美国的一些地方，无论在城市，在农村，我碰到的普通美国人，都谈起现在年轻人中比较普遍地缺乏信仰，精神空虚，不管他人，他们为此感到不安。All the ordinary Americans I met in the cities or in the countryside were concerned that the young people today usually do not believe in anything and lack ideals, and live in spiritual emptiness and selfishness” (Ding 136).

Ding Ling’s depiction of New York shows another case of refracting an image through the lenses of ideology and personal dislikes. The image of the megapolis is colored by her feelings of being a total stranger to this place. She briefly describes the glamour of Manhattan, and then focuses on a lonely old man sitting at the corner of a busy street. The loneliness and misery he radiates, the fact that nobody pays attention to him and he seems to notice nobody are analyzed in detail. The emphasis in this chapter is on the old man’s destiny rather than on the city itself (Ding 77-9). In the second chapter devoted to New York, the author concentrates on her meetings with Chinese-Americans in this city and their explanations of the American economic system and the concept of credit that she, like Fei Xiaotong, finds unacceptable. She mentions the poverty and high crime rate among the black population, and the chapter ends with a series of rhetorical questions about the inability of the wealthiest country in the world to solve the problems of the homeless (Ding 85). The portraits of New Yorkers and her descriptions of social events are intertwined with Ding Ling’s attempts to defend the socialist policies of China, even when she discusses a phenomenon as controversial as the censorship of art and

literary works. There is censorship in China, and this is necessary because the lack of censorship in the United States brings about the proliferation of pornographic works enticing the young people to lead a licentious life. Some people say the Communist party in China brainwashes its people to force revolution on them, but Ding Ling argues that the aggressive advertising in America is also a kind of brainwashing. Moreover, she quotes her American friends explaining that “在我们美国人，商人就是审查官，他们能不能赚钱来衡量作品。对于严肃认真的艺术作品，他们没有兴趣。In America, the businessman is the censor—the only criteria they apply in judging a piece of art is whether they can make money using it or not. They don't care at all about serious art” (Ding 94). The author also vehemently rejects the idea that divorced women in China are subjected to discrimination and insists that men and women in socialist China enjoy equal rights.

Ding Ling finds explanations and justifications even for the most controversial policies of the Chinese Communist Party. In our time of disgraced ideologies and the prevalent conviction that a writer should be as free of ideological baggage as possible, her devotion to communist ideology, proudly declared many times in the book, sounds perplexing, especially against the background of all the suffering she had to endure due to the leftist ideological extremes in China. Yet in the interview with Yu Lihua, Ding Ling insists that she is first a party member, and only then a writer. When Yu Lihua expresses doubt that an artist should think of herself in such terms, and Ding Ling is first and foremost a writer, and then a communist, the answer is: “从时间上讲，我先是作家，后是党员；但从责任义务讲，我首先是党员，后才是作家，是个党员作家。If we consider the sequence of events, I was a writer first, and then a party member but, if we

consider this problem from the standpoint of responsibility and duty, I am a party member first, and then a writer—I am a Communist Party writer” (Ding 105). This belief is so important for the writer, that she repeats it in the lecture she gave in New York on November 6, 1981. (Ding 152). Two lectures she gave in the United States (New York and Iowa /October 31, 1981/) are devoted to her faith that only the Communist Party can lead new China to the future, and that, despite all mistakes, China is on the right path (Ding 139-46, 147-54).

Her personal tragedy is also seen as a negligible problem against the background of China’s great movement toward a radiant future. Ding Ling was invited to a party in Washington where she told the guests that working in the Great Northern Wilderness helped her better understand the working people. Moreover, raising poultry is a very useful social activity because both children and old people need high protein diets. In the chapter describing this party, entitled “Raising Chickens and Raising a Dog” (*Yangji yu yanggou* 养鸡与养狗) she includes a conversation between two women talking about the dog that one of them loves more than her children. The contrast between doing something beneficial for the people and obsessively clinging to an animal to compensate for the loneliness and emptiness of life in a capitalist country is one more argument in favor of the value of her experience in the wilderness. (Ding 113-4).

Her meetings with old friends like Harold Robert Isaacs and Helen Foster Snow are turned into more occasions to discuss the superiority of communist teachings. Writing about her meeting with Isaacs and the pain with which he talked about the Chinese Revolution, Ding Ling concludes the chapter with an appeal to her old friend to preserve his faith in China because communism will prevail sooner or later (Ding 112). The

poverty in which the old and lonely Helen Snow lived is depicted with anger. She includes in the book the letter that Snow sent to her to illustrate the inhumanity of the capitalist world (Ding 123-6). When asked in an interview for *People* magazine to summarize her impressions from the United States, Ding Ling returned to these two themes: the superiority of communism over capitalism and the anxiety tormenting ordinary people under the capitalist rule. She acknowledges the unquestionable achievements of American science and technology and the highly developed material culture the United States. However, this success is paid by periodical crises, unemployment, and inflation turning the lives of ordinary people into a risky endeavor. Liu Zongren and Wang Zuomin both end their books with emphasis on complexity and changeability of America. But Ding Ling writes that Helen Snow's letter was like a textbook for her, finally showing the true face of America. Chinese writers should be happy that even after losing their capability to write, they receive a salary every month and know nothing about the insecurity in which Americans live. She assumes that this is a good answer to all the questions about freedom of expression in China (Ding 126). Like Columbus who saw mermaids in the Caribbean Sea, Ding Ling sees in America what a Marxist true believer is expected to see.

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In these three travel books, the American Other is approached from various angles. Liu Zongren's reactive commitment to Chinese culture creates many psychological problems when he attempts to adapt to a different way of life. *Two Years in the Melting Pot* testifies to the challenges of a dialogue between the representatives of different cultures in a convincing and unpretentious way. Liu's representation of the United States

is motivated by a desire to understand and learn, and although his loyalty to Chinese culture often hinders his communication with Americans, in his narrative the epistemic level overpowers the axiological one. By contrast, the epistemic level of presentation of the Other is prevalent in Wang Zuomin's work. The confident way in which she approaches and describes American realities reminds us of Lu Xun's term "grabbism" (*nalaizhuyi*) that describes his idea of freely taking from foreign cultures what was good and useful for China. In Ding Ling's travel notes, however, the axiological level takes precedence over the epistemic one. Her work is a model of ideological writing in which the perception of the Other is filtered through the lenses of the ideologically superior Self. Ironically, the traditional elitist paradigm of the Chinese spiritual superiority is echoed in the writings of the anti-traditionalist and iconoclastic woman-writer, only in her rendition she makes it sound like Superior Chinese Socialism versus Corrupt American Capitalism.

**Country Is in the Eye of the Beholder: The Image of America in Ilf and Petrov's *One-storey America* and Vassily Aksyonov's *In Search of Melancholy Baby***

The USA may turn out to be the last bastion of capitalism.

Vladimir Mayakovsky

What is Communism?  
The radiant horizon of humanity.  
What is the horizon?  
An imaginary line that recedes the nearer  
one thinks he is getting to it.

Classic Soviet joke

In this chapter I explore the image of America in Ilia Ilf and Evgeny Petrov's *One-storey America* (*Odnoetazhnaia Amerika* 1937) and Vassily Aksyonov's *In Search of Melancholy Baby* (*V poiskakh grustnogo beiby* 1987). I also refer to Aksyonov's first travelogue about the United States, *Non-Stop Round the Clock: Impressions, Meditations, Adventures* (*Kruglie sutki non-stop: vpechatlenia, razmishlenia, prikliuchenia* 1975), to juxtapose some important themes in his two books on this country. I focus on *One-storey America* and *In Search of Melancholy Baby* because in these two books the distorting function of the axiological approach to the Other is most visible. In both works, the approach on the epistemic level is made impossible by the Procrustean bed of ideology in which the image of the United States is simplified. The epistemological value of alterity is not realized in their travels, in other words, the intense engagement with American reality does not alter their already existent notions about this country. Ilf and Petrov's



ideological beliefs are closer to the ideology of Mayakovsky summarized in the first epigraph to this chapter: the United States is the last bastion of capitalism, but the future belongs to socialism. In their book the perception of America is filtered through the belief in socialism as a superior alternative to capitalism. Aksyonov belongs to the disillusioned generation that created the joke in the second epigraph. In his work America is seen through thick anti-Soviet lenses. The comparison of these two ideologically antithetical books, however, reveals some persistent patterns in the perception and analysis of American culture related to the belief in the Russian soul as culturally superior. Despite the antagonistic political philosophies behind *One-storey America* and *In Search of Melancholy Baby*, the presentation of the Soviet cultural life is strikingly similar. In Ilf and Petrov' motherland of the Radiant Future, concert halls are full, audiences are appreciative of music, writers do not worry about the market, and people live with hope. In the densely anti-Soviet atmosphere of Aksyonov's book the reader also discovers that in the Soviet Union concert halls are full, audiences love music, publishing industry is free of market considerations, people are interested in art—in short, it seems that the cultural life in Aksyonov's totalitarian anti-utopia is truly intense. The criticism of American materialism from both Soviet and anti-Soviet standpoints reveals deeply rooted cultural biases. Let us see how the image of America is created in these books.

### ***One-storey America***

“Ilf and Petrov” is the joint pen name used by Ilya Arnoldovich Fainzilberg (1897-1937) and Evgeny Petrovich Kataev (1903-1942). Both of them were born in Odessa. Ilya Ilf graduated from technical college in 1913 and worked a variety of odd

jobs before moving to Moscow in 1923, where he became a journalist for the magazine *Gudok (The Whistle)*. Evgeny Petrov finished classical high school in 1920, worked as a criminal investigator for a short time, and also moved to Moscow to write for several different magazines, including *Gudok*. In 1927, they formed a unique literary partnership which resulted in a number of hugely popular satirical works. Their most famous works are two satirical novels, *The Twelve Chairs (Dvenadtsat' stulyev 1928)* and *The Golden Calf (Zolotoi telenok 1931)*. Both novels satirize the Soviet mores in the first years of the Soviet state. The main male protagonist in these novels is Ostap Bender, a charming rogue who travels around Russia in search of hidden treasures. The rogue, perceived as an outsider, is able to destabilize the accepted order of things. Ostap Bender is an exemplary *picaro* who challenges generally accepted worldviews and reveals hypocrisy and falsehood everywhere he wanders. His function is the opposite of that of the positive hero of socialist realism who provides support for official authority by showing the positive aspects of society. The *picaro* serves “an inherently negative, critical, and antiauthoritarian role” (Booker and Juraga 60). The inherent subversiveness of the picaresque novel becomes more visible within the oppressive context of Stalinism. Ilf and Petrov’s satire in these two novels is ostensibly aimed at “reactionary elements” surviving in the Soviet society, but their works offer subtle criticism of many other aspects of life in the Soviet Union. The emphasis in both novels is on the degree to which greed still propels and defines the relationships between people in Soviet society. Ilf and Petrov also published many feuilletons, the novella *A Pure Soul (Svetlaya lichnost' 1928)*, and the collection of satirical novellas entitled *1001 Days, or a New Scheherazade (1001 den', ili Novaia Shakherezada 1928)*, under the pseudonym of F. Tolstoevsky). They

visited the United States as special correspondents to *Pravda* and traveled across the country in the fall and early winter of 1935-1936. Unlike their other works, the travelogue published after the trip, *One-storey America (Odnoetazhnaia Amerika 1937)*, was not written entirely jointly by the authors. Each one wrote twenty chapters independently and together they wrote seven more (Wright 14). Ilya Ilf died of tuberculosis in 1937, shortly after his visit to the United States. After Ilf's death, Petrov wrote mainly film scripts. During World War II he served as a war correspondent and died in a plane crash in 1942.<sup>49</sup>

In 1949, in an article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta (The Literary Gazette)* Ilf and Petrov's works were attacked by the critics as "lacking ideals," which effectively banned their writings until 1956. *One-storey America* was condemned as "naively and thoughtlessly" praising Americans, and its authors were accused of "slavish adoration of foreign models" (qtd. in Lur'e 176). The harsh official criticism, however, did not affect the popularity of the two authors. Yakov Lur'e points out that they deserve the title "*chitaemye klassiki*" "classics with huge audience" because from 1970 to 1996 their works were published in many towns in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union one hundred and eleven times (Lur'e 193-94). When the same *Literaturnaya Gazeta* published the results of a poll in 1968 surveying which Soviet writers of the period 1920-50 had best stood the test of time, Ilf and Petrov were placed third after Mikhail Sholokhov and Aleksey Tolstoy. The popularity of the authors of *One-storey America* testifies to the importance of this travelogue in the creation of the image of America in the Soviet Union.

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<sup>49</sup> For more information on Ilf and Petrov's biographies see Lur'e, Shcheglov, Wright, and Yanovskaya.

Ilf and Petrov published several chapters of the book in *Pravda* while they were still traveling. Segments also appeared in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and *Vecherniya Moskva* (*The Evening Moscow*). A series of photographs taken by Ilf was published in *Ogonek* in 1936.<sup>50</sup> The whole work was published in the journal *Znamia* (*The Banner*), numbers ten and eleven, in 1936 and two separate editions appeared in the following year. In 1937, an authorized translation was published in America by the New York publishing house Farrar and Rinehart under the title *Little Golden America*. John Farrar decided to change the title because of the enormous success the publisher had enjoyed with the American edition of *The Little Golden Calf*, the title under which *The Golden Calf* was published in the United States in 1932 (Galanov 590; Wolf 156 n4). In this chapter, I refer to the first American edition and give the pages in the Soviet one included in the most complete edition of Ilf and Petrov's collected works in 1961. When the English translation deviates from the Russian original, I provide my own translation.

Ilf and Petrov spent nearly four months in America, visited twenty-five states, and met hundreds of people. There are two poles in analyzing their travelogue. Some Soviet critics castigated the report of their adventures as dangerously positive about America. Some contemporary critics, however, see the book as an assertion of the Soviet supremacy. Karen Ryan reads it as an attempt to exploit American alterity in the service of Soviet cultural construction (Ryan 263). According to Ryan, "Ilf and Petrov's meetings with 'typical' Americans serve to characterize them as primitive and as spiritually and intellectually inferior to Soviet Russians" (Ryan 270). Both interpretations are possible, if the interpreter neglects one important fact—what is emphasized in *One-*

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<sup>50</sup> The photographs and parts of the book were recently published by the Princeton Architectural Press. See Wolf.

*storey America* is the difference between two *social systems* not the difference between two cultures. Ryan notes that the dividing line between *svoi* (one's own) and *chuzhoi* (alien, other) is ideological and the Americans who sympathize with socialism are represented as *svoi* (Ryan 273-75). Yet she does not develop this idea and interprets the travelogue as an attempt to mythologize the Soviet Union. *One-storey America* is an apologia for socialism. If the Soviet Union is praised, it is because it stands for the socialist alternative to capitalism. What is criticized in the United States is always connected with capitalism. In the final analysis, what is asserted in this book is not the supremacy of the Soviet Self but the supremacy of the Socialist Self. The Americans with leftist political convictions are not presented as Others; their belief in socialism makes them *svoi* (one's own). Like the Chinese travelers whose books are analyzed in the preceding chapters, Ilf and Petrov admire the beauty of the American landscape, the amazing achievements of American technological genius, and the generosity of American people. Their conviction that socialism is better than capitalism is similar to that of Ding Ling's. What distinguishes their book from hers is that here the antagonism between socialism and capitalism crosses the national borders of the United States and the Soviet Union. Another distinguishing feature of their work is the attention they pay to cultural life in America. It should be noted that the negative phenomena in this cultural life are also seen as a result of the incessant capitalist pursuit of profit.

Ilf and Petrov spent their first month in the United States in New York. Like many other Chinese and Russian travelers, one of the first things the authors discover about America is the fast pace of life. "The people who passed us did not walk, they ran. And so we, too, ran. From that moment on we could not stop. We spent a whole month in New

York, and throughout that time we are constantly racing somewhere at top speed” (Ilf and Petrov AE 12, RE 17). The whirlpool of the biggest city in the world is described with humor and sympathy: the news vendors shout with such desperation that you need a full week to dig the voice out with a shovel; the electricity on Broadway is trained like a circus animal—it makes faces, hurdles over obstacles, winks, dances, and does anything it is ordered to do; some places are so brightly lighted that, if anyone adds one more little lamp, they will explode from excessive light (Ilf and Petrov AE 13-14, RE 18-21). In their first evening in the city, they impulsively decide to take a bus and go to the last stop. They end up in a poor neighborhood and examine the night lodgings of the Salvation Army. The description of this place and its services and prayers shows the authors’ preoccupation with social problems: “These poor people were not offered work, they were offered only God—a God as spiteful and exacting as the Devil. The night lodgers did not object. Any god with a cup of coffee and a slice of bread was fairly acceptable. Let us sing then, brothers, to the glory of the coffee god!” (Ilf and Petrov AE 16-17, RE 24). They return to their hotel late at night both impressed and disturbed by New York’s immensity, wealth, and poverty. In the first chapter devoted to America, one of the most important topics in this travelogue appears: the coexistence of wealth and poverty in the United States. The two Soviet writers find this phenomenon the most alarming characteristic of America: “No matter where you might go as a traveler, [...] you will see everywhere poverty and riches, which like two inseparable sisters stand hand in hand at all the roads and at all the bridges of this great country” (Ilf and Petrov AE 220, RE 259).

The two socialist visitors write in detail about the insecurity in which Americans live, the pressure to buy on credit, and the inability of government to deal with poverty.

Their preoccupation with social problems moulds both their perceptions and their understanding of America. The supremacy of socialism is defended throughout the book with assertions that socialism allows for more dignity in the life of an individual, because the socialist state is actively engaged with the wellbeing of people and people are free from fear. For instance, the description of their visit to the famous Sing Sing prison illustrates how the United States and the Soviet Union are compared. In a conversation with one of the guards there the authors came to the conclusion that the Soviet penitentiary system aims at the correction of the criminal, while the American one is preoccupied only with punishment (Ilf and Petrov AE 53, RE 64). This episode is typical for Ilf and Petrov's approach to social problems—their defense of socialism is based on the conviction that this social order is more humane than capitalism and offers more opportunity for the development of human potential.

For the short and intense period they spent in New York, Ilf and Petrov develop a love-hate attitude towards it: “It is an excruciating city. [...] It makes your eyes ache. Yet it is impossible not to look upon it” (Ilf and Petrov AE 39, RE 50). Louis Fisher, the American journalist in Moscow who gave them letters of introduction, warned them about the danger to limit their contacts only to radical and intellectual circles in the big cities, and to leave the country convinced that all Americans are progressive intellectuals. He advised them to travel extensively, to try meeting all kinds of people, and to communicate with the ordinary Americans because these Americans make the United States. To organize their trip the two Soviet writers needed help. They looked for somebody who knows America well and can drive, navigate, and translate for them for free, or as they put it “we needed a complex hybrid: a guide-chauffeur-interpreter-

altruist” (Ilf and Petrov AE 33, RE 42). This ideal creature materialized in the person of Mr. Adams, a sixty-three-year-old New Yorker, who had spent seven years in the Soviet Union and considered helping Soviet people his duty.<sup>51</sup> He and his wife helped the authors to buy the car they needed for the trip (a new Ford), prepared the detailed plan for their travels, and agreed to accompany them for two months of driving from New York to California and back.

Their adventure started with a journey through the Eastern States. Two things attracted the travelers’ attention from the beginning of the trip: the roads in America which “like the roads of ancient Rome, are built practically for eternity” (Ilf and Petrov AE 76, RE 90-91) and the American service. The enormity of America’s road building project and the convenience of traveling around this country are described with admiration. As early as the end of the 1930s, the United States is perceived as a country defined by its car-culture: “When we shut our eyes and try to resurrect in memory the country in which we spent four months, we see before us [...] the crossing of two roads and a gasoline station against the background of telegraph wires and advertising billboards (Ilf and Petrov AE 81, RE 97). When the travelers stopped to buy gas, the man from the gas station who filled the tank also checked the level of oil in the motor, tested the air pressure in the tires, cleaned the windshield, fixed the slightly loosened front door of the car, and gave them an excellent map of the state without asking for a single cent more than the price of gas (Ilf and Petrov AE 78, RE 92-93). There is unqualified delight in the quality of American service expressed throughout the book. After one day in Mexico, the authors note that for two months of travel they became so accustomed to

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<sup>51</sup> The prototypes of Mr. and Mrs. Adams are Solomon Trone, a retired engineer who worked as a technical specialist in the Soviet Union for General Electric and his wife Florence, who was also a fluent speaker of Russian ( Galanov 581).



good service, cleanliness, and order that a day in another country was necessary to appreciate it anew (Ilf and Petrov AE 340, RE 394). The people they met in hotels, gas stations, restaurants, telegraph offices, and all other places they visited were invariably polite, efficient, and helpful. Service has entered into the very blood of the people and has become an integral part of the national character. It formed the essence of the way of doing things in America. The discussion of American service is structured in a way characterizing Ilf and Petrov's approach to America: they ascribe everything good in America to the efforts of ordinary people and everything bad to the exploitative capitalist system. The descriptions of the American people's positive achievements are always followed by a scathing commentary on how the class of exploiters misuses these achievements. For instance, "this feeling of respect for service, like all other popular feelings, is played upon expertly by priests and bankers. [...] Service is the favorite expression of the Wall Street robber" (Ilf and Petrov AE 346, RE 402). The presentation of the American capitalist system lacks Fei Xiaotong's ambivalence recognizing both productive and exploitative functions of capitalism. Even the discussion of food in the United States leads to a condemnation of capitalism. The cleanliness and order in American cafeterias are commendable, but the two Russian travelers, as many Chinese travelers before them, do not like what they eat. The restaurant business offers exceptional hygiene, an extensive choice of dishes, but the beautifully prepared food is tasteless. The speed with which this bland food is consumed leaves the impression that Americans do not eat but fill up on food as automobiles are filled with gasoline. The authors cannot accept that the richest country in the world denies its citizens delicious food because the business of feeding people, as any other business, is based on one single

consideration: how much does it pay? The monopolization of food industries brings about the frozen meat, unripe vegetables, and canned goods. In the first several chapters an idea is developed that sounds paradoxical today: Soviet people are actually freer than Americans because they can influence their government to take decisions that favor ordinary people rather than big business (Ilf and Petrov AE 31, RE 40).

Ilf and Petrov's positive impressions from American people go far beyond the excellent service: American hospitality is limitless and outstrips everything possible of this kind; Americans are remarkable people and it is pleasant both to be friends with them and to work with them; they are no idle talkers and always keep their word (Ilf and Petrov AE 33-34, 49, RE 42-43, 59). The ordinary Americans are portrayed with sympathy and deference. They are accurate, they are first-rate workers with golden hands, and they are easy to get along with. Most importantly, they are always ready to help. In Texas, the authors have a car accident and all passing automobiles stop and ask them whether they need help: "[t]he rescuers flung themselves upon us like birds of pray. Every second new brakes screeched and a new passer-by offered his services. [...] we were even glad that we had this small accident, otherwise we would never have discovered this amazing American trait" (Ilf and Petrov AE 171, RE 202). Yet in the humorous portrait of the so-called "average American" they paint, some other features appear:

He is a simple and exceedingly democratic human being. He knows how to work, and he works hard. He loves his wife and children, listens to the radio, frequently goes to the motion-picture theater, and reads very little. Besides, he has a great respect for money. [...] When somebody sells him

a refrigerator or an electric stove or a vacuum cleaner, the salesman never goes into abstract discussions. [...] The purchaser wants to know figures, advantages, expressed in dollars. A political idea is sold to him in the same manner. (Ilf and Petrov AE 207, RE 245).

In the tradition of the Slavophile school, American preoccupation with the material is castigated as a negative phenomenon. The incessant pursuit of material wealth is satirized throughout the travelogue. Moreover, Americans' great respect for money is seen as the main cause for political naiveté and cultural problems in this country. The main problem the authors see with the people they met is the lack of curiosity about other places and other people and the lack of desire to ask serious questions about life and politics. The political naiveté of Americans is obvious not only for the Soviet writers, but also for their travel companion, Mr. Adams. Their relationship with Mr. Adams shows that *svoi* (one's own) in this book is socialist and leftist, not Soviet. Mr. Adams's understanding of American political institutions is an important factor in forming the authors' opinion of American political life.

Discussing American democracy, the two Soviet writers make a distinction between the government and the people. They do not accept that the American political system is democratic but they admit that the relationships between people are permeated with democratic spirit. In their understanding, the concept of democracy is the ideological cement keeping the society together; it is an ideology not a reality: "[...] the right to liberty and to the pursuit of happiness is undoubtedly there, but the possibility of actually enjoying that right is exceedingly dubious. This right is in too dangerous proximity with the money vaults of Wall Street" (Ilf and Petrov AE 370, RE 428). Ilf and Petrov find

that all aspects of American life are dependent on the financial foundations of Wall Street and they attribute the corruption in the United States to this dependence (Galanov 585). According to the American Constitution, the masters of the country are the millions who compose the great American nation: “an honest, boisterous, talented people, who have a somewhat too great respect for money but who are hard-working” (Ilf and Petrov AE 373, RE 431). These masters, however, cannot exercise their power if the interests of the rich are concerned. A Soviet man, on the other hand, loves his country because he owns “the soil, the factories, the stores, the banks, the dreadnoughts, the airplanes, the theaters, and the books, [...] he himself is the politician and the master of all” (Ilf and Petrov AE 376, RE 435). Here once again the supremacy of socialism is defended because this social system is concerned with the interests of ordinary people empowering them to be the masters of their own country. “The money vaults of Wall Street,” which symbolize capitalism, are criticized because they obstruct the realization of ordinary Americans’ rights.

One detail in the way they describe the meeting of journalists with President Roosevelt shows an interesting case of using Soviet realities to interpret American democracy. The President answers journalistic questions twice a week, which is defined by the authors as a “somewhat conditional” ritual, because everybody knows that the President would not disclose any particular secrets to the participating journalists (Ilf and Petrov AE 372, RE 431). The conviction that the President can hide everything he considers necessary tells more about the functioning of the Soviet democracy than the American one. Fei Xiaotong’s ideas about American democracy changed considerably during the time he spent in the United States and at the end he understood this

phenomenon as a constant struggle between the interests of labor and capital. Ilf and Petrov, however, focus entirely on the exploitative role of capitalists and ignore the political achievements of working people. Their understanding of American political institutions does not change during their stay in the United States. Yet they acknowledge that democracy of daily intercourse is strongly developed in America and democratism prevails in relations between people:

We wrote about American democracy, which in fact does not give man freedom and only masks the exploitation of man by man. But in American life there is a phenomenon which should interest us no less than a new machine model. That phenomenon is democracy in intercourse between people, albeit that democracy, too, covers social inequality and is a purely outward form. *The outward forms of such a democratism are splendid. They help a lot in work, deliver a blow to bureaucratism, and enhance human dignity* (Ilf and Petrov AE 381-82, RE 441, Emphasis added).

Here one of the few discrepancies between the American and the Russian editions appears. In the first edition of the book in the Soviet Union, there was one recommendation added before the sentences marked in italics: [...] “nam ochen’ pomoglo by izuchenie amerikanskikh norm v otnosheniakh mezhdru nachal’nikami i podchinennymi. we can benefit greatly, if we study American standards regulating relationships between superiors and subordinates” (See Lur’e 310). In the following editions, this heretical idea was discarded and in the Russian edition I refer to, the third sentence in this passage reads as follows: “Khotia etot demokratizm takzhe prikrivaet sotsial’noe neravenstvo i iavliaetsia chisto vneshnei formoi, no dlia nas, dobivshis’

sotsial'nogo ravenstvo mezhdud liud'mi, takie vneshnie formy demokratizma tol'ko pomogut ottenit' spravedlivost' nashei sotsial'noi sistemy. Although that democratism, too, covers social inequality and it is a purely outward form, for us, the people who have achieved social equality, these outward forms only can help to enhance justice in our social system" (Ilf and Petrov RE 441, Cf. AE 381). The content and the following changes in this paragraph are as revealing with respect to Soviet realities as the authors' interpretation of Roosevelt meeting with journalists. The hierarchical social relationships characterizing tsarist Russia reappeared in a new guise in the Soviet Union not long after the Revolution in 1917, and the relationships between superiors and subordinates in the Soviet socialist democracy were rather inequitable. Ilf and Petrov do not notice the paradox in the statement that the United States is an undemocratic country in which democratic spirit prevails in the relationships among people. Their devotion to socialist ideals and their rejection of capitalism prevent the development of a better understanding of the complexity of American political system, and the epistemological value of alterity is not realized in their notions about American democracy.

Ilf and Petrov's descriptions of small American towns and the factories they visited show the influence of two traditional Slavophile ideas: the paradigm of Materialistic West versus Spiritual Russia and the rejection of man's slavery to mechanical production. The title of the book, *One-storey America*, testifies to the importance of small towns in America. The majority of the American population live in one-story or two-story houses in small towns. These places acquire their character not from architecture, but from automobiles and everything connected with them—gas stations, Ford or General Motors dealerships, and repair shops. Like Fei Xiaotong, Ilf and

Petrov write about the lack of local flavor in the architecture of most American cities.

While some big cities like New York, New Orleans, and San Francisco have their inimitable personalities, almost all other American cities resemble each other:

You may drive a thousand miles, two thousand, three thousand, natural phenomena will change and the climate, the watch will have to be moved ahead, but the little town in which you stop for the night will be exactly the same as the one which you had seen somewhere two weeks before (Ilf and Petrov AE 85, RE 103).

The residential areas where well-to-do people live are an idyllic haven of wealth possible only in fairy tale, a haven quite different from the business centers built of iron and brick. The authors find business centers frightful, because all their strength goes to the creation of idyllic havens for wealthy people only. As any other topic in the book, the discussion of small towns' architecture ends with a denunciation of the system dividing the towns into rich and poor areas. Many of the rebellious writers of America have come from the small towns of the Middle West because they need to express their disgust with uniformity and "the deadly and futile quest of the dollar" (Ilf and Petrov AE 87, RE 106).

The description of the city of Schenectady, "the biggest small town in the United States," reveals the same pattern. In the narration about this city, the theme of spiritual poverty accompanying material wealth is introduced explicitly and American freedom is satirized:

[Schenectady] has much asphalt, brick, and many electric lights, probably more than Rome, and certainly it is bound to have more electric refrigerators than Rome, and more washing machines, vacuum cleaners,

baths, and automobiles. But this city is exceedingly small spiritually, and in that regard it could very well dispose of itself in one of our little lines (Ilf and Petrov AE 91, RE 109-110).

In small cities like Schenectady, Americans are free people as long as they go to church and hate communism. If they follow these two rules, their freedom is unlimited. The authors visit the factories of General Electric and the miraculous electric house of Mr. Ripley, the head of the publicity department of the General Electric Company. In both places they witness the American innovative genius at work. Ilf and Petrov's admiration for American technological prowess, however, is always modified by the awareness of the social price paid for the technological achievements. The workers and even the engineers in the factory are worried that the advance of technology will lead to a higher percent of unemployment. The system of credit the Americans are forced to use actually deprives them of real ownership because, if they lose their jobs, they realize that they are the slaves of the credit institutions. The level of technology in America is incomparably higher than American social conditions, forcing people to live in fear of losing their jobs. "Oh, what a fearful life these millions of American people lead in the struggle for their tiny electrical happiness" (Ilf and Petrov AE 164, RE 195).

Ilf and Petrov's descriptions of visits to places of high technology are strikingly different from the enthusiastic pictures Fei Xiaotong and other Chinese writers create. The visit to a Ford factory in Dearborn gives them the opportunity to see for the first time the mass production of cars. One of the most interesting episodes in the book is the authors' meeting with Henry Ford. He shares with them his dream of creating small



factories where workers are connected with farmers in order to avoid oppression from traders and financiers:

The farmer,” continued Ford, “makes bread. We make automobiles. But between us stands Wall Street, the banks, which want to have a share of our work without doing anything themselves.”

At this point he quickly waved his hand before his face, as if he were chasing away a mosquito, and said: “They know to do only one thing—to scheme tricks, to juggle money” (Ilf and Petrov AE 129, RE 154).

The authors see in this project not only Ford’s hatred for Wall Street, which he declares openly, but also an attempt to turn the workers into petty bourgeoisie and prevent their gatherings in great numbers in the big cities. Once again, an American phenomenon they observed is interpreted in accordance with the Marxist theory of class-struggle. The language Ilf and Petrov use to summarize their impressions from “the amazing mechanic” shows a great deal of respect for the energy, ideas, and achievements of the indefatigable industrialist. Despite their high opinion of Henry Ford, however, his factory is defined as “an astounding picture of the triumph of technique [technology]<sup>52</sup> and the misfortune of man.” The Ford employee receives a good salary, yet he is turned into one unthinking, unskillful, and easily replaceable part of the production process: “[t]hese people seemed to be depressed in spirit, seemed to be overcome at the conveyor with a state of daily madness [...]”(Ilf and Petrov AE 116, RE 140).

The rejection of capitalism and incessant pursuit of profit is implied in the stories about the Indians Navajo whose reservation the travelers visit on their way to California. They met a former missionary who went to live with the Indians in order to convert them

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<sup>52</sup> In this book, Ilf and Petrov use the term “technique” instead of “technology.”

to Christianity, but then discovered that his real Christian mission was to live with Navajos and try to understand them. After spending eighteen years with the Indians, he realized that they turned him into an Indian because of their honesty, nobility, and sincerity. The former missionary tells the travelers a story about an Indian man who made some money and decided to take up trade. He never sold the goods he bought at a price higher than the one he paid and, when the missionary tried to explain to him that he needs to do it in order to profit, he said: “You are advising me to do something dishonest” (Ilf and Petrov AE 223, RE 261-62). The authors remember this story a month later when they are following the investigation of John Pierpont Morgan Jr.’ role in dragging the United States into World War I. Senator Gerald Nye, the member of the Senate Committee investigating the case, asked Morgan whether he knew that by exporting money into Europe he supported war. Morgan admitted that he knew and when asked why, despite his awareness, he continued doing it, he answered with genuine surprise: “What do you mean, why? [...] But that is business! Trade! They bought money and I sold it” (Ilf and Petrov AE 223, RE 262). In contrast, all the Indian tribes Ilf and Petrov visited during their travels are depicted as small utopias of solidarity preserving their culture and impeccable ethics in the greedy world of white men. In their reservations, poverty seems a reasonable choice because it permits life with dignity.

The rejection of capitalism is central in the presentation of Chicago. In New York the authors are disturbed by its poverty and wealth, but in Chicago they are overcome with anger at the people “who, in their chase for the almighty dollar, have reared on a fertile prairie on the shores of the full-watered Michigan, this horrible town” (Ilf and Petrov AE 139, RE167). Instead of using the wealth the earth has given to them to build

“gleaming palaces of joy,” they have built a place where an excellent university and a philharmonic orchestra coexist with abject poverty and lawless racketeers. Observing the absurdities of Chicago, the authors come to the conclusion that “technique [technology] in the hands of capitalism is a knife in the hands of a madman” (Ilf and Petrov AE 139, RE 167). In the chapters devoted to Chicago, another significant theme is introduced: the inability of Americans to appreciate art contrasted to the Russian love of art. They go to the concert of the famous violinist Fritz Kreisler in Chicago and found the hall half-empty and the audience ignorant.

He played subtly, poetically, and wisely. In Moscow he would have received an ovation of half an hour after such a concert. It would have been necessary to take away the piano and to put out all the lights in order to stop the ovation (Ilf and Petrov AE 144, RE 173).

Here, however, the great musician is forced to play waltzes and other light pieces to satisfy the public—a humiliation for the artist begging for charity. When the authors listen to Rachmaninoff and Stokowsky in New York, they are shocked by the apathetic reaction of the audience: “We sensed cold indifference—as if the public had come, not to hear remarkable music remarkably played, but rather to discharge a dull duty” (Ilf and Petrov AE 141, RE 169-170). All the concerts they attend in the United States produced the same impression. Art is at the mercy of rich people, and the state does not support it. When they tell their American friends that there are four opera houses in Moscow working all year round, except for an interval of three months, nobody believes them. The cultural policy of the United States leaving the management of cultural life mostly in the hands of the rich is unacceptable for the socialist visitors. In Santa Fe, they discover

the fine buildings of the Rockefeller Institute of Anthropology. They enjoy the wonderful collection, yet asked themselves: “But what would happen if Rockefeller’s son had not been interested in anthropology?” (Ilf and Petrov AE178, RE 211).

The two Soviet writers’ criticism of the commercialization of art in America is particularly pronounced in the chapters devoted to Hollywood. During their stay in the United States they watch more than hundred movies and realize that in Moscow only the best movies of the best directors are shown. What is offered to the American audience, however, is something completely different:

All these pictures are below the level of human dignity. It seems to us that it is degrading for a human being to look at such pictures. They are designed for birds’ brains, for slow-thinking human cattle of camel-like lack of fastidiousness (Ilf and Petrov AE 291, RE 338).<sup>53</sup>

All four main standard types of pictures: musical comedy, historical drama, gangster movies, and a movie featuring some famous opera singer have only one plot, which is varied endlessly. With the historical drama the situation is even more serious: “The plot of such a play is what God sends. If God sends nothing, the play goes on without a plot. The plot is not important. Important are duels, executions, feasts, and battles” (Ilf and Petrov AE 293, RE 340). Ilf and Petrov tour the Hollywood studios for several days and talk to the people making the movies. They come to the conclusion that every thinking person there hates what they do: “Sensible people in Hollywood, and there are not a few of them there, simply moaned at that defilement of art which goes on there every day and

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<sup>53</sup> Fifteen years later, Viktor Nekrasov’s reaction to American television programs echoes Ilf and Petrov’s sentiment: “Yes, American television is a frightening phenomenon. I had heard a great deal about it, but I had to see it to understand. Really, how can you avoid killing off your neighbor, how can you help dealing him the “knock-out” blow, when from morning till night the television does nothing but show you better ways to do it. You’d better do it to him, or else he’ll do it to you” (Nekrasov 104-105).

every hour” (Ilf and Petrov AE 300, RE 349). In the final analysis, only the bosses of studios are happy because the only thing they are interested in is the box office. The good pictures that accidentally appear are made against the will of the bosses. One of the persons the authors talk to explains to them that motion pictures are perhaps the only industry into which capitalists have come not for profit alone. The idiotic films are made on purpose and the serious problems of life are anathema for Hollywood. “This work of many years has already yielded a frightful harvest. American spectators have completely unlearned to think” (Ilf and Petrov AE 305, RE 355). The mighty ideological Hollywood machine works to keep people interested only in what is directly connected with their houses, their cars, and their nearest neighbors. The ignorance about the serious problems of the world must be maintained.

Superficially read, *One-storey America* can be interpreted as an apology for the Soviet Union and a denunciation of America. Yet closer scrutiny reveals that in this book the object of criticism is capitalism, not America. The authors emphasize that a cultured American does not recognize Hollywood mass production as an art. The educated people in the United States believe that the native film industry is a moral epidemic hurting all the superior achievements of American culture because the regular watching of these movies can turn even the most brilliant man into an idiot (Ilf and Petrov AE 295, RE 342). The crippled art of Hollywood and the lack of spirituality in America are also blamed on capitalism:

We do not at all insist that this absence of spirituality is an organic attribute of the American people. [...] It is capitalism that has made these people thus, and in every way it nurtures in them this spiritual lassitude.

Terrible are the crimes of American capitalism, which with amazing trickiness has palmed off on the people the most trivial of motion pictures, radio, and weekly journalistic tosh, while reserving for itself Tolstoy, Van Gogh, and Einstein, but remaining profoundly indifferent to them (Ilf and Petrov AE 376-77, RE 435).

When the noted director Arturo Toscanini, who conducted the New York Philharmonic, turned to the people for financial support after a radio concert, he received the necessary means mostly from poor people who sent a dollar in exchange for an autographed picture of the famous artist (Ilf and Petrov AE 143, RE 171). This story shows that Ilf and Petrov see the problems with cultural life in America as inherent to capitalism, not to American people.

The authors' belief that ideological differences are more important than national ones is revealed in their portraits of Americans with leftist political values. Most important of them is their "guide-chauffeur-interpreter-altruist," Mr. Adams, described with humor and sympathy. The role he plays in their adventure is the one of "an angel without wings" (Ilf and Petrov AE 32, RE 40). In a letter to his wife Ilf writes: "Eto Pikkvik. Ezdit' s nim ochen' priatno i smeshno. He is like Pickwick. To travel with him is very pleasant and fun" (Ilf 558). Mr. Adams is insatiably curious about the world and the people. This curiosity combined with his absentmindedness constantly puts him in comical situations. His absentmindedness is not the traditional forgetfulness of a scholar, "but rather the stormy, aggressive absent-mindedness of a healthy person full of curiosity carried away by a conversation or a thought and for the time being forgetting the rest of the world" (Ilf and Petrov AE 134, RE 159). Everything he says is interesting and wise,

and his erudition includes not only America, but the world in general. His political insightfulness, his interest in and compassion toward ordinary people, his friendliness and readiness to help make him one of the most attractive personages in the book. The authors note that the more they know him the more they love him (Ilf and Petrov AE 209, RE 246). The former missionary living with the Indians is a self-proclaimed Bolshevik: “‘I am a Bolshevik!’ shouted the former missionary in farewell, pointing to his red shirt and roaring in laughter (Ilf and Petrov AE 226, RE 266). In California, the travelers meet a representative of wealthy America, whose ancestors have disembarked from the *Mayflower*. Convinced of the injustice of the capitalist order, he abandoned his rich family and joined the Communist Party. In his house the authors meet another communist, the secretary of the district committee of the party. Here is how this meeting is described: “‘Before us were two typical representatives of American communism—a worker communist and an intellectual Communist. The secretary was a young man with high cheekbones who looked like any young Moscow Communist” (Ilf and Petrov AE 282, RE 327). The devotion to communist ideal blurs the national differences, and the young communists in California and Moscow not only work for a common cause but also look alike. In Carmel, they meet another wealthy descendant who became socialist, the famous journalist Lincoln Steffens, “one of the best people in America” (Ilf and Petrov AE 283, RE 328). The sick writer expresses his desire to travel to the Soviet Union because he wants “to see before his death the land of socialism and to die there” (Ilf and Petrov AE 285, RE 330). These portraits of American people show that the Soviet Union is celebrated in this book because it is “the land of socialism.”

Paradoxically, the two believers in a radical political philosophy striving to transform the world describe America in a way reminiscent of the traditional paradigm of Materialistic America and Spiritual/Cultural Russia. Preoccupation with material side of life is seen as the main source of all American problems. The slavery of man to mechanical production overshadows the benefits of industrialization. Americans are materialistic and money-oriented, whereas Russians love art and music. The spiritual superiority of the Soviet people is exemplified not only in the appreciation of art and literature, but also in the communist idea itself. America is phenomenally rich, it has enormous resources and the best workers in the world, yet it cannot provide job security for its entire population because the main stimulus of American life is money. Just like the Chinese Self-strengtheners in the nineteenth century, the two Soviet writers believe that the lessons the Soviet Union should learn from America are “episodic and too specialized” (Ilf and Petrov AE 380, RE 440). The idea that the American technological progress can be transplanted in a country with a different social system without changing that system appears in their book as well. Compared to *The Golden Calf* and *The Twelve Chairs*, *One-storey America* shows many differences: it is a factual reportage of a well-documented trip, there are no fictional stories or heroes, and it is devoted to a country far away from the Soviet Union. However, there is one significant similarity between the two satirical novels and the travelogue. The *picaro* Ostap Bender in a series of comical adventures exposes the greed still ruling the life of Soviet citizens. His creators travel in a different country, but their adventures result in a book that exposes and attacks the greed in the United States.



### *In Search of Melancholy Baby*

Vassily Pavlovich Aksyonov (1932-2009) is one of the most protean and popular contemporary Russian writers. He was born in Kazan and brought up by his father's sister because both his parents were sent to labor camps. From 1948 to 1950, he lived with his mother, the writer Evgenya Ginzburg<sup>54</sup>, in Magadan (Siberia) where he completed school. He graduated from Pavlov Medical Institute in Leningrad in 1956, and worked as a medical doctor in small cities near Leningrad and in a tuberculosis clinic in Moscow. Aksyonov began writing and publishing short stories while practicing medicine. The success of his writings led to a full-time commitment to literary activity. He made his mark in the world of Russian letters in 1962 with the story "Halfway to the Moon" ("Na polputi k lune") which was translated into many languages and praised worldwide. Aksyonov's relationships with the Soviet authorities were rather complicated due to his experimental style and his commitment to describe Soviet realities without distortion (Lauridsen and Dalgard 18). He participated in a group of writers who tried to publish the uncensored anthology *Metropol* in 1979. As a result, his work was banned and he was exiled in July 1980. Aksyonov settled down in the United States where he worked as a professor of Russian literature and continued to write and publish. After retiring as a professor at George Mason University, he moved to France and visited Russia often for prolonged periods. He died in a hospital in Moscow on July 6, 2009. His Soviet citizenship was restored in 1990 and his complete works were published in Moscow in 1994-1995. He wrote numerous short stories and several novels, most important of which

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<sup>54</sup> Evgenya Ginzburg (1904-1977) is the author of *Krutoi marshrut (Steep Route)*, a memoir in two parts about her eighteenth years in Gulag. It was translated into English under the title *Journey into the Whirlwind*.

are *Colleagues*, (*Kollegi* 1961), *It's Time, My Friend, It's Time* (*Pora, moi drug, pora* 1965), *The Steel Bird* (*Stal'naia ptitsa* 1965), *The Burn* (*Ozhog* 1980), *The Island of Crimea* (*Ostrov Krym* 1981), *Paperscape* (*Bumazhny peizazh* 1983), *Skazhi izium: roman v moskovskikh traditsiakh* (*Say Raisins: Novel in Muscovite Tradition* translated as *Say Cheese!* 1985), *Moskovskaia saga* (*Moscow Saga* translated as *Generations of Winter* 1994), *Novy sladostny stil'* (*The New Sweet Style* 1998), *Novye Vol'teriantsi i Vol'terianki* (*The New Male and Female Followers of Voltaire* 2004), *Moskva Kva-Kva* (*Moscow Kva-Kva* 2006), *Redkie zemli* (*Rare Lands* 2007). He also wrote plays and film scripts as well as stories for children.<sup>55</sup>

His visit to the United States in 1975 resulted in the travelogue *Non-Stop Round the Clock: Impressions, Meditations, Adventures* (*Kruglie sutki non-stop: vpechatlenia, razmishlenia, prikliuchenia* 1975), published in the magazine *Novy Mir*. His second book about America *In Search of Melancholy Baby* (*V poiskakh grustnogo beiby*) appeared in 1987. *In Search of Melancholy Baby*'s scope is larger than a travelogue—it blends features of a travelogue, memoir, and fiction. Aksyonov's two books about America have the most complex construction of all the books I analyze. His penchant for innovative literary experiments is reflected in the composition of these books. In *Non-Stop Round the Clock* the impressions from America and American people are combined with the fictional story called "Typical (tipichnoe) American (amerikanskoe) Adventure (prikluchenie)." In this story, Aksyonov's nemesis, Memozov<sup>56</sup> and a good hero, called

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<sup>55</sup> For more information on Aksyonov's biography see Mozejko, Kustanovich, Simmons, and Glad.

<sup>56</sup> Memozov first appeared in the story "Getting an Unwanted Guest Out of the House" ("Vyvod nezhelatel'nogo gostia iz doma" 1969) as an anti-author causing many psychological problems for the

the Muscovite, are involved in a series of adventures playing with popular stereotypes of America: gambling in Las Vegas, partying in Los Angeles, meeting famous Western movies' actors in a cowboy bar, and trying to save a beautiful woman dressed in white. The chapters of *In Search of Melancholy Baby* are divided by fictional vignettes entitled "Sketches for a Novel to Be." In them the Hero of the Novel (The Hero of My Novel, HMN, Her Majesty Navy), who works as a parking attendant, his landlady and her boyfriend as well as some other Russian and Vietnamese emigrants live their American dreams. The Hero often remembers his previous life in the Soviet Union as a theater director. In both books the fictional parts provide comic relief and highlight some of the most popular Soviet clichés about the United States, but do not alter the image of America created in the factual parts. In this chapter I use the text of *Non-Stop Round the Clock* published in *Novy Mir*, the first American edition of *In Search of Melancholy Baby* in 1987, and the Russian edition published in 2000. In the Russian edition some additional parts are included, for instance, the descriptions of trips to Florida and the Caribbean. The fictional parts are also enhanced to include more memories about his time in the Soviet Union. If the text exists only in Russian or there is a discrepancy between the Russian and the English text, I offer a translation. In all other cases, I quote the English edition and give the pages in the Russian one.

The title *In Search of Melancholy Baby* is borrowed from a famous American jazz song. Jazz symbolizes freedom and anti-ideology throughout Aksyonov's writing and jazz music occupies a significant place in most of his works. The author's approach to America in this book is as ideological as Ilf and Petrov's in *One-storey America*. The

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author in his quest for Good. J.J. Johnson points out that Memozov is usually associated with materialistic, Western ideas corrupting or polluting Aksyonov's Russian soul (40).

difference is that in *In Search of Melancholy Baby*, Aksyonov's staunch anticommunism defines the image of the two countries in the center of the narrative: the United States and the Soviet Union. He declares that "[t]he anti-Americans of this world—Gabriel García Márquez included—are enemies of freedom and friends of a global concentration camp"(Aksyonov *In Search* AE 219, RE 262), and coins the term Natsbols (National Bolsheviks) to describe the supporters of the Soviet regime. The book is fiercely anti-Soviet and the reminiscences of life in the Soviet Union can be described as a reversed ethnocentrism—everything that is Soviet is bad, and everything that is anti-Soviet is good.

Painting his America, the author begins with an analysis of the anti-American sentiment in Latin America, Russia, and Europe which is so intense that can only be called hatred (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 7, RE 10). In his understanding, "anti-American sentiment is essentially hatred for an outdated stereotype, a celluloid phantom" (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 9, RE 11). The spread of anti-Americanism should be understood as a manifestation of provincial inferiority complex, which is the main reason for the spread of the Marxist doctrine itself. It is somehow difficult to explain the anti-Americanism of Europeans with provincial inferiority complex, so the author quotes the explanation of an "important personage in Washington": "Elementary [...] we're rich; they're jealous" (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 121, RE 117). Despite decades of a thoroughgoing anti-American propaganda in the Soviet state, however, the Russians have not developed an anti-American complex. Aksyonov mentions briefly the travel books of Gorky, Pilnyak, Mayakovsky, and Ilf and Petrov, and ascribes their unfavorable impressions from America to the threat they sensed here—the United States represents an alternative to violent Russian revolution because the workers here instead of revolting

buy cars. American capitalism promises a completely different revolution: the technological one which will create the “yet unknown and undefined age of liberalism” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 12, RE 14).

The author’s generation rejected the anti-Americanism of their fathers and developed pro-American feelings which started with “the miracle of tasty and nourishing food-stuff in the midst of wartime misery” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 14, RE 15). During the brief but euphoric period of postwar contacts in Western Europe, Russians discovered that they and Americans were very much alike: “[...] Russians still think of Americans as close relations. The Chinese, on the other hand, they think of as beings from outer space. And although the idea of communism traveled to China via Russia, the Russian in his heart of hearts believes that if anyone is predisposed toward communism, it is the Chinese, not he or his fellow Russians” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 15, RE 16). The Soviet intelligentsia of the author’s generation began leaning unconsciously in the direction of America. The love for American movies and jazz was a must among fashionable young people. They created an idealized picture of America as a reaction to the official propaganda and a protest against “the romance of revolution” characterizing the older generation. The America cult was in essence the younger generation’s “romance of counterrevolution.” Aksyonov sees America as an alternative to the “outdated and nauseating belief in Socialist revolution.” He feels grateful that the powerful America is the leader of “the forces of liberalism and benevolent inequality” called upon liberating the world from “totalitarian decadence” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 19, RE 20).

Aksyonov is well aware that when one speaks of a society as large as America, it is easy to fall into the trap of generalizations. Yet he willingly ventures some

generalizations while trying to capture the typical features of American people. Americans are an outgoing people. They are more courteous than the French (at least with foreigners). America is freer of xenophobia than any other nation. Americans are obsessed with physical fitness. The independence of elderly Americans shows love of life. The pages devoted to the American national character end with a passage that reveals another type of reaction to the Soviet reality. Aksyonov praises at length the principle of “benevolent inequality” on which the American society is based. The “benevolent” part of this principle “must ensure all members of society the means to maintain their humanity.” The former citizen of the Soviet Union sees equality as static, and inequality as passionate, creative, and dynamic. Precisely because America is not the land of “liberty and justice for all,” everybody has a chance to change his life in the chaos of economic freedom (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 38, RE 37). This panegyric on inequality is different from the usual praise of American democracy and equality in many travel books about the United States. Yet it is typical for Aksyonov’s approach: if something in America is the opposite of something in the Soviet Union, it is, by default, positive.

After leaving New York where they stay at the beginning, the author and his wife buy a car and start their journey in America. Like Ilf and Petrov, on the road from New York to Los Angeles, Aksyonov discovers the excellent roads in the United States and American friendliness. But his admiration for American service is intertwined with stories about the totalitarian oppression in the Soviet Union. When a waitress in Texas understands that she serves a writer who has been “kicked out” for writing books the Soviet government did not like, she opens her arms and says with warmth: “Welcome to America!” (Aksyonov *In Search* AE 47, RE 43). In Santa Monica, the author receives a

message that the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR has stripped him of his citizenship. His reaction to this news is published in the next day morning edition of *New York Times* under the title: “Having been informed about the government’s decision, Aksyonov said ‘To hell with them!’” (Aksyonov *In Search* AE 49, RE 47). In the Russian edition, the chapter devoted to this event is much longer and includes a description of a dispute between Russian and American intellectuals about the American hostages in Teheran and a subchapter about the author and his wife’s political discussions with some acquaintances in Washington. Writing about these disputes, Aksoynov tries to show the relativity of the notions of “the Left” and “the Right” in the contemporary world and to find explanation of one paradox:

V Sovetskom Soiuzhe my schitalis’ levymi, smut’ianami, nenadezhnymi elementami, a nam protivostoiali nesmetnye polchishcha pravyykh, ofitsial’nykh kommunisticheskikh propagandistov i apparatchikov. V Amerike zhe my s nashim antikommunizmom okazalis’ blizhe k pravym. In the USSR, we were considered leftist, troublemakers, untrustworthy elements. Against us were hordes of rightist communist propagandists and official bureaucrats. In America, we, the anticommunists, turned out to be closer to the political right” (Aksyonov, *In Search* RE 28, Cf. AE 49).

The author’s effort to show the primitivism of “The Left-the Right” division is undermined by his own rhetoric: America is the last fortress of the free world, Soviet Union is a concentration camp, Marxists are dogmatists, Marxism is outdated. Che Guevara is not the symbol of the left; its symbols are Idi Amin and Muammar Gaddafi. The talented Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a “bestly serious” leftist, but his personal friend

Fidel Castro is a tyrant (Aksyonov *In Search* RE 52-54, Cf. AE 49). There is not one critical word about the political Right, except when it is associated with the Soviet leaders. The attempt to point out that justice and compassion are better criteria for approaching the world than “Left” and “Right” is stultified by Aksyonov’s anticommunism.

After a few months in California, the author and his wife are back on the road. He decides to move to Washington where the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies offered him a fellowship. At the Kennan Institute, Aksyonov is impressed by the Russian and Soviet experts he meets. He argues that the prevalent opinion in Soviet academic circles about American naiveté with respect to communism and Soviet politics is downright wrong. American Slavists, in his opinion, are the finest in the world, and they even surpass their Soviet counterparts (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 64, RE 73). Soviet Americanists, on the other hand, are stymied by ideological and travel restrictions. Both the atmosphere of the Institute and the architecture of the capital attract the Aksyonovs and they decide to settle down in Washington. With the beginning of their life as citizens of the capital, the admiration for the American service is gradually displaced by complains about inefficient seamstresses, plumbers, trash-removal companies, and many others involved in the arrangement of their new home. In accordance with the general pattern of the book, according to which everything American is good, whereas everything Soviet is bad, the negative impressions are summarized as follows: “[...] capitalism, the Russian émigré discovers to his dismay, is undergoing a Socialist warp of apathy, poor service, and hackwork” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 77, RE 76). At the Kennan Institute, Aksyonov wrote a novel about a Soviet citizen drowning in the sea of bureaucratic papers.



The creation of the novel was accompanied by the author's efforts to understand how to deal with the Immigration and Naturalization Service officials—a task that proved to be no less thorny than dealing with the Soviet red tape. A black woman working for INS treats the author in an openly rude manner. This incident provokes a series of meditations on white racism, black racism, and theoretical Soviet internationalism versus real American multiculturalism. Aksyonov refutes the popular socialist cliché about the decadence of the West. For a person who grew up in a country where internationalism was an important part of the dominant ideology, he is shockingly racist: “[...] a major source of Western sin is actually the third world, which Soviet ideologies would have us believe is an innocent victim.” And also “The West, and especially its Anglo-Saxon variant, represents a last fortress of common sense—a fortress subjected to waves of primitive hedonism from less advanced societies” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 97, RE 92-93). Here the post-colonial notion that the West is oppressive and the Rest is oppressed is turned upside down. The West is the real victim endangered by the exports of the third world: “masturbatory musical rhythms, herbs and powders that twist the mind” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 96-7, RE 92).

The author's thoughts on American democracy, the American financial system, and American media once again reveal the pattern “Soviet is bad, American is good.” One of the differences between the Soviet and the American society is how people spend their money. According to Aksynov, a lavish purchase in America seems indecent: “here spending money is a much respected and socially useful activity” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 105, RE 102). Several pages after this unexpected definition of American spending habits, the author contradicts himself: “I'm glad America can support a caste of the dirty

rich. [...] The presence of an inaccessible elite makes life more interesting or, let's face it, more fun. I don't need a gold Rolex or a jeweled Concorde, but somehow I get a kick out of knowing that someone somewhere has the ridiculously expensive real thing." In the Russian edition these thoughts are ascribed to an anonymous participant in a dispute over equality (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 109, Cf. RE 105). The whole subchapter on inequality is presented as a discussion among friends so that the most controversial statements are made by anonymous discussants and not by the author (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 106-114, Cf. RE 102-110). The form is changed, but the ideas are the same. The former Soviet citizen is a staunch supporter of inequality, even if it creates "inaccessible elite." This elite is necessary for the successful functioning of the economic machine. America has found the best way to deal with the tensions between haves and have-nots—it makes the poor richer, instead of making the rich poorer. For instance, a Honda (Volkswagen in the Russian edition) and a Rolls-Royce are equal as far as actual transportation is concerned, and Honda is accessible to everyone, explains the author (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 106-114, Cf. RE 102-110).

The pluralism of American political system is perplexing for a Russian émigré. Aksyonov admits that he does not understand the political process of this country in its entirety, but he is sure of one thing: "After five years in America I can't help laughing when I read about the 'American propaganda machine' that Reagan supposedly manipulates with such skill" (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 113, RE 109). What Soviet propaganda calls the "American propaganda machine" is a projection, a figment of imagination created by people who have never lived in a democratic country with a free press. Aksyonov discards the data on American poverty as exaggeration and rejects the

report on the number of kidnapped children as a fabrication. Nonetheless, there are phenomena in the United States that provoke the author's disapproval. He finds the obsession with sexual liberalization "a craze, a mass orgy" that smacks of bad taste. The feminist movement in America is rather aggressive for the taste of the Soviet citizen who has witnessed the actual defeminization of women under the legal Soviet equality of sexes (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 132-33, RE 136-38). Sexual liberalization in the United States, often castigated by the Soviet press as a sign of capitalist decadence and immorality of capitalist society has not changed America significantly. According to Aksyonov, he lives amid chaste Americans and believes that they are in the majority. In the chapter in the Russian edition discussing homosexuals, feminism, and sexual life in America, there is a passage that is missing in the American edition:

Mezhdru tem sovetskoe obshchestvo, kotoroe, kazalos' by, v silu zheleznykh ogranichenii vsego neideologicheskogo (poprobui naiti v kiosках Soiuzpechati zhurnal'chik s golei naturoi) dolzhno bylo stat' polnost'iu puritanskim, na samom dele takovym ne tol'ko ne iavliaetsia, a, naprotiv, v zhadnoi okhote za zapretnymi iablochkami, b'et inoi raz vse zapadnye rekordy. Meanwhile, the Soviet society, which, by the force of iron limitations over everything non-ideological (it is impossible to find a magazine showing some nudity on Soviet newspaper stands), was supposed to become absolutely puritan, turned out to be the opposite. The greedy pursuit of the forbidden fruit there sometimes surpasses all Western records (Aksyonov, *In Search* RE 140, Cf. AE 138).

The same conclusions are repeated in the chapter discussing the quality of life in American colleges and universities. In the subchapter “My Maryland Amazons,” the students the author meets when he teaches Russian literature at Goucher College are portrayed as follows: “American students are amazingly genteel, pure, even (stone me, if you will) chaste.[...] In fact, I would venture to say that the average Komsomol girl has a good deal more dissipation under her belt than our average Amazon.” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 186, RE 225-25) The discussion of sexual mores also follows the general pattern of the book: the real decadence exists in the Soviet Union, while Americans are moral people despite the sexual revolution.

The first cracks on this near perfect American image appear in the discussion of American architecture which betrays the influence of the traditional idea about Materialistic America and Spiritual/Cultural Russia. Aksyonov dislikes New York because this town is completely different from a big European city. Here the author discovers the epistemic value of alterity: “Not until we came to America did we learn that, yes, we really are Europeans” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 29, RE 28). He and his wife Maya decided not to settle down in New York chiefly for aesthetic considerations. They found repulsive the utilitarian architecture in the big cities: the monotonous buildings were obviously built only for profit with outright disdain for man’s aesthetic needs. The author admires contemporary American architecture, but the architecture before the Great Gatsby-era reveals a country which was “an aesthetic wasteland, an all-purpose factory, a dollar mill” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 28, RE 27). Moreover, after looking at the careful restoration of a 1910-era house, Aksyonov notes that “not even upstart merchants in provincial Kazan or Nizhny Novgorod would have paid good money to put up a house

with such monstrous turrets!” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 28, RE 27). This aesthetic verdict is modified by the author’s confection that refugees look for resemblance to the cities they used to live and only the people who have grown up in America are capable of appreciating American urban pop. In Los Angeles, the American city landscape is castigated once again. Los Angeles is a town “designed by people oblivious to town planning and history,” and it gives the impression of “being totally cut off from culture, from life in general” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 50, RE 28) Aksyonov realizes that he was so much under the spell of “the mythology of the place” during his previous visit in this town that he failed to grasp the reality behind it (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 50, RE 63).

The frustrations of the Russian émigrés in the United States are blamed on the Soviet propaganda. The critically thinking Russians tend to reject even the truth the propaganda machine produces: “[...] as a direct result of anti-American propaganda the CTS [Critically Thinking Soviet] forms a picture of America as an ideal society, prosperous and romantic” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 31, RE 30). The clash with the complexity of the real country leads to disappointment. The author himself is disappointed by American provinciality. From a distance, America seemed “like the crossroads of the world.” The fact that many important international events even do not make it on the evening news is incomprehensible in a country perceived as “the natural home of cosmopolitanism” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 32, RE 32). In the Soviet Union, he pictured Americans as “citizens of the world;” here he finds them “detached, withdrawn, sequestered on their American planet” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 122, RE 118).

American television’s coverage of the sport events is chauvinistic and Ameri-centric. The NFL and NBA champions are called “world champions” without a real competition with

the rest of the world. But Aksyonov sees how the overpowering America gradually changes all newly arrived émigrés. The only explanation of American provincialism is that the country is a planet with an unsurpassed variety itself. With the passage of time, the author feels how he willy-nilly is being sucked “into the great big colorful world of American provincialism” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 127, RE 123).

The influence of the Materialistic America/Spiritual Russia paradigm is visible in Aksyonov’s analysis of some other aspects of the United States’ cultural life.<sup>57</sup> He visits a conference in Amherst, Massachusetts, sponsored by the Theater Communication Group, where three hundred delegates from two hundred American theaters gathered. Not a single reportage about the remarkably interesting discussions appears on television. This is how the author reacts to the silence of the media:

The lively and talented theatrical world of this country has to take a back seat, to accept the role of a low-income relative. Where are the faces I saw at the conference, faces full of thought, imagination, humor? What the country sees in their stead, day in and day out, is screenfuls of personable

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<sup>57</sup> In Aksionov’s first travelogue, *Non-Stop Round the Clock*, the influence of this paradigm is explicitly stated in the author’s assessment of the role of Russian immigration in American society:

V tselom zhe, bez vsiakikh somnenii, russkaia etnicheskaia gruppy v SSHA—eto bol’shoi otriad talanlivykh liudei, vnosiashchikh vesomyi vklad v ekonomiku i kul’turu strany. Statistika govorit, chto u amerikaskikh russkikh odin iz samykh vysokikh urovnei obrazovaniia, chrezvychaino vysokii protsent uchenykh i tvorcheskikh liudei. Malo sred russkikh biznesmenov i finansistov, no eto, na moi vzgliad, ne takaia uzh bol’shaia beda. Generally speaking, the Russians in the US are, without a doubt, a large group of talented people with a considerable contribution to the economy and culture of this country. According to the statistics, the American Russians are characterized by a very high level of education, and particularly high percentage of scholars and artists. There are not many businessmen and financiers among them but, in my opinion, that is nothing much to complain about (Aksionov, *Non-Stop* 113).

In accordance with the notion of Spiritual/Cultural Russia and Materialistic America, Russians in Aksionov’s presentation rule the world of science and culture, while Americans are good at finance. The conclusion of this passage leaves no doubts that the author likes scholars and artists and dislikes businessmen.

nonentities with one message and one message only: to wooden mediocrity there is no end (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 143, RE 148).

The commercialization of television is described in a way which is reminiscent of Ilf and Petrov's denunciation of Hollywood's production. According to Aksyonov, the Soviet slogan "Art belongs to people" is realized in America. Ironically, this fact provokes the wrath of this defender of democracy. He questions the all-powerful logic dictating that audience should get what it wants. The choices of the audience depend on what is offered: "Mutual influence between mass audience and mass culture spins round and round in a vicious circle." There is no effort to break this vicious circle even though the public is fed with "soap" or, as the Russian equivalent of this term goes, "snot with syrup." One of the great artistic problems in America is "the clampdown on the avant-garde." The American literary, theatrical, and cinematic establishment shows preference for hot items and fear of risk and innovation (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 144-45, RE 148-49). Another theme from Ilf and Petrov's book appears in the analysis of publishing industry: "The Russian reading public knows another American literature. Russian translators, to give them their due, select books for their merit, not for their sales" (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 154, RE 156). The author does not notice that the criticism of the prevalence of market mechanism in the cultural life contradicts the praise of "benevolent inequality" and economic freedom. Not incidentally one of the scarce positive comments on Soviet Union appears in the discussion of literary life in America: "[...] Soviet readers in the last twenty-five years have had the benefit of a long list of brilliant American titles" (Aksyonov *In Search* AE 155, RE157). Aksyonov seems unaware that this long list was

possible precisely because the publishing policy in the Soviet Union was centralized, therefore liberated from market considerations.

The description of Oscar Peterson's unlucky visit to Moscow is similar to Ilf and Petrov's depiction of the concert halls in the Soviet capital. Deciding that they were being treated rudely by the authorities, Peterson and his trio left Moscow without performing. After the several thousand people who have traveled from all over the Soviet Union to listen to him understand that he is not coming, they do not disperse for several hours. When someone overhears the author saying that he has been to a Peterson concert in London, he is surrounded "by a sea of faces all asking questions at once. The audience? Not many young people, basically forty and over. A third of the seats were empty. Did you hear that? A third of the seats were empty!" (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 207, RE 243). Here the Russian passion for music is emphasized in comparison to the London audience's relative lack of understanding. In the Russian edition there is one more significant episode in this chapter. A well-known jazz-musician in Washington remembers his visit to Moscow and his meeting with the Moscow jazz-fans:

O Bozhe Vsemogushchii, oni nas vsekh znali po imenam, znali kto s kem i kogda igral, nazvania nashikh al'bomov, daty vypuskov, vse kluby, v kotorykh my kogda-libo igrali [...] oni bol'she znali o dzhaze, chem my sami. Oh, God Almighty, they knew our names, the titles of our albums and the time of their release, the clubs in which we played and who played with whom [...] they knew more about jazz than us. (Aksyonov, *In Search* RE 248, Cf. AE 210)



Here the competence and good taste of Soviet audiences are confirmed by an American artist.

The last chapter of the book summarizes Aksyonov's thoughts about his new home. He notes that his first travelogue contains no criticism of America; it was written to shed the stereotypes of years of anti-American propaganda.<sup>58</sup> The second book is more sober: "[...] I see more than the bright windows of my new home; I see its mildewed corners as well" (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 212, RE 255). The "mildewed corners" are mentioned only here in this chapter, the rest of it analyzes the worst manifestations of the Soviet anti-American propaganda and narrates a story about a meeting with an old friend from Moscow. She has been in America only for a short time, but has already noticed the

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<sup>58</sup> Aksionov refers to his first book about America as excessively positive (Aksionov, *In Search* AE 211, RE 254). A close reading of *Non-Stop Round the Clock*, however, shows that the image of America in this book is much closer to the standard Marxist interpretation. Moreover, writing about his experience as a professor at UCLA, Aksionov criticizes the American prejudices against the Soviet Union. This is how the author's students reacted to his lecture on contemporary Russian literature:

Prezhde vsego ikh privleklo raznoobrazie mnenii, stolkonovenie razlichnykh, poroi poliarnykh tocek zrenia. V silu razlichnykh predubezhdenii (vsem nam poniatno, otkuda oni vzialis') amerikantsy znaiut lish' to, chto meshaet razvitiu nashei literatury, no daleko ne vseгда ponimaiut to, chto vdokhnovliaet nas i zovet ne ostavliat svoikh usilii.

Trudnosti nashi—v silu takzhe predubezhdenii—ochen' chasto preuvelichivaiutsia. Odnazhdy ia chital na leksii odin iz rasskazov Trifonova i govovil na ego primere ob intuitivnoi proze, o tom, chto chitatel' zdes' prizyvaetsia v soavtory i stanovitsia (pri izvestnom, konechno, usilii) uchastnikom tvorcheskogo akta, vrode slushatelei na dzhazovom kontserte. Posle chtenia odin parenok pechal'no skazal:

- Kak zhal', chto takoi zamechatel'nyi rasskaz nel'zia napechatat' v Sovetskom Soiuze. Prishlos' pokazat' knigu, po kotopoi ia chital i tirazh kotoroi byl sto tysiach ekzempiarov. What attracted them [the students] most of all was the variety of opinions, the conflict of different, sometimes antagonistic, points of view. By virtue of certain prejudices (we all know where they come from), the Americans know only what hinders the development of our literature. They seldom understand what inspires and summons us not to give up. Our problems—by virtue of some prejudices again—are often exaggerated. During one of the lectures, I read a Trifonof short story to illustrate what is intuitive prose and how the readers (if they make some efforts) can become co-authors just like the audience in a jazz concert. After hearing it, one of the students said with a sigh:

-It's a pity that such an amazing story cannot be published in the Soviet Union. I had to show him the book that was published in one hundred thousand copies (Aksionov, *Non-Stop* 75).

This passage asserting the variety of opinions and the freedom of the Soviet writers is the opposite of the picture painted in Aksionov's second book about America.

main difference between life in the Soviet Union and the United States: it is a lot harder for Americans to die than it is for the Soviet citizens because “Life is more human here; it’s harder to leave than the life we lead” (Aksyonov, *In Search* AE 220, RE 263). This episode summarizes Aksyonov’s perception of the difference between life in the Soviet Union and the United States—life in the Soviet state is inhumane compared to life in America.

Ilf and Petrov end the discussion of every aspect of American life with a conclusion that shows the advantages of socialism over capitalism. Aksyonov approaches America with a similar ideological zeal but with an antagonistic ideology. His anti-Sovietism defines the way he sees and describes the United States. America in his presentation is not only rich and powerful, but also generous, tolerant and humane, and ready to lead the world to a new age of liberalism built on beneficial inequality. There is one aspect of their images, however, that is similar, namely, the attitude toward some aspects of American cultural life. The assaults on Hollywood and the profit-driven publishing industry betray the influence of the traditional paradigm about Materialistic West versus Cultural/Spiritual Russia. The way in which American and Soviet audiences are portrayed confirms this influence. No matter whether the Soviet Union is Ilf and Petrov’s promised land of the future or Aksyonov’s “global concentration camp”, its citizens show a remarkably good taste in architecture, literature, music, and cinema.

## Conclusion

The textual construction of various Americas in the travelogues by the Chinese and the Russian authors offers a variety of problems, which can be approached from many angles. The many written Americas in these travel narratives reflect China and Russia's drive to modernize, and the exploration of the United States as a potential model for modernization. The admirable America of technological miracles and material progress, the disturbing America of a high income inequality between the haves and have-nots, the inspiring America of free speech and democratic policies, the hypocritical America of hidden racial problems, the gracious America of generous friends, the brave and cruel America of indefatigable pioneers, and other mutually exclusive images coexist in the travelogues showing not only the complexity of the country in question, but also the writers' searches, discoveries, and disappointments. The different perspectives on the United States are often based on the clash between Chinese and Russian versions of Marxist dogma and the American free market ideology. While the latter has been relatively consistent throughout the period in which the travel books were written, the former went through ideologically turbulent times—the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China and Stalin's purges followed by Khrushchev's thaw in Russia changed the Marxist believers' perspectives. These changes are reflected in the travelogues: the enthusiastic faith in socialism characterizing Ilf and Petrov's approach to United States is different from Ding Ling's unbending certainty that the Communist Party is right even when it makes mistakes: that is, their hopeful belief that the Marxists can build a new world is replaced by her dogmatic assertion that what they have built cannot

be worse than capitalism. During his first visit to the United States, Fei Xiaotong does not see himself as either Marxist or anti-Marxist, but his analysis of man's need to see the meaning of his labor is very close to Marx's theory of alienation. In Aksyonov's work Marxism is rejected with passionate hatred, while in Liu Zongren and Wang Zuomin's books it is conspicuously absent—a change anticipating the crisis of belief characterizing the intellectuals in post-communist Russia and China.

The role of Marxist ideology in forming these perceptions and presentations of America is undisputable, but its function can be understood better if it is analyzed against the backdrop of traditional beliefs in the spiritual superiority of both China and Russia over the West. Despite their pronounced cultural, economic, and political differences, and independently of their political ideologies, Russian and Chinese writers uniformly tend to see a “spiritless” and materialistic America which betrays the influence of the paradigm of Materialistic West versus Spiritual East. I demonstrated in the chapter “Friend and Foe: Chinese, Russian, and Soviet Images of America” that this paradigm played an important role in regenerating the national mythologies in both countries after they realized their material and technological backwardness with respect to the West. Moreover, a close reading of the Marxist descriptions and analyses of America convinced me that the ambitious socialist projects in China and Russia can be seen broadly as a new incarnation of the traditional notion of the spiritual superiority of these two countries over the West. The presentation of socialism as ethically superior to capitalism both compensated for the awareness of material backwardness and mobilized the social energies necessary for the building of a new society. What becomes clear through my analysis above is that the socialist perspectives of these writers can be approached as modern incarnations of the

traditional paradigm of spiritual/ethical superiority of both China and Russia over the West. Without doubt, this is only one aspect of this multifaceted historical phenomenon, but it shows that along with its revolutionary changes, socialism offered some continuity with the past. In the travel books of both Chinese and Russian Marxist authors, the spiritual superiority of socialist ideology is claimed with all the confidence characterizing the claims of cultural superiority raised by the pre-socialist (and sometimes anti-socialist) thinkers in both countries. Despite the differences in complexity of the images of America in the Chinese books, the overall approach of the Chinese writers is more open-minded and humble than the approach of the Russians. Forthright expressions of the notion of Russian cultural superiority over America in both communist and anticommunist works are more pronounced compared to the discussion of the paradigm of Chinese spiritual superiority in the Chinese texts.

The most discouraging discovery of my exploration is that the distorting force of ideological projections over a foreign reality does not depend on the political ideology held by the writer. No matter whether the pre-existing convictions are based on scholarly books or are founded on popular cultural clichés, preconceptions simply hinder the dialogue. The understanding of the Other and the realization of the epistemological value of alterity is a process so fraught with challenges that there is no need for dramatic dissimilarities between the participants to exemplify its intricacy. Eric Hayot argues that the challenge of cross-cultural understanding is not that of getting along with people who like a different kind of ice-cream than you do but of getting along with people who believe that your eating of ice-cream is morally offensive, that is, “in meeting forms of difference [...] that force one to reconsider one’s most normalized assumptions about the

proper relations between self and self, world and world” (268). My reading of the travelogues, however, shows that a simple dispute among the lovers of one and the same flavor of ice-cream over who is the real producer of the ice-cream and how the consumption of this product should be carried out leads to enormous challenges for cross-cultural understanding. None of the authors of these travel narratives disputes the achievements of modern technology and the desirability of a decent standard of life; none of them is opposed in any way to historical progress. Yet the Marxist ideology of some of the writers transforms America into a hell of exploited workers, while the lack of Marxist beliefs brings about the representation of a more multifaceted society.

Even if the recognition of the ideological lenses through which we see the world is the only achievement we are capable of realizing in our presentations of different worlds, the intellectual honesty involved in the acknowledgement of their presence will set in motion the epistemological advantage of alterity. David Porter ends his *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* with a pertinent summary of both the intricacy and the necessity of cross-cultural dialogue:

While it is perhaps naïve to hope that the ideological lenses that mediate cross-cultural vision will ever become obsolete, to recognize their presence and grapple resolutely with their historical contingency would increasingly appear, as we enter the fifth century of this encounter, both an ethical imperative and a purely pragmatic precondition to more fully engaging with all that Chinese culture, among many others, has yet to teach us about ourselves. (246)

Porter's conclusion comes closer to Gadamer's postulation that the awareness of our own biases and the elimination of all existing fore-meanings lead to the openness necessary for the understanding of the Other and the representation of the Otherness for what it is.

The realization of the role of one's own pre-existing notions about a foreign country or culture in determining what one perceives and represents, is a thorny process. In the books I analyze here only Fei Xiaotong and Liu Zongren seem to be aware to a certain extent that the ways in which Chinese culture has formed their mental universe can interfere with their perceptions of America. The role of stereotypes in cross-cultural communication is discussed only in Fei's *First Visit to America* and Liu's *Two Years in the Melting Pot*, and both are vigilant against the force of their own cultural habits. Fei is keenly aware of his deep commitment to traditional Chinese culture; Liu fully realizes that his own "Chineseness" is reinforced by a cultural inferiority complex that obstructs his communication with Americans. In both cases, their self-awareness stimulates them to gaze attentively at their object of exploration and it produces their nuanced descriptions of America. Ironically, Fei's second book on the United States offers an image of this country more conventional and stereotyped than the one created in his first book. It is difficult to do more than speculate on the reasons for this change, but the epistemological enrichment of the Self resulting from the better understanding of the Other characterizing Fei's first book is absent from his second one.

Ding Ling, Vassily Aksyonov, and Ilf and Petrov's books demonstrate a commonality of communist and anticommunist ideology: both unmistakably twist perceptions and representations. None of these writers is aware of the function of her or his previously held beliefs in the creation of the pictures they paint. Consequently, in

determining their images of America, their beliefs are more important than their experiences and observations. The confidence of these writers that they have deciphered and can pinpoint “the truth” about America generates the ideologically-ridden and one-dimensional images of the country they describe. One of the most significant characteristics of their manner of presentation of the United States is its universalistic slant: both socialism and capitalism are discussed as universal solutions to the world’s problems, and are interpreted abstractly. Any idea that the functions of these social systems can be seen differently in relation to the historical moment, the cultural tradition, and the concrete social situation is totally lacking.

With the exception of Ding Ling, the Chinese authors are more aware than the Russian writers of the difficulties involved in the process of communicating with and borrowing from another culture. Fei Xiaotong disputes the possibility of borrowing the achievements of the West while avoiding the problems accompanying these accomplishments; he writes about the long and heated discussions among Chinese intellectuals focused on the question of potential transplantation of economic or cultural and social practices. The Russian authors, however, seem not to notice the complexities of trans-cultural borrowing. Ilf and Petrov believe that the Soviet Union can take from the United States the specific technological knowledge it needs, while avoiding the American slavery of man to technology that the two Soviet writers describe with resentment. Aksyonov thinks that the implementation of democracy, a free market, and “benevolent inequality” can go together with a sort of an “aesthetic control” over popular culture that will stop the production of soap-operas, bad literature, and commercial pop music. Despite the utopian quality of Ilf and Petrov and Aksyonov’s ideas about cross-cultural



borrowing, there is still a desire to learn something in America, no matter how much this desire is deformed by the communist or anti-communist convictions of the authors.

In contrast, in Ding Ling's work the cross-cultural dialogue is still-born. Even what she likes in the United States is not related to China or connected with the possible communication and mutual enrichment of the two cultures. In Fei Xiaotong's first travelogue, America and China are perceived as two distinct and radically different cultures, and their alterity makes the exploration of the Other challenging, exciting, and fruitful. In Ding Ling's travel narrative, China and America exist as two separate and very different worlds that can be compared, but not interconnected. At first sight, Wang Zuomin's approach to the United States seems to resemble Todorov's ideal of respecting another culture, while remaining committed to one's own. Her portrayal of America is well-informed and multidimensional, yet the possibilities of cross-cultural dialogue are not fully realized, and the fertility of potential interconnectedness between Chinese and American cultures is not envisioned.

The textual construction of America shows the ways in which different perspectives see differently and thus testifies to the challenges of cross-cultural communication. The best testimony of these challenges is the fact that some of the best writers of two countries famous for the richness of their literary traditions produced various written Americas that reveal considerably more about the outlook of their authors than about the country in question.

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