

Chinese Fictions and the American Alternative: Pearl Buck and Emily Hahn

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SUMMARY

Pearl Buck's *My Several Worlds* (1954) and Emily Hahn's *China to Me* (1944) articulate a field of cultural experience whose gender-specific character is superimposed on the distinctly American rhetoric of empire as it pertains to China. Buck's humanitarian mission and Hahn's unconventional encouragement of travelers' contact with natives are two feminine/feminist responses to mainstream Western colonialism. Both authors align themselves, in different ways, with America's self-image as a more humane, liberal and "feminized" alternative to the patriarchal, imperialist European powers. The contradictions that infuse their works, which criticize American injustice and hypocrisy while subscribing to American policies, are symptomatic of America's polarized self-image and of the new leadership role that America forges for itself. For self-criticism and its counterpart, the ever more intense desire to "do good," is part of a strategy of political legitimation by which America sets itself up as the rightful heir to European hegemony.

KEY WORDS

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I. A Historical Overview

Published in 1699, Louis le Comte's *Mémoires* makes the following claim:

La Chine a conservé plus de deux mille ans la connaissance du vrai Dieu et a pratiqué les maximes les plus pures de la morale, tandis que l'Europe et presque tout le monde restaient dans l'erreur et dans la corruption.¹

For more than two thousand years, China has preserved the knowledge of the true God and has practised the purest moral maxims while Europe and almost everyone else remained in error and corruption.

Barely two centuries later, Thomas Taylor Meadows writes with equal conviction in his *Desultory Notes on the Government and People of China* that the Chinese should be made to recognize the "mental as well as . . . physical superiority" and "bow before the moral power of the civilized West."²

These violent vacillations in the Western image of China cannot be explained, as is generally believed, by increased Sino-European contact, which brought a more realistic appraisal of China's military, economic, political, and moral power. Nor, as William Appleton concludes in his study of the changes in the Western evaluation of China throughout the centuries, are they the result of "unreasonable exaltation by

the Jesuits" which "had harmed the cause of China" and "had generated a counter balance of abuse."³ Rather, the Western idea of China, based as it is on China's essential difference from the West, contains the possibility for both valorizations and denigrations, since it does not depend on a correspondence with a "real" China, but on the China that is always different from Europe. China is thus an empty profile for Europe, a recipient for an infinite variation of Western projections and desires and, as "other," is endowed with the ability both to absorb polarized claims and neutralize contradictions.

The Western image of China is an instance of what Edward Said calls "Orientalism." According to Said, orientalism is "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the "Orient" and "Occident".⁴ This basic distinction between East and West accounts for the two planes on which European apprehension of the "other" simultaneously operates. At the "manifest" level, orientalism is "the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached"; at the level of "latent" orientalism, it is "the collection of dreams, images, and vocabulary available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line."⁵

The existence of these two planes explains how, with all their categorizing and domesticating of the Orient into a coherent entity, Western opinions and attitudes of the Orient are marked by a particular insularity that defies change even in the face of empirical knowledge, with fantasies and dreams always impinging upon any attempt at objective and rational discourse. Any change in factual knowledge—for example, theories about the oriental language, society, literature—takes place at the level of manifest orientalism. A stubborn propensity to adhere to certain ideas about the Orient that new knowledge has disproved and radical shifts in point of view regarding it both derive their credibility from the unchanging status of the Orient as "other." The malleability of

the oriental image, its very illusoriness, is conditioned by an assumption of its fundamental difference from the West.

As a body of theory and practice, orientalism is held together by an internal consistency that is premised upon, and made possible by, the unequal power configuration between Orient and Occident. The Orient always occupies the weaker and more passive position of being discovered, studied, interpreted, understood, judged, and even "created" by a Western cultural, intellectual, and political network. Orientalism serves as an "accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness,"⁶ and therefore, is at once limiting (it is a set of constraints that inscribe perceptions of the "other" within the limits of its ideological possibility) and productive (Western self-definition and cultural tradition, especially since the eighteenth century, are built around the confrontation between Orient and Occident).

While the existence of China was known to the Romans and Greeks, real Sino-European contact began with the Mongol conquest of North China in 1215. Even as Mongol power and the idea of the horde threatened European security, the legend of Prester John and his Christian kingdom located somewhere west of China fired dreams of large-scale Mongol conversion. Expeditions to the court of the khans produced a literature of wonder, which freely mixes fact and fiction. The *Travels* of Marco Polo (1254-1323) describing the fabulous court of the Great Khan, is one of the earliest examples of this literary tradition. Friar Oderic of Pordenone (1286-1331) wrote of a monastery where he saw "the souls of gentlemen trapped in" "a multitude of animals of diverse kinds . . . such as apes, monkeys, and many other animals having faces like men," following his expedition of 1323. The idea of China, from the very first, is characterized by the interplay between fact and fiction to the point where even the initial discovery, as Tzvetan Todorov suggests of European discovery in general,

is already fraught with the memory of an earlier idea: "le récit lui-même n'est-il pas le point de départ, et non le point d'arrivée seulement, d'un nouveau voyage?"⁸ ("Isn't the account itself the point of departure, and not only the end point, of a new voyage?")

Although the Mongols forced themselves upon European consciousness and henceforth changed the course of Sino-European relations, they only added another dimension to a plethora of European ideas of China that predate them. Since antiquity, references to China had been both vague and loaded with a significance that far exceeded geographical location. The variety of names that referred to China: "Sin," "Chin," "Sinae," "Sinim," "Tzinista," "Tauguas," "Seres"; the different sources, whether Malay, Hindu, or Arab, by which the names were transmitted to Europe; the ways in which names were associated with dynastic titles or coveted products (China was the "land of silks")--these are some of the factors that contribute to an original confusion surrounding the idea of China. Its very name encodes two levels of signification--as land mass and as the matrix for an infinite variety of images and meanings associated with the Unknown, the Different, the Other.

China's location was thought to be anywhere from Central Asia to Ethiopia. More serious attempts at locating China suggest the sharing of sources, copyings, or the combining of different sources. Nor are copyings limited to geography. Traces of Virgil's idea that silk is combed out of fleecy leaves was still found in the Middle Ages. By the early seventh century, Theophylactus Simocatta gives relatively accurate descriptions of China, yet his narrative, too, subscribes to the pattern of well-informed observations and fable. While describing the power of the king and his princes, he goes on to say how he heard that the city was founded by Alexander the Macedonian.⁹ Serious knowledge was mixed with conjectures, revealing the tenuous hold and precarious status of any

empirical knowledge about China that was continuously threatened by an underlying dream world of fantasy. This mixture of fact and fiction characterizes most of the "geographical," "historical," "anthropological," or "missionary" writings of the time; in the case of China, it extended until the nineteenth century, when the "human sciences" were constituted.

In his study of Africanist discourse, Christopher Miller points out that the repeated copyings and intertextual nature of knowledge about Africa perpetuate a tradition whose beginnings forever recede into the remotest antiquity, whose utterances tended to be "ideas received from always anterior sources, which cannot be located; hearsay from" one who has witnessed "but remains absent; hints, rumors, and reports,"¹⁰ providing an interesting perspective on the self-reinforcing character of a discourse that is marked by lacunas and ellipses. Since sources always point to older sources or are the results of combined sources; the body of information created is subject to constant arrangement and re-arrangement whereby ideas are easily extracted from their contexts and transplanted in different ones. Ideas and facts, however disparate, are preserved and made to fit into the formal structure of "otherness" whose logic claims and constrains them as they affirm and strengthen it. This is why Ptolemy can make claims in the second century about China that were less accurate than those of Pliny (A.D. 23-79) who wrote before him,¹¹ just as later writers who had travelled in China and were in a position to know more still supported their claims from with textual authorities, tailoring their observations to a pre-conceived idea of what China should be.

This is especially true of the age of "sinomania" in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when increased contact only brought up a different set of European desires regarding China. During the "Rites Controversy" in the seventeenth century, the Jesuits tried to reconcile Christian

dogma with the teachings of Confucius by suggesting that the concept of monotheism could be found in Chinese writing. Some even claimed a common origin between early Chinese religion and Christianity. They affirmed that the Chinese were descendants of Japheth, the eldest son of Noah, who had given them the Ancient Law, which could still be discerned in the "YinYang" mystic symbols of the *I Ching* (*The Book of Changes*). These theories evoked immense interest in the scientific community in Europe, setting off debates and speculations about the petrification of the Chinese character. No less a figure than Leibnitz saw in these theories the possibility that Chinese might be the original universal language of mankind before Babel.¹²

The recasting of Chinese history within the Biblical time frame suggests the European propensity to magically transform wish into reality simply by an act of will. The expression of desires, formed of highly coherent arguments supported by "proofs" and "facts," depends on the discontinuities and failures of knowledge that mark and produce the discourse of China. What characterizes Africanist discourse is again applicable here: "When Prester John reaches identification with the real Christian Kings of the real Ethiopia, the discourse has found its happiest moment: the object projected into the void returns perceptualized as reality itself."¹³

It is not surprising that the Cathay of Marco Polo was not immediately associated with the Seres of Antiquity, since myth and geography have, from the beginning, been conflated with the etymology of China. With the fall of the Mongol dynasty in 1368, Sino-European contact ceased, but the idea of Cathay retained all its powers of suggestion and became a source of inspiration for later travellers. When Portuguese and Spanish explorers discovered the sea-route to China, they found not the Cathay and Cambelec of Marco Polo, but China and Peking. In this rediscovery of China, both the old names and the fact that these places had been known before were forgotten. It

was not until 1603 that Benedict Goes confirmed that Seres, Cathay, and China were one and the same place.¹⁴

Europe's lapses of memory function alongside ideas about China that remain unchanged; China is always known, and yet continuously newly discovered. Goes' identification did not end the violent vacillations in the Western evaluation of China. With Western ascendancy in the eighteenth century, as power configurations between China and the West changed, the shattering of China's military might was accompanied by drastic re-evaluations of Chinese morality and culture.

The forging of a new Western identity that conformed to its status of world supremacy had to reckon with the figure of China, for centuries promoted as an object of emulation. Indeed, Europe's growing sense of its self-importance may be gauged by an opposite tendency to revise its image of China. By the time that Sir William Jones (1746-94) dismissed Chinese culture in the withering observation that "their letters, if we may so call them, are merely symbols of ideas; their popular religion was imported in an age comparatively modern; their philosophy seems yet in so rude a state as hardly to deserve the appellation,"¹⁵ the Chinese vogue had passed, marking the beginning of a new phase in which China was held up as a prime example of oriental despotism and stagnation, the antithesis of Western progress and civilization, and one of Europe's most glamorous justifications for Empire.

The shift in the Chinese image from civilized perfection to decadence and depravity does not prevent "older" notions about China, derived from periods of Chinese strength in regard to the West, from interacting with new ones. While the older notions continue to influence European perceptions of China, however, they are henceforth anchored in a Western perspective of dominance and power that is impossible for China to reciprocate.¹⁶ Stereotypes, judgements, and clichés about China are not only not disputed, but have the potential to cross over to the world of "realpolitik." Facetious as it is in

tone, Prosper Mérimée's *Lettres à une inconnue*, which was published in 1860 at the time of the Sino-French war, is a good example of the increasing overlap between cultural and political domains:

Je me prépare à nos conquêtes en Chine en lisant un nouveau roman que vient de traduire Stanislas Julien . . . C'est l'histoire de deux demoiselles . . . qui . . . font des vers . . . Elles trouvent deux étudiants qui, de leur côté, écrivent avec la même facilité, et c'est un combat à n'en plus finir. Dans tous ces quatrains, il n'est question que d'hirondelles blanches et de lotus bleus . . . Evidemment les gens qui s'amuse à ce genre de littérature sont d'abominables pédants, qui méritent bien d'être battus et conquis par nous qui procédons de la belle littérature grecque.¹⁷

I prepare for our conquests in China by reading a new novel that Stanislas Julien just translated . . . It's the story of two maidens . . . who . . . write poetry . . . They find two students who, on their part, write with the same facility, and its an unending battle thereafter. In all these quatrains, there are nothing but white swallows and blue lotuses . . . Evidently, people who enjoy this kind of literature are abominable pedants, who deserve to be beaten and conquered by us who come from the tradition of beautiful Greek literature.

In an age of Empire, there are no longer "innocent" forms of cultural apprehension. We recall Macaulay's famous justification for Empire: "a single shelf of good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."¹⁸

In order to understand the new significance presented by the idea of identity/alterity, it is important to grasp the scope

of Western expansion. In the early nineteenth century, Europe and the U.S. controlled 35% of the earth's surface; between 1878-1914, the West controlled 85% of the world in colonies and protectorates. Notwithstanding marked differences between British, U.S., and French imperialism, there are often shared methods of colonial administration. From "informal" empire building, the West soon practised a militant imperialism that increasingly acquired territories for occupation rather than settlement, reinforcing notions of the world's division into "Western" and "non-Western"--a demarcation that runs from geography to morality, and that increasingly comes to depend on notions of race and color. There was, in the West, a sense of racial and religious solidarity, and the conviction that "whatever our rivalries and jealousies . . . we Europeans, including even Russians, are all imbued with the one spirit of humanity, justice, and progress, summed up in the word 'Christian.'"¹⁹ The idea of a "Western" identity symbolizing all that is good, true, and right, advances claims of a moral obligation to rule "the lesser races" by forcing upon them what Europe knows is for their own moral and material advancement. Conquest is valid when, as Secretary Palmeston puts it, "Commerce may go freely forth, leading civilization with one hand and peace with the other, to render mankind happier, wiser, better."²⁰

Raymond Schwab claims in *La Renaissance orientale* that the discovery of oriental languages in the eighteenth century opened up for European vision areas beyond the classical and biblical traditions, thus marking the beginning of world history. India played a central role in this "oriental renaissance." With the publication of Anquetil-Duperon's translation of the *Zend Avesta* in 1771, it was Sanskrit, not Chinese, that revealed Europe's linguistic past and became the focus of European attention. Despite the discrediting of previous interest in Chinese as the original universal language, the secularization of linguistics brought serious progress to

Chinese studies. In some ways, the peripheral importance of sinology provided a flexibility in the study of Chinese that allowed for the incorporation of more wide-ranging interests beyond the purely linguistic. Jean Pierre Abel Rémusat, who occupied the first chair of Chinese established at the College de France in 1814, translated a number of Chinese works besides writing his *Eléments de la grammaire chinoise* and *Essai sur la langue et la littérature chinoises*. Stanislas Julien (1797-1873), Pauthier (1801-1873), and Hervey de Saint-Denys (1823-1892), among others, translated Chinese novels, plays, and poetry, which inspired literary experimentation with new art forms.

The birth of linguistics inaugurated a new humanist trend that saw the world as one and mankind as one family. Michelet expressed the profound excitement and idealism surrounding the idea of human unity when he spoke of Eugène Burnouf in the following terms: "Mot sacré de la Renaissance! Là, je l'ai bien senti! L'Unité de l'âme humaine, la paix des religions, la réconciliation de l'homme avec l'homme et leur embrassement fraternel."²¹ (Sacred word of the Renaissance! There I really felt it! The unity of human soul, the peace of religions, the reconciliation of men and their fraternal embrace.") How did universalism and tolerance and the positive concept of nationalistic thinking become transformed into a paranoid theory of irreconcilable racial differences to the point where, as Kipling has it, "East is East and West is West; and never the twain shall meet?"²²

It is ironic that the roots of modern "scientific" racism, the handmaid of imperialism whose mad logic was not recognized until it led right back to Europe, are located in the age of Enlightenment, the very age that first advanced the concept of world unity. In their use of vocabulary, imagery, and analogy, the *philosophes* were often guilty of systematizing, diffusing and propagating prevalent prejudices that would later facilitate imperialism's task of reviving patterns of

racial thinking, the basis of its ideology. For example, in a section entitled "Caractères des nègres en général" ("Characters of the negroes in general"), Diderot's and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* refers to the moral deficiencies of certain African tribes while distinguishing others in the terms that "les préjugés de l'éducation les rendent un peu meilleurs; cependant, ils participent toujours un peu de leur origine; ils sont vains, méprisants, orgueilleux, aimant la parure, le jeu, et sur toutes choses les femmes."²³ (The influence of education renders them a bit better, yet they always retain a little of their origins; they are frivolous, disdainful, proud, loving finery, gambling, and above all, women.)

In *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*, Voltaire's description of the physical characteristics of Blacks suggests their greater affinity with animals than with the rest of humankind:

Leurs yeux ronds, leurs nez épatés, leurs lèvres toujours grosses . . . la mesure même de leur intelligence, mettent entre eux et les autres espèces des différences prodigieuses. Et ce qui démontre qu'ils ne doivent point cette différence à leur climat, c'est que des Nègres . . . transportés dans les pays les plus froids, y produisent toujours des animaux de leur espèce.²⁴

Their round eyes, flat noses, always thick lips . . . even the level of their intelligence, put prodigious differences between them and other species. And what shows they do not owe this difference to their climate is that Negroes . . . transported in colder countries, always produce animals of their kind.

In explaining the donkey as a degenerate version of the horse, Buffon uses analogies that inadvertently set up the framework for later racial hierarchies placing Blacks on the

bottom rung:

Si le Nègre et le Blanc ne pouvaient produire ensemble . . . le Nègre serait à l'homme ce que l'âne est au cheval, ou plutôt, si le Blanc était homme, le Nègre ne serait plus un homme, ce serait un animal à part, comme le singe . . . mais cette supposition même est démentie par le fait.²⁵

If the Negro and the White man could not reproduce together . . . the Negro would be to man what the ass is to the horse, or rather, if the White man was man, the Negro would no longer be a man, he would be a different animal, like a monkey . . . but this supposition itself is refuted by fact.

The list may be extended indefinitely, across national borders, and may generally be regarded as a pan-European phenomenon.²⁶

The eighteenth-century penchant for classification created a framework in which categories of racial superiority and inferiority of later scientific or pseudo-scientific race theories were conveniently fitted. Although the meaning of race changed from a simple characteristic of human difference and diversity to become the central determining factor of human action, the theories of Gobineau (1816-1882) or Ernest Renan (1823-1892) echo much of the general rhetoric used by the Enlightenment thinkers.

As European identity and values became more systematically defined against the growing institutionalized difference of the Orient, the latter came to represent what Europe rejected and no longer admitted for itself—deceit, cruelty, weakness, sensuality, despotism, etc., which were reinforced by actual colonial encounters. With greater access to non-European cultures, whether through study, travel, or popular

literature, the Orient became the familiarized complement to Europe, for Europe to rule, enjoy, and be inspired by. A proliferation of travel literature such as Jules Verne's *Le Tour du monde* published in 1860, and journals such as the *L'Année géographique* stimulated public interest in new lands and adventure. Publications of the trials and heroism of missionaries who suffered persecutions, and stories of tragedies surrounding soldiers stranded in hostile lands articulate an ethos of Western rectitude, courage, and self-sacrifice.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, Western self-definition was subsumed under a coherent imperial image. Colonial theories, until then fragmentary and dispersed, were welded into a doctrine that consolidated economic, political, and moral forces. It was at this time, when colonial ideologies became a matter of national policy, that there was conscious promotion of an imperial culture through education, public ceremonies, parades, invented traditions and rituals such as "Empire Day" and "Bastille Day."

As science was annexed by an imperial ideology,²⁷ political and social theories revolved around two dominant ideas: 1) the fundamental and unbridgeable difference between races manifested in history as the natural fight of the races, and 2) the evolutionary potential for "lesser" races to one day reach the level of development of civilized nations. For example, as its subtitle "A Philosophical Inquiry into the Influence of Race over the Destinies of Nations" indicates, Robert Knox's *Races of Man* (1850) speaks of territorial acquisition as an expression of racial war. John Westlake's *Principles of International Law* (1894) stipulates that rights of political sovereignty can only be considered if native states begin to act like Western nations, while Leopold de Saussure's *Psychologie de la colonisation française dans ses rapports avec les sociétés indigènes* (1899) argues that the inequality of races dooms hopes of assimilation to the French system, which can only be corrupted through contact with them.

There was complete conviction, often accompanied by deep probings of conscience, of Europe's right to rule. It was the "White man's burden", the idea of a *mission civilisatrice*, that provided the ultimate justification for Empire. As Lord Curzon, the British Viceroy to India (1899-1905) put it:

Your task is to fight for right, to abhor the imperfect, the unjust or mean . . . to care nothing for flattery, or applause or odium or abuse . . . but to remember that the Almighty has placed your hand on the greatest of His ploughs . . . to feel that somewhere among these millions you have left a little justice or happiness or prosperity, a sense of manliness or moral dignity, a spring of patriotism, a dawn of intellectual enlightenment, and a stirring of duty where it did not before exist.²⁸

Although criticism of Empire existed, it was generally aimed at the practice rather than the theory of imperialism. In *Imperialism* (1902), the first critique of Empire as it was practised in his day, J. A. Hobson deplored abuses perpetuated by the imperial system, but believed it legitimate as long as it secured "the safety and progress of the civilization of the world."²⁹ Likewise, socialists like Jean Jaurès might question France's political system, but never its ability to bring enlightenment to the natives. Even Marx and Engels, who censured colonialism, accepted that it fulfilled a historical necessity in shaking Asia out of its stagnation and accelerating its participation in world revolution.³⁰

In the next section, I would like to turn to two American women writers—Pearl Buck and Emily Hahn—who are generally perceived as being critical of imperialism and sympathetic to the cause of China. I shall argue that their respective visions of China hide unconscious cultural assumptions, and come out of the peculiar coincidence between imperialism and

the tradition of humanistic thought discussed above. Their expression in an American context not only heightens the complex and self-contradicting nature of an imperialist discourse that is always grafted to a humanistic module, but introduces us to another problematic of empire.

II. Pearl Buck's *My Several Worlds* and Emily Hahn's *China to Me*

Pearl Buck's *My Several Worlds* (1954) and Emily Hahn's *China to Me* (1944) articulate a field of cultural experience whose gender-specific character is superimposed on the distinctly American rhetoric of empire as it generally pertains to China.

Buck's humanitarian mission and Hahn's unconventional vision of travel which encourages contact with natives for both truly exotic experiences and professional possibilities are two feminine/feminist responses to a mainstream, "patriarchal," and "imperialist" form of cultural apprehension and interaction generally associated with European colonialism. They align themselves, in different ways, with America's self-image as a more humane, liberal, and "feminized" alternative to the imperialist European powers whose legacy the United States increasingly inherited. The contradictions that infuse their works, which criticize American injustice or hypocrisy while subscribing to its policies, are symptomatic not only of America's polarized self-image, but of the new leadership role that America forges for itself. For self-criticism, countered by ever more intense and rigorous desires to "do good," is also part of a strategy of political legitimation by which America sets itself up as the rightful heir to European hegemony.

From the first, there was an ambivalence in America's China policy. American disapproval of British or French imperialist policies did not exclude a certain amount of collusion with the European system. Indeed, there was seldom any conflict in practice between American idealism and

American self-interest, as Charles Denby, the United States envoy to China in 1885-98, cynically pointed out: "as the condition of the Chinese improves, his wants will increase. Fancy what would happen to the cotton trade if every Chinese wore a shirt. Well, the missionaries are teaching them to wear shirts."³¹ America often relied on British facilities, such as the ports of Malta and Hong Kong, shared the benefits of the European empire and adopted many of its methods in demanding the most-favored nation treatment or extraterritoriality.

American ideals of self-determination for the Chinese were never relevant to the facts of China except when they were beneficial to American interests. Secretary of State John Hay's Open Door Policy (1899), which evolved into the 1920s, is a case in point. Later associated with the tradition of American benevolence and moral righteousness, the Open Door, whose central tenets were the preservation of Chinese territorial integrity and equal treatment for all foreigners, was originally devised to prevent ambitious powers (such as Russia) from annexing Chinese territory and excluding the others from sharing its benefits.³² In 1915, when Japan's Twenty One Demands violated the Open Door policy, secretary Lansing conceded that Japan had special interests in China, since "it would be quixotic in the extreme to allow the question of China's territorial integrity to entangle the United States in international difficulties."³³

American political ambivalence was complemented by a cultural ambivalence toward China. In many ways, although America believed itself morally superior to Europe, it inherited many European stereotypes and prejudices about the Chinese. Chinese cultural oddities were mixed in with images of Chinese evil, and residues of the Enlightenment's adulation of the Chinese operated simultaneously with convictions of their racial inferiority, so that while America considered itself the "special" friend of China, it also reserved its highest scorn for

China's increasingly visible inefficiency and backwardness.³⁴ Indeed, contradictions in American attitudes toward the Chinese run so deep that when American missionaries were more than ever committed to saving Chinese souls in the 1870-80s, America itself was wracked by anti-Chinese riots which led to passage of the Chinese Exclusion Acts.³⁵

In her Nobel award acceptance speech in 1939, Buck characterized America as a country that was "still young" and "[had] not yet come to the fullness of [its] powers."³⁶ America between the two World Wars, was a country conscious of its rising powers and increasing involvement in world affairs. Although America played a key role in China quite early on--since 1922, when the Anglo-Japanese Alliance permitting the prolongation of British Far Eastern Naval dominance came to an end, American influence began to outstrip Britain's³⁷--the image of an America developing into its global role was prevalent until after World War Two, when its world leadership status was consecrated.

As modes of autobiographical writing that take for their theme the depiction of cultures and peoples, the narratives of Buck and Hahn are not so much internal quests as highly personalized explications of historical event or cultural experience, and are both intended and perceived as historical or anthropological documents. Since their reliability and accuracy as such depend on subjective personal experience and first-hand knowledge, they are predicated upon a transparency between experience and truth, and exemplify a particular overlap between autobiography and history.

The tension that arises from the equation between autobiography and history, subjective experience and objective truth, is centered on the assumption of historical authority by the subjective voice. An eyewitness narrative that simultaneously subscribes to an author's view and is accorded an independent historical value free of subjective manipulation both shares the general concerns that surround the structure

of the first-person narrative and differs from them in significant ways. First, there is the idea of truth and fiction, the particular obsession of traditional autobiographers. While basing the validity of their endeavors on the profession of truth-telling and on the faithful and sincere rendering of facts, they are nevertheless aware that their enterprise is flawed from the beginning, since the coherence of their narrative depends on an interpretive selective memory that orders the unformed chaos of life into a life history. However, as Lionel Trilling points out, the shift in emphasis from passive truth-telling to active self-creation and a higher truth of human experience, especially in twentieth-century autobiographies, delineates the transformation of "sincerity" as an end in itself to become a means to "authenticity."³⁸ Therefore, inasmuch as André Gide, for example, may deplore the fact that "les Mémoires ne sont jamais qu'à demi sincères, si grand que soit le souci de vérité . . . Peut-être même approche-t-on de plus près la vérité dans le roman"³⁹ ("Memoirs are but partly sincere, however great the concern for truth . . . Perhaps one can come closer to truth in the novel"), his *Si le grain ne meurt* only serves to affirm the authenticity of a work and, by extension, of a self that recognizes its project of impossible sincerity.

In the case of the works to be discussed, I would argue that metaphysical wrestling with the idea of truth-telling appears irrelevant. The self is a cultural entity defined by nationality, situated in the midst of cultural interaction, at once deriving its authority and value from an external historical reality and giving to that reality its own stamp of authenticity as lived experience.

Part of the reason for the successful dual roles of the subject "I" as both presence (the "living" agent through which history is authenticated) and absence (the neutral spectator whose only role is the impartial recording of historical events) is determined by the structural and aesthetic problematic of

the first-person narrative. According to Kate Hamburger, the "experience field" of the "I" entailing subjective self-expression is oriented toward objective truth or reality. The "I" has the subjective quality of the lyric, and yet tends towards the historical in positing the self as a non-fictional historical document:

The "I" of first-person narration does not intend to be a lyric "I," but a historical one, and therefore it also does not assume the forms of lyric statement. It does narrate personal experience, but not with the tendency to present it as being only subjectively true, as being its experience-field in the more concentrated sense, but instead, like every historical "I," is oriented toward the objective truth of the narrated.⁴⁰

The double nature of the "I" often masks the subjective nature of historical enterprises. In the case of cross-cultural representation, it is doubly important to bring back the writing "voice" in all its ideological trappings to which the full significance of any act of cultural domination, direct or indirect, can be traced.

My Several Worlds begins with a statement of Buck's intentions. Characterizing her enterprise as an incomplete autobiography, which comprises a happy private life and the "age into which I am born. Never, or so it seems to me as I read history, has there been a more stirring and germinal period than the one I have seen passing before my conscious eyes" (*My Several Worlds* 4), Buck sets out to sketch an eyewitness account of the transformation of China from a feudal society to a Communist state, with all the years of civil war and attempted reform in between.

Buck then backtracks to her childhood, presenting a panorama of incidents that are viewed from the present of writing; the past is given a retrospective significance that

leads right up to Buck's adult identity as intermediary between East and West. Born in 1892 in West Virginia to missionary parents, Pearl Buck was taken to China as an infant. Apart from a couple of sojourns in the United States, when she studied for Bachelor and Master's degrees, Buck spent most of the first part of her life in China, which she left permanently only in 1934.

Buck's early awareness of self is the consciousness of her belonging to both "the small white clean Presbyterian world of my parents and the big loving merry not-too-clean Chinese world" (10), two separate worlds to which she not only has equal access, but within which she can assume respective American or Chinese identities at will: "When I was in the Chinese world I was Chinese, I spoke Chinese and behaved as a Chinese and ate as the Chinese did, and I shared their thoughts and feelings. When I was in the American world, I shut the door between" (18).

Beyond the contained transplanted world of her parents looms the specter of America, the dreamworld "from which all blessings flowed" (*My Several Worlds* 5), a view that, as Buck's description of her childhood game reveals, her Chinese playmates apparently share:

"Foreigners" had done evil things in Asia--not the Americans, my small and even tactful friends declared, for Americans, they said, were "good." They had taken no land from Asian countries and they sent food in famine time. I accepted the distinction and felt no part with the other Western peoples of Europe, whom at that time I considered also my enemies. Our version of the universal game of cops and robbers in those days was the endless war of Chinese and all good Asian allies against the imperialist powers of the West, and as the sole American in the game, it was my duty to come forward at the height of battle and provide food and

succor for the ever-victorious Chinese. Thus half a century ago did the children of Asia play at the game of later reality, and it was quite by chance that a small yellow-haired American represented her country among them. (6-7)

In identifying herself with America and attributing to the game a prophetic dimension that anticipates her own later role as champion of the Chinese cause, Buck reinterprets her presence among the Chinese as so much preparation for the humanitarian mission that both she and America would assume. The direction of the narrative transforms Buck's privileged intimacy with the Chinese into a valuable tool of knowledge that would henceforth be put into the service of America's national destiny, which is to contribute "to the solutions of the world's problems" (407). Buck's inability to recognize in her vision of an American humanistic mission, whose claims to universal validity have familiar undertones of the imperialist venture she so vehemently deplores, is an irony whose outlines are most apparent when she grapples with the circumstances surrounding her own presence in China.

Buck explains her parents' motives to live in China as part of the spirit of "an America bright with the glory of a new nation, rising from the ashes of war, and confident of power enough to "save" the world" (*My Several Worlds* 4). She sees in her parents' self-sacrifice and goodness the embodiment of certain Christian ideals without necessarily deviating from her conviction that misguided intolerance and repudiation of human equality form the basis of evangelization. As she confesses, the "white fire" of her father's spirit so embarrassed her that she would not bring her Chinese friends home, for she knows they would be subjected to pressures for conversion.

Yet, Buck also has a selfish reason for keeping them from her parents—she wants to earn their trust and "not risk their doubt" that she might have "used their friendship to win them

to a foreign god" (60). For this, she is "richly repaid . . . for to this day I value what they shared with me, their homes, their work, their laughter and good talk" (60).

Buck does not just gain friends but the right to speak about them and to secure for them the best that America can offer. Her objection to the missionary enterprise is limited to the God missionaries serve, and does not extend to its humanitarian presence. By emphasizing the secular aspect of Christianity, Buck has merely replaced the Christian god, which to her is anachronistic and sectarian, and can no longer encompass the global vision of the world, by America, henceforth the only true depository of universal human values.

There is a historical basis in the facility with which Buck transposes humanism unto an ideological plane, to the point where humanism appears to be the natural offshoot of democratic America. Since American missionary and commercial ventures abroad have always been tightly grafted to certain liberal or democratic values, there is, to an extent, a convergence between religious, economic, and political ideals. Buck has merely exchanged religion for humanism (to her, material aid is more important than saving souls), and therefore is able to bring about an unproblematic association between humanism, progress, and America.

On this point, Buck is less honest than the father she presumes to judge. He at least does not labour under any delusion that he and other missionaries "went to China without invitation and solely from our sense of duty" and therefore understands that "the Chinese owe us nothing" (*My Several Worlds* 90). At the outbreak of the Chinese uprising against foreigners, he goes so far as to admit that "if our country has taken no concessions, we have kept silent when others did, and we too have profited from the unequal treaties" (90). For Buck, however, lumping America with other white men is a gross injustice, even if she does, at more lucid moments, admit to America's racist and imperialist tendencies.

Taking up her father's observation on America's complicity in carving up China, Buck reverses the direction of his indictment by differentiating America's guilt of silence from "the guilt of the weight of the history of the white man in Asia," (*My Several Worlds* 90) and rhetorically converts Chinese hostility against America into a drama of misdirected persecution and American martyrdom ("The burden of Asia has fallen upon us, and for what the other white men have done, we too must suffer" (90)).

Buck's sense of injustice has a personal dimension. In the climate of social unrest that marked early twentieth-century China, two events directly affected Buck--the Boxer Rebellion (1900) during which the family had to flee to Shanghai, and the Revolutionary Army attack on Nanking in 1927, when she barely escaped alive. Buck recognized the end of an era when, during the Boxer Rebellion, she saw, for the first time, Chinese hatred and her mother's fear of a Chinese:

I had never known what hatred was . . . I could not understand why we . . . should be lumped with unknown white men from unknown countries who had been what we were not, robbers and plunderers. It was now that I felt the first and primary injustice of life. I was innocent, but because I had the fair skin, blue eyes, blond hair of my race, I was hated, and because of fear of me and my kind I walked in danger. (33)

Buck's refusal to accept that the innocent must be punished with the guilty on the basis of race cannot recognize the process in reverse, namely that it is also because of her race and the system put in place by the "robbers and plunderers" that she owes her very presence in China. She never quite outgrows the child's hurt, and between later narration of actual events, protestations of her own and America's innocence are intertwined with exhortations to prove their

goodwill to the Chinese. What this goodwill involves increasingly reveals the ideological and political thrust of Buck's humanistic philosophy.

Like Graham Greene's quiet American, Buck's idea of America is not only a dangerous mixture of idealistic innocence and moral blindness, but is fraught with flagrant contradictions. Buck's American humanistic ideal more and more takes the form of a moral right to "save" China from Communism, a right which "the aggressors, the imperialists, the white men of Europe and England, . . . the empire builders . . . who made us all hated in Asia" (*My Several Worlds* 206) have forfeited because they had been partly responsible for driving the Chinese to Communism in the first place. With no awareness of logical disparities, Buck's reasoning vacillates between professions of Sino-American equality, often defined by such far-fetched appeals to shared values between Americans and Chinese (as a "continental" people, they both have similar natures (317)), and a whole gamut of frustrated imperialist desires conveyed in terms of "winning" and "losing" Asia, as the following passage so clearly shows:

I knew that if Mr. Kung [Buck's tutor] and my grandfather could meet and talk things over they would understand each other and agree together . . . I knew and know to this day that could such men as they have met and could they have found a common language . . . all that has happened need not have happened, Pearl Harbor would never have been, and the atomic bomb would not have fallen and American prisoners of war would not have come back wounded and dying from a Communist China, for the Chinese would not have yielded to the Communists had they known there was hope in the white men of the West. It was when the last hope died that the Chinese turned away from us in final despair. (49-50)

Despite talks of cultural understanding, the real tragedy of the Communist success seems to be the loss of an American foothold, a viewpoint again consistent with Buck's happy line of thought that can continue to maintain American political innocence even as she explains that America's China policy failed because it supported the wrong man, Chiang Kai-shek, who tried to win over the Chinese by American force (*My Several Worlds* 48-49). Then, too, no political analysis of this nature is quite complete without the orientalist judgement which resorts to essential racial and cultural characteristics as the final explanation for historical events, and Buck duly attributes Chiang's failed leadership not to any policy blunders or any number of reasons related to incompetence and corruption, but to his loss of his people's respect, a process quite "in accord with the tradition of Chinese history" (267). She further rewrites the history of Western imperialism in China by explaining the Communist Revolution in terms of Chinese pride and envy: "a smouldering fury has lived on in the Chinese hearts for more than a century" against "all white men . . . who consider themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously superior to the Chinese" because the Chinese "do not love their superiors . . . [and] have never believed that their superiors could exist." (48)

Given the importance of the trope of feminity/feminism in Buck's vision of alternative politics (she has written substantially on the role of women in preventing war and promoting peace), her essentialist arguments and appeals to universal human understanding rather than partisan politics, are ideologically significant. By focusing on human dramas and assessing Sino-American relations from a "domestic" perspective from which politics are extracted, Buck at once neutralizes America's "aggressive" image and dissociates it from the tradition of European imperialism. In identifying America with the feminine, Buck gives America a new

face-feminized and humanitarian--and the moral sanction to fully assume a role of leadership in the world and win the world over to its values.

When Buck's humanistic mission reaches its ultimate substantiation in Buck herself, the writing of *My Several Worlds* and Buck's large body of predominantly cross-cultural fictional works becomes a phenomenological act of cultural understanding as Buck sets herself up as the ambassador of both East and West.

It is at this level of cultural apprehension that domination is most complete. As Buck's personal history of intimacy with China becomes the legitimizing factor for her self-appointed role as its special friend, Buck's "voice," whether in her humanitarian works, fiction, or autobiography, attains the undisputed authority of historical/anthropological seriousness. From the reaction of her American readers who rebuke her for speaking too frankly about human life or inquire why she did not include what they know to be Chinese habits and customs (*My Several Worlds* 262, 284) to that of some offended Chinese who accuse Buck of distorting the image of China in *The Good Earth* (278-283), Buck's fiction, both in intention and reception, takes its place as a genre of writing about cultural experiences that claims more than mere entertainment value.

The fact that fictional works can be taken for anthropological documents, or that an individual viewpoint, whether fictional or not, can assume the totalising dimensions of a cultural testimony, is a phenomenon both common and peculiar to Western representations of China, and generally, of non-Europe or the Third World, from the nineteenth century onwards. In a similar situation, one would never dream of reading Hemingway for an assessment of France or the French character.

As with her autobiography, any sampling of Buck's novels reveals an interest not only in the exotic world of old China, but also in a China locked in the throes of social unrest and

reform. While the topic allows Buck to explore themes of cross-cultural interaction, it also seems most prone to degenerate into propaganda as it is annexed into Buck's relentless humanitarian mission of world unity. Novels such as *East Wind: West Wind* (1930), *The Patriot* (1939) and *The Hidden Flower* (1952), often end on a sentimentalized note of hope that reform and cultural harmony can be achieved despite all odds, as if to insist that racial hatred and cultural conflicts are but aberrations of universal human values.

It is partly in reaction to this stifling Western embrace of universal love that both denies the historical reality of cultural and political domination and hides imperialism behind transcendent human values that the critic and novelist Ngugi argues, in an African context, for self-conscious politicized aspect of resistance literatures. In "Writers in politics," he writes, "Haven't we heard of critics who demand of African writers that they stop writing about colonialism, race, colour, exploitation, and simply write about human beings? Such an attitude to society is often the basis of some European writers' mania for man without history--solitary and free--with unexplainable despair and anguish and death as the ultimate truth about the human condition."⁴¹

Ironically, at a historicized level, perhaps Buck herself would agree with Ngugi's judgement. Buck's novelistic vision of world harmony does depend on an escape from history, and therefore does suggest her tacit acknowledgment that Chinese progress and universal humanism, which she has presented as complementary and mutually reinforcing forces, are in fact inimicable to each other. Her hostility towards modern Chinese intellectuals who, according to her, understand neither "old" China nor the world of Chinese peasants,⁴² her identification with a pre-Westernized Chinese system,⁴³ and the plethora of exotic details that infuse her description of the Chinese, are examples of a desire to maintain the traditional platform, increasingly threatened by rising Chinese national-

ism, on which both her humanist philosophy and her dream of an American sphere of influence may be preserved.

Earlier, I have mentioned the political significance of the process of "feminization" that Buck undertakes for America. Here, that orientalist pose of love is informed by an opposite movement that shows the final direction which it takes. By tying the Chinese cause to herself and setting herself up as interpreter between East and West, she sets up her ego and actions as the defining trait through which China is apprehended. China is subsumed and circumscribed by Buck's vision and inextricably linked to Buck's name. While professing equality with the Chinese, Buck promotes universal love on her (or America's) terms, with herself as model.

In a way, orientalism is Buck's way of escaping her feminine position, and of founding her own "patriarchal" lineage, and that of America's, outside the traditional patriarchy of European colonialism. Her orientalist love obliterates equality more surely than exploitation, since, as Hannah Arendt puts it vis-à-vis the aloofness and integrity of British soldiers in India, at least with exploitation and oppression, "exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed . . . still live in the same world, still share the same goals, fight each other for the possession of the same things," thereby taking on "safeguards of human dignity."⁴⁴ With Buck, there is no aloofness, but the turning of her involvement into a humanitarian mission partakes of the same absolute "division of interests"⁴⁵ that permits neither contact nor conflict.

Buck never questions her right to write about the Chinese, or understands the continuity of purpose in her action that binds her to the tradition upheld by her father and the long line of White men who went to China to teach and "enlighten"; to her, writing about the Chinese is nothing other than the natural result of her having grown up in China and the fact that she loves the Chinese. All the time that she affirms and continues in the Western humanistic tradition,

Buck does not seem to understand that the very possibility for and the fulfilment of her role as an authority on China depend on a system directly opposed to her vision of world harmony. In the end, the question is not one of involvement but insight. Nothing is wrong with Buck's humanitarian mission except the denial that ideology and historical realities of empire have anything to do with the premise on which it is conceived and the way it is perpetuated.

In her introduction to Lin Yutang's *My Country and My People*, Buck writes:

For a long time I have hoped that one of these few [writers] would write for us all a book about his own China, a real book, permeated with the essential spirit of the people. Time after time I have opened a book, eagerly and in hope, and time after time I have closed it again in disappointment, because it was untrue, . . . because it was too fervent in defense of that which was too great to need defense. It was written to impress the foreigner, and therefore it was unworthy of China.⁶

Buck may not agree to impressing the foreigner, but she does expect, even demand, that the book be written for the foreigner and be subject to his approval. Lin Yutang is happy to comply, and ends his book with a dutiful apologetic hope "for patience from the friends of China"⁷ regarding China's clumsy transition to modernity, a situation that is not a little exacerbated by political meddling from those very same "friends" who have a stake in making sure that China either remains weak and easily manipulated or espouses a system of government sympathetic to them. Buck's love for China never extends to a recognition of the superfluity of her own position; the idea that the Chinese may not want to explain themselves to her and America is inconceivable to her, and it is on this basis that she rejects Communism for China.

Emily Hahn's *China to Me* is a partial autobiography in the sense that it spans not a whole life, but only Hahn's China experience. It is written in the flippant style of the travelogue, whereby the relatively naive traveller Hahn is slowly inducted into the Shanghai scene of the thirties, so much so that she becomes an indispensable part of it, ends up rubbing elbows with influential Western policy makers in China and the Chinese jet set, participates fully in its political life, and becomes, in her own words, "an old China hand."

Hahn's China is the China of high cosmopolitanism, exciting parties, carefree fun, and last but not least, political intrigue and historical change of which she becomes a part. It is a China of opportunity, where an unknown American reporter is invited to write of China's ruling class to justify its policies to the world, where personal suffering and heroism has allowed to manifest themselves because of a foolhardy feeling of invincibility that makes the choice of staying on in Japanese occupied China a possibility. The conditions that allow the transformation of Hahn the tourist to an authority on China, the viability of turning a China sojourn into a Conradian adventure with herself as heroine making her own mark in the East are central tenets in Hahn's discourse of cultural consumerism and appropriation, an "Americanized" version of nineteenth-century adventure in the colonies.

Hahn's observation of British aloofness in China reveals the plane on which she places the uniqueness of her China experience:

The British were foolish to cut themselves off completely from the native Chinese. Since their tastes were so different anyway why couldn't they take the risk of being friendly?¹⁸

Hahn's is no ordinary travelogue because she proposes to travel differently. The infinite possibilities presented by China

can only be had if one "enters" Chinese society and interacts with the Chinese, something which Hahn does on both personal and professional levels.

She is not exposing her reader, the vicarious traveller, to any danger of "going native" or undue soul-searching. There is no moral challenge in confronting China "directly" because her unconventional travel experience depends on a systematic elaboration of the dichotomy between a Western center where all the serious and normal business of life goes on and where tragedy can exist, and a Chinese periphery of temporality, a vacation from life where everything is possible and nothing is real. Hahn's complicity with her readers not only through occasional helpful tips about China, but also through an almost willful determination not to give anything Chinese too much serious import, constructs a moral barrier around China that makes physical proximity or contact with the Chinese both desirable and safe. In presenting her observation of the Chinese as an exclusive secret divulged only to her readers, Hahn extends her individual experience into a cultural prerogative in which American society can fully participate and share:

If you ever go out there, be on your guard against certain types of stories which recur again and again and again. For some reason these tales have a special fascination for Chinese chatterers. Cheating in high places is the first. Espionage is the second The third is the good old execution story. (*China to Me* 96)

If these particular Chinese obsessions may actually have a historical basis and reflect the mood of the time, they do not stop Hahn from seeing in them only a strange Chinese eccentricity. Though corruption, espionage, and execution are a very real part of life in the China of the thirties, with Chiang Kai-Shek's secret police out on a rampage against both

suspected and confirmed Communists, they are but aspects of China's charm for Hahn who sees in them nothing more than a rare and privileged spectacle of fun. Despite the threat of war and internal power struggle, all that matters is that China remains available for her, a factor clearly articulated in her praise of Shanghai:

Of all the cities of the world it is the town for me.
Always changing, there are some things about it which
never change, so that I will forever be able to know it
when I come back. There will still be the Chinese . . .
No, they can't take Shanghai away from me. (1)

It is to ensure that availability that Hahn has to downplay all "serious" Chinese concerns. From the black list for the literati to exile, Hahn does not allow her Chinese to be affected. Thus, the black list, the symbol of Japanese oppression, is dismissed as Chinese paranoia, just "a figment of the lively Chinese imagination" (58), while exile is conceded to only in terms of the displacement of the jet set for better company and comfort—"if you can arrange for money," a Chinese friend reportedly told her, "(Hongkong) is nicer than Shanghai. After all the best Chinese have escaped from Shanghai" (*China to Me* 105). Since nothing is allowed to take on any tragic overtones, even war in China—a "slightly comic oriental war" (11)—is domesticated by the affectionate proprietary attitude of the narrator, who reduces horror and chaos into the manageable scales of local color for a tourist experience.

There seems to be a paradox in Hahn's narrative. If being in China is the basic condition for Hahn to shed her anonymity to become a visible member of the elite, the theme of China as an unreal land of fantasy promoted all along appears to undermine any real sense of accomplishment. It suggests that while Hahn may claim to being in the middle of

history, her ability to play a conspicuous role in society is predicated upon the relative unimportance of the history she is living through.

Hahn herself encourages this conception. She may admit to having her naive conception of herself as an "artiste" disdainful of politics dashed as she takes on the modish existence of the American in China who is drawn into political intrigues, yet she is time and again surprised that politics can take on such importance in the lives of her Chinese friends and the "old men in China who pretend to care only for the fighting prowess of their battling crickets . . . [and who] keep their shrewd old ears to the ground when trouble is brewing in the government" (34), and seems to forget that China to them is not a prolonged party or that they do have a real stake in being kept informed.

In putting herself and China on the periphery of experience, is she presenting her cultural enterprise as a "woman's" writing only, and therefore not to be taken seriously? On one level, certainly, Hahn's bemused attitude towards those who take politics (and life) seriously is linked to her tourist enterprise. In promoting her persona as a woman who does not take part in politics, Hahn reinforces her position as the exemplary tourist and guide who is only capable of focusing on the lighter side of life, and therefore can allow nothing negative or serious to intrude into the exotic experiences she promises.

On another level, however, it is by way of a feminized persona that Hahn lays a backhanded claim to history and fulfills the aspirations that Conrad inspired ("I don't suppose it was an inborn Sense of Adventure . . . that first sent me wandering off. Let's blame it on Conrad primarily" (*China to Me* 34)). For, like Buck, it is through the "domestic" sidelines that she can enter into and participate in imperialist process of history-making. In this way, paradoxically, the claim of historical accuracy and seriousness of Hahn's travelogue is

predicated upon the act of not according the Chinese too much human reality. Hahn's own transformation from non-entity to "old China hand" is effected only when the Chinese are dehumanized into exotic objects, and Chinese history reduced to a comedy of sorts.

This is why, given the peripheral importance of China in her eyes, Hahn remembers this period of heightened existence with nostalgia, as "a full life that I had back in those years of 1935-36" (*China to Me* 16). When Hahn further explains her decision to stay on in China at the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in terms of a reckless feeling of invincibility, she makes it quite clear that her potential for significant action in China is contingent upon her not taking China too seriously:

We were still so sure of ourselves, so used to thinking of ourselves as privileged overlords of the East, that the danger was muted; it took on an aspect of a sort of constant threat of accident, like driving a car with faulty brakes. (47)

If Hahn does not go as far in cultural appropriation as an English acquaintance she mentions who actually believes he is Chinese and claims China by speaking in terms of "we Chinese" (144) her own vocabulary of possessive pronouns ("my Shanghai") is no less indicative of the orientalist plane of cultural appropriation on which she interacts with the Chinese. The Chinese, even friends, are specimens to her curiosity, and cultural discoveries always take on an aspect of voyeurism. While, doubtless, real emotions exist, the "old China hand" always inhabits the friend, and anthropological interest under the guise of friendship and tolerance keeps a full-time vigil for invaluable secrets that can only be had through contact with the natives. As she admits, it is only after she had Chinese friends that Hahn could go "with them

around to the back of scenes and peered at the same old world through a glow of strange colored footlights" (10). The culmination of Hahn's China experience, apart from the writing of *China to Me*, is the writing of the biography of Mrs. Kung, a member of China's famous Soong family. While this enviable professional opportunity fits into the general scheme of her promotional "tourist package" that everything can happen in China, if only one dares to "experience," its political resonances cannot be missed, even by Hahn herself. Hahn's cryptic version of the job offer is illuminating:

The idea of a book on the Soong sisters grew out of John Gunther's book *Inside Asia* in two ways: first because it was John who named me as a likely person to do the job . . . and second because a passage in his book so infuriated the Soongs they made an important decision affecting me. (*China to Me* 81)

What has the Soong's anger against John Gunther (which is never specified) to do with Hahn? Even as she self-righteously claims that her appeal lies in her promise to tell the "truth" about Mrs. Kung, her emphasis on her own lack of qualifications implies that this is only half the answer. She seems to want the reader to know that, at the time of her undertaking, she has not been long in China, speaks little Chinese, and knows painfully little about Chinese history (when Hahn self-consciously used the word "Kuomintang" for the first time, she remarked to her Chinese friend that "you can see that I had been learning about Chinese politics or I would not have known that word" (19)).

This uncharacteristic modesty on Hahn's part may be an indirect way of pointing to the real reason behind Mrs. Kung's job offer. She must implicitly realize that it is precisely because she does not know China other than as a fantasy land that she is allowed to be made an authority on it. Her

"apolitical" persona makes her the perfect candidate to tell the "truth" about Mrs. Kung (*China to Me* 93) and presumably to correct the unmentionable paragraph in Gunther's book.

Mrs. Kung was not disappointed, since Hahn romanticized her as a Chinese and an aristocrat, and gave her the necessary attributes to win an American audience. It is in reference to Mrs. Kung that Hahn writes:

As long as any of us may live in China I think we are still a little bemused by Chinese ladies, just beuse they are Chinese. We can tell ourselves that it is nonsense, but still we are fascinated by the romance of their Chineseness. (89)

Hahn is careful not to probe too much into Mrs. Kung's wealth, or discuss her ties with Chiang Kai-shek's repressive Nanking government. And when she feels it necessary to mention Mrs. Kung's political connections and Chinese politics, she invariably counteracts that with a message on Mrs. Kung's "personal integrity" and an extra bit of flattery for the American reader:

I am not going to argue by saying that you can't hold her responsible for her position. China is called a democracy, but it is a far cry from that structure of society to the government we have set up in Washington. In many ways there is no basis for comparison. Nobody knows that better than I do. Mme Kung is a power in China. But she does think in large numbers; she does try to work for the people, and I think that her interest in her friends is an asset rather than a liability. (158)

For all the suggestion of a political motive underlying Mrs. Kung's "trust," there is no sense that Hahn is making

moral concessions, or betraying her principles, in writing a biography that conforms to the image Mrs. Kung wants to present to the world. This is because, in a way, even Mrs. Kung is subsumed under the reality of her self-creation as "old China hand," even if it is also Mrs. Kung who allows her to most fully realize her orientalist ambition. Hahn has no qualms about the moral ramifications of her consent to write about Mrs. Kung or her collusion with a political system that, through hints and indirect allusions, leaves much to be desired because both are fundamentally unreal to her, and in themselves have no moral import for her. Accepting and colluding with different systems here become the ultimate expression of the orientalist dream: the tourist can do anything as long as he/she answers to another "truer" system or morality.

By insisting on the political and cultural implications of individual actions in a cross-cultural context, I am not suggesting that the only alternative and the safest way to avert participation in the cycle of violence and appropriation is to give up and stay home. However, there must be acknowledgement of the manifold and subtle ways in which power is maintained and perpetuated, and of the impact of socio-economic and political realities on individual action and on the "self-evident" or "transcendent" values that dictate them. Through Buck and Hahn, the extent to which presumably objective eyewitness accounts and cross-cultural representations are influenced by a mix between the private desires and fears of the writers and public pressure is made clear. The content of the works are but one aspect of an extensive fabric of communication and cultural production. Without going so far as to acknowledge the writers' conscious or unconscious ideological affiliations disclosed in their writings, or analyze how their actions and achievements reinforce the pattern of eurocentrism and prove the validity of Western power, such basic facts as the accessibility to them of

different cultures, and other material circumstances and conditions that define the nature of their conceptual frameworks and allow them to write in the first place have to be considered. There is nothing natural in the ability to speak for the natives, just as there is nothing universal in the discourse of travel that masquerades itself behind the naive faith that the world belongs to and can be won by anyone with enough goodwill and curiosity.

Notes

¹ Leon Poliakov, *Le Mythe aryane* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1971) 1135.

² Mason Gentzler, ed., *Changing China* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977) 34.

³ William Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951) 173.

⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 3.

⁵ Said 73.

⁶ Said 6.

⁷ Sir Henry Yule, ed., *Cathay and the Way thither*, revised by Henri Cordier, Vol. II (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1911) 202-203.

⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, *La Conquête de l'Amérique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982) 21.

⁹ Yule, vol. I, 1-34.

¹⁰ Christopher Miller, *Blank Darkness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 15.

¹¹ Yule, vol. I, 15.

¹² Arnold Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin: The Jesuits at the Court of China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942) 1122.

¹³ Miller 61.

¹⁴ Yule, vol. I, 173-182.

¹⁵ Sir William Jones, "On the Second Classical Book of Chinese," *Works IV*. Quoted in Appleton 154.

¹⁶ Robin W. Winks and James R. Rush, ed., "Introduction," *Asia in Western Fiction* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1990) 8.

¹⁷ Prosper Mérimée, *Lettres à une inconnue*. Quoted in William Leonard Schwartz, *The Imaginative Interpretation of the Far East in Modern French Literature* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1927) 20.

¹⁸ Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minute of February 2, 1835 on Education in India," *Imperialism*, ed. Philip D. Curtin (New York: Walker and Co., 1971) 182.

¹⁹ Edward Harper Parker, *China, Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1903) 44.

²⁰ Tony Smith, *The Pattern of Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 30.

²¹ Michelet, *Histoire de France*. Quoted in Raymond Schwab, *La Renaissance orientale* (Paris: Payot, 1950) 311.

²² Although Kipling continues somewhat differently--"But there is neither East nor West . . ."--a reconciliation between East and West is only made at the level of the heroic. See Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West," *Kipling: A Selection of his Stories and Poems*, ed. John Bécroft, vol. II (New York: Doubleday, 1956) 425.

²³ Diderot and D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie* (Berne et Lausanne: Chez les sociétés typographiques, 1780) 314.

²⁴ Voltaire, "Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations," *Oeuvres complètes*, tome XIII (Paris: Chez Antoine-Augustin Rencouard, 1819) 7.

²⁵ George Louis Leclerc de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, tome VI (Paris: De l'imprimerie royale, 1769) 149.

²⁶ Poliakov discusses this extensively in his chapter, "L'anthropologie des Lumières," *Le Mythe aryan* 151-181.

²⁷ Charles Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1871), which argues for the survival of the fittest, feeds racist views by providing an evolutionary scale into which nations and races of the world are fitted. See *Descent of Man* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

²⁸ Quoted in Alan Sandison, *The Wheel of Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1937) 7.

²⁰ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1965) 232.

²¹ Karl Marx, "Revolution in China and in Europe" 19-27; Frederick Engels, "Persia and China" 120-126. See Marx and Engels, *On Colonialism* (New York: Internatinal Publications, 1972).

²² David Anderson, *Imperialism and Idealism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 34.

²³ John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 4th ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979) 309-323.

²⁴ A. P. Thornton, *Imperialism in the Twentieth-Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977) 233.

²⁵ American ambivalence toward Japan, in some ways both China's "double" and its foil, shows up the contradictions in American attitudes toward China: during the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, while the Grover Cleveland administration remained neutral, American public sympathy went to Japan's "plucky little soldiers." See Marilyn Young, *The Rhetoric of Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968) 15. Fairbank also mentions that in 1931, at the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, the Stimson doctrine refused to recognize Manchukuo while America continued to sell war supplies to Japan, an anomalous situation that may partly be explained by America's inability to take China seriously. See Fairbank 316.

²⁶ Fairbank 319.

²⁷ Pearl Buck, *My Several Worlds* (New York: The John Day Company, 1954) 345.

²⁸ Fairbank 314.

²⁹ Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971) 12.

³⁰ Andre Gidé, "Si le grain ne meurt," *Oeuvres complètes*, vol 10 (Paris: Nouvelle revue française, 1933-1939) 341.

³¹ Kate Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*. Trans. Marilyn J. Rose (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973) 313.

³² Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1987) 16-17.

³³ At the publication of *The Good Earth*, Chinese intellectuals

accused Buck of presenting an untrue or unrealistic portrait of Chinese life. In response, Buck affirmed that her descriptions were eyewitness accounts, and moreover charged that the Chinese attitudes were typical of modern elitist intellectuals who were ashamed of their peasants whose way of life often reminded them of their discredited feudal past. See Paul Doyle, Pearl S. Buck (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1965) 49-54.

⁴³ In her acceptance speech at the award of the Nobel Prize in 1939, Buck affirms that her writing is very much influenced by the traditional Chinese novel, which is more interested in character portrayal and "telling a good story" than in technique: "And like the Chinese novelist, I have been taught to want to write for these people (the ordinary man and woman). . . a novelist must not think of pure literature as his goal. He must not even know this field too well, because people, who are his material, are not there. He is a story teller in the village tent and by his stories he entices people into his tent." See Doyle 97. Apart from incorrectly assessing the traditional Chinese novel (See the refutation of Buck's idea in *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Milena Doleselova-Velingerova (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), Buck also skips over about four decades of Chinese literary history. Even if one concedes that Buck consciously identifies her work with popular writing, she makes no attempt to put her theories on the Chinese novel in the context of more recent Chinese literary developments, or alludes to the highly self-conscious direction to which Chinese literary production has taken.

⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Imperialism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968) 92.

⁴⁵ Arendt 92.

⁴⁶ Buck, "Preface," *My Country and My People* by Lin Yutang (New York: The John Day Company Inc., 1953) xi.

⁴⁷ Lin 364.

⁴⁸ Emily Hahn, *China to Me* (New York: Doubleday, 1944) 86.