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Travel Writings on Asia

Curiosity, Identities, and Knowledge
Across the East, c. 1200 to the Present

Edited by
Christian Mueller · Matteo Salonia



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ISSN 2662-7922

ISSN 2662-7930 (electronic)

Palgrave Series in Asia and Pacific Studies

ISBN 978-981-19-0123-2

ISBN 978-981-19-0124-9 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0124-9>

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Cover illustration: Artefact/Alamy Stock Photo

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The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors would like to record their gratitude to the individuals and institutions whose support made it possible to put this volume together and who contributed to the completion of the final manuscript. We received financial assistance from the School of International Studies at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. We are very grateful for the numerous intellectual stimulations, comments, and discussions from and with colleagues at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China, the University of Nottingham, Ningbo University, the Institute for Historical Research London, and the Rothermere American Institute at the University of Oxford, among many others.

One great source of inspiration and reflection over the last years has been our students at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. In many modules on Western and Global History and on the historical encounters between Europe and Asia, our students never cease to surprise us through their inquisitive curiosity. This book is also for them and for future generations of students who embrace the curiosity to explore, encounter, and dare to know.

We would like to express our gratitude to the institutional support and assistance received through the School of International Studies at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China by the Centre for Advanced International Studies, the Research Cluster for Global, Imperial and Transnational History, and the Global Institute for Silk Road Studies. We

would also like to thank the reviewers commissioned by Palgrave Springer for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this volume.

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modules the University of Nottingham on encounters with the ‘unknown East’ by medieval Christians, Jews, and Muslims, with a particular focus on travellers’ accounts of Mongols and the nature and impact of these interactions on all parties.



Introduction: Curiosity, Identities, and Knowledge in Travel Writings on Asia

Christian Mueller and Matteo Salonia

I TRAVELLERS AND THEIR LITERARY REFLECTIONS

In his late reflections on travel writings as part of the discovery and measurement of the earth, the famous nineteenth-century scientific explorer and global traveller Alexander von Humboldt addressed the fundamental premise that human movements irrespective of their intentions lead to forms of discovery.

The greatest of all mistakes that can be found in the geography of Ptolemy [in the opinion on the extension of Asia to the East], has led humankind to the greatest discoveries in relation to new parts of the earth. [...] Everything that triggers movement, whatever the moving force may be: mistakes,

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unfounded speculations, instinctive divinations, deductions based on facts, will lead to the broadening of the horizon of ideas and to new ways of intelligent inquiries.¹

Alexander von Humboldt starts his “Critical Inquiries” in 1852 with the observation that the miscalculation of one authority has triggered many forms of human action in exploring the planet. It is for him the act of travelling that generates knowledge and ultimately drives forward human intellectual progress, even if the travellers themselves might be misguided. Human triggers and reasons for travelling can be numerous, but Humboldt also indicated that the mental mapping of the world might provoke individual difficulties in reconciling preconceived constructions of space with the encountered human geography. This process of curiosity and its individual and collective processing in configuring, reflecting, and readjusting knowledge and identities about Asia is the topic of this book.

The most prominent European example for the individual difficulty to readjust his curiosity and preconceptions of Asia with his experienced encounter could arguably be Christopher Columbus.² As early as 1470, Columbus claimed his plans for the westward voyage and his curiosity on “well founded scientific reasons” in establishing the distance between the Canary Islands off the North African coast and Asia (or rather Chipangu = Japan) at an optimistic 2.760 miles instead of the actual 12.000 miles.³ When he finally reached the Caribbean in search for Chipangu and Cathay, nothing matched his spatially preconceived knowledge. Columbus elaborated in a letter to Luis de Santangel, Chancellor of the Exchequer of the Kingdom of Aragon upon his return in March 1493 the meandering travels through the Caribbean islands. “I followed its coast to the westward and found it so large that I thought it must be the mainland, - the province of Cathay; and, as I found neither towns nor villages on the sea coast [...], I kept on the same route, thinking that I could not fail to light upon some large cities and towns.”⁴ The absence of

¹ Humboldt (1852, 34). The addition in the quote appeared in Humboldt’s footnote.

² Navarrete (1853, 80–82). See already Humboldt (1852, 35–38).

³ Columbus (1969, 13). See also Parry (1981, 222–223).

⁴ Columbus (1870, 2).

towns and in fact everything that China and Japan stood for in the European imaginary finally made Columbus partly readjust his mental image of the encountered space.

Travelling appears in the vast literature as the paradigmatic form of human experience. Semantically and conceptually, travel and experience are linked in Germanic languages while most other European languages connect travel to a laborious ordeal and connect acquired liberal education semantically to a widely travelled person.⁵ Travels require a huge effort to mentally and cognitively appropriate a different world while the travellers remain rooted in the cultural, mental and social framework of their original background.⁶ It is this specific combination of experience, generation of meanings, and the continuous articulation of space that make travel reports a unique source for the specific ways of thinking and interpretations of individual travellers. The results of this articulation, the travel reports, open windows to understand the human social and mental structures that conceptualise knowledge about space in different times.⁷ This volume focuses on different actors from across the globe who travelled to, within, and through a geographical space that we may broadly consider as Asia. In reflecting upon their experiences and encounters in travelling this space in its diversity, the travel writers try to locate these within their diverse worldviews and preconceived knowledge. Even when discussing accounts penned by European travellers, the contributions to the volume trace some of these individual and collective attempts through the analytical lens of curiosity as a human capacity and a mode of observation that led to the creation of a plurality of Asias before and against the scholarly assumption of a coherent dominating othering of “the Orient.”

⁵ Bauerkämper et al. (2004, 9–14), Gebhardt (1986, 97–99), Fernández-Armesto (2006, 1–2).

⁶ Kennedy (2014, 5–7), Robinson (2014, 21–22), Tuan (1974, 30, 37).

⁷ See e.g. Harbsmeier (1982), Parry (1981), Duncan and Gregory (1999), Hulme and Youngs (2002), Osterhammel (2013, 139–142), Das and Youngs (2019), Youngs and Pettinger (2020). For Asia see in particular Strassberg (1994), Tuan (1974, 30–38), Hostetler (2001), Hargett (2018).

2 “IN SPACE WE READ TIME”⁸—HISTORIOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS OF TRAVEL WRITINGS ON ASIA

In recent years, the historiography on travel writings and on the re-discovery of space as an analytical category has taken off to the extent that the fields of history, ethnography, anthropology, and cultural studies articulated emphatically a “spatial turn.”⁹ The introduction reviews the different conceptual and analytical approaches to travel writing and travel and locates the volume in the literature by offering an analytical concept that has been largely neglected—the aspect of human curiosity.¹⁰ Since the 1970s, scholarship has asked for a stronger conceptualisation of travel as a form of cultural practice.¹¹ In the last decades, different authors have proposed an interdisciplinary programme that would embrace the practice, the programmatic intentions, the literary representation, and the repercussions as the four themes for research.¹² It is striking that the field has seen a considerable amount of publications around these themes, yet mostly with a focus on Europe and the Americas, Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East. Asia and East Asia in particular as a historical meso-region has not been the subject of prominent studies of travel writing on a larger scale or as part of a polycentric or integrative perspective on human travellers and their reflections on travel experiences and practices.¹³

⁸ Friedrich Ratzel (1904, 28). See Schlögel (2016, 3–7), Osterhammel (2013, 86–87).

⁹ Osterhammel (1998), Schlögel (2005), Döring and Thielmann (2008). See the new publications in Bavaj et al. (2022), esp. Bavaj (2022, 1–5, 9–17).

¹⁰ On curiosity see: Blumberg (1983, 229–444), Parry (1981, 42–47) Gebhardt (1986, 97–113), Stagl (1995, 1–12), Ball (2013, 2, 16, 98), Osterhammel (2013, 27–29; 2018, x), Pennock (2019, 1–31), Gustafsson Chorell (2021, 242–248).

¹¹ Maczak and Teuteberg (1982), Bauerkämper et al. (2004).

¹² See e.g. Bauerkämper et al. (2004, 9–31).

¹³ Tuan (1974), Hostetler (2001), and Hargett (2018) address the relative lack of research on travel, knowledge, ethnocentrism, and power in Asia (China in particular) but also do not attempt to connect this insight with a more inclusive reflection on travel writings as a source of space and identity construction in encountering non-Asian actors. Wang (2014) has provided an insightful perspective on China’s anthropological and cosmological views of East and West, stressing how the concept of Orientalism in the tradition of Said diminishes China’s rich intellectual history and denies its own agency and “world-scapes” (Wang 2014, 7–17).

This is surprising for at least two reasons. Firstly, a strict historicisation and contextualisation of travels and travel practices allows us to integrate mechanisms of actions and biographical specificities of travellers in their specific historical circumstances. Asia as a spatial and perceived cultural meso-region offers a vast field for individual and collective perceptions and creations of space. The production of knowledge through the act of travel as a form of intellectual self-recognition (“Erkenntnis”) and the relationship of experience and text between semantics and social history with a clear regional focus on Asia offers the potential to understand the dialogic nature between the far and the near, the known and the yet unknown, and the self and the other.¹⁴ These intellectual and existential processes are not confined to a mere “Western” or imperial act of travelling as generating power through knowing an Orientalised “Asia” in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁵ Europeans travelled with different mental capacities and ideological agendas, and they apply different modes of observation that do not necessarily add up in a coherent ideology to conquer. So did Chinese, Japanese, and other people.¹⁶ Tuan and Wang have shown that Europeans were not the only expansionist powers who used “othering” and “imperial gazes” to inscribe ethnocentric ethnographies into Asian spaces.¹⁷ At times, inscribing political or expansionist programmes through specific forms of travel was one of the outcomes of a guided curiosity to know and exercise influence. Many social groups and individuals in Asia also travelled and conceptualised their own mental maps and cultural geographies of Asia, yet with different coordinates of generating meaning.¹⁸ However, the cultural and social formation of Asia from multiple actors inside and outside of Asia and its diverse historical, topographic, and cultural representations have been relatively under-researched.

¹⁴ Blumberg (1983, 235–236), Gebhardt (1986, 97–102), Wang (2014, 12), Osterhammel (2018, x).

¹⁵ Osterhammel (2013, 400–405; 2018, x), Hostetler (2001, xvii), Reinhard (2015, 4–8).

¹⁶ See Tuan (1974, 37), Strassberg (1994, *passim*), Hostetler (2001, xvii, 21), Wang (2014, 12–16 and *passim*), Hargett (2018, 13).

¹⁷ Tuan (1974, 36–38), Wang (2014, 13–17).

¹⁸ Tuan (1974, 30–37), Rubiés (2002, 243, 250–251), Wang (2014, 1–17, 179–211, and *passim*).

Secondly, Asia in its more ideological form of the “Orient” has been at the forefront of theoretical and conceptual discussions on travel writing since the 1970s. Empirical studies take still for granted the stimulating yet overly schematic and simplistic assumptions of Edward Said. In following Foucault’s concept of knowledge as power, Said assumes rather than evidences the unity of an imperial ideology that all encounters between West and East entail, with the sole intention to dominate and rule the East.¹⁹ “From travelers’ tales [...] colonies were created and ethnographic perspectives secured.”²⁰ Said suggests that travel writings in particular create colonial power and discourse which are possessed entirely by the coloniser. Ambiguities, nuances, and in fact other forms of inquiry or knowledge that are not primarily understood in the form of discursive power are completely absent from the ideological conceptualisation of “Orientalism.” Other postcolonial theorists have held Said responsible for a historical and theoretical oversimplification in his quest for an assumed single “intentionality and unidirectionality” of all colonial power.²¹ Interestingly, although equally adhering to a relatively unhistorical and ideological assumption of unified colonial power, Homi Bhabha has argued strongly for a much more diverse and open approach in studying especially prejudice as an ambivalent form of “appropriating” the East in colonial discourse.²² However, many historical and literary studies on travel writings seem to focus on the “imperial gaze” under Said’s paradigm of unified ideological accusation rather than on Bhabha’s ambiguity as a heuristic tool when analysing Western and Asian travel writers. The volume seeks to fill the gap left by the fact that singularised narratives of imperialistic conquest have dominated the scholarly landscape where the recognition of a multiplicity of voices and nuances within those voices who entered the region of Asia cannot be subsumed under an ideological effort of postcolonial homogenization. On the contrary, the

¹⁹ Said (1978, *passim*), Said (1994, xviii-xix, 58), Bhabha (1983, 24–27).

²⁰ Said (1978, 58–9, 117 (Quote)), Said (1994, 58–59). Few sources in the nineteenth century are so explicit and audacious as Sven Hedin in his *Autobiography* published in 1925: “When I reached home, in the spring of 1891, I felt like the conqueror of an immense territory; for I had traversed Caucasia, Mesopotamia, Persia, Russian Turkestan, and Bokhara, and had penetrated into Chinese Turkestan. I therefore felt confident that I could strike a fresh blow, and conquer all Asia, from west to east.” Hedin (2003, 80).

²¹ Bhabha (1983, 25).

²² Bhabha (1983, 24–26).

volume traces some of the writers travelling the world and Asia in order to know and understand the encountered spaces and populations, and to analyse how they utilised their gathered knowledge through different operations of curiosity to act upon the perceived spaces.²³ In doing so, the entrenched debates around Orientalism and Eurocentrism are considered conceptual inclines that as such do not represent theoretical absolutes, but perspectives with varying degrees of overlap that need to be supplemented with more categories to give full meaning to the narratives of travelling individuals.

Space has geographical and geological as well as mental dimensions. Research on maps and cartography has traditionally drawn on travel writings as part of the socio-cultural and political representations of physical geography. Although in 1824 Alexander von Humboldt celebrated the decline of opinionated representations of the world through the rise of exact mathematical and statistical tools, the “critical comparison of descriptive works,” mostly travel writings and missionary reports, remained a highly important source of mapping.²⁴ Critical cartography has contributed immensely to the understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge, especially when mapping non-European spaces. J.B. Harley in particular as representative of a critical Marxist cartography used Foucault and Said to reflect on mapping as an exercise of colonial power.²⁵ Yet, his focus was on physical maps as the product of imperial reflection, not on travel reports as the process of curious knowledge collection and inward roads into the understanding of individual perceptions of space and their social repercussions in disseminating them. Furthermore, the Saidian literature ignores how often, at the moment of encounter with non-European geographies, European writers have produced instances of anti-imperial argumentations and sustained

²³ Paradigmatic are the contributions on travel writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See e.g. Pratt (2008). Osterhammel discusses this critically in the different editions of his book *Unfabling the East*. Osterhammel (2013), Nachwort; Osterhammel (2018, x–xii), and the discussions on “pre-colonialism” and Global Middle Ages: Phillips (2014, 2016).

²⁴ Humboldt (1824, 208, 215).

²⁵ Harley (1988).

self-criticism.²⁶ Our volume shows that there is no clear linear direction towards more imperialism and “Orientalist” gazes since the beginning of European overseas expansion in the sixteenth century, although imperial attitudes, moral and “racial” classifications of different centres relate to a European way of viewing, classifying, and knowing the world until the present.

In the context of the “spatial turn” in the humanities and social sciences, interest has shifted towards the history of collective concepts of different global macro-regions as imagined historical and cultural spaces. The concept of a “mental map,” deriving from cognitive psychology, does not represent a clearly defined theory.²⁷ The mental maps as a concept “represent the world as it appears to the respective observer. [...] It reflects the world as some person believes it to be; it need not be correct. In fact, distortions are highly likely.”²⁸ The spatial mental structures contain attributive values and meanings that relate the observer with their experience and encounter equally to their own backgrounds and to the encountered culture. In our volume, this concept lends itself readily to the study of descriptions, observations, and experiences of travels as we ask how individual concepts of Asia as a space were influenced by human assumptions about the self and society. This cultural semiotic process of reflecting and (re)creating our assumptions about the encountered also embraces the multiplicity inherent in this process that allows us to challenge the assumptions of an essentialist or reductionist approach by uncovering regularities instead of rules and exploring patterns and exceptions instead of insisting on prescriptions. We ask how the worldviews emerging from the travel writings are shaped through the encounters that demand a comprehensive inclusion of meaning of the encountered into existing systems of meaning of the observing travellers, and how shared collective representations of an experienced or imagined

²⁶ The most significant example here would be the first debate on human rights, in the sixteenth-century Spanish Empire. Hanke (1949), Schuster (1966), Clayton (2009), Fitzmaurice (2014, 33–51), Sison and Redín (2021). But cases of self-criticism among European travel writers are widespread beyond the great Spanish debate. See for example Salonia (2021) and several of the contributions in this volume, including Ruairidh Brown’s and Christian Mueller’s chapters. For a broader discussion of rights’ discourses in the Western tradition, see Tierney (2004).

²⁷ Gould and White (1974), Schenk (2013), Osterhammel (2015, 86–94). See also Osterhammel (1998).

²⁸ Gould and White (1974, 6).

spatial environment in turn affect processes of cultural group and identity formations.

This volume addresses these inventions of Asian “realities” as documents of self- and other-recognitions. We suggest that in order to fully understand the process of aligning travel perceptions with the cognitive structures, the individual in their encounters and experiences through travel as well as the literary representation of their processed experiences needs to be taken seriously. While travellers expose intentions when they actively bring about cultural encounters and experiences on their travels, their motives and intentions cannot be assumed to match specific single concepts or even ideologies. Lifting the general suspicion of a unity of bourgeois imperial travellers to the East, the volume proposes to reconsider the very forms and motives of encounter with different, far away cultures and societies. Especially through the concept of curiosity that can be framed as less ideological than “Orientalism” and more open to understanding alignments, interferences, and collisions of culturally different expectations and experiences, the volume explores the possibilities of understanding individual practices of constructing Asia beyond a monolithic “Orientalist” suspicion. This however does not prescribe a naïve ignorance of the multiple motives that underlie individual actions. Rather, we propose a problematisation of standard dichotomies, and crucially, to this end we include chapters exploring also intra-Asian curiosities and travels. Specific motives and their ideological foundations must be read as part of the critical analysis of travel writings as historical sources.

3 IN TIME WE READ SPACE—CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES IN REPRESENTING ASIA

Asia is by itself not a unified single natural entity.²⁹ It is many. Thus, our concept of Asia is a term of human geography gone through human historical consciousness. This positions our sources, the travel reports, at the crossroads of source criticism between remains of unconscious human reports about their curiosity and conscious human narratives about the legacies and morals of their experiences. In deciphering these two distinct historical dimensions of individual operations in giving meaning to experienced environments, the humanities can first contribute to reading space

²⁹ Koselleck (2018, 28).

in time, in an Asia that changes according to the historically bound context of the unconscious and conscious descriptions of a differentiated meso-region.³⁰ Further, the volume contributes to reading time in space, in a chronology of travel reports about Asia in which space emerges in different distinctions and subtle nuances as a continuously shifting meso-region with characteristics of subdivision and differentiations.

The assumed perception of superiority of Europeans in terms of civilisation facing Asian modernity loses its dogmatic strength when we look at the diversities of parallel synchronous and asynchronous interpretations of time in and between spaces. In this context, the perception of Asian space and spaces influences the perception of normative times of development and progress—notably more prominent after the seventeenth century. The perception of space and the way in which it is described also relates to the critique of the sources. In the tradition of source categories like the travel report, the education of the objective observing individual gives way increasingly to an observing authentic individual who appropriates reality of encountered spaces through a personal critique and not through an objective categorization of collecting knowledge. This becomes prominent and problematic around 1800.³¹

Travellers were supposed to deliver authentic yet objective information. This preoccupation was already apparent in the Middle Ages, for example in the composition, transmission, and reception of the account of Marco Polo's travels (1254–1324).³² The emergence of an *ars apodemica* in the West in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the ethnographic observations in China starting from the Ming dynasty were utilised to

³⁰ The practices of travellers offers us individual windows into analysing spatial differentiation across time through different imagined perceptions of Asia. The individual analyses also comprise detailed understandings of Asian spaces that emerge at the same time in front of the observing and curious travellers. They show imagined times of development among and across cultures as a synchronous development towards a prescribed normative development of civilization or as an independent emergence of comparable and compatible systems of values and societal rules. The exploration of asynchronous developments and their perceptions as well as the tolerance of ambiguity towards synchronous developments of social and cultural forms that are comparable is part of the programme to take serious the views of our observing protagonists in their curious descriptions and conceptualisations of Asia in its variety and diversity.

³¹ Osterhammel (2018, ix–x, 400–404).

³² Busi (2018).

turn objective facts into political and administrative knowledge.³³ While this knowledge–power nexus was to some extent always present, it did not predetermine the categories of observation or the anthropological constant of observing outside of given categories for the sense of curiosity itself—simply to know and to report what was not yet known. This trend to deliver information based on curiosity not channelled merely through the utilisation for power sees peaks in the sixteenth and the late eighteenth centuries during the first European Encounters and the Enlightenment. In 1789, the French Anquetil-Duperron could still claim the aim of an educated traveller for the enhancement of the knowledge of humankind.

The true Traveller is someone who loves all humans like brothers and who is unsusceptible to pleasures and needs, who stands beyond grandeur and low sentiments, praise and criticism, riches and poverty. Without binding himself to a special place, he rapidly moves throughout the world as an observer of good and evil, without interest in its origin or its motives within a specific nation. If this traveller is knowledgeable, he has a clear judgement and discovers at once what is ridiculous and untrue in a behaviour, a habit, or an opinion.”³⁴

The ideal traveller as described here is invented as a cosmopolitan citizen who is knowledgeable and prepared, but also abstracts from his own person and sentiments towards an elevated point of observation without suspending his own critical judgement. The purification of lower sentiments and the rational observation bestow upon the traveller the right of an opinion that is no longer bound to a European context of culture, but the true voice of reason. Most travel reports do not conform with this ideal, yet they mirror and reflect upon important elements of the problem of authenticity and critical reasoning to understand the generation of different types of knowledge about other cultures. Thomas Thornton highlighted in his Ottoman travels in 1809 the vital importance of impartiality, a superiority to prejudice, a sobriety of observation, and a patience of inquiry “which few travellers possess.”³⁵

³³ Gebhardt (1986, 98–100), Stagl (1995, 51–55), Hostetler (2001). See for an early modern example Bauch (1712).

³⁴ Anquetil-Duperron (1789, V). See also Osterhammel (2013, 146–147).

³⁵ Thornton (1809, I, 3).

This element of impartiality becomes an ambivalent feature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the tradition of romantic individualism that placed sentiments and experiences before factual accounts. The competition and differentiation between professional explorer and individual tourist gaze became already apparent in the normative evaluation of travellers. Friedrich Ratzel saw this professionalisation in danger when he insisted that the aim should always be to “elevate from a higher form of tourism towards a professionalized scientific travel.”³⁶ This rather European or Western shift in observations on Asia has profound repercussions for intra-Asian travel reports as they also shift from factual to normative accounts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ella Maillart when reflecting on her travel through Central Asia in 1935/6 famously captured this. “When I crossed Asia with my friend Peter Fleming, we spoke to no one than each other during many months, and we covered exactly the same ground. Nevertheless my journey differed completely from his.”³⁷ Subjective observations multiplied views on Asia, but also opened the doors of entry for ethnocentric and racial hierarchies that attributed civilizational stages in a linear historical process of development to regions in Asia.

This is however not necessarily a process of Western appropriation of Asian spaces only. European and North American travellers increasingly attempt to appropriate Asia as a diversified space on moral grounds and those of racial distinction. But in adopting Western ideas of progress beyond the fiction of a distinction between Western technology and Asian values (*ti yong* - 体用), Asian travellers equally applied a linear element of historical progress to characterise the differentiation of Asian spaces and ultimately claims to leadership on Pan-Asian ideas.³⁸ The ideological origins of a normative progressive pattern with the West against the West can be traced in the adoption of normative observations on intra-Asian difference by experiencing, conceptualising, and ultimately understanding

³⁶ Ratzel (1884, 154).

³⁷ Maillart (1951, 5). Her writings convey this focus on the relationship between travel and the exploration of the self: “[Travelling to escape] cannot be done since one travels with one’s mind. It is always one’s self one finds at the end of the journey.” See also Maillart (1936/2009), Forsdick (2009) and Mulligan (2008).

³⁸ For the distinction between Chinese core values and Western useful techniques (中学为体, 西学为用), see: Ch’en (1969, 4), Mueller (2020, 222), Wang (2014, 9, 15–16).

space through a new conceptualisation of linear and normative progress in time.

4 CURIOSITY, KNOWLEDGE, IDENTITY—REFLECTIONS ON THE ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES FOR THE TRAVELLING CONSTRUCTION OF ASIA

The current volume follows a more specific and modest, yet analytically much clearer concept. It focuses on the self-definition of the traveller as they move across Asian human geographies in different epochs to understand the forms of knowledge about the East generated in specific contacts and encounters.³⁹ In uncovering the core human desire of meaning-making individuals to seek and to relate to their findings, the volume connects individual traveller experiences from the Middle Ages to the modern vlogs and social media travels. Although the cases picked are mostly featuring elite men in travelling, the volume is cognisant of the still largely unwritten history of women and non-elite men travellers across Asia. Yet, in focusing on male perspectives, the volume presents a more specific interpretation of gendered narratives to argue for nuances beyond the male colonial gaze in the exploration and conceptualisation of Asia.⁴⁰

Among those categories of encounters, contributions will discuss religion and spirituality, governance and legitimacy, practices and symbolism of different forms of mobility, and the question of knowledge as a tool of reasoning, judgement, and power. All contributions will take up the perspectives of the travellers to reflect upon the act of personal observation as source of authenticity and legitimacy to investigate the intricate dialogic relations between the knowledgeable observing subject and the observed object. This changing relationship does not follow a clear-cut chronology, nor easy categorizations of Western and Eastern. At times, Christian and Islamic travellers entering Asia manifest a genuine curiosity, even as they accept civilizational discourses and hierarchies. More importantly, such hierarchies are not necessarily self-referential and self-congratulatory, but rather often based on a concept of civilization that

³⁹ Carrier (1995, 3).

⁴⁰ See among others Foltz (2010, 19–20), Mills (1991), Smith (2001), Wang (2013).

could be shared transculturally.⁴¹ On the other hand, early modern and modern examples that are also considered in this volume exemplify both Western and intra-Asian (Japanese) narratives that sometimes accompany empire-building efforts and either assume or conceptualise methods for the study of “others.” Even in these cases, instances of scepticism and self-criticism complicate the picture, so that our case studies on the reverberations of curiosity and the testing of self-perception in travel writing truly problematize current dichotomies and a reductive focus on the category of power in the literature on encounters. Such problematization is relevant and challenging also for those who study (and live in) a contemporary world where the tensions and opportunities surrounding the relations between East and West appear more pressing, and where the phenomenon of de-territorialised identity formation across Asia involves both transnational communities and people moving within a nation-state.

The history of travel writing and the historical dimension of Asia’s human geographies are two fields that continue to produce important scholarly works. For instance, recently Boris Stojkovski has carefully collected in two volumes an enjoyable array of essays on travel writing that touch upon themes such as flora and fauna, music and spirituality, from Herodotus to the twenty-first century.⁴² And with regard to intra-Asian encounters, Upinder Singh’s and Parul Pandya Dhar’s book on connections, imperial expansion, and historical networks represents a gem for any reader interested in the flows of ideas, political and cultural patterns across this continent.⁴³ Edited volumes have turned out to be the most flexible means also to gather essays at the intersection of these two topics, exploring the history of travel literature specifically treating

⁴¹ Our attempt follows the nuanced approach found in Rubiés (2000). For a beautiful discussion of a shared, cross-cultural concept of civilization in Latin Christian, Muslim, and Chinese travel writings, starting from the example of the late medieval proverb of the “three eyes of the world,” see Rubiés (2009, 37–112).

⁴² Stojkovski (2020). An important, more theoretical volume on this historical field is Hulme (2002).

⁴³ Singh and Dhar (2014).

voyages and encounters across Asia.⁴⁴ And we now have an increasingly clear and varied picture of changing descriptions of Asian social and physical landscapes across time.

Still, the existing literature, even when surveying the intersection between travel accounts and Asian spaces, and even when alternating different chronologies and rationales for the juxtaposition of certain case studies, is lacking in conceptual depth and chronological breath. What ideas are particularly well suited to open windows into the reasoning and emotions behind the written record of travellers moving across Asia? And what continuities can we trace over time and among both non-Asian and intra-Asian travellers? In their book *A Century of Travels in China: Critical Essays on Travel Writing from the 1840s to the 1940s*, Douglas Kerr and Julia Kuehn combined a narrow chronological focus coinciding with the aftermath of the Opium War with the choice to look only at English-speaking writers.⁴⁵ This undeniably deepens our grasp of preoccupations and agendas of Anglophone travellers during a key century in the history of China, but it also determines much of the tone and many of the conclusions found throughout the volume, which ultimately in many of its essays finds what it seeks: European “othering” and imperialist gazes. Readers interested in longer trends, comparative reflections, and nuanced conclusions remain unsatisfied.

Attempts to stress the openness and curiosity of European travellers to Asia during the Enlightenment have also turned out to be promising but problematic. Through a brilliant and compelling analysis of materials from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, Jürgen Osterhammel has portrayed the Enlightenment as an exceptional period in the history of European encounters with (and representations of) Asian human geographies.⁴⁶ However, in doing so, he has indirectly reinforced the presumption that, before and after this exception, European travel writers were supposedly unable to experience and express similar forms of openness and curiosity. Moreover, we should not assume that civilizational discourses were always proceeding on different, mutually unintelligible tracks. Interestingly, Steve Clark and Paul Smethurst have questioned

⁴⁴ This is not to say that there are no important monographs in this field, best exemplified by Emma Teng’s fascinating work on Chinese colonial representations of Taiwan (Teng 2004).

⁴⁵ Kerr and Kuehn (2007).

⁴⁶ Osterhammel (2018).

this assumption by including in their collection of essays studies of Asian authors, but their chronological focus is still quite narrow, while their volume is not regionally focused as it considers also the impact of Asians travelling to the West.⁴⁷ In the present collection of essays, we focus on one global region, Asia, and we aim to broaden the chronological framework—beyond an admittedly important yet uncharacteristic century such as the one following the Opium War, and beyond a period surrounded by an aura of exceptionality such as the Enlightenment.

We also wish to both expand and problematize Gerard Delanty's suggestion that commonalities and links between East and West are more relevant than apparent dichotomies.⁴⁸ Indeed, to some extent, it is relatively easy to develop comparative analyses that stress apparent similarities, and the study of the experiences and reconstructions of the same Asian landscapes by different Eurasian actors is no exception. Since at least the late medieval period, a basic definition of civilised societies was shared transculturally by the “three eyes”—Christendom, the Islamic world, and China. This common understanding of ordered polities and civilizational traits, in turn, sparked genuine curiosity as well as production of knowledge among European and Asian travellers, both before and after the Enlightenment—which was therefore not exceptional.⁴⁹ Yet, it is crucial to recognise that, besides this shared idea of civilization and shared notions of space and movement, each traveller also articulated unique discourses underpinned by locally rooted meanings, and political, cultural, and/or spiritual identities. The desire to stress commonalities should not blind us to the fact that Christian and Islamic universalisms engendered intellectual and cosmological world-scapes that differed radically from those of China, or to the fact that Columbus had Jerusalem in mind while seeking Asia—something that can only be explained by taking locally rooted identities seriously.⁵⁰ The contributors to our volume are sensitive to this reality, which rules out the option of merely universalising post-modernist categories and probes the terminologies and narratives usually employed in global history. On the one hand, cosmopolitanism has truly been a dimension of the encounters taking place across Asia, underscoring

⁴⁷ Clark and Smethurst (2008).

⁴⁸ Delanty (2006).

⁴⁹ Rubiés (2009).

⁵⁰ On Columbus's cosmology and motives, see Delaney (2011).

the poverty of reducing human interactions to power structures, or the generation of knowledge about social landscapes to univocally European “othering.” On the other hand, the global turn is not applicable seamlessly across chronologies and should not be a license to only focus on networks and convergences. Permanence(s) gave value to encounters and networks. And underneath the experiences of travellers and the intelligibility of cosmopolitan institutions, there remain local identities, value systems and audiences, which deserve attention if we want to decipher the origins and literary uniqueness of different texts.

The three concepts proposed in this volume—curiosity, identities, knowledge—are flexible enough to shed light on voyages taking place across different chronologies. They also allow our contributors to test the limits of continuities and delve into specific cultural backgrounds that distinguished travel writers, their anxieties, expectations, responses, and motives. Curiosity is intended here as a genuine, persistent interest towards unknown or partly known areas and societies of the Asian continent, expressed in deeds and words by travellers moving to Asia or within it. Other historians studying travel literature about Asia have already toyed with the idea of curiosity,⁵¹ but they never placed it centre stage in their analysis, maybe to avoid charges of naiveté. Yet, taking curiosity seriously does not imply abandoning a rigorous study of travel accounts: to the contrary, it expands it by acknowledging the role played by emotions and by the expectation of encountering intelligible social institutions and human actions. Besides, genuine curiosity itself contributes to colour our understanding of self-interested and self-conscious authorship, because inquisitiveness—more than often half-baked political agendas—links the author’s frustrations and successes to the readership, assigning value to information about civilised polities and uncharted spaces.

Identity is a fundamental analytical concept to contextualise the experience of the traveller, both when he/she moves and when he/she writes. While it is certainly true that the experience of encounter can challenge and change the identity of the traveller, we should not overlook the multiform ways in which the identity of the traveller can draw unnoticed and apparently counterintuitive networks on a map of Asia—such as in the case of the spiritual networks drawn by the Japanese Otani expeditions and discussed in one of our chapters. Identity determines also

⁵¹ See for instance Paolo Chiesa’s essay in Odoric of Pordenone (2002, especially 42–43).

the locally rooted value assigned to the intellectual images of spaces and ordering of geographies. For instance, as evidenced in the writings of Ma Huan (c. 1380–1460), by the Ming period Chinese intellectuals were developing a tradition of Sinocentric discourses that categorised Asian societies according to an increasingly self-confident imperial geography.⁵² This tributary worldview was relatively recent, in the long history of Chinese civilization. As reconstructed by Mingming Wang, ethnocentric discourses had emerged during the Song-Yuan period, should be placed within a broader, more varied tradition of Occidentalism, and need to be contextualised in a changing geopolitical and economic landscape where travels to the “Western Ocean” had ceased to be primarily pilgrimages and had become profit- and tribute-seeking.⁵³

Finally, travel literature illuminates the modes and channels through which knowledge about Asian spaces, politics and peoples has been produced and disseminated in different contexts and centuries. To be sure, we shall not be blind to the role often played by knowledge in the construction and elaboration of hierarchies and political discourses for the original readership. However, it is also true that knowledge about the vast Asian landscapes across which different civilizations encountered each other could be produced to express human emotions, to crystallise memories, and then disseminated to quench genuine curiosity just as much as to claim an active role in a specific intellectual tradition. Aristotle famously noted that human beings enjoy seeing above all other senses, not merely with the intention to use the absorbed information, but also, simply, seeing for the sake of seeing.⁵⁴ The Italian readers of Giovanni Battista Ramusio’s sixteenth-century collection of travel accounts were the same crowds chasing and interrogating Giovanni da Empoli (1483–1517) upon his return from “the Indies:” they desired to complete the geographic knowledge of the ancients, by harmoniously integrating it with their generation’s voyages to Asia.⁵⁵ These are dimensions of knowledge that can be recovered only when we move away from narratives of

⁵² Ma Huan (2019), for instance in his evaluation of the countries around China on 11–13. On the emergence of the idea of Asia among Chinese intellectuals, see Xiangyuan (2021).

⁵³ Wang (2014, 200–211).

⁵⁴ Lear (1988, 1–2).

⁵⁵ On Ramusio see the reflections in Small (2012). On Giovanni da Empoli see Salonia (2019, 2021).

naked power structures and instead take curiosity and identity seriously. This is not to say that our volume ignores writings produced in political and military contexts such as British imperialism and the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. On the contrary, we aim to offer to readers a more balanced and varied picture of continuities and changes in travel literature on Asia across the centuries.

5 NAVIGATING THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF ASIA—THE CONTRIBUTIONS

The volume opens with two chapters on the history of travel, encounters, and travel writing in Asia during the Mongol period. Claire Taylor invites readers to appreciate the different experiences and emotions lived by two late medieval authors entering Asia from the West: the Franciscan missionary and envoy William of Rubruck and the pilgrim adventurer Ibn Battuta. Their narratives reflect the different circumstances of their voyages, and Taylor's careful contextualization and nuanced comparison allows us to go beyond apparent divergences and to uncover how geopolitical situations could prompt the two authors to redefine the very notions of space, home, and other, thereby affecting the images of Asia created for Frankish Christian and north-African Islamic audiences. Joseph Benjamin Askew integrates this picture of mobilities across Eurasia during the so-called *Pax Mongolica* by questioning the extent to which this period favoured trade and by shedding light on the different motivations of an array of travel writers who journeyed across Asia during those centuries. The writers considered by Askew include not only Europeans like the merchant Francesco Balducci Pegolotti and the Franciscan friar Odoric of Pordenone, but also intra-Asian travellers like the Korean official Ch'oe Pu. The overall picture emerging from these opening chapters offers an invaluable introduction to Asia in the Mongol period. Islamic, European and intra-Asian travellers moved across Eurasia for different reasons and with different expectations, sharing at times similar mental attitudes, such as curiosity, but also eventually constructing a human geography profoundly influenced by their identities and by resilient cultural and religious frameworks.

The next two chapters in the volume explore the theme of curiosity in European writings about Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Matteo Salonia guides readers through the Asian sections of Antonio Pigafetta's account of Ferdinand Magellan's expedition. It is a voyage

across the Pacific Ocean and then through vivid descriptions of Asian ceremonies, including friendly banquets, funerary rites, courtly audiences, and sexual practices. Pigafetta is an inquisitive yet also empathetic observer who avoids judgements and captures his audience in a constant invitation to draw their own conclusions. His account is, crucially, also a text saturated with Christian chivalry. Compassion and locally rooted identity therefore coexist, and incidentally the periodization separating medieval and early modern mindsets is yet again found wanting. Georg Schindler's chapter about European discussions on the dynastic transition between the Ming and the Qing dynasties continues this reflection on curiosity by exploring the responses of Catholic missionaries to political changes in China. Texts by Martini, Schall, and Navarrete are compared to reflect the different agendas and responses of these authors, but also to reflect on the pervasive curiosity about news from China in the European audience. Schindler demonstrates that European Catholic attitudes towards the East were very far from dismissive or uniformly colonial, as these important writers recognised the sophisticated civilization of the Chinese empire and even agreed that the conquering Manchu were not "barbarian." Moreover, this chapter will be of interest to scholars interested in the opportunity to flesh out political theories and conceptualizations of legitimacy in the international stage from early modern travel literature and ethnography.

That simplistic Saidian narratives are completely confounded by a serious hermeneutical study and a respect for the often conflicting and not seldom self-critical thoughts of individual travel writers—even when one reaches the period of more intense European colonialism—is confirmed by the splendid analysis of Duncan McPherson's writing, which is offered in Chapter 6. Here, Ruairidh J. Brown compellingly argues that even in a text that is punctuated by imperialist rhetoric and dichotomies, things are not as simple as they may at first appear. McPherson's determination to spread what he triumphantly perceived as rational scientific knowledge leads him to label some Chinese traditions as "barbaric," but also to denounce some British customs as reckless. Dichotomies do not correspond to East vs West, and they instead overlap throughout the text to show the lights of reason and the sufferings brought by passion and irrationality wherever they can be found. China is re-conceptualised according to Enlightenment ideas of progress, becoming a space where human reason struggles to emerge victorious, among Europeans and Asians alike. Such nuanced and fruitful approach to nineteenth-century

sources is evident also in Christian Mueller's chapter on German imperial dreams in the Far East. In the writings of Ferdinand von Richthofen we find a peculiar vision of industrial and commercial progress, where across Eurasia peoples at different civilizational stages would cooperate, and where China in particular is assigned an important role and independent agency. Richthofen's curiosity, to be sure, is still guided by a clearly Eurocentric understanding of material development, but his images of the East do not correspond to crude racial stereotypes and are actually characterised by a genuine inquisitiveness and a desire to learn more about Asian peoples. This is noticeable especially about nations like Japan, on which Richthofen had very limited knowledge before reaching the East. Taken together, Brown's and Mueller's chapters demonstrate how, even during the period of most intense imperial expansion, European travel literature about Asia does not fit broad generalisations. If one trait emerges more clearly, it is the confidence in material progress and human reason applied to science and industry—something that is not perceived as entirely alien to Asian spaces and human geographies.

Continuing the discussion of intra-Asian travel sketched by Joseph Askew for the pre-modern period, Chapters 9 and 10 present two modern case studies. Stephen W. Kohl and Ronald S. Green investigate some of the Ōtani expeditions seeking Buddhist treasures and establishing non-political Tibetan-Japanese connections at the start of the twentieth century. Nagatomi Hirayama writes about Japanese imperialism in Manchuria in the 1930s. Besides expanding the scope of the volume to include a sustained reflection of intra-Asian travel literature, these topics also integrate each other. On the one hand, the Ōtani expeditions so captivatingly reconstructed by Kohl and Green were moved by a genuine interest in discovering archaeological remnants of Buddhism along the Silk Road and in developing spiritual networks and friendly relations between temples across Asian spaces and, significantly, around obstacles posed by political tensions and imperial rivalries. While on the other hand, the Japanese texts presented by Hirayama were part of a Japanese propaganda effort aiming to reimagine entire areas of the Asian continent to spatialize Japanese interests and stabilise a project of intra-Asian colonialism. Therefore, these chapters represent pivotal contributions to the discussion of a wide array of themes, including respectively informal exchange of knowledge through long-distance religious networks and the production of geographic and ethnographic “knowledge” at the service of an expanding, militarised state. Yet taken together they also offer a striking

juxtaposition of two alternative geographies: a state-driven one easily seen on political maps of imperial Japan, and a religious one drawing lines of communication and fellowship underneath political borders as well as across time.

Chapter 10 focuses on a specific decade, the 1960s, to illustrate the surprisingly divergent agendas and guided curiosities with which different genres of Western literature approached Asian spaces. Salonia and Mueller do so inviting the reader to juxtapose political and tourism narratives from the 1960s—at times reaching back to travel experiences across China and Central Asia in the 1930s like the influential novel travelogues by André Malraux—with the reportages from China written by the Italian novelist Goffredo Parise. The final chapter by K. Cohen Tan continues the reflection on intra-Asian mobilities by exploring contemporary issues of identity and the inscription of power as they relate to space and migration in China. The importance of the contribution is to consider different forms of travel as mobilities and their influence on the re-articulation of space. This re-articulation of space and curiosity in a very guided and pre-figured way is also part of the rise of modern consumerism and tourism since the 1860s. European perspectives on Asia would highlight and even call for the curiosity of the travellers to correct the Baedekers and Thomas Cook handbooks since the early twentieth century. The claims to provide “independence of travel” to “open the eyes of the tourist to the possibilities of finding something different, something new” suggest a curiosity that is increasingly countered with the clear structure of hierarchically organised knowledge and sights that must be seen.⁵⁶ “To-day the Chinese people are as simple and primitive in their habits and customs as they have been for ages past” is a clear testimony to the shift of curiosity guided towards the consumption of the expected.⁵⁷ This, however, happens in intra-Asian travel reports as much as in Western travel reports on Asia and relates much more to the overarching structure of reading a modernisation concept of time as stages of progress into a differentiated Asian space.

⁵⁶ Baedeker (1914, iv–v), Cook (1924, Introduction, n.p.).

⁵⁷ Cook (1924, Introduction, n.p.).

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CHAPTER 2

The Production of Knowledge and Preservation of Self-identity: William of Rubruck and Ibn Battuta in Contact with Mongols

Claire Taylor

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter takes as its starting point the writings of two western medieval travellers who journeyed into Mongol West, Central and East Asia. They are a Franciscan envoy-missionary to the Mongols, William of Rubruck,¹ who travelled from the Levant, across the Black Sea to the Pontic steppe, across Central Asia and the Altai mountains to the

¹ Most often cited for Rubruck's *Itinerarium* has been Dawson (1955, 2003). Cited here is Jackson and Morgan (2009). There is not a great deal of specialist modern analysis of the source and its writer, although he is referred to in many works on the Mongols and the West but see Carolla (2019) and Weaver (2020).

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Mongolian court and back between 1253 and 1255, and the better-known globe-trotting North African pilgrim/scholar Ibn Battuta,² who between the 1320s and 50s journeyed throughout much of Africa and of West, Southern, and East Asia, encountering Mongols on the way.

Contact between East Asia and the west had declined since the ancient world, in part because of the waning of trading Empires in both regions and regular movements of displaced Central Asian nomadic groups from the steppe into Europe, further disrupting trade routes. This lack of contact should not be over-stated, as the archaeology shows, but few goods, let alone people, appear to have made the whole journey in one step, let alone to have communicated widely about it. This changed as a result of maritime advances in China and particularly the rapid Mongol expansion from the early 1220s, linking the Far East, Central, and Islamic West Asia, and Eastern Europe, for the purposes of conquest, followed more sustainably by trade and taxation. The death toll of these rapid conquests was in the millions, but the over-land infrastructure of Eurasia was hugely improved for others with the ambition and ability to traverse it.³

After Chinggis Khan (r.1206–1227 CE) conquered the Mongolian heartlands,⁴ his attention soon turned to expansion. The first campaigns to the west had destroyed the Khwarezmian Empire by 1220, and control of most of Persia and Transoxiana brought the ‘pagan’ Mongols to the frontier of the Dar al-Islam. Chinggis Khan’s son Mönke Khan (r.1251–1259 CE) dispatched his brother Hülegü to subdue the rest of Persia and the Ishmaelite Nizari sect known as the Assassins, which he accomplished in 1256. Sunni Baghdad was ignominiously razed in 1258. The Abbasid dynasty was now decimated, and Mongol rule established, significantly reducing Muslim-held lands, although Islam still thrived as the dominant faith throughout. In 1260 Hülegü pressed on into Syria to attack

² The modern edition of Henry Yule’s 1886 Hakluyt Society translation is Mackintosh-Smith (2003), cited here. Before that see Gibb (1958). A highly useful companion to the primary source is Dunn (2005). See also Dunn (1995) and Harvey (2007).

³ For the Mongol conquests in a trans-Eurasian context, see Cunliffe (2015); Abu-Lughod (1989); Frankopan (2015, 158–201).

⁴ For works on the initial Mongol expansion and its context, see Golden (2009, 2011), Jackson (2009), Morgan (2007), Munkh-Erdene (2018). The only source we have by Mongols in this early period is the anonymous work known as *The Secret History of the Mongols*, probably composed shortly after Chinggis Khan’s death to commemorate him: De Rachewitz (2006).

the Mamluks, unsuccessfully, and so the Euphrates became the realistic boundary between the Mongols and Muslim-held lands. The Christians in the Levant dabbled in events, but were unable to make much of an intervention to their benefit. As the Ilkhans, the family ruled this region until 1355, but long before then had converted to Islam themselves.⁵ These were the first Mongols to be encountered by Ibn Battuta, in 1336.

By 1223 the resistance of the Caucasus and of the Russian princes had been reduced, and Mongol armies returned to Europe in 1237 more definitively. The Pontic steppe and the eastern parts of Europe were allocated to Chinggis Khan's grandson, Batu, forming what would become known as the khanate of the Golden Horde. In 1241 a campaign into Europe was undertaken and it was feared that central Europe would fall, except that the army withdrew to the steppe, possibly at the news of the death of Chinggis Khan's son and successor Ögedei (r.1229–1241 CE).⁶ This was the territory where William of Rubruck would first encounter the Mongols, in 1253, and begin his long journey to the Mongol heartland and back. In 1332, Ibn Battuta would also travel here to make his second contact with Mongols, by which time these khans had also converted to Islam.

After decades of warfare against dynasties in the Far East, Qubilai, another grandson of Chinggis Khan, made huge gains in China. He was famously visited at Khanbalik (Beijing) and Xanadu by the Polos in the 1260s and 70s. Song China finally fell completely by 1279. This time, Buddhist and Confucian beliefs and practices were what drove the sedentary Mongol state, designated the Yuan dynasty.⁷ China was in close contact with Islamic south and south-east Asia by the time Ibn Battuta visited China in 1345–1346, but China nonetheless would dismay him.

The so-called *Pax Mongolica* which was established across these regions enabled rapid communications, encouraged and protected trade, and enabled the spread of major faiths systems, particularly Islam. On the ground, as a result, peoples mixed and expanded their horizons as never

⁵ On this process see Amitai-Preiss (1995), Amitai (2013), Bartlett (2002, 160–200), Dewese (2009, 122–125), Jackson (2017, 2019), Morgan (2007, 128–151), Pfeifer (2006).

⁶ See Biran (2009, 2016, 2019), Morgan (2007, 120–128), Berend et al. (2013, 443–448), Vásáry (2009), Dewese (2009, 125–133).

⁷ Allsen (1994), Davis (1998), Fairbank (1992, 108–127), Morgan (2007, 99–119). For recently published sources, see Hartman (2020).

before, albeit ultimately to the benefit of tax collectors and religious elites.⁸ Whereas to Rubruck in the 1250s the Mongols were pagan invaders from the east who threatened both Christians and Muslims in the Levant, by Ibn Battuta's day, most of Asia was dominated by the descendants of Mongol converts to Islam.

2 WRITING ABOUT TRAVEL WRITERS⁹

One of the most important aspects of travel literature as a source for the global middle ages, is that travellers recorded what was unfamiliar, strange, exciting, terrifying, or simply what they thought would be of interest to readers. As such William of Rubruck and Ibn Battuta allow us to access aspects of the Mongol world which were unremarkable to the Mongols themselves. The almost-anthropological function of these external sources is therefore as crucial to our understanding of Mongols as are political and diplomatic sources.

William of Rubruck's and Ibn Battuta's texts also have in common that each conveys at points a powerful sense of deep cultural loneliness. They experienced this disproportionately, but it heavily informed the knowledge they each constructed for themselves, from a sense of cultural superiority. The established historical understanding of 'othering' is therefore an obvious analytical framework through which to consider them. However, we need something more subtle, because neither traveller was always in the dominant culture but found themselves strangers in strange lands, where they instead were 'other'. To help establish a more useful framework of comparison, I am applying Elka Weber's model for identifying the 'other' in a more nuanced sense.¹⁰ She suggests not only a juxtaposition between the observer (in our case, William of Rubruck and Ibn Battuta) and the most obvious 'other' (sky-worshipping Mongol idolators, to Rubruck; Christians and also Buddhist Mongols to Ibn Battuta). There were also 'others' who were conceptually and theoretically 'closer' to the writers' ideological 'homes', but who were also obstructive, frustrating, and even dangerous to the traveller's objective and outlook. They

⁸ See Folz (2010, 59–126), Martinez (2009), May (2012, 109–129); Waugh (2017).

⁹ On this topic, see Allen (2004), Campbell (1988), Carolla (2019), Legassie (2017), Block and Figg (2000), Ohler (1989).

¹⁰ Weber (2000).

undermined and neutralised the ideological metanarrative within which the world encountered by the traveller was negotiated.

For both William of Rubruck and Ibn Battuta, these were ‘heterodox’, apostate, or otherwise poorly observant members of their own faith. In Rubruck’s case, the Mongols he encountered everywhere from the Black Sea to their capital at Qaraqorum, occupy the more extreme position. However, Nestorian Christians and an Armenian ‘monk’ he encounters presented evidently insurmountable obstacles to the conversion of the Mongols. Ibn Battuta’s obvious ‘others’ in a more traditional sense are Christians in West Asia and the Buddhist Mongols in China, but he is appalled also by Muslims drinking alcohol, and actively shuns Muslims of incorrect understanding, such as the Shi’a Twelvers.

Both classes of ‘other’—the obvious and obstructive other—provide a mirror before which oppositional self-identity was shaped, maintained, and tested. They help us to think about the two travellers when they understood themselves to be minorities and outsiders, however self-righteous they felt. However, when they felt out of place and out of control, lacking the sort of agency usually arising from their religious identities, both were able, to varying degrees, to return to a temporary shared ‘home’ with their co-religionists. For Rubruck, this was in the company of the other European Christians he occasionally encounters. For Ibn Battuta it was found in fellow, correctly observant Muslims including the Islamic minority in China.

Even so, we should not draw too close a parallel between the experiences of the two men. The contrasts are instructive. F. Fiona Moolla observes that, ‘(h)uman self-realization is almost universally tracked as a voyage...allowing incorporation into a new developmental state’.¹¹ This applies well to Ibn Battuta. He changed and developed self-consciously as part of his actual and metaphorical ‘journey’ to become a better and more successful Muslim. But the process of self-growth was, I consider, largely denied to William of Rubruck. In fact, he denied it to himself.

The contrast is not simply down to the personalities or even the specific experiences of the two travellers but is partly structural. Islamic teaching encouraged travel for religious learning even beyond the *Hajj*, routinely incumbent upon Muslims. Ibn Battuta excelled himself in this

¹¹ Moolla (2013, 380–390, at 381).

sense, enthusiastically visiting holy sites, holy men, and Muslim communities throughout the world that became known to him through his insatiable curiosity as a traveller, observing and interacting with what he found, but leaving it intact. Christian thinking in the period prioritised the inner journey. Whilst some journeys were necessary for Christian activity, including those of envoys or missionaries, even pilgrims might be suspected of travelling for adventure rather than out of devotion. William of Rubruck travelled not for adventure and prosperity like Ibn Battuta, but because he was instructed to by King Louis IX of France (r.1226–1270). He was unhappily dutiful, not curious. He did not experience an inner journey as he travelled, attempting instead to survive the physical journey and, hopefully, to effect changes in Mongols.

My point here is not to consider Ibn Battuta brave and outward looking in relation to Rubruck. In either medieval faith, the pilgrim-adventurer is a willing traveller but, paradoxically, is cautious and risk averse: choosing where to go; taking logistical and other practical precautions in order to get there safely; being less likely to travel if these conditions are not met. The pilgrim's journey is not supposed to be easy, but neither should it prove seriously injurious. On the route to Medina, running west of the largely ungoverned Hijaz mountains of Arabia, pilgrims were frequently killed, sometimes in large numbers, by natural and unnatural forces.¹² Ibn Battuta faces peril on several occasions, but also provides numerous examples of how pilgrims prepared for and took measures collectively to avoid such drama. He sought patrons or paid for the best logistical help, and he chose like-minded companions. Occasions where he is robbed or where his life is threatened are the exception. His goal is to prosper in some way.

The envoy or missionary, in contrast, is literally 'sent', and into hostile territory. They deliberately put their life in the hands of others who have reason to harm them. During almost the whole of his journey, William of Rubruck's safety was in the hands of people he could scarcely communicate with, let alone be allowed by them to exert agency over where and how he would travel. His 'guides' are in fact guards and he was frequently kept in the dark about what the next days would hold. But his enforced vocation led him to submit readily to whatever he was faced with. His goal was to be effective and to impact on the external world. He holds

¹² Dunn (2005, 67).

fast to his monastic identity, always, and does not grow or develop. This distinction, as well as the distinction between the fundamental ‘other’ and the ‘other’ who should have been an ally, will be borne in mind in considering both the external and interior worlds of our travellers resulting from contact with Asia.

3 WILLIAM OF RUBRUCK (TRAVELLED 1253–1255)

In the early 1240s it became clear to Europeans that the mounted archers invading Catholic Hungary could bring their ruin.¹³ As noted, the invasion halted there. An explanation which made some sense to European Christians and those of the crusader states of the Levant, was that some Mongol rulers were converting to Christianity and therefore backing off. This was not beyond the realms of possibility because Christianity was already widespread in the east. It was not of the sort of Christianity represented by the European and Mediterranean traditions. It was dominated by Nestorians, exiled from the West for their incorrect belief in the fifth century. By Rubruck’s time they had become very isolated from the west, and it was not they but mythical Christian kings such as ‘Prester John’ and ‘King David’ who were the focus of western hopes.¹⁴ Crusaders in the Levant therefore lapped up the rumour that the Mongol general Sartaq, to be found on the Pontic steppe beyond the Black Sea, was Christian. This was what prompted the crusading king Louis of France to despatch William of Rubruck to the East. As we shall see, he was quickly disabused of the notion of Christianised Mongols.

We know little about the Franciscan friar William of Rubruck. He was probably French-Flemish and was familiar with France. He was probably based at a convent in Syria or at Nicosia in the 1240s, and was certainly in Cyprus in 1248–1249 when King Louis received a very encouraging embassy from the Mongol khan Eljigadei. He was still in the Levant during Louis’ unsuccessful crusade of 1248–1254.¹⁵ His journey was one of several missions which increased European and West Asian

¹³ Jackson (2009, 2018), sources 36 and 37. See also Curta (2006, 408–414), Ho (2012).

¹⁴ On European Christian understanding of the east, see Berger (2020), Czarnowus (2014), Jackson (2001, 2009, 2018), Morgan (1996).

¹⁵ There are numerous good overviews of the Crusades but Jean Richard was also a specialist on Louis IX: Richard (1999), esp. 408–424. On the relationship between the

Christian ‘knowledge’ about Mongols from Iran and the Pontic steppe eastward, which had evidently included the news about Sartaq’s supposed conversion.¹⁶

Before beginning his mission properly, Rubruck travelled to Constantinople where he partnered up with a Franciscan travelling companion, Bartholemew of Cremona. With a servant boy, a clerk of Louis’s called Gosset who would hold the money which the Franciscan Rule forbade the friars from carrying, and a disastrously inept interpreter, they set out across the Black Sea in Summer 1253 to begin a two-month journey to Sartaq’s camp. From there, he hoped ideally to then launch a mission to some Germans who had been captured in Hungary and were now Mongol slaves in Central Asia.¹⁷

However, the king had dispatched Rubruck with a letter to Sartaq which caused some consternation. As a result, the friar was forced to undertake a second journey, to Sartaq’s father, Batu, ruler of the western Mongols, and finally to the latter’s cousin and ally, the great khan Mönke, four months further away in Mongolia. Rubruck returned to the Levant in 1255 by reversing the route and composed his letter to Louis, who was by then back in France. For all its lack of autobiographical information, this work, known as the *Itinerary*, is highly personal in style, and an unparalleled account of its type in terms of what it tells us about the thirteenth-century Mongols of the steppe and Mongolia.

Rubruck’s Observations on Mongols

To make sense of what went wrong at Sartaq’s camp and subsequently, we need to understand something of the ideology of the Mongol khans, about which William is one of our most important sources. He indicates a religious system with three core elements; worship of the sky god, Tenggeri; reverence for ancestors, represented by felt ‘idols’; and interaction

Mongols and this crusade, see Jackson (2009), esp. 65–69. Elijigidei’s letter is no. 56, which also contains a related letter from the Armenian Constable Smbat to the crusaders.

¹⁶ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 26–41). This is well-illustrated by sources relating to earlier embassies and spying missions sent from west to east and vice-versa in the 1230s and 1240s, and related perceptible misrepresentations and possibly wilful misunderstandings. See Jackson and Morgan (2009, 26–39); Jotischky (2004). The mendicant missions, including that of Rubruck, are drawn on insightfully in Legassie (2017).

¹⁷ For their identification and fate see Jackson and Morgan (2009, 44–45, 145–146).

with the supernatural through shamen, who determined many aspects of everyday life and predict the khans' fortunes. However, and crucially, there was also a place for Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian concepts of the supernatural, to the extent that Mongols did not dismiss outright the existence of other gods.¹⁸ As such, there was belief in the efficacy of other ritual specialists too. Whilst travelling to Batu's court, for example, their Mongol 'guide' would take the monks to camps of elite Mongols and, Rubruck says, 'we had to pray for them'.¹⁹ At Mönke's court, the Khan and, some of his wives and children dabbled in Nestorian rituals, and one wife had reputedly been Christian herself. But we should consider Mongols as eclectic rather than 'open-minded' in religious matters. Sartaq did seem interested in what the Rubruck had to tell him about the Christian faith, and appeared to believe some of it, but on departing from him for Batu's court, the monk was told by officials, "Do not say that our master is a Christian. He is not a Christian; he is Mo'al (Mongol)".²⁰ William finally realises that 'they regard the term Christian as the name of a people...although they may have some belief in Christ they have no desire to be called Christians, since they want to promote their own name, Mo'al – to a level above all others'.²¹

It was in this context that Mongol khans had a driving metanarrative, as powerful as that resulting from any other medieval religious system. Tenggeri had commanded Chinggis Khan²² to conquer all other peoples of the world. It followed from this 'Mandate of Heaven' that all other kings were rightfully subjects of the Mongols. The logic of this meant that Christian envoys could only be understood as either conveying the submission of the ruler who had dispatched them, or that the ruler refused to submit and was, thereby, understood to be declaring war; in other words, inviting conquest. This misunderstanding meant that the khans could not understand the concept of an alliance of equals with Christians against Muslims. This was the gist of alarming and threatening communications from Guyuk Khan to Pope Innocent IV in the mid-1240s.²³ This

¹⁸ May (2012, 172–198).

¹⁹ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 141).

²⁰ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 120).

²¹ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 120).

²² For the most convincing dating of the Mandate, see Amitai (2013, 43–46).

²³ Dawson (2003), no. 4. For the pope's response, *ibid.* no. 2.

had appeared to shift in 1248 when Eljigadei's embassy to Louis made far more friendly overtures,²⁴ but Mönke would later denounce Eljigadei's approach.

This made the task of a traveller on royal business a difficult one. At Sartaq's court, Rubruck claimed not to know the content of the letter he carried from Louis. All he knew for sure, he said, was that Louis surely greeted Sartaq as a Christian and asked him to accommodate and support William in ministering to the German slaves. In this context, William's identity was that of a missionary. On reading the letter though, Sartaq, Batu, and Mönke understood it as an appeal for military aid against the Mamluks. This made Rubruck a political envoy instead. It made all the difference in the world.

We know that to some extent William anticipated the issue. At Constantinople he met Baldwin of Hainault, a recent envoy from the Frankish Emperor of Byzantium to Qaraqorum, who had made the journey via Sartaq.²⁵ He advised that it would be unwise to claim to represent Louis's political and military wishes, and that he should stick to presenting himself simply as a man carrying out his god's work. This, Rubruck decided to do, and if that had been the only content of the letter, he might have been guided to the German slaves. Instead, from the point in the narrative where Sartaq reads Louis' letter, the friar has to continually and unsuccessfully deny being an envoy. He trod a fine line and at Mönke's court, he writes, officials were 'amazed and kept repeating constantly, "Why have you come, seeing that you did not come to make peace?"'²⁶

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer all the evidence that the letter had these dual elements, but we should understand Rubruck to have been a man in fear of his true, diplomatic identity being discovered. Yet he is no coward. Even as a missionary he feels able to say to Mönke, "I tell you that he (Louis) has never done you any injury. If he had done you any, so that you were obliged to wage war on him and his people, he himself, as a man of justice, would be willing of his own accord to make amends and to seek peace", and alternatively, "(i)f you, without good

²⁴ Jackson (2009), no. 56.

²⁵ Giebfried (2020). Another traveller making the journey was King Het'um of Armenia: Boyle (1964). The relationship between Armenia and the Mongols was very different because they surrendered early on. See also Dashdondog (2011).

²⁶ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 172).

cause, intend to make war on him or his people, our hope is that God, Who is just, will aid them”²⁷.

More generally, if Rubruck’s account often reads as ethnography, being apparently dispassionate and descriptive, simply recording information is not his intent. Alongside accounts of Mongol life which he thought Louis would find interesting, he signals his disapproval, for example of the drinking practices at court, which are ‘thoroughly distasteful and greedy’.²⁸ His most hostile passages concern his experiences of travel. Minor functionaries demand food, wine, and other gifts from the travellers, who, as Franciscans, have carried only a little with them.²⁹ He is not even sympathetic to the wretchedness of the poorer people he met, perhaps because they imposed on him rather than waiting for Christian charity, and also because they seemingly defecated wherever they were, even mid-conversation.³⁰

Such hostility was partly the result of his party being deprived of virtually all his freedom and agency on his enforced journeys between Mongol courts. For no apparent reason, for example, the party is split up by Batu, with Gosset and the boy being returned to Sartaq to await William’s return. The ‘guide’ who then takes them on their four-month journey to Mönke tells them that if they struggle to travel across the freezing steppe in Winter, he would abandon them.³¹ William says, ‘(t)here is no counting the times we were famished, frozen and exhausted’.³² Bartholemew suffered so much on the journey that he eventually asked to remain at Qaraqorum rather than return.³³ This was in spite of the fact that he had almost been executed for breaching a seemingly incomprehensible Mongol taboo in stepping on the threshold of a tent.³⁴ Ultimately, Rubruck’s own interest in Mongols is predicated on the fact that he would

²⁷ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 172).

²⁸ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 77).

²⁹ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 97 and 101).

³⁰ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 108).

³¹ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 136).

³² Jackson and Morgan (2009, 141).

³³ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 180, 207, 250–251).

³⁴ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 194 and see 21, 117, 196, 212).

ideally ‘preach war against them’, and he advocates a military campaign again at the end of his work.³⁵

Rubruck and Other Christians

Rubruck met Nestorians in large numbers in Mongol courts. They were worse than a disappointment to him. He notes that they create ‘big rumours out of nothing’, having misled Europeans into believing in a Christian kingdom under ‘King John’. They are responsible for the notion that Sartaq and others had converted. William notes frustratedly, ‘(a)nd yet the fact is that they are not Christians’.³⁶ It seemed to him perhaps, that the Nestorians, not the Mongols, were to blame for Christian misunderstandings of Asia, and thereby for his situation.

This was possible because Nestorians were not marginal in Mongol society. They often attained good political positions. Rubruck accuses them of being sycophants, following Mongol courts ‘as flies do honey’.³⁷ At Sartaq’s court, he was initially aided by a Nestorian official, Coiac, whose family soon move in on the monks and deprive them of devotional objects including their priestly vestments and most of their books, including a jewel-encrusted Bible given to Rubruck by Louis’ queen, Marguerite. Rubruck later learns that the Nestorians paraded around Sartaq’s court in his vestments. On his return journey he tried to recover the items, but Coiac’s family accused him of trying to take back presents which he had supposedly offered to Sartaq. Except for the Bible, the items are eventually returned through Sartaq’s own intervention: It seems likely that it was the Nestorians and not Sartaq who coveted the items all along.³⁸

Worst of all, the Nestorians he meets are, in his eyes, ill-informed about the Christian faith and lax in their practice of it. They do not put a representation of Christ on their crosses, are ignorant of the meaning of most of Scripture, are drunkards even in church (making ‘a great howling as they chanted in their drunkenness’), are polygamous, feast on meat on Fridays like Muslims, play along with shamanic rituals, and charge for

³⁵ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 173, 278).

³⁶ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 122).

³⁷ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 187).

³⁸ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 119, 134, 255–256, 258).

performing sacraments. On Palm Sunday he shuns their sacraments even though he is their co-religionist. All in all, they undermine the chance of Mongols fully understanding the real meaning of Christianity.³⁹

Rubruck is also vexed by a false monk, an Armenian called Sergius, who claims to have been instructed by Christ to represent the Armenian Church amongst the Mongols. He gives the impression of pious humility, yet he flaunts a great silver cross which had been given to Mönke in exchange for money to rebuild a Church in the Levant destroyed by Muslims. He claims only to eat one meal a week, but actually has a store of nuts and dried fruit which he keeps to himself. Rasputin-like, he has influence over Mönke and his family, and monopolises their understanding of Christianity even more than the Nestorians do. Rubruck discovers to his horror that Sergius has misled Mönke into believing that, should he convert to Christianity, western rulers as well as the Pope would submit to him. Sergius is also so obnoxious and aggressive in his encounters with Muslims that Mönke has him move his tent further from the court. Later, it transpires that he is not a real monk at all but is a weaver. As damage limitation, William tries to control what other Christians say. On hearing Sergius expound on the creation of the first man in a discussion with a Nestorian, he recognises a common dualist trope, which he calls Manichaeic, and warns the false monk in no uncertain terms to stop talking there and then.⁴⁰

Rubruck, confounded by the Christians at court, is comforted only by his infrequent contact with Europeans. One was a woman he names as Pascha, from Metz, had who endured great hardship as a slave but kindly cooks a meal for the famished friars. Another is a hugely talented goldsmith from Paris, William Buchier, who is held in very high esteem because of his creations.⁴¹ When William first meets him, he is crafting an astonishing silver fountain in the shape of a tree for Mönke, from which multiple kinds of alcohol could be served. At Qaraqorum itself, Rubruck eats a joyful dinner with Buchier and his Catholic wife. At Easter he encounters a crowd of Hungarians, Alans, Russians, Georgians, and

³⁹ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 117, 163–164, 189, 194, 196 (quotation), 207, 211, 241–242).

⁴⁰ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 48–49, 174–175, 187, 194–199, 205–257, 225, 227–228).

⁴¹ On the trafficking of people and cultural appropriation by the Mongols see Allsen (1997).

Armenians who had been trafficked to the capital. They were habitually denied communion by the Nestorians unless they converted to their church. Naturally, Rubruck takes them as his flock. He tells them that acts of theft against their Mongol masters are justified if they are not given enough food but that, should they be conscripted in the Mongol army, they should let themselves be killed rather than kill a fellow Christian. They would thereby become martyrs. All of this, he said publicly, he would be prepared to defend in front of Mönke, ‘for the Nestorians of the camp were there when I was giving these instructions, and I suspected they might perhaps vilify us’.⁴²

What Rubruck encounters in contact with both Mongols and with non-European Christians makes him both stubborn and vulnerable. In the end, for all his stoic bravery in proselytising and defending the Christian faith, he was confounded by both the Mongols and Asian Christians. He only managed to baptise six people in total and regarded his mission as an ill-advised failure.⁴³

4 IBN BATTUTA (1304–1368/1369; TRAVELLED 1325–1352)

In contrast with Rubruck’s *Itinerarium*, the *Rihla* of Ibn Battuta was put into writing by a professional author, Ibn Jazayy, commissioned by the sultan of Tangiers in 1355 on the traveller’s return from Mali in 1354, some years after most of the events it describes.⁴⁴ It sometimes has a similar, semi-ethnographic feel to it as Rubruck’s account, but usually Ibn Battuta is describing different Islamic peoples rather than those of other faiths. Unlike William of Rubruck, Ibn Battuta was a willing pilgrim and scholar. By his day, Mongol rulers in west and central Asia ruled over millions of Arabs, Persians, and Turks within the Dar al-Islam, and he was planning to travel amongst these, his co-religionists. As such, his encounters with steppe Mongols were far less disconcerting and frightening than were those of Rubruck.

Ross Dunn observes of Ibn Battuta that he ‘belonged to a large class of lettered but not accomplished men who, for want of serious career

⁴² Jackson and Morgan (2009, 182–183, 208–210, 212, 215 [quotation], 223 [and note 5], 224).

⁴³ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 253).

⁴⁴ Dunn (2005, 310–320).

possibilities in the central cities, gravitated out to the expanding Muslim frontiers, where a Muslim name, a reasonable education, and a large ambition could see a man to a reasonable job, even to riches and power'.⁴⁵ Even so, outwardly he was a pilgrim, a devotee of Sufism, a jurist, and an educated traveller expecting and receiving hospitality and gifts, including slaves and wives, from patrons of the Dar al-Islam, in accordance with the Islamic instruction to support those on pious journeys. He travelled in considerate company and often in some luxury. The *Rihla* indicates that before he even reached Arabia on *Hajj* for the first time, he was dispatched on a spiritual journey. A revered North African Sufi suggested that he visit three fellow practitioners in India and China and convey his greetings to them. He identified more and more closely with the Sufis and we are told that he almost settled down to become a full Sufi practitioner himself.⁴⁶

Ibn Battuta travelled eastward decades after the Mamluks had destroyed remains of the crusader states, with the fall of Acre in 1291. He was in Islamic-held lands entirely for his journeys through the Levant and well beyond. He had three, unconnected, periods of contact with Mongols.

*Arabia to Tabriz (1326–1327)*⁴⁷

In November 1326, Ibn Battuta left Mecca to visit Iraq as part of a comfortably accommodated intellectual entourage returning to Baghdad in a caravan paid for by the sultan Abu Sa'id Bahadur (1316–1327 or 1335), an 'excellent and generous king'.⁴⁸ He was very much benefitting from the efficient Islamic infrastructure in the region. He detoured significantly to visit several renowned centres including Basra and Shiraz and their Sufis. Less pleasingly, he encountered Sunnis ignorant of Arabic, poorly observant Muslims, and other warlike Arabs. His money and centrality to the caravan kept him safe in the Euphrates marshes, and he

⁴⁵ Dunn (2005, 312). See also Dunn (1995).

⁴⁶ Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 63).

⁴⁷ For this section of the *Rihla* see Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 51–80); Dunn (2005), esp. chapter 5.

⁴⁸ Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 77).

is met only with generosity in the towns he visited thereafter. He arrived in Baghdad in the Summer of 1327.

Even before arriving, he would have been aware of the devastation wrought by Mongols a century earlier. Only towns which surrendered were spared the worst atrocities under Hülegü. The region had made a limited recovery and was more peacefully exploited under Gaykhātu (1291–1295) and notably Ghazan (1295–1304), under whom the Ilkhanid state had become officially Muslim. To someone of high birth like Ibn Battuta, this branch of the Mongol polity would seem to have focussed thereafter on respectable statecraft through taxation, the promotion of Islamic practices, and science. It was Sunni except for a brief, ignominious Shi'a period under Öljaitu (1304–1316), Abu Sa'id's father. Ibn Battuta tells the Sunni version of his conversion, which portrays him as ignorant of the correct version of the faith until dogs he has set on the qadi Majd al-Din are tamed by the holy man, and the khan sees the true path of Sunni Islam.

At Baghdad, he would have met foreigners from Tibet and China, fellow Arabic-speaking North Africans, and Sufis.⁴⁹ Although it was under Mongol rule, Ibn Battuta would have found Baghdad familiar in many ways and been impressed by the global reach of the Ilkhans. As such it was not adventurous as it may at first appear to have decided to accompany Abu Sa'id's vast *malhalla* on a sight-seeing journey north. Along the way, the official 'Ala al-Din Muhammad was ordered to detour to the beautiful Mongol capital at Tabriz, in itself a cosmopolitan commercial crossroads. Ibn Battuta praises the fabulous bazaar although he is somewhat shocked by the opulence. Before journeying back to Baghdad, he rejoined Abu Sa'id's caravan and even had a brief audience with him, was a result of which he was provisioned and entrusted to professional organisers of *hajj* logistics. Thus far, the world of the Mongols offered Ibn Battuta little by way of culture shock, and nothing he could not easily reconcile with his faith and identity.

⁴⁹ Morgan (2015, 73).

*The Black Sea and Pontic Steppe (1332–1333)*⁵⁰

Ibn Jubayr encountered Mongol rulers next during a circuit which took him, along with a growing household of slaves and concubines, across and around the Black Sea and to Mongol al-Qiram (Sary Krim) in the Crimea, and then across the Caucasus onto the western Eurasian Steppe to the lands of Mohammad Özbek (1312–1341), the Kipchak khan of the Mongol *ulus* which would later be known as the Golden Horde, and who had only recently converted to Islam.

To reach it, he had taken a ship crossing the Black Sea, and had one of his few encounters with peril and enforced self-reliance. A terrible storm hit the boat and, after a serious battering and being unable to steer, the captain limped for Kerch, at the boundary with the Sea of Azov. But the people of Kerch indicated that there was some danger in their port also. He later disembarked and was taken aback to encounter a Church containing what he is told is a statue of Ali within it. He decided to hire transport and lead his retinue to the cosmopolitan, latinised port of Kaffa. This was a mistake, he later considered. Although the town is impressive, he describes being appalled at the ringing of church bells by Christians throughout the city. He and a group of other Muslims cause a scandal by ascending a minaret and loudly issuing the call to prayer and reciting the Koran. The town's Muslim official feared that the affront to the Christian rulers would result in violence, saying "When I heard the call for prayer and chanting I feared for your safety".⁵¹ Ibn Battuta left the town for the safer walls of al-Qiram a couple of days later.

It was at this point that he decided to head for Saray on the Volga, the capital of Batu's successors. He was again anticipating the familiar within the exotic. Saray was a city choked with people and markets trading wood, furs, and slaves southwards, and luxuries to the west. It was also a stopping point for Islamic travellers of all kinds. It was to be a seven-hundred-mile journey, but he was in the safety of the retinue of a Turkish *amir*, who had been summoned by Özbek Khan. Once again, he willingly undertook a huge endeavour for any traveller, but again had a military escort and logistical ease for the majority of the journey. They may have been peripheral to the Dar al-Islam, but Özbek's territories were vast, incorporating the Ukrainian steppe and extending south to the Oxus delta

⁵⁰ Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 119–130), Dunn (2005), esp. chapter 8, Norris (2004).

⁵¹ Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 120).

with the Aral Sea. He was then in a landscape that would have been familiar to William of Rubruck (of whom he most probably had never heard).

He first caught up with Özbek in the region near al-Machar. He describes with astonishment his first glimpse of the mobile *ordu*, with its rolling palaces, mosques, markets, and even smoking kitchens, all drawn by oxen and horses, and hundreds of wagons carrying the khan's goods. Özbek's own tent was covered on the outside with tiles made of gold, and those of his wives were almost as opulent. Of the khan, he notes that he is diligent in fighting Christians and has subdued Constantinople. The khan was welcoming but somewhat strange to Ibn Battuta, drinking heavily of kumiss, which, whilst alcoholic is not specifically forbidden in Islamic law, and, to his horror, appearing drunk in the Mosque.

Around this time, the traveller tells us that he had been intending to travel much further north, to the 'Land of Darkness', attracted by stories of fascinating economic practices, but that it would be so arduous a journey, so frozen, so expensive, that he chose to abandon the plan. Instead, he decided to accompany the Özbek's wife Bayalun back to her father, Emperor Andronicus III of Byzantium, in order to give birth to their son at Constantinople. Again, Ibn Battuta is dependent for his protection on a patron, this time Bayalun herself. The entourage, he tells us, consisted of several hundred people, four hundred wagons, and thousands of horses and horsemen. But these only accompanied her to the Byzantine border, where Ibn Battuta again experienced a culture shock. He was once again in Christian lands with Christian laws and customs. The royal expedition takes on supplies of wine and meat including pork, and formal Islamic prayer is not observed. At the city, he and other Muslims are called *Sarakinú* (an implicitly derogative term) by the guards and refused entry. Eventually Bayalun intervenes and they are granted access but have to be put under the Emperor's protection to stop them being molested, which it seems certain would otherwise happen.

Ibn Battuta is hugely impressed by Constantinople, but again chose when to be a tourist and when to stop. For example, he wishes to view the interior of a church but is told that visitors have to prostrate themselves before the cross, without exception, so he remains outside. After a brief stay in Constantinople—during which he was able to meet the emperor, Ibn Battuta returned to the steppe with Bayalun's escorts, through a brutal Winter, and did eventually reach Saray.

Eventually the traveller set off for India via the Hindu Kush, traversing Mongol Transoxiana, during which time one of his slave concubines gave birth to a short-lived baby. He is aware that the early Mongols had ravaged this territory too, but this does not impinge upon his high regard for its Mongol ruler 'Ala al-Din Tarmashirin, even though he is again in a land where customs are different from those he has practised at home. He leaves Tarmashin just south of Samarkand, with useful and prestigious presents from him.

*China (1345–1346)*⁵²

In 1345, after an extensive career in India serving Muhammad Tughluq, the Islamic ruler of India, and then dangerously falling out with him, Ibn Battuta departed by boat for China as Tughluq's ad-hoc messenger to Sheikh Burhanuddin of Sagharj. He was tasked with delivering to him 40,000 dinars to pay for the latter's expenses for returning to Delhi. Emperor Toghon Temur (1320–1370) was a Buddhist and had adopted Confucian principles in matters of state. At Quanzhou, we hear that the traveller was eventually given permission to travel north along the Grand Canal to the capital, Khanbalik. He then reversed the journey, afraid of being caught up in Mongol internecine warfare, and took a boat for the Strait of Malacca in 1246.

Before continuing we should address the significant issues concerning these sections of the *Rilba*. The journeys he claims to have undertaken in south-eastern and eastern Asia would have been by far his most extensive, but they constitute less than 6% of the book. They are also amongst the vaguest of his various accounts, and some sections on China specifically contain factual errors. The question of veracity and accuracy cannot be resolved here,⁵³ but it could simply be the case that he dismissed China because he disliked most of what he encountered. Furthermore, how interested was his patron in hearing about the world beyond the Dar al-Islam? Was it perhaps even a subject to be avoided? The issue is of course of real significance for the study of Mongol-ruled China, but we are not considering Ibn Battuta's accuracy here, rather, the impression he conveys of non-Islamic lands. In terms of understanding the traveller

⁵² Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 261–273), Dunn (2005), esp. chapter 11.

⁵³ For the debate, see Dunn (2005, 102–103, 166, 174, 177, 253, 260).

himself and his relationship with China, it seems quite plausible that he encountered and reacted to what he says he did *somewhere* in China.

I say this also because there are specifics which seem unlikely to have been invented. For example, he was hugely impressed by Chinese produce and lists dozens of agricultural products which to him surpass even those of the fertile crescent; he waxes lyrical about material culture such as precious metals, silks which even the very poor wear, and paintings and ceramics; is fascinated by gender roles, and also by the economic infrastructure, for example paper money, markets, ports, canals, and also coal, which he has never seen before.

However, of Yuan China as a whole, he says, whilst it was a ‘beautiful country’, it ‘afforded me no pleasure’. Much about both elite and everyday life appalled him. In this context it indeed made a difference to him that the ruler is of the lineage of the destroyer Chinggis Khan, and it was a land of ‘infidels’⁵⁴ and idolators, where pigs and dogs were consumed, and where people took no care about their personal appearance. Whilst he was there, he witnessed a royal funeral involving the mass sacrifice of horses and inhumation of living slaves.

There are aspects of Yuan-adopted bureaucracy which he considers oppressive in ways he has never encountered in any of his previous travels. The overall impression given is of a political culture where the Muslim traveller is subjected to huge levels of suspicion and surveillance, if supposedly for their own protection and that of their goods. Highly accurate likenesses of travellers, including his own, were painted ‘without us being aware of it’ and exhibited publicly, as a record of people passing through for state records.⁵⁵ He is impressed by the safety of China’s roads and inns, but in cities, Muslims are confined to particular quarters, and only there can they guarantee being treated respectfully. The money and goods of Muslim merchants are sometimes impounded and they have their freedoms circumvented even in terms of what they might spend their money on. This was apparently because ‘the Chinese say: “We will not have it said in the Musulman countries that their people are (stripped) of their property in China, and that ours is a country full of riotous living and harlotry”’,⁵⁶ which, implicitly, it was. Furthermore, the

⁵⁴ Quotations at Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 262).

⁵⁵ Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 263). See also Endicott (1994).

⁵⁶ Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 265).

Yuan had turned Muslim against Muslim: Burhanuddin of Sagharj spends the 40,000 dinars but refuses to return to Delhi and is instead appointed head of all Muslims in the Yuan territories.

Ibn Battuta was truly alarmed ‘by the prevalence of infidelity’, saying, ‘whenever I left my lodging I saw many offensive things which distressed so much that I tended to stay at home as much as possible. When I saw Muslims it was as though I had met my family and relatives’.⁵⁷ As such, he sought out of what he felt to be safe places and people. A Chinese ambassador he had met in Delhi, showed him around Quanzhou and secured a house for him. As a result, he was then visited by named representatives of the town’s many Muslims, including Tájuddín of Ardebil ‘a virtuous and generous person’, and Kamáluddín Abdallah of Ispahan, ‘a very pious man’. He also re-encounters a merchant, Sharif al-Din al-Tabrizi, to whom he had owed money since in India, but who does not seem to be asking for it back.

The description of Islamic life at Hangzhou is vivid. The legacy of Othmán bin Affán, the philanthropic Egyptian founder of the Muslim quarter, overshadows the rest of the town. In contrast, in Canton he visits a truly disconcerting unnamed ascetic. He had claimed to be a Muslim, but also to have said, “My prayer is certainly not the same as your prayer”.⁵⁸ The hermit claims to have met Ibn Battuta previously, and also to have known the Prophet Muhhamad. He is prone to vanishing and having people impersonate him and, implicitly, to drugging, poisoning, or hypnotising guests. Ibn Battuta is alternately reverential and frustrated by him.

Of course, such details concerning the Islamic community so far from home could have been fabricated by Ibn Battuta, but the motive for doing this, when he was vague about so much else, is unclear. It gives an impression not only that he did visit China, but that he did not trouble to say much about it which would not interest Muslims. Significantly, he could easily have been caught out in a lie, had he lied. This was in recounting in great detail his journey to Khanbalik in the company of another north African, al-Bushri of Ceuta, whom he had first met in India. He describes how the two men wept upon meeting each other again. Al-Bushri was

⁵⁷ Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 268). Dunn gives ‘pagan’ rather than ‘infidelity’: Dunn (2005, 258).

⁵⁸ Mackintosh-Smith (2003, 267).

now very wealthy, having fifty female and fifty male slaves. He gives Ibn Battuta two of each and travels towards Hangzhou with him for four days. The writer says that he had since met al-Bushri's brother in Africa. All of this could easily have been verified or disproved from Tangiers, had he been suspected of fabrication to some end or another.

5 CONCLUSION

Although Ibn Battuta refers several times to the Mongol campaigns of the previous century having ravaged the lands of Islam, history did not discourage his travel within the Dar al-Islam. We have seen how easily he reorientated himself wherever he travelled in west and central Asia. Towns of the western steppe were 'firmly linked to the international networks of judges, teachers, and scribes along which he always endeavoured to travel'.⁵⁹ He was reaping the benefits of belonging to a religious polity in which, although it was not politically united, regional differences between observant Sunnis did not alarm him. Even where lands were ruled by relatively recent converts to Islam, official ideologies and practices were the same as his own. The unexpected details about daily life which inform the reader are often the same as those of value to the historian of travel and of Asia. It also seems unlikely that he was not also aware of what he would encounter in Yuan China. Working as he did at the Indian capital for Muhammad Tughluq, he encountered Muslim envoys and merchants familiar with the country, presumably as critical of the Buddhists as he would find himself to be. If we get an impression of surprised dismay at what he found, this was surely the result of the issue concerning the entire east Asian section of the *Rihla*: distance from the facts but, I consider, not the experience. As such, it seems likely that he travelled to China with prejudices and, whether he recalled the exact details later or not, they were fulfilled. Otherwise, his identity as a literate, employable legalist and Sufi adherent allowed him to flourish.

William of Rubruck, in contrast, knew very little about what he would find on the steppe, where he planned to travel, and central and east Asia, where he did not, except that he hoped that it would include Christian Mongols and other Christian kings. He could proselytise under the protection of either, and, whether he knew the full extent of what King

⁵⁹ Dunn (2005, 163).

Louis had written or not, he could baptise new converts, minister to trafficked Europeans, and find allies against the Muslims of the Levant. Except for the few westerners he eventually finds at Qaraqorum, he found only non-Christians and bad-Christians in the east. Yet his self-belief as a European Christian never wavers. When he entered Mongol territory, he writes, ‘I really felt as if I were entering some other world’,⁶⁰ and compares Asia unfavourably to Europe, telling Louis that, ‘Nowhere have they any “lasting city”’, that Qarakorum and Mönke’s palace there compared poorly to St. Denis and its royal basilica, the home of Louis’ dynasty.⁶¹ Once there, he recalls numerous bad experiences at the hands of his ‘guides’, and comes to rather expect and accept this. But ranking highly amongst his worst encounters was when Nestorians stole his Communion vestments. They had taken away Rubruck’s identity, the outwards signs that he could officially say Mass and baptise converts. His tone is markedly different once he re-enters Europe. Christians of the Don region feed the party for three days straight by collecting meat for them door-to-door because of a misunderstanding that had left him bereft of oxen and horses.⁶²

The potential of Elka Weber’s nuanced schema is met most obviously when William discusses Muslims. He identifies them as targets of crusades and against whom Louis wants to build an alliance. But when he encounters them in various situations with Mongols, he does not approach them in an especially hostile manner. He tries to preach to and even baptise some, unsuccessfully. It is difficult in most cases to ascertain quite what he thinks of them, but we can see that they, like Buddhists, are relatively low in the hierarchy of ‘others’. He therefore debates with Chinese Buddhists and Muslims as incidental ‘others’, in front of Mönke (the ‘other’), with the ‘help’ of Nestorians (the obstructive ‘others’): he gets nowhere.

Ibn Battuta’s observations on ‘paganism’ in China takes us to the heart of the matter. He was not travelling the world but the *Islamic* world. He scarcely ventures beyond voluntarily, implicitly for fear of cultural contamination. When forced to, he tries to return psychologically, for example when instructed to venture into China, where he has to seek out a ‘home from home’ amongst other Muslims. Rubruck is typically the foreigner.

⁶⁰ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 71 and 97).

⁶¹ Jackson and Morgan (2009, 220).

⁶² Jackson and Morgan (2009, 109, 110).

He is a man in survival mode, holding his nerve by clinging to a version of the world he can survive, rigidly battling foreign attempts to compromise or shape who he is internally, as he loses almost all agency over his actual fate. Ibn Battuta finds many spiritual homes *because* he is in Asia; William of Rubruck finds few, and does so *in spite* of Asia rather than because of it.

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Travelling Across Late Mediaeval Eurasia: Travel, Curiosity and Knowledge in the Mongol Period

Joseph Benjamin Askew

1 INTRODUCTION: GEOGRAPHIES AND INTER-ASIAN TRAVEL

Over the past century, history has become increasingly dominated by approaches that focus on the material basis of the discipline while other approaches are often written off as idealistic. When it comes to the mediæval period in Inner Asia it is not obvious that a materialist approach is very useful. There is not a lot of evidence of trade along the so-called Silk Route, a term invented by Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen, a nineteenth-century German working with a colonial framework of expanding trade between Europe and China, rather than ever used by the people who lived along it. If trade is ruled out as a motivator then there

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is the obvious question of what did motivate the people who did travel between the two ends of the Eurasian landmass. This chapter will argue that there were three main groups of travellers within Asia itself, the diplomats, the religious and the unfree. Contrary to the modern expectation the persistent violence of Inner Asia made trade by land impossible and so the main driver was, simply, curiosity. Not just that people travelled for the pleasure of knowing, although some did, but that the opportunities arose for people to satisfy in their curiosity.¹

Inter-Asian Travel

Unlike the West, where Marco Polo starts his book by asking the reader to find someone to read it to them, East Asia has a much longer literate tradition resulting in more accounts of inter-Asian travel. However, almost all of these are a very limited social class drawn from the scholar-gentry. Thus the main source of literate travellers are those that travel on government business. Countries within the Chinese tribute system regularly sent tributary missions to Beijing and many of these have resulted in reports that display a great deal of curiosity about China. The best example of this would be the Qing-era *Jehol Diary* (*Yŏrha ilgi*) by the Korean official Pak Chiwŏn (1737–1805).² Pak was expected to write reports on his visit and let the Korean Court know about developments in China. In these reports, Pak discusses the Chinese economy, manufacturing, notable temples, the countryside and generally displays a high level of curiosity about Korea's neighbour. He also included strong arguments in favour of learning from the Chinese to strengthen Korea as much as possible in order to fight the Manchus.³ There has been a strong tradition of religious figures travelling within East Asia. From the earliest times to the modern period, Buddhist monks have travelled to and from China in order to spread their religion. These have included famous figures like Xuanzang (玄奘, c. 602–664 AD) who went to India to collect scripture. This tradition continued unbroken until the modern period when

¹ None of this is intended to ignore the largest number of people who travelled in this period: slaves taken during the Mongol wars. Naturally, curiosity played no role in their movement at all. The references to these people are just so small in number and technical in detail that a proper discussion requires a separate paper.

² Pak Chiwŏn (2010).

³ Pak Chiwŏn (2010, 149).

Japanese monks such as Ekai Kawaguchi (河口慧海, 26 February 1866–24 February 1945) who visited Tibet twice and Nepal four times between 1900 and 1915.⁴ Other source of literate travellers in East Asia was those captives who were forced into exile in other countries. One example of this is the Korean official Kang Hang (1567–1618) who was taken to Japan during Japan’s invasions of Korea in the late Ming. From Japan, he wrote copious amounts about all aspects of Japanese society and government including lists of important Japanese generals, the structure of the Japanese government and Japan’s geography.⁵ However, the majority of captives forced into slavery were not literate and so no record of their suffering has survived. Private merchants and traders did exist, but these have left very few accounts and almost never appear in the historical records.

The Geographical Background

To understand why trade is so rare, it is important to understand the geography of Central Asia. Stretching from southern Ukraine to Manchuria is a vast grass plain that has been occupied by various nomadic groups since the beginning of recorded history. Marked by rainfall so low that it cannot support much tree growth but enough for a sea of grass, the history of this region has been determined by geography but also by the domestication of the horse. It is a region shaped above all by mobility. It is not that these regions are incapable of supporting farming and sedentary societies. Lands previously held by nomads in southern Russia, northern Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Mongolia and the Great Plains of the United States are now some of the most productive grain-producing regions in the world. Inner Mongolia supports a population of almost 25 million people, and the former region of Manchuria has over 90 million people, virtually all of whom engaged in agriculture until recently.⁶ Equally unsurprisingly, these grasslands, until recently, were also all dominated by nomadic

⁴ Kawaguchi has often been accused of spying as a result. See Ekai Kawaguchi, *Three Years in Tibet*, at *Three Years in Tibet* by Ekai Kawaguchi—Free Ebook (gutenberg.org), Accessed, 10: 26, September 27, 2021.

⁵ Kang Hang (2013).

⁶ Herodotus may well record the moment where the nomads moved from being farmers on the plains to proper nomads as he claimed some Scythians were still farmers. See Herodotus (1926), Book IV, Volume 2.

groups that relied on their large herds of horses to raid, extort and enslave their weaker neighbours.⁷ It is the highly mobile horse that enabled nomads to take these grasslands and hold them against all comers. As Paul J. Smith pointed out the Chinese were perfectly aware of this military advantage. In 1127, Lv Yihao, a military advisor to the Song Court wrote,

A level plain covered by shallow grass, on which horses can advance and withdraw with ease, is the perfect terrain for the use of cavalry. There one soldier on horseback can oppose ten soldiers on foot. But mountain forests and streams and marshes, which endanger and impede the forward and backward movement of horses, is just the right terrain for the use of foot soldiers. There one soldier on foot can defend against ten soldiers on horseback.⁸

Smith points out that Lv greatly underestimates the advantage of the mobility given to the soldier on horseback. Citing a case in the war between the Song and the Nuzhen Jin Dynasties, Smith points out that seventeen Jin horsemen ran into a detachment of 2000 Song soldiers who blocked their way. Surrounding the Song soldiers and firing arrows into their ranks, the Song soldiers eventually broke and almost half of them died.⁹ All through Chinese history, Chinese armies have been led out on to the steppe and all too often they have suffered a disaster as a result. Perhaps the greatest loss of life in a single battle before World War One took place on 1 September 1449 when a Ming Emperor led his army in person to confront the Mongols. In the following Tumu disaster, almost half his army of half a million is said to have died.¹⁰

2 THE NOMADIC OPTION

If the steppe is shaped by mobility then it ought to follow that trade was widespread as one of the greatest impediments to pre-modern trade was the cost of transportation. One of the usual features of the literature on

⁷ For the Comanche, see Hämäläinen (2008) and Fehrenbach (2007).

⁸ Cited in Smith (1991, 14).

⁹ Smith (1991, 14–15).

¹⁰ See Mote (1974, 243–272). Tumu is not particularly far north on to the steppe either. It is located in what is now the modern province of Hebei.

nomads is the general assumption that they favour trade. In this, they are often compared to China whose government is usually assumed to have been opposed to trade and commerce.¹¹ This is clearly an adaption of Western justifications of the Unequal Treaties and Treaty Ports although it is very hard to find evidence in the historical record of Mongols engaging in any trade at all.¹² Of all the precursors of long-distance Eurasian trade as laid out by Ron Harris, it is noteworthy that in this period the Mongols can only be said to have one—itinerant peddlers.¹³ They lacked family firms, there is no evidence of loans or agents before the conquests, they had no applicable law (in the conquest period Mongol law was a secret and so could not serve as the basis of a mercantile system) and they did not form business partnerships until after the conquest of sedentary communities.¹⁴ The Inner Asian merchant community par excellence was the Sogdians who came from settled farming communities.¹⁵

This lack of interest in trade is illustrated by the basic facts of animal production in the Mongol world. It is an oddity that the Mongols produce very few animals per capita. As has been well known for a long time, the average herd size was well below the maximum that could be controlled by a single shepherd. Fredrik Barth found that the Basseri held fewer than 100 sheep per family while one adult could control up to 800.¹⁶ In a sense what the nomadic tribes are producing is not sheep but young men. The aim is to maximize the amount of violence that a

¹¹ Traditionally Chinese governments may have been opposed to free trade, but it is hard to ignore the enormous evidence of highly regulated, government-approved trade in pre-1911 China.

¹² Juvaini specifically says few merchants ever visited the Mongols. See Juvaini (1997, 77–78). It is interesting that this claim persists despite what might be called the gross physical evidence: that is, the Mongols had a small, simple, undifferentiated pastoral economy that supported a small population on the edge of famine, while China as a whole had a large, vibrant, highly specialized, technologically sophisticated economy that supported something like one hundred and twenty million people in some of the largest cities in the world at the time of the Mongol invasions. The Mongols had nothing remotely comparable to the economy of Song dynasty China as shown, for instance, in Gernet (1970).

¹³ Harris (2020, 65–79).

¹⁴ These partnerships are discussed in Allsen (1989, 83–126) and Endicott-West (1989, 127–154).

¹⁵ Harris (2020, 80–86).

¹⁶ Barth (1986, 13, 16).

family group is capable of producing. This is necessary in a nomadic environment because even a moment of weakness means being pushed off the land and losing both animals and women.¹⁷ Thus the adult males in a nomadic society do not routinely work in the sense understood in a sedentary society. As the first significant European traveller to the Mongols and envoy of Pope Innocent IV, the Franciscan monk John of Plano Carpini (c. 1185–1252) noted,

The men do nothing but occupy themselves with their arrows and to a small extent look after their herds; for the rest they go hunting and practice archery ... All work rests on the shoulder of women; they make fur coats, clothes, shoes, bootlegs and everything else made from leather. They also drive the carts and mend them, load the camels, and are very quick and efficient in all their work.¹⁸

This shapes the way that economic exchange takes place on the steppe. Although Mongols show no particular sign of trade in the normal sense, they do exhibit *Ran*: an involuntary purchase where the buyer is able to use threats of violence to set the price.¹⁹ Most notably in their relations with the Chinese, the nomads tended to demand luxury goods at prices set by themselves under a threat of violence.²⁰ This East Asian steppe tradition seems to be behind the famous massacre at Otrar leading to the Mongol invasions of the Islamic world. According to Ala ad-Din Ata Malik Juvaini, (1226–1283), a Persian official of the Mongol Il-Khanate in Iran, the Mongol envoys behaved so disrespectfully that the local governor, Inalchuq, was pushed to execute them.²¹ This is perfectly

¹⁷ As most famously happened to Genghis Khan himself as a young man following the death of his father.

¹⁸ See Spuler (1972, 80–81).

¹⁹ This is not common in Western legal culture but it was common in Iceland before Christianity. Iceland had two sorts of forced purchases that were not clearly distinguishable. *Ran* is the forcible taking of an object, the other was self-assessing the price of an object. The latter does not differ from the former by much as the person taking the object determines how much to pay for it. For examples see Miller (1996, 77–101).

²⁰ Most notably described by Barfield (1989).

²¹ Juvaini (1958, 79–81). There is a divide between the East Asian and Western commentators. Westerners, perhaps lacking experience of the Chinese tribute system, call these men merchants. The East Asians, Mongols and Chinese, call them ambassadors. Igor de Rachewiltz points out that the Mongols describe these men as envoys, *elchin*, but

in accordance with nomadic behaviour in China, but it seems to have come as a surprise to the Muslim world. In the modern period, this is often found in most nomadic communities as a persistent and unrelenting demand for gifts even though the threat of violence has been moderated by effective systems of law and order. In the Mongol period, most of the European travellers across Eurasia report similar behaviour which sometimes became outright theft.²² The Dominican friar Simon of San-Quentin (c. 1245–1248), who was part of the diplomatic mission to the Mongols in 1245, pointed out,

Such greed consumes them that when they see something which pleases them, immediately they pull at it with great vehemence or carry it away by violence from the man who owns it whether he is willing or unwilling²³

Similar opinions are expressed by others from outside of Europe so this cannot be written off as an expression of bias against nomads. The famous Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) also writes:

[I]t is their nature to plunder whatever other people possess. ... They recognize no limit in taking the possessions of other people. Whenever their eyes fall upon some property, furnishings, or utensils, they take them.²⁴

It is perhaps ironic, given the mobility of the Mongols themselves, that they so often imposed immobility on everyone else. Around 1602 the Jesuit Benedict Goës walked from India to China with a merchant

he calls them merchants anyway. See Sects. 254, 265 of Rachewiltz (2006 I, 181, 189). The YS 1.19a calls them envoys not merchants. See also Cleaves (1982, 189).

²² For example William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Mongke, 1253–1255*, edited by Peter Jackson and David O. Morgan. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990, 97, 98, 108, 114–115, 119–120, 179–180, 207–208, 273).

²³ Simon de Saint-Quentin, *Histoire des Tartares*, translated by Jean Richard, (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1965) “Tanta vero in eis cupiditas exardescit ut cum aliquid quod sibi placeat vident statim aut nimia importunitate extorquant, aut violenter auferant ab illo cuius est, velit nolit”. Sinor (1990, 5) points out that when Simon of Saint-Quentin said this he was speaking from bitter experience.

²⁴ Ibn Khaldun (2005, 118).

caravan. He noticed the fear the merchants had of attracting the attention of nomads in what is now northern Xinjiang, as this area

Ha[d] an evil fame on account of its liability to Tartar raids, and therefore this part of the road is traversed by merchants with great fear. In the day time they reconnoitre from the neighbouring hills, and if they consider the road safe they prosecute their journey by night and in silence. Our travellers found on the way the bodies of sundry Mahomedans who had been miserably murdered. Yet the Tartars rarely slay the natives, for they call them their slaves and shepherds, from whose flocks and herds they help themselves.²⁵

The most common experience of all travellers in the Mongol period was being stuck far from home while waiting for fighting among Mongols to end so that they could continue to travel. The most famous description of this is Marco Polo who explains how his father and uncle ended up in China by saying that they had only intended to go to Sarai, on the Volga River in modern Russia. However, fighting broke out between the Golden Horde, based in southern Russia, and the Il-Khanate, based in what is modern Iran which meant that “no one could travel without peril of being taken”.²⁶ A brief lull in the fighting allowed the Polos to travel to Bukhara, where they had to stay for three years as they “found they could neither proceed further forward nor yet turn back again”.²⁷ In the end, they were able to make the trip as envoys of the Mongol Khan, not as merchants, as an ambassador from Persia told them “in our company ye shall travel with perfect security and need fear to be molested by nobody”.²⁸ It was as envoys of the Great Khan that they were able to return to Europe, carrying an official golden tablet as proof of their status.²⁹ When the three Polo men attempted to go to China together, it took them three and a half years to get there.³⁰ However, they took

²⁵ Goës (1914, 239–240).

²⁶ Polo (1993, I:5) and Polo (1875, I:5).

²⁷ Polo (1993, I:10) and Polo (1875, I:10).

²⁸ Polo (1993, I:10); Polo (1875, I:10). Needless to say this suggests everyone else could be molested with impunity.

²⁹ Polo (1993, I:15–18) and Polo (1875, I:15).

³⁰ Polo (1993, I:25) and Polo (1875, I:26). On each of the three occasions the Polos tried to walk the “Silk Road”, they were held up for longer than three years.

the most arduous route possible, crossing into southern Xinjiang through the Wakhan corridor, suggesting that other routes over easier terrain were not safe.³¹ Even while travelling in service of the Khan, Marco Polo was attacked by Mongols and his entire group was enslaved or killed except for seven survivors.³²

Other travellers reported similar problems caused by Mongol infighting. Rashid al-Din, (1247–1318), who served as vizier to the Il-Khans, pointed out that it was normal to execute the dependents of rival Mongol rulers and seize their goods. This may refer only to those sedentary merchants who entered into *ortaq* relations with Mongol princes but it is possible that it means anyone from a place ruled by a rival.³³ The Flemish Franciscan monk, William of Rubruck (1248–1255), sent by Louis IX of France to convert the Mongols, regretted that the Nestorians would have accepted a Patriarch appointed by the Pope and so essentially joined the Catholic Church “if the routes lay open”.³⁴ The Italian Franciscan and future Archbishop of Beijing, John of Monte Corvino (1247–1328) said that fighting among Mongols in 1305 meant that he had heard no news from Europe for the previous twelve years.³⁵ Islamic sources report much the same problems. When the Moroccan-born Berber religious scholar Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Batuta, commonly known as Ibn Batuta, (1304–1368/1369) wanted to return to Morocco, he could not by land because of fighting between various Mongol groups.³⁶ He knew of someone who had tried to cross by the land route but he had died.³⁷ He had both arrived and departed from China by boat and so avoided Inner Asia completely. He could not have been more clear about the dangers posed by Mongols to travellers, saying that the area around the Great Wall was

³¹ This is perhaps the most extreme route possible as the Wakhan corridor is exceptionally high. Much easier routes should have been available.

³² Polo (1993, I: 99) and Polo (1875, I:100).

³³ Rashid al-Din (1971, 258).

³⁴ Rubruck (1990, 213–214) and Van Den Wyngaert (1929, 280).

³⁵ Dawson (1980, 224–227) and Wyngaert (1929, 347, 349).

³⁶ Ibn Battuta (1994, 910–911).

³⁷ See Ibn Battuta (1971, 548).

occupied by wandering tribes of heathen, who eat such people as they can catch, and for this reason no one enters their country or attempts to travel there. I saw nobody in [Canton] who had been to the Great Wall, or who knew anybody who had been there.³⁸

Even when pro-Mongol commentators are trying to be reassuring they usually show how dangerous travel on the steppe was. The Persian scholar Juvaini wrote “[f]or fear of [Chaghatai’s] yasa and punishment his followers were so well disciplined that during his reign no traveller, so long as he was near his army, had need of guard or patrol on any stretch of road”.³⁹ That is, the roads were safe as long as you travelled in an armed convoy close to a powerful ruler. This is backed up by the account of Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, an Italian who was employed by the Florentine *Compagnia dei Baldi* in Antwerp from 1315 to 1317; in London in 1317, in Cyprus from 1324 to 1327 and again in 1335. Pegolotti pointed out that when a Mongol ruler died the road was not safe for merchants until a new ruler was firmly in power. As the route through the grasslands controlled by nomads was the least safe part of the trip Pegolotti recommended travelling in a group of at least sixty.⁴⁰ Pegolotti claimed that nomads would simply demand money from travellers amounting to a quarter of the total expected costs of using the route from the Mediterranean coast of Turkey to Tabriz in the northwest of Iran.⁴¹ This insecurity persisted well after the Mongol Empire. In the fifteenth century when Athanasius Nikitin travelled from his native Tver in Russia to India between 1466 and 1472, he was robbed by nomads twice before reaching Iran,

The smaller of our boats ran foul of some fishing-stakes, was seized, and instantly plundered, with all my things in her. In the larger vessel we reached the sea, but having grounded at the mouth of the Volga we were taken ... There they took her ... dismissing us bare and naked beyond the sea, and forbidding us to return home Then came the Kaitaks [a tribe

³⁸ Ibn Battuta (1916, 123).

³⁹ Juvaini (1997, 272).

⁴⁰ Pegolotti (1914, 152–154) and Lopez and Raymond (1961, 357–358).

⁴¹ Pegolotti (1914, 164).

that occupied what is now Daghestan] and made the whole party prisoners, and we came to Derbend, but we [were] robbed.⁴²

3 THE LACK OF TRADE

When it comes to evidence of trade, it is possible that the main accounts are shaped by the need to tell a good story. Marco Polo, for instance, might well have said that his father and uncle were the first “Latins” Khubilai Khan had ever seen in an effort to heighten the dramatic effect.⁴³ However other European travellers do not mention seeing other Europeans either. John of Plano Carpini did not mention a single Western European who could support his claims. Even though the Mongols by this stage controlled parts of what would become Eastern Europe, he did not meet any Eastern European merchants on the steppe. The only Europeans he mentions were Russian princes going to pay their respects to the Great Khan and Western merchants trading with the Russians from the West or via Constantinople.⁴⁴ In 1305 John of Monte Corvino claimed that he had had no confessor for eleven years and had heard no news from Europe for the previous twelve.⁴⁵ The lack of a confessor shows that Catholic missionaries did not travel to, or within, China with any frequency as it would have been unlikely for any European to have missed the chance at confession in such a dangerous part of the world. In 1346 or 1347, the Italian Franciscan John de Marignolli visited southern China as part of an embassy from Pope Benedict XII between 1338 and 1348, but did not mention seeing a single European merchant although he did mention a *fondaco*, a warehouse and inn, run by the Franciscan

⁴² Nikitin (2010, 5–7). See also Kirchner (1946, 46–54).

⁴³ He does mention a German at the siege of Xiangyang, but that is probably a reference to an Alan. William of Rubruck claims his main purpose for going to Mongolia was to find some German slaves, but he did not find even a trace of them although he did mention a single female German slave. See William of Rubruck (1990, 44, 144–146, 226, 145).

⁴⁴ Dawson (1980, 70–71) and Wyngaert (1929, 128–130). The merchants going to Kiev from the West were from Vratislava, Poland and Austria. The most important of those going to Kiev from Constantinople are named as “Michael the Genoese and Bartholomew, Manuel the Venetian, James Reverius of Acre, Nicholas Pisani”.

⁴⁵ Dawson (1980, 224–227) and Wyngaert (1929, 347, 349).

mission.⁴⁶ This absence of evidence is not unique to European sources. Ibn Batuta does not mention any European merchants in China. Even modern Chinese scholars have not been able to find any evidence of Europeans in China at all apart from a small number of well-known missionaries.⁴⁷

The strongest evidence of European trade to China in this period is the work of Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, the *Libro di divisamenti di paesi e di misuri di mercatanzie e daltre cose bisognevoli di sapere a mercatanti*, commonly known as the *Pratica della mercatura* which was written between 1335 and 1343.⁴⁸ It has been argued elsewhere that this text does not refer to a trip to China, and the strongest reasons involve mobility. Pegolotti's handbook recommends using donkeys to cross the deserts and vast grass plains on the edge of Siberia between Crimea and China. However, donkeys are not typically kept by Inner Asian nomads and so would have been hard to acquire.⁴⁹ Donkeys simply lack mobility as well as being unable to carry substantial loads and do not like cold weather. This is very important in regions where travellers with poor mobility might die if they fail to reach the next well. Not only would no one use donkeys to cross Inner Asia there does not seem to be a single historical account of anyone doing so. The reference to using pack horses within China to follow the Grand Canal from Hangzhou to Beijing is also unexpected. Horses are not typical of southern China and there is no reason to use them if water transport is available.⁵⁰

4 WHAT DROVE CONTACT: CURIOSITY

If trade is ruled out as a reason for long-distance contact during the Mongol period, the obvious question is why people were travelling at all. The most commonly given reasons among European sources at this

⁴⁶ John de Marignolli (1914, 299). For a discussion of the *fondaco* see Constable (2003).

⁴⁷ Li Han (2010, Volume 2, 994–995).

⁴⁸ Evans (1970, xxvi–xxxix).

⁴⁹ The “Five Animals” usually listed as typically kept by Mongols are “sheep, goats, horses, camels and sometimes yaks” but not donkeys. See Barfield (1989, 20–24) and Bold (2001, 36–41).

⁵⁰ For an excellent introduction to the problems the Chinese have had raising or even keeping horses alive, see Smith (1991).

time were religious and diplomatic as with the East Asian accounts. The Europeans had heard that there were Christians, or at least non-Muslims, further to the East and they might be recruited for the ongoing struggle with the Islamic world. The Mongol conquests represented an opportunity to convert a people without a written scripture. As no one knew anything about the Mongols, and much of the knowledge available was not very reassuring, the motives behind these contacts seem driven by a curiosity about the possibilities involved and fears of the dangers involved. Western governments wished to know what they did not know but did not know enough to judge the risks. This would explain why rather minor religious clerics were sent to carry out this diplomacy at the time rather than Court officials. It would matter little if a low-ranked Franciscan was killed in Central Asia. However not all the friars were on official business. The Italian Franciscan Odoric of Pordenone (1286–1331), who writes perhaps the best account of China in this period, simply wanted to go to the East to convert the pagans and had asked permission of his abbot for leave in order to do so. His account is marked by descriptions of tea drinking, Chinese writing, bound feet, fishing cormorants and a wealth of other details about China at this time including the very curious claim that the women of China were the most beautiful in the world.⁵¹ He was curious enough about China that he even visited a temple,

In one of those monasteries which I visited there were three thousand monks and eleven thousand idols. I went thither at the hour fixed for feeding their idols, that I might witness it; and the fashion thereof is this: All the dishes which they offer to be eaten are piping hot so that the smoke riseth up in the face of the idols, and this they consider to be the idols' refectation. But all else they keep for themselves and gobble up. And after such fashion as this they reckon that they feed their gods well.⁵²

What is perhaps unusual about Odoric's account is that when he was curious about an issue he did not let sectarian differences impede him and he repeatedly claims to have asked people from every community. For instance, when trying to estimate the size of Hangzhou, he said "I

⁵¹ The claim about the beauty of Chinese women is certainly unexpected from a Franciscan. See Odoric of Pordenone (1916, 197).

⁵² Odoric of Pordenone (1916, 185).

made diligent inquiry regarding the city, and asked questions of Christians, Saracens, idolaters, and everybody else, and they all agreed as with one voice that it had a circuit of one hundred miles”⁵³ He was willing to eat with Buddhist monks and discuss the transmigration of souls with them.⁵⁴ The good friar clearly had a highly curious mind and this does not appear to be uniquely European either. Ibn Batuta seems to have wandered across much of Eurasia at this time, going north into Russia and south across the Sahara as well as all the way to China, out of pure curiosity. As a religious scholar and judge, he had the sort of knowledge that was in demand in Islamic communities right across Eurasia. There appears to be some evidence of curiosity about the Western end of the Eurasian landmass in China. Two of the most poignant pieces of evidence of Europeans in China during the Mongol period are the tombstones of the children Katerina and Antonio Vilioni found in Yangzhou, dating to 1342 and 1344 respectively.⁵⁵ Katerina Vilioni’s tombstone seems to have a collector’s mark inscribed on it suggesting that someone had found it sufficiently curious that they obtained it.

Curiosity played a role at every level of society. Well after this period East Asian governments were using diplomatic travellers to satisfy their curiosity. Part of the reason for this is that the East Asian tradition is that the Emperor does not travel, or at least not among ordinary people. The number of times Chinese Emperors have left the palace to go on tour around their Empire is so small that it is noteworthy when they do it. The ethnically Chinese Daoist master Changchun (長春子, born Qiu Chuji, 丘處機, 10 February 1148–21 August 1227) was summoned to Samarkand because Genghis Khan was curious about his teachings and especially claims that he had the means to prolong life.⁵⁶ His disciples wrote an account of his travels that provides a great deal of information on the conditions around Samarkand, and an interesting view of the steppe world across Central Asia. The opportunity to convert the ruler was too great to pass up. The prime example of curiosity shaping the history of this period is in Marco Polo’s account. According to Polo, when he was

⁵³ Odoric of Pordenone (1916, 195).

⁵⁴ Odoric of Pordenone (1916, 201–203).

⁵⁵ See Rouleau (1954, 346–365) and Lopez (1977, 455–457).

⁵⁶ Li Zhichang 李志常 (1985) and Li Chih-ch’ang (1931). See also Bretschneider (2000, 35–108).

presented to Khubilai, what struck the Khan was his discreet and prudent personality which led him to appoint the younger Polo to a diplomatic mission. Observing that other envoys were boring, Marco Polo tried to pique the Emperor's curiosity,

he had taken note on several occasions that when the Prince's ambassadors returned from different parts of the world, they were able to tell him nothing except the business on which they had gone, and that the Prince in consequence held them for no better than fool and dolts, For he took great delight in hearing the affairs of strange countries. Mark therefore as he went and returned, took great pains to learn about all kinds of different matters in the countries which he visited, in order to be able to tell about them to the Great Khan.⁵⁷

However, the curiosity of Kings and their assorted officials also had a negative aspect. During the Ming dynasty, a Korean official called Ch'oe Pu (1454–1504) had been heading home from his post on Cheju Island to observe three years of mourning for the death of his father when his ship had been blown off course in a storm. With very limited control over the speed and directions of his ship, he ended up off the coast of Zhejiang near Ningbo.⁵⁸ His experience though shows the darker side of curiosity as he raised a great deal of suspicion. Ch'oe was repeatedly questioned about where he came from by highly suspicious officials. The Ming dynasty at this time had a problem with Japanese pirates and the local officials had a very limited understanding of Korea so naturally, the assumption was that Ch'oe was a spy. He was warned to keep his curiosity under control with an official privately telling him,

I see that you are not an evil man. But simply because your speech is not the same, you are really like someone blind and deaf. I truly pity you, and I shall tell you something; remember it. Be very careful of yourself. Do not talk freely to people.⁵⁹

While Ch'oe could not speak to the locals he was able to offer written explanations based on a common understanding of Classical Chinese

⁵⁷ Polo (1993, I: 27–28).

⁵⁸ See Ch'oe Pu (1959, 66–72).

⁵⁹ Ch'oe (1959, 97).

grounded in Confucianism. Koreans at this time prided themselves on their Confucian orthodoxy and to some extent Korea was a more thoroughly Confucian society than China. This provided him with a framework to talk to the Chinese. As with the prisoner of the Japanese Kang Hang, it would have been naïve for Ch'oe to think that his behaviour would not have legal and political consequences back home and so his behaviour had to be above criticism. The report that Ch'oe wrote shows the dangers he was in because of the curiosity of others. The Chinese constantly prod him to see if he is really Japanese and ask for information that might have been politically and militarily sensitive. A Chinese official demanded that,

If you are a Korean, write and bring to us [a statement of] the historical periods of your country, its changes of rule, the capital cities, the geography, the people, the customs, sacrifices, rules for mourning, population, military system, land tax, and styles of dress. We shall compare it with the Histories and note what is and is not so.⁶⁰

These officials seem to be well aware that attracting the Emperor's attention was not a good idea. After being interrogated, the Chinese officials remove all references to bandits and pirates in Zhejiang in the report and so Ch'oe refuses to sign what is a false account. Ch'oe is then privately warned that the Emperor did not need to know about such things and Ch'oe should look to his own safety.⁶¹

In a series of odd encounters, Ch'oe was prodded in what was perhaps a test of his character. He was told to abandon filial piety in order to advance his career in serving the Chinese government. He was asked to write the Korean King's surname and personal name, which should have been taboo. Ch'oe responded in a thoroughly Confucian manner insisting that a loyal minister was also a filial son and that even if he was outside Korea, the King's name was forbidden.⁶² He was constantly put in positions that he felt might compromise his loyalty to his King. Even the smallest things provoked suspicion such as his poem of thanks to a local official. He was immediately questioned about how he knew so much

⁶⁰ Ch'oe (1959, 130). It is noticeable that Ch'oe does not discuss the military.

⁶¹ Ch'oe (1959, 110–111).

⁶² Ch'oe (1959, 112).

about the geography of the area.⁶³ The Chinese seem intently curious about the degree to which Korea had adopted Confucianism and his interrogators came back to this over and over again. He was asked about which literary models Korea followed and his grasp of Classical Chinese culture. Ch'oe firmly asserted Korea's mastery of traditional Chinese literature,

They asked, "What are your literary styles?" I said, "The memorials follow the polished style of Sung and Yuan, the narratives and essays follow T'ang and Sung. Interpretations are required of passages from the Five Classics, and questioning commentaries are required of passages from the Four Books. In everything we follow Chinese forms. ... They said, "Name the Classics and the books in order." I said, "Golden Mean", "The Great Learning", "The Analects" and "Mencius" are the Four Books. The "Book of Changes", "Book of Odes" "Book of History", "Spring and Autumn Annals" and "Book of Rites" are the Five Classics.

Despite these repeated demonstrations of familiarity with the Confucian classics, the Chinese continued to refer to him as a barbarian.⁶⁴ A Chinese official openly said to him that, "The laws of the country are extremely strict, and the punishments decreed are very severe. A new regulation Imposes banishment for divulging Information to barbarians. Do not show others any of what I have written; it is only for you to know".⁶⁵ He was taken to Beijing and held prisoner while being told he was being given an award. His response was to downplay curiosity about his motives by falling back on Confucian values in an effort to get home,

Our coming here had nothing to do with affairs of state. After being on the verge of death, we sought only to return home alive. Now our dying breath has grown strong, our dried guts have softened, our hurt feet are healed, and our weak bones have hardened. That is all because the graciousness of the Emperor in caring for strangers is generous and great. I without having served China in the slightest, have received that generous and great kindness. I am already embarrassed; why, then, should there be a giving of awards? What I want is to go home quickly, see my old mother, bury

⁶³ Ch'oe (1959, 136).

⁶⁴ See Ch'oe (1959, 146, 154, 155, 244, 245, 266).

⁶⁵ Ch'oe (1959, 146).

my dead father, and carry out my filial duties. How can the Board of Rites know what urgency this son feels?⁶⁶

Eventually, Xh'oe was granted an audience with the Emperor even though it is likely that this audience served no purpose other than the Emperor's curiosity. Ch'oe, caught in a highly charged political moment, was asked to dress appropriately for the occasion. Ch'oe could have been executed if he offended the Emperor, or if he offended his King. His response was to hold on to the certainties both countries shared: he refused to take off his mourning clothes out of respect for his late father claiming that, "Mourning for a parent is something that one must observe. To wear beautiful clothes is to be unfilial. I am human; how can I take off my mourning clothes and put myself in the position of being unfilial?" The Chinese officials did not accept this, trying to argue that dressing properly to meet the Emperor was like reaching out a hand to saving a drowning sister-in-law, one of them saying,

I discussed that today with His Excellency, the President of the Board of Rites. For the time being, mourning for a parent will be unimportant and Heaven's [i.e. The Emperor's] gracious-ness important. The rite of bowing acknowledgement cannot be dispensed with.⁶⁷

When this failed to work, the Chinese officials simply physically removed his hat and replaced it with a proper Court one instead.⁶⁸ Thus, according to Ch'oe's account, Ch'oe managed to uphold Korea's reputation for being Confucian while satisfying the Emperor's curiosity.

5 CONCLUSION

During the Mongol period, there appears to have been no expansion of trade, but a great opportunity for people to travel to the other ends of the Eurasian continent. This opening up produced some of the most extensive travel writings before the modern period in a variety of cultures. Not

⁶⁶ Ch'oe (1959, 250–251).

⁶⁷ Ch'oe (1959, 254).

⁶⁸ Ch'oe (1959, 255–258). Traditionally a man should not touch a woman he was not related or married to, such as his sister-in-law, but ever since Mencius it has been an example of a rule that should be broken in extremity.

only did Chinese people like Changchun travel to what is now Uzbekistan, but Marco Polo, among others, travelled to China, while figures from the Islamic world like Ibn Batuta managed to wander from Spain to Canton. This is largely an incidental, not intentional, result of the Mongol conquests. Despite traditions of border closure, Koreans like Ch'oe Pu could travel to China and reach home safely. In so far as can be determined, these travels were not motivated by materialist motives. There was little effort to trade and none to conquer. They seem to have been largely motivated by curiosity and a desire to learn. There does not even seem to have been much motivation to let other people know. Marco Polo might have taken his story to his grave if he had not been taken prisoner by the Genoese. Odoric of Pordenone waited until old age before setting his story down. For the West, these early discoveries were most important because they had been out of touch with the wider world for longer. Not since the Roman Empire had embassies travelled to China from Europe. Marco Polo's book would have a revolutionary impact not least because Christopher Columbus would carry a copy with him to the Americas. These travellers had brought the world together in a small way.

In another way these travels mark an important divergence. Alfred W. Crosby has argued that the period 1200–1600 marks a revolution in the way the West thought. The West became more quantitative in how they thought about time, space and mathematics as well in painting, music and bookkeeping.⁶⁹ But it may be just as likely that the Islamic and Confucian world moved away from such trends as the West invented them. Ibn Batuta and Ch'oe Pu are two learned men whose knowledge subsumed them within the dominant religious and political traditions of the day that did not necessarily require a great deal of curiosity. Ibn Batuta was a religious scholar and judge. Young men in the Islamic world would go on achieving renown and reward by studying religious texts and being appointed as Islamic judges, but their work remains of little importance outside the world of the religious scholar. Starting in the tenth century, Islamic scholars would be warned against curiosity as one of the defining features of the Sunni School was that some things had to be accepted as they were without asking why (*bila kayf*).⁷⁰ Ch'oe, unfortunately executed after his return to Korea for being on the wrong

⁶⁹ Crosby (1998).

⁷⁰ Crone (2005, 219).

side of a political dispute, was a Confucian scholar. Generations of young East Asian men would go on studying to pass the Imperial Examinations where they were told they would find rewards.⁷¹ To all but a small number of specialists the results of their work are of little interest even to their descendants. The European religious tradition of learning had required celibacy and so was perhaps not all that appealing to most young men. Other options were becoming attractive. At about this time the first universities in Europe are opening which were neither the handmaiden of the Church nor the plaything of the government. Students had the option to study what they were interested in. In a sense, curiosity had become institutionalized but only in the West. The growth of knowledge was soon to be spectacular.

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⁷¹ As the traditional saying goes 書中自有黃金屋 書中自有顏如玉, meaning that within books are golden mansions, within books are faces like jade.

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Asian Ceremonies and Christian Chivalry in Pigafetta's 'The First Voyage Around the World'

Matteo Salonia

1 INTRODUCTION

Famished, sickly, desperate. Such must have been the appearance of the first Europeans to ever enter Asia from the East, having crossed the largest stretch of water on the planet—the Pacific.¹ With gums swollen by scurvy, and with eyes momentarily forgetful of spices, scanning the coastline of scattered islands for food, these ghostly figures seemed more

¹ Their mission was to find for Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and king of Spain, a westerly route to the Asian markets, which would allow Castilian ships to procure spices without questioning the Portuguese monopoly on the easterly route as effectively established by the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494). For a discussion of the entire Magellan-Elcano expedition, see Parry (1981, 282–294), Morrison (1978, 549–659); and the shorter

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the unhappy prisoners than the masters of the ships that carried them.² Their captain, Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521), had found the strait for which Columbus and a host of other explorers had groped along the American coasts for almost thirty years. Brave and ruthless, Magellan was not lingering on the price that the enterprise had cost up to that point—a mutiny by Spanish pilots who hated their Portuguese leader, the loss of two ships, and the death of many men during the crossing of a bay that turned out to be an uncharted ocean. Yet the latter, harrowing experience was crystallized by Magellan’s greatest admirer, Antonio Pigafetta (c. 1492–1531):

We were three months and twenty days without getting any kind of fresh food. We ate biscuit, which was no longer biscuit, but powder of biscuits swarming with worms, for they had eaten the good (it stank strongly of the urine of rats). We drank yellow water that had been putrid for many days. [...] Rats were sold for one-half ducat a piece, if only one could get them. But above all the other misfortunes the following was the worst. The gums of both the lower and upper teeth of some of our men swelled, so that they could not eat under any circumstances and therefore died. [...] Had not God and His blessed mother given us such good weather we would all have died of hunger in that exceedingly vast sea. In truth I believe no such voyage will ever be made again.³

summaries in Kamen (2003, 197–200) and Canova (2019). See also Oliveira (2002) and the key document detailing the contract between Magellan and the Spanish court, “Agreement entered into by the King of Spain and Fernando de Magallanes and Ruy Faleiro for the voyage to the Spice Islands,” in Benitez Licuanan & Llavador Mira (1990, 3–6). This document partly explains both the northerly route chosen by Magellan after passing the strait and the time that he spent in the Philippines even if they evidently were not the “spice islands.” Other collections of documents are considered in Torodash (1971). On the Treaty of Tordesillas, see Ribot García et al. (1995), Varela Marcos and Vernet Ginés (1994), and Leon Guerrero (2004).

² The first two islands sighted by the fleet were Rota and Guam, of the Marianas. Magellan looked at Rota from a distance and then ordered to approach Guam.

³ Pigafetta (1995, 26–27). This is the edition of the text that I will follow here; it is the most accurate translation into English, and it reproduces in color the maps from the original manuscripts. For a treatment of the text’s history, see the “Bio-Bibliographical Note,” in Pigafetta (1995, xxxviii–lvi). For a good edition of the original text (from the Italian manuscript preserved at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan), see *Il primo viaggio intorno al mondo*, edited by Camillo Manfroni and recently reprinted by Ghibli (2014). A more recent edition in Italian is in Canova (2000).

The first encounter of this starving crew with a group of Asians was not promising. Before Magellan could make a landing at Guam, several small boats sailed toward the Spanish ships, and a multitude of men and women boarded and skillfully stole everything that they could lay their hands on, including one boat that was fastened to the side of one of the caravels. This prompted Magellan to order a punitive landing, and during the skirmish that followed, his men were able to recover their boat but not to grasp much food before falling back to the ships and sailing away. This incident, which caused the Spanish to name these islands *Islas de los Ladrones* (Islands of the Thieves), meant that more men would die from malnourishment and scurvy before a decent amount of food could later be obtained in the course of more friendly encounters, in the Philippines. But the enterprise would cost many more lives, including Magellan's, and in the end, Pigafetta would be one of the only 18 men who made it back to Seville in 1522, out of the 237 who had sailed from the Guadalquivir in August 1519.⁴

This essay is neither a chronological reconstruction of the entire expedition nor a comprehensive analysis of all the themes in Pigafetta's account, *The First Voyage Around the World*. Rather, I would like to offer some reflections on the impact of curiosity on this text. The meaning of curiosity is twofold. First, Pigafetta pens colorful descriptions of Asian landscapes, flora, fauna, sounds, and rituals.⁵ Here, I shall focus on customs and rituals, because images of Asian ceremonies in *The First Voyage* exemplify well Pigafetta's genuine and tranquil inquisitiveness. My argument is that the author, in general, avoids judgments and leaves his readers free to wonder, rationalize, and/or evaluate the perplexing rituals that he witnessed, took part in, or heard of.⁶ Secondly, Pigafetta is *himself* a curiosity: a knight from Vicenza aboard Spanish

⁴ Another handful of survivors eventually reached Europe years later. Parry (1981, 123).

⁵ I will not explore the theme of language here, but Pigafetta adds four vocabularies to his pamphlet: for Guarani, Patagonian, Bisayan, Malay. The last two are longer, and as noticed by Cachey in his Introduction they are impressively accurate. Pigafetta (1995, xxix). On this issue, Cachey gives some useful references in endnotes 119, 221, and 344 on pages 148, 161, and 174 respectively. For a more detailed discussion, see Bausani (1960) and Soravia (1994).

⁶ Other scholars have already commented on Antonio Pigafetta's curiosity and on his unwillingness to judge the societies and customs that he encountered. See for instance Caraci Luzzana (1992, 290–292), Da Pozzo (2005) and Canova (2001, 10). See also Parry (1981, 285–286). The attempt by Pablo Castro Hernández to question this

ships sent on a mission to find spices. His is an odd presence. He is much more out of place than the other Italians in the crew, who are Genoese pilots.⁷ He is also a unique character when compared to the Florentine merchants who in those decades were reaching India from the West, on Portuguese ships.⁸ Contrary to them, Pigafetta holds a chivalric value system and has the composure of a nobleman. As we shall see, this identity is linked to his primary audience and explains why the lyrical climax of the book has nothing to do with precious spices or Eastern markets, but instead deals with Magellan's heroic death. Both the first definition of curiosity—resulting in open-ended images of Asian ceremonies—and the second one—causing the transformation of Asian landscapes into a stage for chivalric acts—constitute a theme through which we can reconsider several pages of *The First Voyage* and recover the intellectual and emotional reactions that they sparked among sixteenth-century readers.

These “two curiosities” of Antonio Pigafetta are mirrored in the introduction of his book. He begins by explaining how, in 1519, he had joined Magellan's fleet, armed by Charles V at Seville, thanks to the recommendation of a fellow Vicentine, Francesco Chiericati, who at that time was the papal ambassador in Spain. Pigafetta needed the intervention of such a well-connected friend because he was neither a sailor nor a merchant investing money in the enterprise. He was eager to take part in the voyage toward the Indies simply because, as he stated in the first paragraph, after reading and hearing about “the great and marvelous things of the Ocean Sea,” he wished to see them for himself. And he illustrated his two main objectives quite clearly: “so that I might be able thereby to satisfy myself somewhat, and so that I might be able to gain some renown with posterity.”⁹ In other words, from the very beginning of his

consensus is not compelling. Castro Hernández (2018). Castro Hernández skillfully reconstructs the Renaissance aesthetic attitudes that are echoed in a few passages of *The First Voyage*, but this seems a *non sequitur* with regard to the specific issue of Pigafetta's general attitude toward Asian nations. In the vast majority of his descriptions of rituals, traditions, courtly etiquettes, and even sexual practices the Vicentine employs a matter-of-fact prose without aesthetic comments and hence devoid of even indirect moral evaluations.

⁷ One of the Genoese on board has left a dry account of the voyage, published in the aforementioned edition of Pigafetta (2014, 187–202).

⁸ On these Italian merchants and their cultural attitudes and values, see my articles: Salonia (2019) and Salonia (2021). A collection of relevant primary sources is in Spallanzani (1997).

⁹ Pigafetta (1995, 4).

book, Pigafetta on the one hand resembles a curious tourist and on the other hand is self-conscious about the opportunity he has to acquire fame among his primary audience, which as we shall see were fellow knights and courtesans. In the first half of this chapter, I will present examples of the Vicentine writer's curiosity, in particular toward different Asian rites and ceremonies, from courtly to sexual. In the second half of the chapter, I will move on to analyze the chivalric tone of the book, which is linked to Pigafetta's curious background.

2 OPEN-ENDED IMAGES: THE CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ASIAN CEREMONIES

After fleeing from the rapacious inhabitants of Guam, the hungry travelers reached the Philippines and began to wander around the archipelago. The first interesting description of a baffling Asian ceremony follows the arrival in front of the island of Limasawa and the classic exchange of gifts between Magellan and the local king.¹⁰ On this occasion, Magellan stayed onboard, while Pigafetta managed to be sent with another crewmember onshore, where the king hosted them at a banquet. The Vicentine knight writes:

When I reached shore, the king raised his hands toward the sky and then turned toward the two of us. We did the same toward him as did all the others. The king took me by the hand; one of his more notable men took my companion [...] The king's men stood about us in a circle with swords, daggers, spears, and bucklers. The king had a plate of pork brought in and a large jar filled with wine. At every mouthful, we drank a cup of wine. The wine that was left in the cup at any time, although that happened but rarely, was put into a jar by itself. The king's cup was always kept covered and none else drank from it but he and I. Before the king took the cup to drink, he raised his clasped hands toward the sky, and then toward me; and when he was about to drink, he extended the fist of his left hand toward me (at first I thought that he was about to punch me) and then drank. I did the same toward the king. They all make those signs one toward another when they drink. We ate with such ceremonies and with other sings of friendship. I ate meat of Good Friday, for I could not do otherwise.¹¹

¹⁰ Pigafetta (1995, 35–36).

¹¹ Pigafetta (1995, 37).

This vivid and amusing scene is the first European description of Filipino courtly life, which Pigafetta chose to frame within the concept of friendship. He does not comment on the simplicity of the ceremonies that he witnessed but rather gives the impression that he had a good time, surely satisfying some of his curiosity, which was anyway far from quenched as we learn from the fact that soon after the lunch he was busy writing down “the names of many things in their language.”¹² The only thing that Pigafetta feels compelled to justify is about himself, explaining why he broke the divine law of abstinence on Good Friday.

Pigafetta shows a similar attitude later in his account, when he covers the events taking place at the city-port of Cebu. Obviously, there are several interesting themes that are present here as well as in other parts of the text—such as clothing and fauna, flora and cooking, diplomacy and the Christian faith—but they are beyond the scope of my chapter, so I shall continue to focus on Pigafetta’s depiction of ceremonies witnessed by the European explorers. In the midst of the long section on the stay at Cebu, the Vicentine nobleman pens three long paragraphs, each of them dedicated to the peculiarity of one local ceremony or custom: pig slaughtering; sexual intercourse; and funerary rites. The reader learns that the ceremonial killing of a hog is performed by two elderly women, who honor the sun by dancing while holding flags, blowing bamboo trumpets, and sprinkling wine upon the heart of the hog. Then one of the women thrusts a lance through the heart of the hog.¹³ “The other one dipping the end of her trumpet in the blood of the hog, goes around marking with blood with her finger first the foreheads of their husbands, and then the others [...]”¹⁴ Pigafetta was evidently not among those in a hurry to find spices, as he readily employed his time to explore Asian human geographies and cultures, making sure that he would be invited to whatever daily activity could “satisfy” his curiosity. *The First Voyage* is thus very far from ship logs and dry letters of sailors, witnessing the nobleman’s eagerness to absorb the surreal and unexpected treasures of the East, inviting his readers to savor them patiently. Pigafetta was aware that his travel writing was engaging in the creation of knowledge about Asian societies, and he resisted the temptation to disparage the consecration of

¹² Pigafetta (1995).

¹³ Pigafetta (1995, 56–57).

¹⁴ Pigafetta (1995, 57).

the swine. The text does not justify it either, but instead the author leaves the account open to different interpretations and evaluations. He limits himself to close the paragraph with a statement that stresses the significance of such actions within a novel cosmology that invites the reader at the very least to pause: “Thus no one but old women consecrate the flesh of the hog, and they do not eat it unless it is killed in this way.”¹⁵ The following, quite famous paragraph, is dedicated to the use of bolts on the penis for sexual intercourse.¹⁶ Pigafetta does not condemn this custom; he carelessly confesses that he was so curious about it that when going around the town he often asked “many, both young and old, to see their penis,” and he only tentatively and very briefly claims that the custom has something to do with the “weak nature” of the Filipinos.¹⁷ Later in the book, Pigafetta drops even such kind of vague hypothesis about “weakness.”¹⁸ When he describes the custom (among Javanese men) to use little bells around their penis to attract the attention of their lovers and then to keep them on while having sexual intercourse, he simply states that “women take great pleasure,” without judging the practice.¹⁹

Finally, the third paragraph in this section deserves more space, as it has thus far attracted little attention from scholars. It details funerary practices in Cebu in unembellished but empathetic prose:

The deceased is placed in the middle of the house in a coffin. Ropes are placed about the box in the manner of a palisade, to which many branches of trees are attached. In the middle of each branch hangs a cotton cloth like a curtained canopy. The most principal women sit under those hangings, and are all covered with white cotton cloth, each one sits by a girl who fans her with a palm-leaf fan. The other women sit about the room sadly. Then there is one woman who cuts off the hair of the deceased very slowly with a knife. Another who was the principal wife of the deceased, lies down

¹⁵ Pigafetta (1995).

¹⁶ Pigafetta (1995, 57–58). This paragraph is absent in most French manuscripts. Pigafetta (1995), endnote 204 on p. 158.

¹⁷ Pigafetta (1995, 58).

¹⁸ Here Pigafetta is clearly engaging with an already existing literary tradition concerning Asian genital infibulation and decoration, which included the important fifteenth-century account of Niccolò de’ Conti. See Canova (2001, 8–10).

¹⁹ Pigafetta (1995, 116).

upon him, and places her mouth, her hands, and her feet upon those of the deceased. When the former is cutting off the hair, the latter weeps.²⁰

The First Voyage here offers a clear example of its author's ability to describe what is alien with a simplicity that never devolves into detachment. The passage confirms that Pigafetta is an inquisitive observer, and that often his nuanced words paint with fine strokes while at once leaving the broad contours and the overall evaluation of the scene still open. When he has to point out something that could easily be misjudged, for instance that "they keep the body in the house for five or six days during those ceremonies," he immediately hastens to add an exculpatory parenthesis: "I believe that the body is anointed with camphor."²¹ That is to say, Pigafetta's images of unheard-of Asian customs and rites are the fruit of the author's genuine curiosity, of his desire to see "marvelous things" for himself, but they are also nuanced and open-ended, leaving the audience free to make up their mind about the origins, rationale, and overall appropriateness of perplexing acts.

Pigafetta does not change his matter-of-fact yet lively prose even when, later in the course of the voyage, he learns about the much more morally questionable funerary rituals taking place in Java:

We were told also that when one of the chief men of Java dies, his body is burned. His principle wife adorns herself with garlands of flowers and has herself carried on a chair through the entire village by three or four men. Smiling and consoling her relatives who are weeping, she says: "Do not weep, for I am going to sup with my dear husband this evening, and to sleep with him this night." Then she is carried to the fire, where her husband is being burned. Turning toward her relatives, and again consoling them, she throws herself into the fire, where her husband is being burned.²²

²⁰ Pigafetta (1995, 58–59).

²¹ Pigafetta (1995, 59).

²² Pigafetta (1995, 116).

This rite of self-immolation, which was practiced in India, Java, and Bali for centuries, could have been very easily targeted for moral indignation.²³ Yet in his short description, Pigafetta refrains from using any adjective or adverb suggesting disapproval or stressing horror at the fate of Javanese women. In fact, he ends the passage abruptly with one last line that, if short of a justification, surely might have echoed in the mind of a sixteenth-century reader as a glimmer of rationale: “Did she [the wife] not do that, she would not be considered an honorable woman or a true wife to her dead husband.”²⁴

When the Vicentine knight encounters wealthier and more sophisticated courts than those of the Philippines and the Moluccas, he merely opts for slightly adjusting his vocabulary, perhaps just enough to leave the readers enchanted, while still allowing (and almost inviting) them to draw their own conclusions about the news of such distant customs. For example, this is Pigafetta’s account of the courtly culture that he witnessed in the wealthy state of Brunei:

We entered the courtyard of the palace mounted on the elephants. We went up a ladder accompanied by the governor and other chiefs, and entered a large hall full of many nobles, where we sat down upon a carpet with the presents in the jars near us. At the end of that hall there is another hall higher but somewhat smaller. [...] There were three hundred footsoldiers with naked rapiers at their thighs to guard the king. At the end of the small hall was a large window from which a brocade curtain was drawn aside so that we could see within it the king seated at a table with one of his young sons chewing betel. No one but women were behind him.²⁵

Pigafetta, who is evidently much more intrigued by court etiquette than by spice markets, continues his careful description of the scene:

Then a chief told us that we could not speak to the king, and that if we wished anything, we were to tell it to him, so that he could communicate it to one of higher rank. The latter would communicate it to a brother of the governor who was stationed in the smaller hall, and this man would

²³ On the long history of widow sacrifice across South and Southeast Asia, see Creese (2001).

²⁴ Pigafetta (1995, 116).

²⁵ Pigafetta (1995, 72–73).

communicate it by means of a speaking-tube through a hole in the wall to one who was inside with the king.²⁶

To the Vicentine knight as well as to his readers, this custom was at once perplexing and intelligible, as the men at arms, the layers of aristocratic ranks, and some form of outward respect in addressing a ruler were all signs of civility, in continuity with (not opposition to) late medieval and Renaissance European notions of kingship and political sophistication. Not by chance, the following sentence in the text is dedicated to Bornean actions showing homage, which though perhaps amusing are immediately justified by Pigafetta with a shorter and otherwise redundant clause:

The chief taught us the manner of making three obeisances to the king with our hands clasped above the head, raising first one foot and then the other and then kissing the hand toward him, and we did so. This is the method of royal obeisance.²⁷

The account continues with an indirect conversation between Pigafetta and the king, where the Europeans interestingly do not qualify the universal claims of the Habsburg emperor, but rather place Spain and Brunei on the same level. Obviously, what matters here is not whether Pigafetta reported the words that were truly spoken during the encounter, but rather that the image of Asia absorbed by his audience stressed a shared, transcultural notion of kingship:

We told the king that we came from the king of Spain, and that the latter desired to make peace with him and asked only for permission to trade. The king had us told that since the king of Spain desired to be his friend, he was very willing to be his, and said that we could take water and wood, and trade at our pleasure. Then we gave him the presents, on receiving each of which he nodded slightly.²⁸

The paragraph concludes by impressing on the reader's mind the image of a prosperous polity:

²⁶ Pigafetta (1995, 73).

²⁷ Pigafetta (1995).

²⁸ Pigafetta (1995).

To each one of us was given some brocaded and gold cloth and silk [...]. They presented us with refreshments of cloves and cinnamon, after which the curtains were drawn to and the windows closed. The men in the palace were all attired in cloth of gold and silk which covered their privies, and they carried daggers with gold haft adorned with pearls and precious gems, and they had many rings on their hands.²⁹

This story is the first accurate description of a Malay court by a European traveler.³⁰ Pigafetta deliberately closes it in an abrupt manner, lightheartedly mirroring the way in which his own meeting at a distance with the ruler had come to a sudden close. Here as in many other passages, *The First Voyage* shows all the limits of historiographical frameworks that reduce every European encounter to an act of insensitive “othering.” Pigafetta does not offer a comparison with European spaces and courts, and he does not insert an overall judgment about the reasonableness of Bornean customs. Strikingly, only a couple of paragraphs later—as a sort of brief and dry afterthought—readers are told that the king of Brunei is Muslim.³¹

Pigafetta’s readiness to recognize ceremonies and symbolisms that confirm the civilized character of the societies he encountered resembles the attitude of the Islamic traveler Abd Al-Razzaq, as recently described by Joan-Pau Rubiés.³² I find Rubiés’s suggestion that a late medieval concept of civilization was shared transculturally across Eurasia especially insightful and useful to move beyond rigid dichotomies. With regard to Pigafetta, the tendency to downplay religious differences when portraying Islamic courts and Muslim kings is confirmed later in the book, when Pigafetta describes a strange scene that took place in Tidore, one of the Moluccas. At this point in the voyage, three out of five ships had already been lost, Magellan had died, and many Spaniards had been killed at the famous ambush during a meal in Cebu. I shall return to these episodes in the second half of the chapter. Suffice it to say here, that because of

²⁹ Pigafetta (1995).

³⁰ For a very interesting discussion of Brunei at the turn of the sixteenth century, see Nicholl (1980). Nicholl argues that the official chronology of Brunei’s sultans is wrong and that Pigafetta witnessed a civil war between Muslims and Buddhists caused by the very recent introduction of Islam. He considers the key witness of Pigafetta on pp. 37–39.

³¹ Pigafetta (1995, 74).

³² Rubiés (2009, especially 55–93).

their precarious situation and due to the memory of the recent betrayal suffered at Cebu, some of the men in the expedition feared for their lives and suspected another conspiracy, so they communicated to the king of Tidore their intention to leave immediately, even without loading all the available cloves. At this point, the king, who had busied himself to gather more spices for his guests and who had held a sincere intention to establish an alliance with Spain, protested by desperately recurring to his holy book and swearing that there was no conspiracy against the Europeans and no danger. This is how Pigafetta draws the scene:

Then he [the king] had his Koran brought, and first kissing it and placing it four or five times about his head, and saying certain words to himself as he did so (which they call *zambahean*), he declared in the presence of all, that he swore by Allah and the Koran which he had in his hand, that he would always be a faithful friend of the king of Spain. He spoke all those words nearly in tears.³³

Incredibly, according to Pigafetta, the Spaniards were so moved by such oath that they decided to remain at Tidore for longer and even rewarded the Muslim king with the imperial insignia.³⁴ This is yet another example of how Pigafetta's prose remains, in the words of Giovanni da Pozzo, *impassibilmente stupita*, "unperturbedly surprised."³⁵ In this case, the only comment that he inserts after the description of this story is that later on the Spanish discovered how the king of Ternate had indeed been advised to kill them in order to please the Portuguese, but he had refused. Hence, Pigafetta's only comment sounds like a vindication of his and his companions' nonchalant and positive reaction to the king's oath over the Koran, if not as an oblique suggestion of the validity, in Asia, of oaths sworn over non-Christian sacred texts.³⁶ Obviously, I am not suggesting that Pigafetta espoused religious indifferentism. On the contrary, his account is dotted with expressions of faith and with episodes concerning the spreading of the Gospel. Yet we should not forget that Christianity could also stimulate a flexible universalism, potentially

³³ Pigafetta (1995, 95).

³⁴ Pigafetta (1995, 95).

³⁵ Da Pozzo (2005, 442).

³⁶ The French manuscripts omit the word Koran and state that the king swore on his crown. Pigafetta (2014, 138), note 7.

favoring the recognition of transcultural civility. This explains how Ming China could be at once more religiously tolerant and more ethnocentric than Christian Europe and the Islamic world.³⁷

Let us now return to Pigafetta's insatiable interest in the various courtly traditions and languages of political civility across Asia. Of course, he could not miss the opportunity to dedicate several pages of the book to China, even though he did not visit that country. Both Pigafetta and his Asian interlocutors perceived the Chinese emperor as the highest political authority in Asia, sitting at the top of a complex hierarchy of interlocking suzerainties. In this sense, rather than an alien political landscape, Asia appeared to Pigafetta (and his readers) intelligible and admirably well-ordered. As well put by Zoltán Biedermann, "In the sixteenth century, there was a critical mass of polities across the globe operating on grounds of analogous, or even homologous, strategies of power building, acting and soon interacting imperially, without conquering in the modern sense of the word—and understanding that they could measure forces and negotiate precisely on such grounds."³⁸ In Pigafetta, we find exactly a perceived continuity and a shared concept of political stability rather than insensitive dichotomies of "self" and "other." With his usual, serene curiosity, and having asked many questions to a well-informed "Moor," Pigafetta thus portrays the most powerful court of Asia:

He [the Chinese king] has seventy crowned kings subject to himself, and some of the latter have ten or fifteen kings subject to them. His port is called Guantau. Among the multitude of other cities, there are two principal ones called Namchin and Comlaha [Beijing] where the above king lives. He keeps four of his principal men near his palace, one toward the west, one toward the east, one toward the south, and one toward the north. Each one of those four men gives audience only to those who come from his own quarter.³⁹

Artfully extending his actual, physical voyage into a country that he has not visited, Pigafetta leads his audience into the halls of the Forbidden City and stresses the themes of space and rituals. Space is articulated both through the vastness of the imperial palace and through the list of

³⁷ Rubiés (2009, 108).

³⁸ Biedermann (2018, 35).

³⁹ Pigafetta (1995, 118).

suzerains who pay homage to the Chinese emperor—to the point that the list of lesser kings becomes itself a special tour of Asia.⁴⁰ Rituals harmoniously bring together and render visible on a daily basis such breathtakingly vast power. Yet the reader would look in vain for an overall assessment of Chinese civilization, for a judgment toward its pagan ceremonies and customs, or for comparisons with European powers. The audience is, therefore, invited to react to the text, and even to actively co-author it by drawing a conclusion about the author’s open-ended portrayal of moving landscapes, dense with surprising yet never unintelligible human action. Pigafetta once more colors his account with details about specific ceremonies. So, after impassibly mentioning how those who disobey the Chinese king are executed by flaying, with their skin dried, salted, and publicly exposed,⁴¹ the Vicentine moves to report a more amusing detail of court culture:

That king never allows himself to be seen by anyone. When he wishes to see his people, he rides about the palace on a skillfully made peacock, a most elegant contrivance, accompanied by six of his most principal women clad like himself; after which he enters a serpent called *nagha*, which is as rich a thing as can be seen, and which is kept in the greatest court of the palace. The king and the women enter it so that he may not be recognized among his women.⁴²

This positive description of “a most elegant” stratagem is followed by another glance at the majesty of the imperial palace, with its seventy thousand guards, and halls adorned with copper, silver, gold, and precious gems. The enormous palace as portrayed by Pigafetta—“it takes a day to go through it”⁴³—is a space inviting the reader to imagine China’s stability, justice, and prosperity, characteristics that are in turn projected throughout Asian human geographies by the symbol of Chinese suzerainty, which must be displayed by all tributary kings in their capitals: the dragon.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Pigafetta (1995, 118).

⁴¹ For a scholarly discussion of slow torture and capital punishment in imperial China, see Brook et al. (2008).

⁴² Pigafetta (1995, 119).

⁴³ Pigafetta (1995, 119).

⁴⁴ Pigafetta (1995, 118).

3 FAMILIAR ANTIPODES: CHIVALRIC THEMES IN A WORLD OF ISLANDS

In her beautiful book *Chivalry and Exploration, 1298–1630*, Jennifer R. Goodman explains that “many themes, motifs and preoccupations link the literature of late medieval chivalry with factual narratives of exploration.”⁴⁵ Unfortunately, *The First Voyage Around the World* is absent from the pages of Goodman’s work, yet I believe that Antonio Pigafetta’s identity as a knight had an important impact on some key sections of his narrative. As I suggested in the introduction of this chapter, Pigafetta’s identity was *itself* a curiosity of which he was self-conscious: there was no other Italian nobleman onboard. Crucially, after the voyage, Pigafetta first gave a draft of his memoirs to emperor Charles V, and then sat down to reorder his notes into a book, which he eventually opted to dedicate to Philippe Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes.⁴⁶ As a result, some key passages in the text re-familiarize the antipodes, by articulating an intrusion of Christian chivalric themes into Asian landscapes.⁴⁷ The Vicentine gentleman writes not from the perspective of a merchant, or a pilot keeping a logbook, or an imperial officer, but rather from the perspective of an intellectual knight.⁴⁸ His “Asia” is then not only concerned with the marvelous that “satisfies” his curiosity, as I have shown above, but also with chivalric discourses and parallels to Mediterranean geographies familiar to his primary audience—something that secures his second objective as stated in the introduction: “to gain some renown with posterity.” The traces of this chivalric theme that I will briefly present here are: the portrayal of the first solemn Holy Mass in the Philippines; the lyrically central place of Magellan’s death; and the shorter hints at knightly leadership (or lack thereof). The splendid maps in the original manuscript, which I will not treat here, are arguably

⁴⁵ Goodman (1998, 45).

⁴⁶ For a discussion of Pigafetta’s search for patronage, the attempt to obtain it from the Pope, and his eventual decision to opt for the Grand Master of Rhodes, see Pigafetta (1995, xlii–xlvii).

⁴⁷ For an introduction to European chivalry and its connection to courtly culture, see Scaglione (1991). On the genre of chivalric poetry in Italy, see the contributions collected in Di Natale and Carrassi (2007).

⁴⁸ It is not altogether clear whether Pigafetta was already a Knight of Rhodes before embarking on the journey around the globe, but he had been received within the order by the time he penned the final version of his account.

a fourth chivalric aspect of the text, as they depict a world of islands clearly connected to the Mediterranean tradition of *isolari*, with which the Knights of Rhodes were surely familiar.⁴⁹

The question of whether the first Mass celebrated in the Philippines as described by Pigafetta took place at Limasawa or in some other island has been much debated.⁵⁰ Here I shall merely focus on Pigafetta's portrayal of this Easter Sunday liturgy because it represents a clear example of chivalric themes. According to *The First Voyage*, on the morning of Sunday, March 31, 1521, Magellan sent a message to the king of Limasawa, letting him know that he and his men were about to disembark but would not do so to exchange other gifts or to partake in meals with him, but rather to celebrate the Mass and pray. Then, Magellan ordered the priest to prepare a place for the liturgy, and, as recalled by Pigafetta:

When the hour for mass arrived, we landed with about fifty men, without our body armor, but carrying our other arms, and dressed in our best clothes. Before we reached the shore with our boats, six pieces were discharged as a sign of peace. We landed; the two kings⁵¹ embraced the captain-general [Magellan], and placed him between them. We went in marching order to the place consecrated, which was not far from the shore. Before the commencement of mass, the captain sprinkled the entire bodies of the two kings with musk water. At the time of the offertory, the kings went forward to kiss the cross as we did, but they did not make any offering. When the body of Our Lord was elevated, they remained on their knees and worshipped Him with clasped hands. The ships fired all their artillery at once when the body of Christ was elevated, the signal having been given from the shore with muskets.⁵²

This scene, still quite captivating for modern readers, and surely enchanting and touching for a sixteenth-century Catholic audience, is followed by three sentences that deliberately insert a courtly theme between two religious acts:

⁴⁹ For a discussion of these maps of Asian archipelagos, which were intended by Pigafetta as an essential component of his account, I recommend Pigafetta (1995, xxx–xxxvii).

⁵⁰ Schreurs (1981).

⁵¹ Local Filipino kings whom Magellan and Pigafetta had already met and befriended in the previous days.

⁵² Pigafetta (1995, 39).

After the conclusion of the mass, some of our men took communion. The captain-general arranged a fencing tournament, at which the kings were greatly pleased. Then he had a cross carried in and the nails and a crown, to which immediate reverence was made.⁵³

The celebration of the Eucharist plays a fundamental role in the narrative. To a reader uninitiated to chivalric poems, this remains simply a beautiful episode of religious piety and a model act of thanksgiving by faithful Catholic men led by a good captain. However, to Pigafetta's primary audience, fellow knights and courtesans who were very well acquainted with chivalric literature, this description of a Holy Mass revealed multi-layered meanings. First, Magellan leads armed men to the shore, forming effectively a group of knights; then, the captain stands between the local kings and they proceed together toward the altar, thus indicating spiritual brotherhood; finally, Magellan acts almost *in persona Christi* when he blesses his new pagan friends with musk water.

As explained by David E. Clark, in medieval literature Mass attendance is central to knighthood. In his study of the *Morte Darthur*, Clark also argues that Christian worship is linked to temporal benefits.⁵⁴ This is a striking observation when one notes that Pigafetta decided to insert, right after his description of Easter Mass, a long paragraph where Magellan asks his new allies to let him erect a cross at the top of their island. Pigafetta has Magellan explain to the local kings that this cross would symbolize their friendship with the Spanish emperor and guarantee that in the future other Spanish ships "would do nothing to displease them or harm their property." Moreover, if they erected the cross and adored it "neither thunder, lightning, nor storms would harm them in the least."⁵⁵ It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the liturgical celebration—from the marching of armed yet peaceful men toward the altar to the elevation of the Eucharist—and the promise of future temporal benefits are chivalric themes artfully and vividly inserted into the narrative by Pigafetta. Needless to say, *The First Voyage* does not have the sophisticated symbolism and the diversified spiritual hierarchy of knights that one finds in the *Morte*

⁵³ Pigafetta (1995, 39).

⁵⁴ Clark (2015).

⁵⁵ Pigafetta (1995, 40).

Darthur.⁵⁶ Yet the sudden echo of knightly themes on the Asian stage is one more reason to consider Pigafetta's account a fascinating and in some way unique piece of travel literature. This is why we can say that Pigafetta was himself *a* curiosity: the only Italian knight imbued with epics and images of Christian chivalry among his fellow crewmembers, and surely the only one to write a book that would influence images of the East formed in the minds of countless Europeans readers.

The death of Ferdinand Magellan is the second episode in Pigafetta's narrative that introduces chivalric values into Asian landscapes, moving from piety and liturgy to heroic actions, sacrifice, and fame. After days spent solidifying an alliance with the chief of Cebu, Magellan became involved in a local dispute about tributes between his ally and the chief of Mactan, a nearby island. A detailed reconstruction of Magellan's stay at Cebu, his political and military objectives, and the facts surrounding the battle at Mactan is beyond the scope of my contribution.⁵⁷ Instead, I propose to read this passage in isolation, as if we did not know that it is part of a piece of travel literature. Suffice it to say that the Portuguese captain eventually decided to move with three long boats and about sixty armed men against Mactan, in the early hours of April 27, 1521.⁵⁸ Pigafetta, who being a knight was part of the posse and probably fought next to Magellan for most of the battle, thus invites his readers to visualize the dramatic events at the bay of Mactan:

When morning came forty-nine of us leaped into the water up to our thighs, and walked through water for more than two crossbow flights before we could reach the shore. The boats could not approach nearer because of certain rocks in the water. The other eleven men remained behind to guard the boats. When they saw us, they charged down upon us with exceeding loud cries, two divisions on our flanks and the other on our front. When the captain [Magellan] saw that, he formed us into two divisions, and thus did we begin to fight. The musketeers and crossbowmen shot from a distance for about half-hour, but uselessly.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ On religious life and knighthood see also Riddy (1987, 113–137).

⁵⁷ A good contextualization of Magellan's objectives and actions is in Field (2006).

⁵⁸ A useful map of the battle can be found in Morrison (1978, 643).

⁵⁹ Pigafetta (1995, 60).

Rather than calling off the attack, Magellan ordered some of his men to go burn the houses near the shore, but the diversion did not work, as according to Pigafetta two Spaniards were killed on the spot and the natives reacted by attacking the rest with even more fury. The text then continues in a crescendo of tragic tension:

So many of them charged down upon us that they shot the captain through the right leg with a poisoned arrow. On that account, he ordered us to retreat slowly, but the men took to flight, except six or eight of us who remained with the captain. The natives shot only at our legs, for the latter were bare; and so many were the spears and stones that they hurled at us, that we could offer no resistance. The mortars in the boats could not aid us as they were too far away. So we continued to retreat for more than the distance of a good crossbow shot from the shore, still fighting in water up to our knees. The natives continued to pursue us, and picking up the same spear four or six times, hurled it at us again and again. Recognizing the captain, so many turned upon him that they knocked his helmet off his head twice, but he always stood firmly like a good knight. Together with some others, we fought thus for more than one hour, refusing to retreat farther. An Indian hurled a bamboo spear into the captain's face, but the latter immediately killed him with his lance, which he left in the Indian's body. Then, trying to lay hand on sword, he could draw it out but halfway, because he had been wounded in the arm with a bamboo spear. When the natives saw that, they all hurled themselves upon him. One of them wounded him on the left leg with a large *terciado*, which resembles a scimitar, only being larger. That caused the captain to fall face downward, when immediately they rushed upon him with iron and bamboo spears and with their cutlasses, until they killed our mirror, our light, our comfort, and our true guide. When they wounded him, he turned back many times to see whether we were all in the boats.⁶⁰

The key question that one should ask is whether this text has anything to do with travel literature. Or is this brief, yet dense and emotional story encapsulating various themes that are typical of the chivalric genre? Outnumbered and wounded yet undimmed, Magellan is portrayed as the embodiment of chivalric values: "he always stood firmly like a good knight." Pigafetta reconstructs the scene as the ultimate sacrifice of a knight whose virtues went evidently beyond maritime skills and bravery

⁶⁰ Pigafetta (1995, 61).

at sea.⁶¹ To grasp how Pigafetta deliberately inserts chivalric notions of heroic death and even hints at Christian teachings on laying down one's life for his friends, it is key that we realize how the last part of the story must be completely made up by the author. The Vicentine knight surely fought side by side with Magellan, but near the end of the battle, and by his own oblique admission, he too abandoned his "mirror," as we suddenly find him watching Magellan's last stand from "the boats." Considering that the long boats were so far that their mortars could not help, when Magellan fell Pigafetta must have been at least half a mile away from the scene. All he could have distinguished from that distance were tens of Mactan warriors surrounding something in the water. In fact, it is even possible that Magellan was not killed where he fell but that he was captured, carried on shore, and later ritually murdered, since human sacrifice of enemy warriors was a common practice in the Philippines before the Spanish conquest.⁶² Hence, the inclusion of this detailed and moving section, truly a chivalric poem in miniature, is a self-conscious and deliberate decision by Pigafetta, who would have felt embarrassed to write that he had fled and found himself so far from Magellan that he had no exact knowledge of the great captain's final moments. This lyrical apex of the book is also a clear indication of how, underneath cosmopolitan attitudes and shared notions of civility, culture and locally rooted meanings still matter.

This insertion of Christian chivalry into Asian spaces does not always take the form of long sections like those describing the Easter Mass or Magellan's death. There are other instances in *The First Voyage* where Pigafetta briefly alludes to Magellan's Christ-like behavior. For example, when the fleet flees from the first encounter with the thieving natives of Guam, the exhausted crew eventually take refuge on an apparently uninhabited island, and Pigafetta informs the reader of Magellan's love for his men, as well as the effects of the captain's *caritas* on them:

⁶¹ The fact that Magellan was not a member of the high nobility is not a problem for Pigafetta's narrative. As explained in a very enjoyable essay by Alberto Castaldini, the Indo-European tripartite system (priests, warriors, farmers) was "rigid at birth but alterable by an existential choice-search-vocation, which could be perfected by a conquest. The courage of the 'quest' transforms into knights." My translation from the Italian text. Castaldini (2014, 39).

⁶² Field (2006, 329–333).

He [Magellan] had two tents set up on the shore for the sick and had a sow killed for them. [...] We stayed there eight days, and during that time our captain went ashore daily to visit the sick, and every morning gave them coconut water from his own hand, which comforted them greatly.⁶³

This act of love is an instance of *imitatio Christi*.⁶⁴ It is itself a chivalric act, and it could arguably be linked to Magellan's frequent Mass attendance besides the communal liturgies, something mentioned several times by Pigafetta and that would have been noticed by readers who were saturated with chivalric literature.⁶⁵

In other passages, the issue of honorable behavior (or lack thereof) is merely hinted at. Pigafetta portrays the king of Tidore as a good ruler and an honorable man. First, as I explained above, the author informs the readers of how the king rejected the advice to betray the Spanish after having promised friendship, and sincerely swearing (on the Koran). Then, Pigafetta credits the same king with going above and beyond his duties toward the Spanish, by giving gifts to a local governor to make sure that he would do his best to procure more spices.⁶⁶ On the other hand, a member of the expedition, Joao Carvalho, is shown to lack chivalry. After the death of Magellan, the king of Cebu had second thoughts about his alliance with the Spanish, and he treacherously murdered many of them during a banquet—to which Pigafetta did not take part as he was on the ship to recover from a wound. According to the Vicentine knight, when the survivor of this ambush begged for help from the beach, Carvalho abandoned him to his fate because he harbored the desire to replace him as the commander of the ships.⁶⁷ Later, in the space of two paragraphs, Pigafetta accuses Carvalho of freeing an important prisoner after receiving bribes in gold and of “usurping for himself” three local women who had been taken onboard to be brought to Spain.⁶⁸ Finally, Pigafetta does not

⁶³ Pigafetta (1995, 31, 34).

⁶⁴ For a nuanced discussion of the complex meanings of *imitatio Christi* in late medieval chivalric literature, see Shou (2018).

⁶⁵ For instance, when talking about the stay at Cebu, Pigafetta informs the reader: “The captain-general went ashore daily during those days to hear mass, and told the king many things regarding the faith.” Pigafetta (1995, 53).

⁶⁶ Pigafetta (1995, 96).

⁶⁷ Pigafetta (1995, 64).

⁶⁸ Pigafetta (1995, 75–76).

name those who in the midst of the terrible return voyage across the Indian Ocean demand to change route and surrender to the Portuguese in Mozambique, but he does comment positively about another group on board, who, “more desirous of their honor than of their own life, determined to go to Spain living or dead.”⁶⁹

4 CONCLUSION

Pigafetta did not write the account of his voyage through stiff dichotomies. His descriptions of ceremonies across Asian landscapes stress continuity at the antipodes. They discretely encourage the European reader to spot a shared notion of civility behind the layer of apparently perplexing traditions. Pigafetta’s curiosity leads him to observe, disembark, take notes, ask questions, but almost never to compare or to propose clear-cut interpretations. While comparisons with European customs and rites would have unavoidably led the audience to focus on difference, Pigafetta’s abrupt endings and transitions, as well as his lack of explicit evaluations, leave the audience free to complete the author’s thoughts and to guess the rationale of what is described, thereby absorbing the similarities of human societies sharing a basic notion of civilization. Pigafetta’s calm, empathetic curiosity toward ritual and institutional forms of civility—in grief and pleasure, in kingly awe and friendship, in governance and faith—opens a window on the variety of responses among pre-modern European travelers visiting Asia. Memories and reconstructions of their experiences were much more multiform, complex, and nuanced than a dismissive “othering.” In the passage detailing the unfortunate first encounter at Guam, when local people stole what they could from the hungry travelers and Magellan reacted with a punitive landing causing a small pitch battle, Pigafetta adds three sentences that (gratuitously) turn the table and force the reader to identify for a moment with the thieving natives:

When we wounded any of those people with our cross-shafts, which passed completely through their loins from one side to the other, they, looking at it, pulled on the shaft now on this and now on that side, and then drew it out, with great astonishment, and so died. Others who were wounded in the breast did the same, which moved us to great compassion. [...] We

⁶⁹ Pigafetta (1995, 122).

saw some women in their boats who were crying out and tearing their hair, for love, I believe, of those whom we had killed.⁷⁰

This is more than empathy. It is indeed compassion, with a pinch of regret.

The findings of the first half of this chapter are all the more relevant because my contribution focused on a Vicentine knight, not a merchant. In some of my recent work, I have discussed how cosmopolitan reactions to Asian encounters were especially marked among late medieval Italian merchants like the Florentine Giovanni da Empoli, while his nemesis Alfonso de Albuquerque represented the more militaristic attitudes of Iberian aristocratic leaders. Yet this study of Pigafetta has shown that even among European knights there were different sensibilities toward the East, its societies, and the production of knowledge about them.

In the second half of this chapter, I have proposed a hypothesis about the intrusion of chivalric themes even into the fabric of Pigafetta's writing about Asia, focusing in particular on two episodes. The Holy Mass of Easter 1521 is given an unusual space in the narrative, partly because of its link to Christian chivalric images. Then, the death of Magellan, fighting while outnumbered, sacrificing himself to save the lives of his men, represents the lyrical climax of the entire book, which draws its meaning and pathos from the heroic high culture of Western Europe. These moving sections, as well as shorter passages such as the one where Magellan taking care of the sick seems to exemplify the *imitatio Christi*, facilitate the presence of Christian and knightly values in Asian spaces—spaces that are themselves rendered more familiar by the inclusion of an *isolario* in the original manuscript.

Therefore, in Pigafetta, cosmopolitan empathy and locally rooted values coexist. On the one hand, he is genuinely curious about Asian ceremonies and courtly rites. Hence, the images of the East emerging from *The First Voyage Around the World* confound the simplistic stereotype of an “othering” and contemptuous West and instead confirm the presence of a Eurasian, shared notion of civility. Yet, on the other hand, it is necessary to recognize that cosmopolitan attitudes never dissolve local identities and ties. Underneath late medieval and early modern global networks and encounters, permanence and culture played a role. Pigafetta is a Catholic knight, a Renaissance courtesan from Veneto, who

⁷⁰ Pigafetta (1995, 29).

consciously engages with the Western literary tradition of the heroic epic. His peculiar identity, culture, and audience anticipate, shape, and prolong the stage of encounter. So much so that a reader familiar with Marcello Fogolino's *Adorazione dei Magi* (c. 1515), which Pigafetta must have seen in the church of St. Bartholomew in Vicenza, is tempted to wonder if that extraordinary painting—dense of knightly, strange figures surrounded by a fablelike landscape—might have been in Pigafetta's mind when he described Asian courts and Christian worship at the antipodes (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Marcello Fogolino, *Adorazione dei Magi* (c. 1515)—Musei Civici di Vicenza, Palazzo Chiericati

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Bowing to a New Emperor: Three Different Missionary Perspectives on the Qing Dynasty

Georg Schindler

1 INTRODUCTION

Travel reports play an instrumental role in the generation of knowledge of other parts of the world. A traveller is someone who has crossed both the geographical and, sometimes, the cultural border between his own world and something foreign. During this crossing, he becomes curious about the foreign, attempting to fit the newly encountered into his own perception of reality. In writing a report he then attempts to describe the foreign for people who have never encountered it, using vocabulary and concepts his audience would be familiar with. This leads to travel reports often using concepts or language far more closely tied to the land of origin of the traveller than the land or people he is describing. It is therefore not surprising that travel reports are seen as more informative about

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the author than about the land or people they are written about.¹ The curiosity about the foreign is derived from his own experiences as well as his background. Mostly, those are things the traveller thinks of as important due to their otherness, significance or their connection to his personal interests. While the initial curiosity defines the areas a traveller is willing to explore, one should also acknowledge the impact of intention. Travel reports were often written with the intent to publish them, sometimes for the individual fame of the author, or, as it is the case in the sources examined in this article, also to further a certain agenda. In order to reach a wide European audience, the traveller aims to answer not only his own, but also the curiosity of the audience. Therefore, travel reports² are always a reflection of the curiosity and interests of the audience. While the curiosity of the audience generally informs the main trajectory or contents of the book, the curiosity of the traveller becomes visible in the details and the amount of space allocated to the various topics. In this way, the curiosity of both the author and the audience also influences the type of knowledge that is created. This knowledge can be encyclopaedic, covering many aspects of the foreign, attempting to establish general knowledge about it. Alternatively, it can be specialized, with the writer focusing on a certain event or his own travels, supplementing them with wider information as he sees fit. Political agenda is reflected in how the traveller chooses to interpret certain events or how he described certain people. Here, one must be careful to keep in mind that the information available to the author during his travels could also have reinforced certain interpretations and narratives. A definitive judgement can therefore only be made if it can be ascertained that the author had had access to multiple narratives and deliberately chose to follow one or establish a new one. In this way, the twofold curiosity of the traveller himself and the audience he was writing for determines the general structure and focus of the report, whereas intention plays a large role in how the observed facts are interpreted.³

¹ Harbsmeier (1982, 1).

² At least those that were written with the intention to publish them.

³ Another important aspect for the general structure of reports is convention, since travel reports form their own literary genre with certain expectations and established modes of description. See Joan-Pau Rubiés (2015).

This article seeks to examine a highly transformative period for China—the dynastical transition between the Ming and the Qing dynasties and its description in European travel reports. By examining the depictions of the new dynasty in three widely read accounts of missionaries in China, it aims to show how the Chinese Rites controversy, the general success of the Christian mission in China and the individual experiences of the travellers up to and after the year 1644 shaped the missionaries’ curiosity towards the emerging dynasty and their expectations of it. The three sources to be discussed are Martino Martini’s *De Bello Tartarico*, Adam Schall’s *Historica Narratio* and Domingo Navarrete’s *Tratados historicos*.⁴ *De Bello Tartarico* and the *Tratados historicos* provide encyclopedic knowledge. In contrast to them, the *Historica Narratio* provides localized specialized knowledge, concentrated on Beijing and the figure of Adam Schall. All three sources, though to varying degrees, exhibit a curiosity in the dynastic transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty. One of the main questions to be answered in this regard was whether this transition was legitimate and whether the new dynasty was a “good” dynasty. Based on their identities as either Jesuit or Dominican missionaries, their experiences of the dynastic transition, their location and the time when they arrived in China, the three sources provide three different answers to this question, thus creating very different knowledge of China under the Qing dynasty.

2 WRITING ON RELIGIOUS TRAVEL WRITERS

At first glance, this collection of sources might be a bit puzzling. Why would one compare writings from two Jesuits and a Dominican? They could not be any more different from one another. Martini writes his account himself, while he is travelling from China to Europe between 1650 and 1654.⁵ Being the first detailed account of the Manchu conquest

⁴ Martini (1654a), Schall (1665), Navarrete (1676). Other editions and translations will be used as necessary.

⁵ The reasons for his journey differ widely in literature. Older scholarship tends to argue that his main reason was to convince the pope to take back the decree of 1645. Sebes (1983, 472), Corradini (1983, 185), and Cummins (1993, 81). More recent scholarship sometimes omits that point. Brockey writes that “in a move of desperation, Martino Martini was sent to Europe that same year [1650] to secure new funds”. Brockey (2007, 112). Brockey’s argument is repeated in an even more radical reading in Litian Swen’s *Jesuit mission and submission*. Swen writes that Martini was sent to report back to Rome

of China, *De Bello Tartarico* became widely popular and shaped the European perception of the conquest. Before the end of the century, it had gone through at least twenty-five editions and translations.⁶ The *Historica Narratio* was created in an entirely different manner. Even though Adam Schall is generally named as the author, this is not entirely accurate. As can be seen in the *Admonatio*, the book was compiled in Vienna from the letters of Adam Schall by Michael Sicuten, a member of the Society of Jesus.⁷ While there have been speculations that Schall might have been in Vienna at that time, these are unfounded, as Schall was standing trial in Beijing in the Calendar case in early 1665 and was under house arrest in Beijing afterwards.⁸ Schall and Martini were both eyewitnesses to the dynastic transition. Even though they both witnessed the initial stages of the conquest of China and decided to side with the newly emerging dynasty, their depictions of this change are different from one another.⁹ This begs the question where those differences originated. The *Tratados historicos* provides another perspective. Rather than supporting the Qing dynasty, Navarrete was highly critical of the foreign rulership, invoking the figure of the tyrant of European antiquity to argue for the liberation

that the Qing mission was more promising than further supporting the Ming court in the south and to recruit young Christian fathers which Swen interprets as “optimism regarding the mission’s future. Swen (2021, 50). This somewhat seems to echo Cummins statement that the Jesuit narrative, despite their eventual loss in the Chinese Rites controversy, has found wide acceptance. Cummins (1993, 2). For a more recent publication which focusses on Martini’s journey as part of the Rites Controversy see Standaert (2001, 1683) or Witek (2010, 143). Both arguments can be found in Mungello (1985, 107).

⁶ Lach and van Kley (1993, 1668). For a more detailed account of the editions see Cordier (1968, 623–627).

⁷ Schall (1665, 5).

⁸ The assertion that Schall was in Europe in 1665 can be found in the preface of the 1834 translation of the *Historica Narratio*. Schall (1834, 26). For the Trial of Schall and his house arrest see Standaert (2001, 312–313) and Brockey (2007, 128–129).

⁹ By initial stages I refer to the conquest of Beijing and the northern parts of China. The consolidation of the Qing dynasty in the South takes considerably longer. Dabringhaus (2009, 35). Especially in the first years after 1644, not all Jesuits supported the Qing dynasty. The *Monumenta Serica* dedicated the majority of their 2011 issue to Polish Jesuits in China, including two articles which compared and contrasted Michał Boym and Martino Martini with respect to their allegiance during the dynastic change in China. Golvers (2011) and Rule (2011). For a more detailed account of the members of the Jesuit faction which supported the Ming dynasty see Brockey (2007, 111–112).

of the Chinese. There are several reasons for this very different interpretation. Navarrete was Dominican rather than a Jesuit. Furthermore, the European image of the new dynasty had suffered due to a lack of success on the missionary front in the years preceding the publication. Just like the *De bello Tartarico*, Navarrete's writings became widely popular and were translated into the major languages in Europe.¹⁰ Despite being very different, Navarrete's *Tratados historicos* is closely linked to Martini's *De Bello Tartarico* and to a lesser degree to the *Historica Narratio*. All aim to defend and cement a particular position in the Chinese Rites Controversy.

In the widest terms, the Chinese Rites Controversy describes the theological debate on questions regarding the methods used by the Jesuits in their Chinese mission. The debate began around the end of the sixteenth century and spans into the eighteenth century.¹¹ The methods of acculturation, also referred to as "accommodation", were initially developed by Alessandro Valignano, Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili.¹² Their successors and followers were challenged by members of their own order as well as parts of the orders of the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, secular priests and the *missions étrangères* in Paris.¹³ While the heart of the conflict (at least officially) was always a theological issue, other sentiments further fuelled the competition between the Jesuits and their opposition. Long-standing disputes between Jesuits and Dominicans as well as envy of the Jesuit monopoly over the mission in China certainly

¹⁰ Navarrete was translated into English, French, German and Italian. Cummins (1993, 5). Lach refers to it as "perhaps the most important single anti-Jesuit piece of Rites Controversy literature". Lach and van Kley (1993, 1678).

¹¹ The starting dates for the Chinese Rites Controversy vary from scholar to scholar, depending on the perspective taken. Liu Yu writes that the Rites Controversy started "at twenty years before the Dominicans set foot on Chinese soil". Yu (2020, 11). This refers to the first official Mendicants who were able to enter China in 1633. Cummins and Li Wenchao trace the origins of the Rites controversy back even further to theological disputes between the Dominicans and Jesuits which escalated for the first time at the end of the sixteenth century. Cummins (1993, 35) and Wenchao (2000, 339). The endpoint is usually the dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773. Some scholars also argue in favor of the Chinese Rites Controversy starting in the 1640s, when the Riccian accommodation is prohibited by decree of the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide. Swen (2021, 1). Similarly, Brockey dates the Rites Controversy to 1637. Brockey (2007, 105).

¹² Rubiés (2011, 323). See also Sebes (1983) for a short history of the accommodation.

¹³ Mungello (1994b, 3) and Yu (2020, 11) and for early Jesuit critics of the Riccian accommodation *ibid.*, 16.

also played their part.¹⁴ The first escalation of this Controversy took place in 1648, when a group of Dominicans, among them Domingo Navarrete, published a decree of the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* condemning the Riccian accommodation methods. In response, Martino Martini was sent to Europe to defend the Jesuit mission from the accusations and look for additional recruits during a time of crisis. He had a vested interest in presenting both the Manchu conquest as well as the Qing dynasty in a positive light. Further doubts on the viability or credibility of the Jesuit mission in China would mean the end of the Riccian accommodation. Twenty-two years later, Navarrete, a member of the Dominican order who had since long ago been at odds with the Jesuits, published his account of the current state of affairs in China, which also contained the history of the Tartar conquest and descriptions of the now ruling Qing dynasty.¹⁵ Like Martini, Navarrete utilized the dynastic transition to further his agenda. However, instead of supporting the Jesuit mission in China, he meant to denounce it and utilized their support of the Qing dynasty as one avenue of attack. Therefore, I propose to read Navarrete's work as a somewhat late, but very extensive answer to the arguments brought forth by Martini and Schall in favour of the Qing dynasty from the other side of the Chinese Rites Controversy.

3 MARTINO MARTINI AND *DE BELLO TARTARICO*

Martino Martini was born in September 1614 in Trento, the modern-day Italy, which at that point in time belonged to the domain of the Habsburg family. He studied at the *Collegium Romanum* where he was taught by Athanasius Kircher.¹⁶ He arrived in Hangzhou in 1643. After the conquest of Beijing by the Manchus, Martini continued to work for

¹⁴ For the main disputes and the competition between the Dominicans and the Jesuits: Cummins (1993, 26–41). The issue of envy of the Jesuit monopoly on the mission in China is discussed in Mungello (1994b, 3).

¹⁵ For a detailed history of the conflicts between the Jesuits and the Dominicans see Cummins (1993).

¹⁶ Ghetta (1983, 363) and Weiyang (1994, 372). Mungello (1985, 106). The connection between Martini and Kircher led to Kircher receiving many materials Martini when writing his *China Illustrata*. Kircher (1667), Prooemium ad lectorem, no pagination given.

the Ming-pretender Longwu in Zhejiang in 1645 and 1646.¹⁷ When the Manchus captured the province, he was invited by their commander to join their side.¹⁸ Thus, Martini worked for both the Southern Ming as well as the newly emerging Qing dynasty. This was reflected in his attitudes towards both sides. While he was not antagonistic towards the Ming emperors, he thought of the Qing as a favourable replacement.¹⁹ Furthermore, he was able to provide detailed, though not always accurate, information on the history of the Manchus prior to 1644 and vivid descriptions of the war between the Qing and the Southern Ming. Martini was declared Procurator of the Vice-Province of China in 1650. He was sent to Europe in 1651 to refute the accusations that led to the decree of 1645 condemning the Riccian accommodation.²⁰ Upon arriving in Europe Martini began to publish several books concerned with China, in order to recruit new Jesuit missionaries and “correct earlier impressions of China as infertile soil for the gospel”.²¹ Martini himself wrote that one of the main concerns of the European audience, and one of the reasons for this book was the recurring question of what the “present state of the kingdom of China is”.²² Since his other writings were still in need of revision, he published *De Bello Tartarico* in order to satisfy the curiosity of the European audience.²³ His account was based on what he had read in Chinese chronicles, eyewitness accounts of other people

¹⁷ This is mentioned in a letter from Father Francesco Brancato to the Father General Vincento Carrafa. Sebes (1983, 477).

¹⁸ Mungello (1985, 106–107). Mungello notes in a footnote that this story, which is told by Martini himself, was not part of the earliest edition of the *De Bello Tartarico*, but instead seems to only have been added in 1655. Mungello (1985, 106), footnote 3.

¹⁹ Sebes (1983, 477) and Golvers (2011, 260).

²⁰ “[...] anno MDCLI superiorum neorum designatuione destinatus Romam esse” Martini (1654a), Praefatio, no pagination.

²¹ Mungello (1985, 114). Brockey (2007, 118–119), quote taken from 153. The books references are *De Bello Tartarico* (1654), *Brevis relation de numero et Qualitate Christianorum apud Sinas* (1654), the *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (1655) and *Sinicae historiae* (1658).

²² “quisque Sinensis Regni praesens sit status” Martini (1654a), Praefatio, no pagination.

²³ “ut multerum auiditati aliquid quo se interim pascat, offeram” Martini (1654a), Praefatio, no pagination.

and what he himself had experienced in the years he has lived there.²⁴ As has been mentioned above, asserting the legitimacy of the Riccian accommodation was another, if not the most important, task of his journey. In order to achieve these goals, Martini focused on providing a very positive picture of Qing China and the possibility of converting the empire to the East to Christianity under the new dynasty. Thus, *De Bello Tartarico* should be seen as part of a propaganda effort of the Jesuits to strengthen their position at a time when their continued success was not entirely certain and their methods publicly in question. While Europe was not completely unaware of the Manchu conquest of China, *De Bello Tartarico* was the first detailed account of the new conquerors. An earlier account of the circumstances in China was published by Michael Boym in 1653. However, it was focused mostly on the Ming court in the South.²⁵ This allowed Martini to shape the European perception of the new conquerors and convince Europe of the benefits of this conquest.

The first advocacy in favour of the new ruling dynasty can be found in the dedication. *De Bello Tartarico* was dedicated to Jan Casimir, king of Sweden and Poland, who had been victorious in the war over the Tartars adjacent to Europe. Martini was quick to point out that while they might be similar, the Tartars he wrote of were more cultured in morals and regiment and “less barbaric”.²⁶ Martini continues the comparison to the western Tartars “While those [the western Tartars] have been defeated by your majesty [Jan Casimir], these have been victors in China”.²⁷ While he does not explicitly link their victory to their better morals and more civilized behaviour, he advocates to not conquer them with the sword, “but

²⁴ “ex Sinensium Annalium diligentis volutatione, tum ex convictu et conversatione cum variis, decem per annos ibidem commoratus, assequi potui” Martini (1654a), Praefatio, no pagination. According to what Martini writes in the *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, he visited seven of the fifteen Chinese provinces between 1643 and 1651, when he returned to Europe. While Martini himself does not give any further information, Giorgio Melis states that those provinces are Beizhili, Shandong, Nanking, Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi and Guangdong. Melis (1983b, 431).

²⁵ The Jesuits had of course related some of the events in their letters to Europe, and the *hollandtsche mercurius* published short notices on the turmoil and conquest of China in 1650 and 1650. Brockey (2007, 108) provides an excerpt from the Vice-Provinces annual letter of 1641 describing the dire situation in China. For the notices in European newspapers, see Lach and van Kley (1993, 1663).

²⁶ Martini (1654a, 2–3). “minus barbari” Martini (1654a, 20).

²⁷ “Illi a maiestatis vesta victi, hi apud Sinas victors sunt” Martini (1654a, 3).

with boons and bestowment so that once they are bound to them, their spirit would soon be conquered as well, and they would recognize and accept the sweet yoke of Christianity”.²⁸ He established that they were milder and more cultured than the Tartars Europe had fought, which opened this alternative avenue on how to “defeat” them. Furthermore, the fact that they conquered China was seen as an opportunity for the Christian mission, rather than a threat.

In the salutation to the reader, he used the metaphor of a flame to further illustrate his point of view concerning the war. Just as the flame was fanned by the wind, the Christian faith would be fanned by the war and shine even brighter and enlighten not just the Chinese, but also the Tartars.²⁹ Martini reinforced this argument by relating that shortly before he left China, he received knowledge that “not few and among others a prince of the royal family, had broken through the darkness of idolatry and stepped out of the shadows of the underworld”.³⁰ It is interesting to note here that the Latin phrase “tenebris vere Tartareis”, meaning “the shadows of the true underworld”, was translated into German as the phrase “from Tartar, or rather hellish darkness”.³¹ This clarification showed that the translator himself was not quite sure whether “Tartareis” was linked to the “Tartars”, or the Latin adjective “Tartareus”, but decided to add this qualifier to ensure that the Tartars would not be seen as the main culprit.

The first two segments of the book presented the foundations of Martini’s argument. The new dynasty was legitimate since their rise was ordained by God and they were not to be seen as a threat to, but rather as an opportunity for the Christian mission. While linked to the barbaric Tartars, they themselves were not barbarians. In order to utilize this opportunity, it was necessary for the missionaries to provide the Tartars

²⁸ “[N]on armis, sed beneficiis ac muneribus; quibus devincti primum, mox etiam victi illorum animi, suave iugum Religionis Christianae [...] agnoscant atque; amplexetur”. Martini (1654a, 3).

²⁹ “[U]t veluti venti flamma, ita hoc belli turbine agitate Religio maiorem calrioremque diffundat lucem: quae iam non Sinas tantem, sed ipsos Tartaros in umbra mortes sedentes irradiet”. Martini (1654a), Praefatio, no pagination.

³⁰ “[N]on pauci, interque hos e Regia familia vir Princeps, [...] discussa idololatrie caligine, e tenebris vere Tartareis emersere” Martini (1654a), Praefatio, no pagination. This is questioned by Navarrete.

³¹ Martini (1654a), Praefatio, no pagination and Martini (1654b), Vorred, no pagination.

with the aforementioned “boons and bestowments” to bind them to Christianity.³²

The main corpus of the book followed these ideas. Martini recounted the foundation of the Ming dynasty, whose founder he described as a “most worthless man”, who, prior to becoming an emperor, had been a robber.³³ He discussed the reign of the Wanli-emperor, whose persecution of Christians he identified as one reason for the downfall of the Ming.³⁴ While the persecution led to military failures, the cause of the first Tartar invasions was the treachery of the Chinese bureaucrats, who feared the growing number of the Manchus.³⁵ Because of these fears, the officials committed crimes against the Jurchen, which leads to the first invasion in 1616.³⁶ Thus, the initial military actions taken by the Manchu were legitimized as a reaction to their mistreatment. Martini further reinforced this idea by recounting the sending of what amounts to a letter of complaint, which was “written in the Tartar script, but containing nothing unjustified and no barbarities”.³⁷ As Corradini points out, Martini’s description of these events is by no means entirely accurate, and the letter sent to the Chinese court was certainly not “full of quite humble and submissive words”. Following Corradini, this could be explained by the sources Martini had access to. The Chinese court could “not admit [...] that a small, and at that time barbaric, king had addressed the emperor in a peremptory discourteous manner”.³⁸ Nevertheless, it reinforced Martini’s depiction of the Manchus as a civilized people who were trying to right the wrongs done onto them. This letter, however, was not answered by the Wanli-emperor, who was characterized as a “very

³² One might interpret the alleviations for Chinese converts granted to Martini in 1656 as parts of these boons and bestowments. Quote see above, footnote 28.

³³ “vilissimus quidam homuncio” Martini (1654a, 4).

³⁴ Lach and van Kley (1993, 1667–1668). Martini (1654b, 23).

³⁵ “Niuche Rengi Tartari excreverant exquo in unum regnum coaluerant, magis magisque formidabilis essent” Martini (1654a, 7).

³⁶ Martini gives three reasons for the Tartar war: the treatment of Manchu merchants in Liaodong peninsula, an intervention in a marriage between two Tartar tribes and the attack and assassination of a king of the Niuche [Jurchen]. Martini (1654a, 7–8).

³⁷ Martini (1654b, 14).

³⁸ Corradini (1983, 188). Martini (1654a, 7): “verbis plane humilioribus ac submission plenius”.

prudent” and “experienced” ruler, but instead handed down to the officials, who in their “usual pride” deigned the Tartar king unworthy of an answer, since he was a barbarian.³⁹ It was only after this affront that the “barbaric” nature of the Manchu ruler became visible and he vowed to sacrifice two hundred thousand Chinese to serve his murdered father in the afterlife. Martini added that this “barbarian custom” was abandoned and corrected “by itself” after they had conquered China.⁴⁰ The war and invasion deep into the Chinese heartland were seen as divine punishment for this persecution.⁴¹ Martini’s reasoning for the failure of the Ming dynasty was twofold: their refusal of Christianity and the failures of the officials and the bureaucracy in managing internal and external affairs.⁴² Martini also took note of some of the negative attributes of the Tartars. On one occasion, the Tartars attacked traders outside the city of Liaoyang. While the German translation of 1654 used the adjective “barbaric”, the Latin version contained the phrase “the treacherousness of the Tartars” without directly associating them with barbarians.⁴³ The Manchu treatment of the Chinese improved under Huang Taiji, who decided to treat the Chinese better and to receive them kindlier.⁴⁴ Martini lauded this change in the Tartar governmental style writing that he left an example for his successors to overpower China by “friendliness rather than arms”.⁴⁵ Years later, the Manchu ruler gained further prestige by showing “greater prudence, friendliness and other regal virtues” than his predecessors.⁴⁶ This was a case of mistaken identity, as the “new emperor” “zungteus” [Chongde] was not a different person, but rather a new era under the

³⁹ “[M]agna polleret prudentia, ac insigni esset in rebus agendis experiential praeditus” and “consuetu superbia, nec responso Tartaricum Regen, tamquam Barbarum” Martini (1654a, 8).

⁴⁰ “[B]arbarum hunc morem reliquerint” Martini (1654a, 9).

⁴¹ Martini (1654a, 12).

⁴² Lach and van Kley (1993, 1664–1665). For the accuracy of Martini’s statements regarding the relationship between the Manchus and the Ming see Corradini (1983, 187–189 and 190–191).

⁴³ “Barbarische Untrew” Martini (1654b, 39) and “Tartarorum perfidia” Martini (1654a, 20).

⁴⁴ Martini (1654a, 23).

⁴⁵ “[C]omitate potius quam armis debellandi Sinas” Martini (1654a, 23).

⁴⁶ “[M]agnam prudentiam [...] comitatem [...] ac reliquas regias virtutes” Martini (1654a, 29).

rulership of Huang Taiji.⁴⁷ Martini believed that this “new” ruler had entered China as a child and learned their “morals, letters, teachings and language” and used this knowledge to further improve his predecessors’ model of rulership.⁴⁸ Chongde also realized the negative impact of the cruelty of his predecessors and improved the treatment of the Chinese and even his Chinese prisoners. Thus, he earned the “love and benevolence” of the Chinese and many dukes and governors joined him. It was in this manner that he conquered “a large part of the empire”.⁴⁹ In contrast to this approach, Martini related the strictness of the Chinese, in where a duke or governor had to fear for his life, if something bad had happened under their administration.⁵⁰ This is an interesting contrast, as the allegedly “barbaric” Tartars were presented as ruling gentler and more justly than the strict and oppressive Chinese court. It is, however, important to note that, according to Martini, the impetus for the establishment of this form of government originated from the intense study of China that changed the Tartars.

However, it was not the Manchus, but unrest within the empire that eventually led to its downfall.⁵¹ Martini recounted the rise of several leaders of such rebels, among others Li Zicheng. Li Zicheng, although denominated as “Leader of the robbers”, was not portrayed in an entirely bad light, as he treated people well and was overall a good ruler.⁵² Martini wrote that he looked after his subjects, lowered the tribute, ordered his new governors to look after the subjects in a friendly manner and treat them as equals. In doing so, he easily retained the conquered regions and was lauded and loved by his subjects.⁵³ This was contrasted with the concept of “tyrannical rule”, characterized by extortion that leads to a lack

⁴⁷ Corradini (1983, 190).

⁴⁸ “[M]ores, litteras, doctrinam ac Sermonem Sinensium [...] perdidicit”. Martini (1654a, 29).

⁴⁹ “[A]more et benevolentia”, “ita et Imperium magna ex parte occupavit” Martini (1654a, 29).

⁵⁰ Martini (1654a, 30).

⁵¹ Martini (1654a, 34).

⁵² Corradini (1983, 192).

⁵³ Martini (1654a, 41).

of fidelity in the subjects.⁵⁴ Most of the aspects of a good ruler attributed to Li Zicheng were also present in the description of the Manchu government in Liaodong. According to the categories established by Martini, the late Ming rule can be described as a tyranny. The populace was extorted by greedy officials and many defected to join the Manchus. For Martini, the late Ming dynasty showed elements of a tyranny and the Qing kingdom in Liaodong did not. When Li Zicheng entered Beijing, Chongzhen, who Martini referred to as the “unfortunate last emperor of the Ming” committed suicide by hanging himself.⁵⁵ Thus, “the dynasty that had been established by a robber was extinguished by a robber”.⁵⁶ While Martini acknowledged that there were further elected rulers of the Ming, they did not count as emperors, since they only ruled part of the empire.⁵⁷

However, after conquering Beijing with subterfuge and achieving his goal of becoming emperor, Li Zicheng revealed his cruelty and greed and is referred to as “tyrant”.⁵⁸ He was eventually defeated with the aid of the Manchus. Once Li Zicheng was ousted, the Manchus remained in China and eventually claimed the throne without the use of force.⁵⁹ The first emperor to be enthroned in China, Shunzi was described as a six-year-old boy of “great gravitas and majesty” possessing “great counsel and prudence, fortitude and fidelity, which caught the admiration of the Chinese”.⁶⁰ Once again, Martini depicted the Qing ruler as an admirable

⁵⁴ “[A]lias enim parva est fidelitatis cura, ubi extorta obsequie tyrannis imperat” Martini (1654a, 41).

⁵⁵ “[I]nfelicissimus Imperator, [...] ultimus [...] Taimingae familiae” Martini (1654a, 48).

⁵⁶ “[I]ta familia, quae latrone inchoara fuit, a latrone extincta est”. Martini (1654a, 48).

⁵⁷ Martini (1654a, 48).

⁵⁸ “Omnio videbatur solum ipsum non diu duraturam tyrannii felicitatem praenuntiare, et tamquam indignum excutere velle” Martini (1654a, 49). The cruelty is first described when Li Zicheng desecrated the corpse of the last Ming emperor, who, according to Martini, had been left in the dark by his officials and therefore bore little to no guilt. Martini (1654b, 76).

⁵⁹ Martini (1654b, 79, 89–93). Martini conceded that this had been planned for a while. Martini (1654a, 54).

⁶⁰ “[N]on minus consilio et prudential, quam fortitudine ac fidelitate insignis fuit [...] Sinas in admirationem rapiebat”. Martini (1654a, 57).

person who inspired the Chinese to follow him rather than subjecting them by force.

All of this was written from secondary sources as Martini himself resided in Nanjing at that time of the conquest of Beijing. He described the dismay of the Chinese in the South once they received the news that Beijing had been conquered first by Li Zicheng and then the Manchus.⁶¹ An envoy sent by the newly elected Ming emperor in the South was sent back bearing message that the Tartars were unwilling to enter peace and keep the northern provinces. They would either “possess the entire empire or nothing at all”.⁶² One might have assumed that the election of a new Ming emperor would turn the Qing into usurpers, since they were now in possession of an empire that had an emperor. However, no such sentiments can be found in *De Bello Tartarico*. Instead, the newly elected Ming emperor caused further internal disputes that allowed the Manchu to conquer Nanjing.⁶³ Martini did not shy away from also describing the cruelties committed by the Manchus against those who resisted the conquest. However, he also pointed out that those who did not resist were generally met with friendliness and that the Manchu changed little in how the provinces were governed once they had been conquered.⁶⁴

Clemency towards those who surrendered is a constant in the remaining chapters of *De Bello Tartarico*, which described the fate of individual cities and provinces. Due to his station in Nanjing during the fall of Beijing in 1644 and his presence in Hangzhou in 1645, Martini was able to provide very detailed descriptions of the events in Southern China. It is assumed that he stayed mainly Zhejiang and Fujian province until 1649, when he travelled north to Beijing to be interrogated by the Board of Rites.⁶⁵ Since *De Bello Tartarico* was meant to describe the Tartar wars in general, Martini hardly ever referred to himself in the book. However, his location still influenced his focus. He was able to provide a very detailed and accurate description of the various conquests and uprisings against

⁶¹ “[C]onfusionem ac metum vidi” Martini (1654a, 60).

⁶² “[T]otum Imperium aut nihil habere velle “ Martini (1654a, 61).

⁶³ Martini (1654a, 61).

⁶⁴ For example, his account of the Manchu conquest of Canton. Lach and van Kley (1993, 1666). Martini (1654b, 100). The idea is reiterated when Nanchang is conquered after a rebellion. Martini (1654a, 89).

⁶⁵ Melis (1983a, 429).

the Tartar conquests in Southern China.⁶⁶ Compared to Adam Schall, Martini's account was far more concerned with the events outside Beijing than with the developments within the capital itself.

Martini created a narrative of the fall of a once-great dynasty, who had failed to admit the Christian religion and suffered the consequences. The new dynasty, while different in origin, was by no means a disadvantage for the Christian mission. Furthermore, the Manchus had abandoned their barbaric rituals and moved towards a just and "good" government, based on Chinese principles and good treatment of their subjects years before they conquered Beijing. Their government was legitimized by their adherence to these principles as well as the delegitimization of the Ming dynasty, who had fallen prey to greed. This was exemplified in Martini's assertion that those who surrendered received "equal, if not better care under the Tartars than they had had under the Chinese emperor".⁶⁷ Cruelty, although present, was reserved for those who refused to submit, which was why many of the cities and provinces surrendered willingly to the Tartars. Apart from the cruelty of the military conquest, *De Bello Tartarico* did not ascribe any "barbaric" properties to the Qing dynasty and took great care to differentiate the Manchus from the more "barbaric" Tartars further in the West. Due to its novelty, the *De Bello Tartarico* quickly became "the most authoritative and best-known description" of the rise of the Qing dynasty in Europe. However, Martini's initial depiction of the Qing dynasty as an improvement of the Ming dynasty proved to be rather short lived. New editions of *De Bello Tartarico* printed in 1660 in Dutch and 1661 in Latin were published under the titles *China devastated by the barbarous Tartar: Including the dreadful ruinous war begun by the Tartars in the empire of China* and *An elegant exposition of the empire of China tyrannically devastated and Ravaged by the Tartars*.⁶⁸ These new titles, published even before the indictment of Adam Schall in China in 1664 reflect a change in the perception of the Qing government in China.

⁶⁶ Corradini (1983, 193).

⁶⁷ "[P]lurimi easdem sub Tartaro obtinuerunt [...] custodiendas, quas sub Sinico habebant Imperatore". Martini (1654a, 63).

⁶⁸ Lach and van Kley (1993, 1668).

4 JOHANN ADAM SCHALL VON BELL AND THE *HISTORICA NARRATIO*

Just like Martino Martini, Adam Schall was an eyewitness to the Manchu conquest of China. Born in 1592, the German Jesuit had come to Beijing as one of three Jesuits summoned by the Chongzhen emperor in 1629 to work at the newly created Calendar office and had remained there since. During the period of turmoil preceding 1644, Schall was ordered by the emperor to cast cannons for the empire.⁶⁹ When Beijing fell in 1644, Schall was present at the palace and witnessed the sack of the city. Once Li Zicheng, whom Schall also served at his court, had been routed, he offered his services to the new Manchu dynasty and was given a position at the new Directorate of Astronomy and a decree protecting his church from any attacks.⁷⁰ It was Schall's success in the service of the Qing and the prestige he accumulated there that founded Martini's optimism regarding the future of the Jesuit mission in China and allowed him to predict a bright future of the Chinese mission in *De Bello Tartarico*.⁷¹ However, Schall was not beyond criticism from other Europeans. In 1650, the Jesuits Lodovico Buglio and Gabriel de Magalhães started what Erik Zürcher called an "incredible mudslinging campaign", accusing him of participating in divinations and moral degradation.⁷² Despite accusations, Schall continued to gain favour with the Qing dynasty, serving as the Director of the Bureau of Imperial Astronomy.⁷³ With the death of the Shunzi emperor, Schall lost his close personal connection to the emperor. With this loss of influence came accusatory attacks from other members of the Bureau fuelled by xenophobia or personal jealousy.⁷⁴ These accusations reached their peak in 1664 and 1665 when the Kangxi emperor ordered the arrest and exile of all European missionaries, which constituted a new crisis for the Christian mission in China. The *Historica Narratio* was published in 1665 by the Jesuits and should be understood

⁶⁹ Schall (1665, 49–58). He is not the only Jesuit who did so during the dynastic struggle between the Ming and the Qing. This practice is later on criticized by Navarrete. Navarrete (1732?, 360, 421).

⁷⁰ Swen (2021, 17), Brockey (2007, 109), and Hsia (2014, 37).

⁷¹ Brockey (2007, 112).

⁷² Swen (2021, 48). Quote Zürcher (2002, 372).

⁷³ Swen (2021, 17).

⁷⁴ Hsia (2014, 38).

as part of their campaign to provide a positive image of the Jesuit mission in China and the dynasty under which the mission operated in a time of crisis.

When examining the *Historica Narratio*, there are several things to keep in mind. The *Historica Narratio* was not written by Schall himself, but rather compiled from his letters by Michael Sicuten and revised by members of the Jesuit order.⁷⁵ Therefore, the contents are not necessarily coherent. Martini wrote his *De Bello Tartarico* as a coherent narrative in 1654, years after he had witnessed the dynastic transition. He emphasized the faults of the Ming dynasty because he already knew that they were going to fall. This is not the case for Schall. When he wrote of the tragedy of the suicide of the last Ming emperor in Beijing, he did not know whether the new kings would prove to be “good” or “bad”. This explains how Schall could both genuinely mourn for the last Ming emperor and provide a very positive image of the Qing. Furthermore, despite being published in 1665, it only covered the time until the death of the Shunzi emperor in 1661. Therefore, the indictment and trial of Adam Schall as well as the Canton exile of the missionaries could not have influenced what Schall wrote in his letters. They could, of course, have influenced Michael Sicuten and the Society of Jesus who commissioned this book. Assessments that Schall’s “interpretation of events, however, does not differ significantly from Martini’s”, are only true in the widest terms. Both writers looked favourable on the Qing and were hopeful regarding the future of the Jesuit mission. Additionally, due to being Jesuits, both had a vested interest in providing good news to strengthen their position in the Chinese Rites Controversy.⁷⁶

While Martini dedicated most of his work to the Manchu conquest, only four of the twenty-five chapters in the *Historica Narratio* were concerned with the dynastic transition. Most of the book described life and intrigues at the court as well as Schall’s achievements at the Bureau of Imperial Astronomy.⁷⁷ The explanation for this discrepancy is twofold: Schall’s location, and the fact that the *Historica Narratio* was compiled from letters.

⁷⁵ “Ego Michael Sicuten, Soc Jesu [...] facta [...] ut liber, qui intituletur *Historica Narratio*”. Schall (1665, 5).

⁷⁶ Quote taken from Lach and van Kley (1993, 1672).

⁷⁷ Schall (1665), chapters 8, 9, 10 and 12.

Martini was active in the South and is known to have travelled in China; Schall remained in Beijing over the transitional period. Therefore, Martino Martini took much more notice of the progress of the conquest in the South, which had greatly disrupted his work. Schall's experience of the dynastic transition, apart from the events in Beijing, which make up for three of the four chapters dedicated to the Manchu conquest, must have been comparatively uneventful. Once the Manchus had taken control of the city, Schall's world returned to normal. This is reflected in the title of the chapter "the renewal of the empire by the Tartars and the careful restitution of the astronomy". Furthermore, the war against the Southern Ming did not feature at all in the *Historica Narratio*.⁷⁸ The description of Li Zicheng in Adam Schall was a lot less favourable than the one found in *De Bello Tartarico*. He expressed outright surprise to be treated well and referred to him as a tyrant, without mentioning his life prior to the conquest of Beijing.⁷⁹

Similar to the depiction in *De Bello Tartarico*, the last Ming emperor was described as a just ruler who was conspired against by his courtiers and was not informed of the threat until the rebels were at the gates of the city.⁸⁰ Schall characterized the Chongzhen emperor as "the greatest, wisest, most capable and in excellence second to no one in the world".⁸¹ The emperor had supported the Christian mission, even if he himself had never abandoned his faith.⁸² Like Martini, Schall referred to Chongzhen as the last emperor of the Ming.⁸³ However, in contrast to Martini the elected Ming emperors in the South were not mentioned. Most likely because Schall had little knowledge of their existence and little curiosity in them, since they did not influence the events in Beijing. For him, the suicide of the Chongzhen emperor constituted the end of the dynasty.

⁷⁸ "Instauratio Imperii per Tartaros et Astronomiae restituta cura" Schall (1665, 84).

⁷⁹ Schall (1665, 71). For references to the surprise of the father regarding his treatment, see 68–69.

⁸⁰ Since this argumentation is repeated (at least partially) in Navarrete, it is safe to assume that it represents the general narrative of the end of the Ming that was accessible to Europeans in China.

⁸¹ "[T]oto orbe forte maximi, ingenii, indolique; bonitate nemini secundi" Schall (1665, 64).

⁸² "Quamvis patriam religionem Rex numquam dimiserat, de Christiani tamen optime semper meritus fuit". Schall (1665, 64).

⁸³ Schall (1665, 64).

Another interesting difference is that the *Historica Narratio* contained more information on Chinese superstition and prophecies concerning the dynastic change than *De Bello Tartarico*.⁸⁴ This curiosity in Chinese superstition became one of the indictments brought forwards against Schall by Buglio and Magalhães.⁸⁵ The presence of these mentions can be explained by Schall's position in the board of Astronomy, an institution that was deeply involved in observing and interpreting various phenomena that were seen as an omen and often associated with divination of fortunate or unfortunate dates.

Similar to their depiction in *De Bello Tartarico*, the Tartars were described in a very positive light. After they ousted Li Zicheng from Beijing, they ordered the body of the last Ming emperor to be buried in all honours and that all magistrates were to mourn him, whether they wanted to or not.⁸⁶ In this affair, "the Tartars showed more sense of duty, human emotion and respect for the name of the emperor than the Chinese, despite the latter regarding them as brutes and dogs in their innate pride".⁸⁷ Like Martini, Schall ascribed "superbia", one of the cardinal sins to the Chinese, whereas the Tartars were portrayed as the morally superior people.

Despite the city being subjected to murder and plunder, the church and its inhabitants were spared. The *Historica Narratio* then followed the further fates of several members of the royal family, noting the tyranny when a younger sibling who managed to flee to Nanjing is beheaded by a relative who had usurped power there. It is noted that the "Barbarians would have spared even the other brother [who was killed by other Chinese because he had attempted to incite a rebellion against the

⁸⁴ Martini only took note of superstitions once, when he mentioned the throne shaking when Li Zicheng sits on it, which was taken as a sign of a short rule. Martini (1654b, 79). Schall related something very similar Schall (1665, 71). Additionally, Schall related a superstition that a change in calendar resulted in the death of the emperor or his deposition and that he had seen depictions of the death of the emperor in a book long before it occurred and of an oracle that had prophesized the end of the Ming. Schall (1665, 58 and 64).

⁸⁵ See footnote 76.

⁸⁶ "[H]onorifica sepultura donatus est, omnibus Magistratibus ad illius tumultum nollent, vellent, plorare iussis". Schall (1665, 65).

⁸⁷ "Tartaris supra Chinensium indolem officiosioribus, et conditionis humanae, Regique nominis observatoribus; quos tamen isti caeteroquin per innatam superbiam fastuose despiciunt, brutis, canisque; accensentes". Schall (1665, 65).

Tartars]”.⁸⁸ As in Martini, it was not the Tartars, but rather the Ming who exhibited traits that were seen as tyrannical. Li Zicheng and his followers were addressed as “barbarians”, due to the nature of the conquest of the city of Beijing and their behaviour once they had taken over.⁸⁹ As in *De Bello Tartarico*, Li Zicheng is characterized as a “tyrant”.⁹⁰ He exhibited some of the character traits that were also visible in *De Bello Tartarico*. He tried to defeat his opposition by force rather than attempting to win them over to his side. This became visible in his pre-emptive attack on the generals defending the Eastern borders against the Tartars. Since they posed a threat to his continued regency, he decided to dispose of them and only after that he would accept the regalia.⁹¹

This was followed by a meticulous report of what happened to Adam Schall and his church in the days between the flight of Li Zicheng and the arrival of the Manchus in Beijing. This was undoubtedly Schall relating his personal experiences, as the report was focused exclusively on Schall and his immediate surroundings. While both Schall and Martini included the divine in their descriptions of the dynastic transition, its role is vastly different. Martini declared that the whole war was part of God’s plan of spreading the faith among the Chinese and Tartars. Schall, on the other hand, did not think of the dynastic transition as ordained by God. Instead, in his perception, the divine mostly interfered in order to save the missionaries, their buildings and their converts.⁹² Arguably, this also reflected the location of the respective authors. While Martini was close to the city of Hangzhou when it was conquered, it is by no means certain that he ever experienced any prolonged period of personal danger.⁹³ Schall, however, was present in Beijing for the entirety of the first conquest of Beijing by Li Zicheng, his interregnum, and the tumultuous days after he fled the city prior to the arrival of the Manchus. He experienced a lot more personal danger than Martini, which in turn is reflected in the very

⁸⁸ “[C]onsanguineo eo loci Imperii nomen usurpante, gladio peremptus occubuit; exaggerante tyrannidem cognato sanguine, cui barbaries prope ipsa in minore fratre, [...] pepercisset”. Schall (1665, 68).

⁸⁹ Such denominations can be found in Schall (1665, 68, 69 and 70).

⁹⁰ See for example Schall (1665, 71, 72).

⁹¹ “[A]nte suscepta Regni insignia pacare imperium, [...] demortui Regis Duces [...] debellare prius”. Schall (1665, 71).

⁹² Schall (1665, 79–81).

⁹³ Melis (1983a, 426).

detailed accounts of the various dangerous situations he found himself in. Schall viewed the Tartars as saviours and provided an even more positive description of them than Martini did. Rather than entering the city, the Tartars camped in front of the gates, to find out what they could do to help. They remained outside the city gates for four days, during which many came to congratulate them and to invite them into the palace. Only after the uncle of the king of the Tartars, who was leading the army in his stead, asked them whether they wished and welcomed to be ruled by the Tartars henceforth, did they enter the city as the new dynasty.⁹⁴ The legitimization for the Qing dynasty as it was presented in the *Historica Narratio* was comparable to the depiction in *De Bello Tartarico*. While considerably less time was spent on the Tartars, their history and their general characteristics, they were also depicted as “good” rulers. In contrast to Li Zicheng they showed moderation and did not strive to secure their rule by force. Instead, they relied on public opinion as their legitimization. The notion of Tartar treachery or long-term plans to claim the Throne, as it is mentioned in Martini, was entirely absent in the *Historica Narratio*.⁹⁵

The overarching narrative of the dynastic change is very different from the one found in *De Bello Tartarico*. Instead of an “event of world-historical significance”, Schall’s description invoked the image of a short period of turmoil followed by a return to the status quo under a new maybe even more favourable imperial family.⁹⁶ Contrary to Martini, Schall did not evoke the idea of divine intervention as a facilitator of the dynastic change. Instead, he argued that the decline of the late Ming which had been concealed from the emperor had opened the door for Li Zicheng, who in turn was ousted by the Tartars.⁹⁷

The history of the Tartars, which Martini dedicated almost a third of *De Bello Tartarico* to, is addressed in chapter twelve. While far less extensive than Martini’s account, Schall followed his argumentation. Huang Taiji is identified as the ruler who accustomed his people to “humanity,

⁹⁴ Schall (1665, 84).

⁹⁵ See footnote 61.

⁹⁶ Lach and van Kley (1993, 1664).

⁹⁷ Schall (1665, 58–71).

loyalty and justice”.⁹⁸ Schall marvelled at how these people, who had just recently been “agrarian and rustic”, managed to “immediately preside over decisions with such gravitas and prudence”.⁹⁹ The “alleged Barbarians exhibited civil virtues beyond expectation”.¹⁰⁰ As in Martini, the Tartars were portrayed as good rulers, who followed the virtues and attempted to rule by example, rather than by force. Due to his location in Beijing, Schall apparently had little interest in the continued conquest and the resistance of the Southern Ming. Instead, the focus is placed on depicting the progress of the mission in Beijing and the high honours that Adam Schall enjoyed there.

When the *Historica Narratio* was published in 1665, the initial optimism concerning the new dynasty in China had already died down. It should therefore also be understood as part of the Jesuit attempts to keep the image of the state of the mission in China positive. However, these attempts to shape the perception and opinion of the wider European public were no longer as uncontested as they had been when Martini published *De Bello Tartarico*. In the same year as the *Historica Narratio* Johann Nieuhof’s account of the 1655–1657 Dutch embassy to the court in Beijing was published. Nieuhof presents an entirely different picture of China. He repeatedly reports of the former grandeur of town and cities, reduced to rubble by the Manchu conquest and of Chinese labouring like slaves under their new masters.¹⁰¹ These sentiments will also feature in Navarrete’s *Tratados historicos*.

5 DOMINGO FERNÁNDEZ NAVARRETE AND THE *TRATADOS HISTORICOS*

Domingo Navarrete was born in 1610, professed as a Dominican friar in 1635 and was ordained in Valladolid in 1639. As was already mentioned, he joined the commission that was to bring the 1645 decree of the Propaganda Fide to Asia. After their arrival in Manila in 1648, he remained

⁹⁸ “Gentiles suos ita ad humanitatem, fidem, justitiamque assuefecit”. Schall (1665, 104).

⁹⁹ “[N]on multo ante agrestes, ac rusticos, ea gravitate, et prudential negotiis decidendis statim praesedissee”. Schall (1665, 104).

¹⁰⁰ “Virtutum civilium exempla supra expectationem inculta haec, uti quidem putabantur Barbarorum”. Schall (1665, 104).

¹⁰¹ Lach and van Kley (1993, 1667–1668).

there for nine years, and, after an attempted trip back to Europe between 1657 and 1658, enters China in 1659.¹⁰² He remained in China until 1664 when he was arrested along with the other European missionaries and sent to Canton. There he was part of the theological discussions and one of the signees of the *Praxes*. In 1699, he left for Europe that he reached in 1702. After his arrival, he spent the time between 1674 and 1676 writing two massive volumes containing his views of China and of the Riccian accommodation.¹⁰³ Despite them being part of different orders, standing on different sides of the Chinese Rites Controversy and twenty years of time, there are some similarities between the circumstances in which *De Bello Tartarico* and the *Tratados historicos* were created. Both writers had spent a considerable amount of time in China prior to returning to Europe. Both works were created in a context of a perceived threat to the mission. In Martini's case, it was the decree of 1645 condemning the Riccian accommodation and in Navarrete's case the exile in Canton as well as the continuation of the Riccian accommodation. Both books were intended to reach and did reach a wide European audience.¹⁰⁴

Navarrete's depiction of the Tartars is very different from the ones presented in *De Bello Tartarico* and the *Historica Narratio*. Rather than a new legitimate dynasty, Navarrete compared them to "a Tiger" used to "be reveng'd of a wolf [Li Zicheng]". Here, the implication was clearly that the Manchus were to be seen as worse than Li Zicheng, who was only characterized as a "robber" but not as a "tyrant". Rather than relieving China of Li Zicheng, the Tartars "trampled down all China, which he already look'd down upon as a Prey exposed to his Barbarous fury". Having successfully ousted Li Zicheng, the Tartars became "more proud and arrogant than before". Returning to Beijing, "he [the Tartar] possessed himself of all, without any better title than mere Tyranny and Usurpation". This is followed by a brutal conquest of the whole Empire, unparalleled in "the Slaughters, the Blood that run about the Fields, the Robberies, the outrages, the miserable Cries and Complaints which

¹⁰² Cummins (1993, 73-91).

¹⁰³ Spence (1998, 36-37).

¹⁰⁴ The many editions of *De Bello Tartarico* have already been mentioned. The *Tratados historicos* was translated into English, French, German and Italian. These translations, together with the Spanish original made the text available for the majority of western Europe. Cummins (1993, 5).

pierced the Clouds”. According to Navarrete “Millions of Chinese” were killed, and many others committed suicide “to avoid falling into the hands of the savage Tartars. Many Cities and towns were left desolate” and the modest Chinese women “ran about the fields weeping and tearing their Hair, flying from the Scourge that pursued them”.¹⁰⁵ These descriptions of the cruelty of the initial Mongol conquest of China were based on hearsay and the study of secondary sources, since Navarrete did not enter China until 1659 and could therefore not have been an eyewitness to these events. It is interesting to note that while Li Zicheng was called a “robber”, the rule of the Manchus was characterized as “tyranny”. Both had brought destruction to China, with the only difference being that the Qing had done so for a considerably longer time and a larger area than Li Zicheng. However, there was one important difference: the Manchus were not Chinese. This would imply that Navarrete considered foreign rulership as something inherently negative and that he was familiar with the concept of self-determination. This is not unthinkable since this idea had been formulated by the time the *Tratados* was published.

Navarrete also mentioned several cities that had been destroyed by the Tartars in his description of his travels in China between 1659 and 1664.¹⁰⁶ While he had not been present for the initial ingression, Navarrete instead experienced the aftermath of several years of war with the Southern Ming. This was something that Schall did not write about, most likely due to a lack of interest and that Martini could not have experienced to the same extent, since he left China in 1651.

In the *Tratados historicos*, the Tartars were not seen as “good” rulers. Instead, they represented the archetype of the Tyrant. They took the empire with the sword, killing indiscriminately and usurping the throne. While Navarrete roughly recounted the information found in the *Historica Narratio* and the *De Bello Tartarico* when describing the initial Mongol conquest, he changed it slightly to provide a more negative image of the Tartars. Instead of being welcomed as the new ruling house, the arriving Shunzi emperor was announced emperor out of “fear and dread”.¹⁰⁷ Like in *De Bello Tartarico*, it is relayed that those who submitted willingly were treated “most courteously [...], but all that held

¹⁰⁵ All quotations taken from Navarrete (1732?, 10–11).

¹⁰⁶ Navarrete (1732?, 269, 272, 279).

¹⁰⁷ Navarrete (1732?, 337).

out were inevitably devour'd by Fire and sword". Instead of focusing on the clemency of such behaviour as Martini did, Navarrete instead focused on the "terror" that this struck into the Chinese and that it was this fear, which led to many cities surrendering.¹⁰⁸ China had become a "slave" under her new rulers.¹⁰⁹ The image of the Qing emperor as a "tyrant" was further reinforced by relating that the courtiers feared the new emperor.¹¹⁰ While Navarrete characterized them as "tyrants", he did not think of them as "Barbarians", since they "live politickly and orderly, and are govern'd by Laws agreeable to Reason".¹¹¹ Further, there is an interesting discrepancy in his descriptions of the initial conquest, which have been cited extensively above, and his own experiences with the Tartar rulers, which were considerably more positive.¹¹²

This begs the question when, why and how this alternative understanding of the Manchu conquest came into existence. One of the reasons could feasibly be the later time period. Martini stayed in China in the late 1640s when the dynastic change had just begun. Navarrete arrived in China in 1659. He experienced the disillusion of the hopes of fast conversion. While he himself had been an eyewitness to the Manchu's "kindness to the Missioners" and them "giving liberty to preach the Gospel and [...] the erecting of new Churches", he denied that they ever contributed to such projects and asserted that the many converts that Martini saw in the near future had failed to materialize in his personal experience.¹¹³ Furthermore, the additional years of war had certainly had an impact on the state of the countryside.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, we know from the change

¹⁰⁸ Navarrete (1732?, 338).

¹⁰⁹ "She that was free, is become a slave" Navarrete (1732?, 11).

¹¹⁰ "The Counsellors[sic] heart is by the emperor's side, in the same manner as a Sheep stands by a Tiger". Navarrete (1732?, 142).

¹¹¹ Navarrete (1732?, 15).

¹¹² He lauds the discipline of the Tartar armies, stating that he "would rather go through Two Armies of Tartars than one of ours" Navarrete (1732?, 270). He also praises the Qing emperors for their generous Almsgiving, asking "What could any Catholick Prince have done more glorious?" Martini (1732?, 27). Nevertheless, he views their rulership over China as ill begotten an illegitimate.

¹¹³ Navarrete (1732?, 369–370).

¹¹⁴ This and a change in the European stance might also have influenced Nieuhof's depiction.

of titles in the new editions of the *De Bello Tartarico* that the general perception of the conquest had changed.

Lach noted the discrepancy of Navarrete's depiction of the Tartars between his depiction of the conquest and elsewhere in the *Tratados*, where he puts them at the same level as sophistication as the Chinese and Japanese and writes that they should not be called barbarians.¹¹⁵ I would argue that this discrepancy existed because Lach did not differentiate between the two different concepts of "barbarian" and "tyrant". Navarrete did. While he did not think of the Manchus as "barbarians", he certainly depicted them as "tyrants". Rather than disliking them based on their lack of civilization, Navarrete's negative depiction of the Manchu was based on their tyrannical rule over the Chinese. Navarrete's fascination with the Chinese has already been noted by scholarship, and it would be safe to assume that contributed to his negative image of the Qing.¹¹⁶ However, relying solely on this explanation for explaining his distaste of the Manchu rulership over China would be an oversimplification. The seventh book in the *Tratados historicos* was dedicated exclusively to the Chinese Rites Controversy. Here, Navarrete published the various decrees associated with the Chinese Rites Controversy. He also presented a lengthy list of "reflections"¹¹⁷ and a long series of "doubts". These "doubts" are concerns and questions regarding the correct behaviour of missionaries and their converts. In these "doubts", Navarrete utilized the characterization of the Qing as "tyrants" to discredit Jesuit missionaries and the Riccian accommodation.

In the very first set of "doubts" Navarrete expressively established that "the Tartar reigning now is a tyrant" and in his commentary that "Christians are never to take part with Tyrants".¹¹⁸ Furthermore, he asked whether it would even be allowed to baptize these tyrants while they were in possession of the kingdom that was not rightfully theirs. Unsurprisingly, the answer to this question is no.¹¹⁹ By negating that possibility Navarrete created an argument that the Jesuit efforts to endear themselves to the Qing dynasty were not in accordance with Christian doctrine.

¹¹⁵ Lach and van Kley (1993, 1673).

¹¹⁶ Cummins (1993, 92) and Spence (1998, 36).

¹¹⁷ Read: Criticisms.

¹¹⁸ Navarrete (1732?, 397–398).

¹¹⁹ Navarrete (1732?, 397).

He also clearly outlined his perception of the Qing dynasty. They were tyrants and usurpers and should only be allowed to enter Christianity if they returned China to its rightful owners. It is interesting to note that Navarrete did not specify who that rightful owner might be. However, since they had usurped it from the Chinese, they are most likely considered the rightful owners. This notion is completely absent from both *De Bello Tartarico* and the *Historica Narratio* and adds the concept of “self-determination” to the aspects that constitute a “good” rule. This interpretation is not unreasonable, since this idea of self-determination had already been formulated by Johann Amos Comenius in the *Gentis Felicitas* in 1659, seventeen years before the *Tratados Historicos* was published.

6 CONCLUSION

All three texts examined are concerned to some degree with the dynastic transition between the Ming and the Qing dynasties. The two recurring concepts in their discussion of the Manchu invasion and claim to the Chinese throne are the concept of the “tyrant” and the concept of the “barbarian”. Both Martini and Schall relate that the Chinese thought of the Manchus as barbarians. The same, however, does not hold true for the European missionaries. Martini and Schall refer to the Manchu’s moral virtues and their benevolent rule to negate this assertion. Navarrete, who in contrast to Martini and Schall did not think of the Qing as a legitimate dynasty, nevertheless did not describe them as “barbarians”, since they lived orderly and were in possession of reasonable laws. Having examined the depictions of what constitutes a barbarian or differentiates someone from being barbarian, it is safe to assert, that the three missionaries shared a general idea of what a “barbarian” was. While connotations of violent behaviour are not entirely absent, this idea corresponds roughly with what Osterhammel refers to as the “third type” of barbarism that refers to a community whose lifestyle lacks “civilization”. However, there is a connection between the Manchus and “barbarians”. In their depiction in *De Bello Tartarico*, they exhibit barbaric traits, which only subside once they had entered China and assumed the throne. Their relatives,

the “western Tartars” are described as less civilized and more barbaric in nature.¹²⁰

All three sources discussed therefore presented Europe with knowledge on a “civilized” people, whose claim to the Chinese empire, however, was detached from their level of “civilization”.

The other concept of rulership that is repeatedly employed by all three writers is that of the “tyrant”, who is seen as the epitome of a bad ruler. While none of them volunteered a definition, one can derive general characteristics of what constituted a “tyranny” from their accounts. The main shared characteristic of the “tyrant” is his willingness to use force to ensure the continuation of his rule, neglecting a more “soft-power” approach as it is described in *De Bello Tartarico* when Martini writes of the Tartars winning over the Chinese by benevolence and good treatment. Additionally, the concept seems to be tied to the notion that the tyrant is not a rightful ruler. This is best exemplified in Navarrete’s “doubts”, where the issue is explicitly discussed. Inferences can be made in *De Bello Tartarico* and the *Historica Narratio* who mostly reserve the term “tyrant” for Li Zicheng, who unrightfully conquered Beijing and claimed the throne. Martini’s descriptions of the late Ming government also bore some resemblances of a tyranny, as he repeatedly highlighted the strictness of the court and its suppression of the officials and governors. However, he never explicitly referred to it as a “tyranny”.

While all three authors agree that the Manchu’s are not “barbarians”, they do not agree on the legitimacy of the Qing dynasty. Both Martini and Schall, asserted the legitimacy of the Qing by relating their “good” rulership and how they managed to win the support of the Chinese governors through their virtues. There is, however, a slight difference in their descriptions of the initial conquest. Martini mentioned that the Tartars had long since planned to take over the kingdom of China and simply refused to leave after ousting Li Zicheng from Beijing. In the *Historica Narratio*, this episode, which could be interpreted as damaging the legitimacy of the new dynasty, is not mentioned. Instead, the Qing are invited into the city and only claim the throne after they had assured themselves that they were only following the wishes of the populace. This difference in perception can be explained by Schall’s personal experience. He

¹²⁰ Osterhammel (2013, 299). For implications of violence see the use of the adjective “barbarous” in Navarrete (1732?, 10) as well as Martini’s description of them relinquishing the barbaric practice of sacrifice Martini (1654a, 9).

was present in Beijing in 1644 and experienced the interregnum of Li Zicheng. In comparison to the latter, the Qing must have appeared as saviours and that is reflected in his description of their arrival. One must also take into account that Schall was almost immediately immersed in the Qing court, where he would have heard the official Qing narratives of their claim to the throne. Martini, in comparison, had to rely on second-hand accounts for this episode in the dynastic transition, since he was in southern China when Beijing was captured. That might have led to him having access to a slightly different narrative of events, in which the Manchus were depicted in a less favourable light.

In contrast to the aforementioned accounts, Navarrete's description of the new dynasty is vastly different. Instead of depicting the Qing as a new, legitimate dynasty of "good" rulers, he decidedly characterized them as "tyrants". Surprisingly, he does not use this term for Li Zicheng, who is only referred to as a "robber" despite the atrocities he committed.¹²¹ There are multiple explanations for this change. Firstly, Navarrete had no desire to defend the Jesuit mission and therefore no reason to support the new dynasty. Secondly, as was already discussed in the chapter concerned with the *Tratados históricos*, denouncing the Qing dynasty allowed Navarrete to attack and criticize the Jesuit mission, which had supported them. The difference between Navarrete's depiction of Li Zicheng and the Qing allows for another interpretation. The Qing are seen as worse and as "tyrants" because they are foreign.

Besides those larger narratives, the individual curiosities of the authors also created different interpretations of the conquest. Martini saw the dynastic transition as divine providence in God's plan for the conversion of China. This notion is unique to *De Bello Tartarico*. Navarrete interpreted the dynastic change as devastating, subjecting the highly esteemed Chinese to the rule of a "tyrant". He is far less curious about the history of the new dynasty since he considered them illegitimate. Instead, his attention is directed towards the cruelty of the conquest and the impact the war had on the cities in China. For Schall, the dynastic transition seemed to be of much less importance. He did not attach any greater narratives to it, except noting that the Tartars might be more suited to conversion. Instead, it is portrayed as nothing more than a period of

¹²¹ Navarrete (1732, 10).

unrest, which, although very dangerous and terrifying, gave way to life as usual once the new dynasty had established itself.

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Travels in a Haunted House. Rational Curiosities and Overlapping Dichotomies in Duncan McPherson MD's Account of the 'Chinese Expedition' of 1840–1842

Ruairidh J. Brown

1 INTRODUCTION

The 'Haunted House' is a stock, commonly recurring structural setting for ghost stories. In such narratives, the setting of a house, a local usually comfortable and familiar to the reader, is distorted by a spectral presence making all 'not as it should be'.¹ Subsequently 'haunted house' tales usually involve a central protagonist who must dispel this spectral distortion, either by transforming himself, such as with Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, or, more commonly, by addressing the

¹ Wolfreys (2002, 18).

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force which has disrupted the order of things, as in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. 'The time is out of joint', declared the titular Hamlet. 'O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right!'²

The 'haunted house' is interestingly also the image evoked by the British Army Surgeon Duncan McPherson MD in his account of the military expedition to China between 1840 and 1842. Casting the British as bold adventurers voyaging into an enchanted land to lift a sorcerer's spell, he dramatically states on the first page of his narrative:

Few boys will venture into a Haunted House, although it interfere materially with their comforts; but how many would congregate to see the one bold adventurer daring to enter its precincts, and endeavouring to dissolve the spell!³

Such framing is interesting as it initially impresses upon the reader notions of encounters with 'mysterious others' being recalled by a bold and heroic 'self'. At first glance, such phrasing would also appear as a classical example of orientalism: an effort to depict the peoples and lands of the 'east' as the mystic and irrational opposite of the Enlightened and progressive 'west'.⁴ However, as this chapter will endeavour to demonstrate, such first impressions are misleading. In fact, McPherson's account offers a far more nuanced construction of both China and, indeed, the British who venture into it. What 'haunts' China equally haunts the British, and what unites and divides humanity is far more fluid than orientalist dichotomies would hypothesise.

What this chapter will in particular seek to reveal is the multi-layered nature of McPherson's account. There is at first a moralistic narrative of British intervention liberating the Chinese people from the archaic practices of the Qing Empire, a narrative that is incredibly bombastic and polemic and is most evident in the opening and closing of his account. There is however another layer of more objective rational curiosity and reflection which makes up the bulk and main body of McPherson's account. The findings revealed are notably more nuanced and sober than the polemic bookends of the text and which unsettle the rigid

² Shakespeare (2008).

³ McPherson (2013, 9).

⁴ For orientalism see especially Said (1978, 78).

dichotomies of identity and hierarchies of knowledge that are suggested by the text's moralising and polemic bookends.

In uncovering this multi-layered nature of McPherson's account, this chapter will be primarily hermeneutic in nature. It will seek not to reconstruct the events of the Chinese Expedition itself nor chronologically assess McPherson's experiences within it. By contrast, it will seek to explore the perception of the world which our author's actions occurred in—what Hans-Georg Gadamer would term his 'historical horizon'⁵—and how his experiences both helped shape, and were shaped by, this framework of understanding. In doing so, it will explore the two fundamental categories of history outlined by Reinhart Koselleck: 'expectations'—the transcendent framework of understanding which gives meaning and purpose to one's actions in historical time, in this case, the polemical moral justification for Britain's intervention in China—and 'experiences'—the immanent encounters one has within the time-space continuum which shape, reinforce, and distort our transcending sense of purpose, in McPherson's case his direct experiences in China during the expedition.⁶ Understanding the interplay between these categories will be fundamental to understanding the relationship between the different layers of McPherson's account and how this in turn effects the identities of the actors in his narrative and the knowledge it constructs of China and the British expedition of 1840-2.

2 THE CHINESE EXPEDITION: A MORAL DUTY

McPherson opens his account by comparing the British to explorers venturing into a haunted house determined to free it from the 'spell' that distorts it. Such introduction immediately suggests a division between 'enlightened west' and 'enchanted east'. It also casts the British as the protagonists of the story and their mission as heroic and moral; they appear as Hamlet, tasked with putting time back 'into joint'.

⁵ Gadamer (2012, 301–302).

⁶ Koselleck's distinction is best illustrated in the essay "'Space of Experience" and "Horizon of Expectation": Two Historical Categories'. Available in English in Koselleck (2004).

Such depiction is characteristic of the moralising tone of McPherson's opening and closing chapters. The British expedition to China is introduced in the first chapter as opening a new era 'in the moral history of nations'.⁷ The account concludes by asserting that the Treaty of Nanking:

paved the way for the utter extinction of the exclusive-ness and idea of supremacy hitherto insisted upon by the Celestial Empire and we have laid open the most valuable mart of commerce to the world at large.⁸

Such overtly moralistic and verbose claims will undoubtedly be looked upon with cynicism by modern readers. The Chinese Expedition—or the 'First Opium War' as it is now more commonly known—is frequently interpreted as an attempt by the British to push opium on the Chinese people, with moralistic defences for the campaign dismissed as a smoke-screen for British material interests.⁹ As Alan Lester, in a widely shared opinion piece, has argued: 'free trade... was used to force China to continue accepting opium imports against its will'.¹⁰

Yet, to dismiss McPherson out of hand in such a way would be to impede our ability to properly engage with and interpret his account. To dismiss his views as merely a smokescreen for British material ambition would be to regard him as either a liar or a fool who had been tricked by the lies of others. Both such positions would prevent us from properly engaging and considering his account and how knowledge of

⁷ McPherson (2013, 9).

⁸ McPherson (2013, 122).

⁹ For examples of the Opium trade being at the foremost of modern British understanding of the conflict see for example see the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the National Army Museum which explain the origins of the conflict predominantly as a dispute over the drug: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Opium-Wars>; <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/opium-war-1839-1842>. See also *The Conversation* which has ran a series of articles challenging the 'benevolent' image of the British Empire. Examples focusing in the Opium War include: Lester A. (2016), 'Britain should stop trying to pretend that its empire was benevolent', *The Conversation*, Available at: <https://theconversation.com/britain-should-stop-trying-to-pretend-that-its-empire-was-benevolent-59298>; Neal S. (2017), 'The Commonwealth and Britain: the trouble with 'Empire 2.0'', *The Conversation*, Available at: <https://theconversation.com/the-commonwealth-and-britain-the-trouble-with-empire-2-0-73707>.

¹⁰ Lester (2016).

China, and indeed Britain, is constructed.¹¹ It is important thus to suspend modern prejudgements about the Anglo-Chinese conflict and instead begin by considering the contemporary understanding in which McPherson's account is rooted.

To best appreciate the historical understanding in which McPherson's account is situated in we might begin by considering the sources of his knowledge of China. There are three notable sources which McPherson refers to in his account: the periodical *The China Repository*; the Pomeranian Missionary Karl Gützlaff; and the English Missionary Henry Medhurst.

The Chinese Repository was Canton's leading English language periodical. The periodical is notable for framing the need for military intervention as a moral duty in the lead up to the expedition, calling on European powers—especially Britain—to liberate the Chinese people from the archaic practices of the Qing Empire by forcing it to open up to international trade. Stressing the moral humanitarian need for military intervention, it declared the need for intervention by Britain as a 'moral duty'.¹²

McPherson is clearly aware of *The Chinese Repository*, declaring it an 'excellent periodical' in the preface.¹³ More than this, the preface also declares that two of McPherson's chapters had already been published in this very periodical. This may very well explain McPherson's focus on the 'moral duty' of the expedition: in bookending the account this way, he is identifying with the editorial line of a journal in which he has previously published. The aim of the opening and closing of the account to situate it within the moral position propagated by *The Chinese Repository* would also be reinforced when one compares the overtly moralising opening and conclusion of the account with the much more grounded and balanced tone of substantial main chapters.

The 'moral' nature of the expedition is also reflected in the work of Gützlaff. Gützlaff had worked as a missionary in China whilst also lending

¹¹ As Gadamer remarks, in order to properly understand a text we need to allow it 'to tell us something, and this requires us to allow our historical witness to speak on his terms'. Gadamer (2012, 271).

¹² The Chinese repository, Canton: Printed for the proprietors. Available Online by the Hathi Trust Digital Library: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000541105/Cite>.

¹³ McPherson (2013, 7).

his services to the Opium dealers.¹⁴ The Pomeranian also published an influential account of his travels in 1834. Gützlaff was an advocate of opening China to global trade, remarking:

unshackled commercial operations will be of mutual benefit... foreigners and Chinese, as inhabitants of the same globe, and Children of the same creator, have an equal claim to amiable intercourse, and free reciprocal communication.¹⁵

Gützlaff further believed that free trade would assist his overall aim of introducing Christianity to China, which would replace their idolatry and superstition. Indeed, the idolatry and superstition of the Chinese is a theme Gützlaff would labour, remarking many of the habits of the Chinese were the ‘offspring of blind superstition’. He also, through his discussion of Chinese religion, stresses the notion of the Chinese are enslaved by custom: they have no true grasp of spirituality, ‘They are religious, because custom bids them to be so’.¹⁶

McPherson refers to Gützlaff as an authority in China, though he does not cite his work directly. It should indeed be noted that McPherson’s knowledge of Gützlaff’s views could have come as much from personal acquaintance as from reading his works: Gützlaff served as a British agent during the expedition, notably filling the double role of magistrate and spymaster during the occupation of Ningpo.¹⁷ Regardless of how he became familiarised, it is nonetheless doubtless that McPherson was knowledgeable about the missionary-come-spy-master’s views.

The other authority that McPherson directly references is Walter Henry Medhurst. Medhurst was an English missionary to China whose book, *China: Its State and Prospects*, was highly influential amongst missionaries. Medhurst, in contrast to Gützlaff, was a critique of the Opium trade and of European expansion.¹⁸ Observing the aggressive and

¹⁴ Lovell (2011, 27–28).

¹⁵ Gützlaff (1840, 88).

¹⁶ Gützlaff (1840, 286–287).

¹⁷ Lovell (2011, 198–199). In order to fully open ourselves to the horizon in which McPherson (2013) speaks from, place names have not been altered to match their modern titles. Thus Amoy is used rather than Xiamen; Canton rather than Guangzhou; ‘Canton River’ rather than ‘Pearl River’; ‘Ningpo’ rather than Ningbo, and so on.

¹⁸ Medhurst (1838, 85).

exploitive behaviour of the European Empires, the missionary remarked that who could blame the Chinese for shutting the door to these ‘barbarians’: ‘if China is closed against us, we may thank ourselves for it’.¹⁹ Furthermore, despite much of the opinion at the time, Medhurst insists China is an advanced civilised nation, describing in detail Chinese industry and the discovery of products like porcelain and gunpowder long before Europeans.²⁰

Yet, despite praising Chinese skill in crafts, Medhurst echoes Gützlaff’s view of Chinese custom. He remarks on the ‘sinfulness’ and superstition of China and laments this will make conversion a ‘Herculean Task’.²¹ He notes that Taoists, ‘like the Athenians of old’, are ‘in all things far too superstitious’. He also gives details about customs that pander to the supernatural, such as the practice of providing for ghosts: ‘[they] must not only feed them, once in a year, but supply them with cash’.²² He also discussed the ‘infernal practice’ of female infanticide, which he assures his readers does exist, though attributes this ‘abominable custom’ to poverty rather than superstition.²³

McPherson mentions Medhurst only once, citing him as an authority on the population of China.²⁴ Familiarity with his work is however suggested by how many of the surgeon’s general remarks about the Chinese map on to the major themes of Medhurst’s *China*. McPherson’s remark that the ‘manufacture of paper and gunpowder, glass and porcelain ware, and the art of printing were all known to them long before they came into use among us more civilised nations’, for example, reflect significant topics in Medhurst’s book where he discusses the development of each craft in detail.²⁵

¹⁹ Medhurst (1838, 116–117).

²⁰ Medhurst (1838, 87–101).

²¹ Medhurst (1838, 69).

²² Medhurst (1838, 167, 178).

²³ Medhurst (1838, 45–49).

²⁴ McPherson (2013, 9).

²⁵ Medhurst’s Fifth Chapter ‘The Civilisation of China’ includes dedicated discussion to the invention of gunpowder, porcelain, and paper amongst other things. It is interesting to note that this section also includes a discussion on surgery which, as will be discussed, is a central curiosity of McPherson’s. Yet McPherson makes not reference to this. The answer to this may be that Medhurst dismisses Chinese knowledge of medicine to ‘quackery’, and thus perhaps McPherson, a recognised medical expert trained at the University of

To this it also may be added that the one reference in McPherson's account to Christianity—a remark in the conclusion suggesting the expedition may prove 'instrumental in sowing the seeds of Christianity'²⁶—may also reflect the influence of missionaries on McPherson's understanding. The prospects of spreading Christianity to China were of course overriding concerns of both Medhurst and Gützlaff, the former indeed titling his work as 'with especial reference to the spread of the gospel'.

It is notable however that the general picture of China McPherson would have got from his sources is that of an archaic, indeed, 'backward' civilisation that had fallen behind that of European nations. This had led to the belief that a war with China to force engagement with wider world had become a 'moral duty'. This view was not universal, and a more negative perspective of aggressive European policy to China would have been available to McPherson via Medhurst. Yet even Medhurst conveys strongly the idea that China is in a state of inertia and is gripped by superstition, with the notable stories of ghosts. From such sources, it is thus understandable how McPherson could view China as a 'haunted house': it had a clear reputation of being a land still under the thrall of supernatural superstition and not yet blessed with the enlightening influence of European civilisation. McPherson also, despite the reservations of writers like Medhurst, shares and reiterates the position of the *Chinese Repository* that it was a moral duty to free China from these shackles of archaic custom.

What these bookends subsequently provide is the 'expectations' of McPherson's historical time: the view that the British intervention was a moral duty and was working for the liberation of the Chinese. This is notably not just an expectation of McPherson's but one spread across a number of western writings and propagated by periodicals such as the *China Repository*. In his bookends, McPherson thus clearly seeks to make evident and situate his work within this understanding of the British mission. What we must now thus consider is whether the more nuanced and sober layer recounting McPherson's actual experiences in China reinforce or distort this moral narrative.

Edinburgh, believed he could learn nothing from it and thus took no interest. Nonetheless, this is just conjecture, though the absence of commentary is notable. For Medhurst on surgery see McPherson (2013, 111–112).

²⁶ McPherson (2013, 122).

3 THE CURIOUS SURGEON

Whilst McPherson may share and appeal to these grander narrative interpretations of the British expedition, when one gets into the main body of the text, one finds such frameworks fade into the background and McPherson's own encounters and adventures take centre stage. Neither are these anecdotal encounters always driven by the grand themes of moral duty but, more frequently, by his own personal curiosities.²⁷

McPherson was a medical expert of some note. Serving predominantly in British India, McPherson rose to Inspector General of the medical service of Madras. Here his most notable accomplishment would be the improvement of sanitary conditions. His accomplishments would result in him being decorated by Queen Victoria with the Imperial insignia of the Order of Medjidia, the only medical officer to be so decorated.²⁸

Giving such expertise, it is not surprising to find much of McPherson's curiosity to be of a medical nature.²⁹ It is subsequently through the lens of 'medical curiosity' that many of his encounters are framed. This is most evident in McPherson's interest in 'small feet' women, something he declares himself 'most anxious to see and examine' and the 'chief curiosity' in Macao.³⁰ By 'small feet' women, McPherson is denoting those who had gone through the process of foot binding.

McPherson eventually gets to interview a 'small foot' woman during a particularly 'tiresome' period of negotiation. The surgeon only refers to these diplomatic manoeuvres in the slightest of detail, instead choosing to elaborate on his encounter and subsequent 'examination'.³¹ Indeed, the 'interview' is the longest anecdote of the whole account. In one aspect, the encounter is a light-hearted comedy of errors: McPherson has to overcome language barriers; the woman is reluctant to show her foot, and McPherson subsequently feels cheated; he eventually convinces her

²⁷ It is notable that McPherson's military campaigns often give him opportunity to engage in his own curiosities. Whilst serving in Crimean War, for example, he would take the opportunity to engage in archaeological research. The result was a published book: McPherson (1857).

²⁸ See Bob Carruthers' biographical note in McPherson (2013, 5).

²⁹ This vantage point is most clearly directed at his assessment of British command, which I will consider in detail section four.

³⁰ McPherson (2013, 27).

³¹ McPherson (2013, 26).

to show him through assurances that his interests are purely medical in nature accompanied by ‘the best placebo’—a bribe. Upon seeing the foot, McPherson then proceeds in a more blunt and sombre tone. The procedure, the surgeon hypothesises, must have been a ‘partial amputation’ that has left a ‘bone protruding’ where the big toe should be.³²

McPherson however does not only provide medical description, but also expresses his opinion on the custom. It is, he leaves the reader in no doubt, a ‘barbarous practice’.³³ He describes the woman’s feet repeatedly as a ‘deformity’ and remarks that these ‘poor creatures’ are ‘invariably crippled’. Indeed, the idea that the custom ‘cripples’—and therefore deforms—is repeatedly pressed upon the reader. ‘Small-footed woman’ are never described as ‘walking’, but always ‘tottering’; ‘stump about’; and ‘hobbled’. He concluded they ‘remind me of... a boy walking on stilts’.³⁴

Whilst not hiding his disapproval of the practice, it is nonetheless notable that McPherson does not adopt a moralising tone, as is found in the opening and closing chapters. Rather, his assessment is much more in the manner of a blunt straight-talking medical professional. Nor, notably, does McPherson use this encounter to labour a point about Chinese barbarity *in particular*. Rather, he equates the practice with the more universal tendencies of cultures to irrationally deform the body as to aspire to misconceived societal perceptions of beauty. Indeed, he compares the practice not only to the ‘flattening of the heads among the natives of Columbia’ but also, tellingly, the custom of ‘squeezing the wastes of English women out of all natural shape’.³⁵

Another key theme McPherson’s medical curiosity gives him a unique perspective on is Opium, the drug receiving its own dedicated chapter towards the end of the account.³⁶ This chapter is notable for its rapid dismissal of the idea that the opium trade was a major cause of the war, restating instead the moralistic perspective which bookends the account. Nonetheless, this is done incredibly briefly, McPherson instead using most

³² McPherson (2013, 26–29).

³³ McPherson (2013, 29).

³⁴ McPherson (2013, 26–29).

³⁵ McPherson (2013, 29).

³⁶ It is Chapter XXI of the account.

of the chapter to consider the drug from the perspective of medical curiosity.

Such curiosity indeed prompts McPherson to do some self-experimentation: ‘I had the curiosity to try the effects of a few pipes myself’.³⁷ This experimentation, coupled with his observations of the Chinese people—the Chinese workman is both physically and mentally superior to the British working class³⁸—leads him to conclude, if used in moderation, opium does not have serious health effects. Indeed, alcohol, he assures his readers, is a far more dangerous pastime and has a far more corrosive effect on society; opium smokers are ‘not so disgusting to the beholder as that of the sottish, salving drunkard’.³⁹

McPherson is however more concerned with stressing the benefits of the use of opium for medical science. ‘There is no disease in which opium may not be employed’, he states emphatically, ‘nor do we know of any substance that can supply its place’.⁴⁰ The drug is used in Bengal ‘as a substitute for quinine’ and was also used to treat the fevers that ‘prevailed so extensively amongst our troops in Hong Kong’.⁴¹ His curiosity in, and perspective of, opium smoking is thus directed from the perspective of its medical value, the surgeon subsequently concluding its benefits for the advancement of medical science far outweigh the risks and dangers caused by those few who choose to abuse the drug.

McPherson’s medical perspective and knowledge allows him to conveniently dismiss certain criticisms of the war and thus avoid dwelling on some of the more controversial aspects of the expedition. It also however reveals the perspective that McPherson adopts for much of his assessment of experiences: that of an objective enlightened and scientific mind giving balanced assessment on the practices and behaviours he encounters. This is clear in his view of opium, as he seeks to give fair assessment through observation and self-experiment. It also informs observations of practices like foot binding, where McPherson frames his interest as stemming from medical curiosity and condemns it on the grounds of physiological damage. This discussion notably does not labour an ‘orientalist’ view

³⁷ McPherson (2013, 114–115).

³⁸ McPherson (2013, 115).

³⁹ McPherson (2013, 116).

⁴⁰ McPherson (2013, 116).

⁴¹ McPherson (2013, 116).

of the inferiority of the Chinese in particular, but rather is put in the context of the suffering of women *across cultures*, including Europeans, in the name of ‘beauty’.

4 THE ‘UNCANNY’ CHINESE

Having thus sketched the historical horizon in which McPherson’s journey occurred in as well as the specific curiosities that framed and motivated his encounters, we may consider the image of China that is constructed in his account.

McPherson attempts to convey the general ‘character’ of China to his readers in the very first Chapter. The picture drawn here is notably inconsistent. In one sense, McPherson depicts the Chinese as a complete ‘other’, dramatically opposite to Europeans in every conceivable way: ‘his port lays west-north’; on a compass ‘he describes the needle as pointing south’; ‘he commences at what we would consider the end of the book’; at funerals ‘they dress in white’ whilst at weddings ‘nothing can be heard but sobbing and crying’.⁴² In addition to this apparently odd world-view, it is also impressed upon the reader that the Chinese are deeply superstitious: worship of ancestors is rigorously enforced; all ‘consult their joss, or god, before commencing any undertaking of importance’; many believe ‘in the transfiguration of souls’, a process which can go terribly wrong if the proper funeral rights are not carried out’.⁴³ McPherson also adds to this the observation that: ‘much duplicity and craft may come to light from amongst the upper classes’ whilst ‘much low cunning, and treachery, and selfishness, may be found lurking beneath the garb of the lower order’.⁴⁴ The Chinese are:

Haughty, cruel, and hypocritical, they despise all nations but their own; they regard themselves as faultless... they style all foreigners barbarians... No argument will induce a Chinamen to adopt a different style of reasoning.⁴⁵

⁴² McPherson (2013, 10).

⁴³ McPherson (2013, 11).

⁴⁴ McPherson (2013, 9).

⁴⁵ McPherson (2013, 10).

Yet, amongst this seemingly negative list of Chinese characteristics, there is also listed many positive traits: in ‘private life, they excel many other nations’; ‘there are no castes among them, consequently the great barrier between man and man... is altogether done away with’; ‘the passing stranger is at all times welcome to partake of the poorest man’s fare’.⁴⁶ Their craftsmanship is also highly praised.⁴⁷ McPherson remarks Chinese ‘guns are of in many instances equal to any of European manufacture’ and ‘their industry and never-ending perseverance enable them to build extensive and powerful batteries’.⁴⁸ Fortunately, for the British, the Chinese being ‘not a warlike race’, were unable to use this to their advantage.⁴⁹ Such differing positive and negative viewpoints of the Chinese mingled together in one chapter subsequently creates a very disorientating perception for the reader and results in contradictions. McPherson describes the lower order as treacherous and selfish *and* remarks that the poorest Chinese man would share his lot with a stranger: the Chinese are at once selfish and generous.

Explanation for this is found in the fact that, in his opening account, McPherson is not relaying his own experience but summarising the accounts of others.⁵⁰ As discussed, McPherson explicitly states familiarity with the *Chinese Repository* as well as Gützlaff and Medhurst and it is highly likely that it is information from these sources that the surgeon relays. Chinese superstition, for example, is a prominent theme of both Gützlaff and Medhurst. Equally, as was noted, McPherson’s discussion of Chinese crafts resembles Medhurst’s major themes.

Noting that such information comes from other sources certainly explains McPherson’s often paradoxical first depiction of the Chinese people. It also however provides somewhat of a framework to McPherson’s discourse as it adds additional points of curiosity to his medical interests. The notion that the Chinese are skilled craftsmen, for example, results in McPherson investigating the quality of Chinese forts and artillery as to confirm their ‘very superior manufacture’.⁵¹ After the fall of

⁴⁶ McPherson (2013, 10).

⁴⁷ McPherson (2013, 11).

⁴⁸ McPherson (2013, 11).

⁴⁹ McPherson (2013, 11).

⁵⁰ McPherson (2013, 9).

⁵¹ McPherson (2013, 107).

the Bocca Tigris McPherson indeed gives detailed anecdote of his findings in the Chinese forts as to give ‘proof of the ingenuity of the Chinese’:

[S]ome guns which had been spiked and deprived of their trunnions at Cheumpee, were here recognised, mounted on carriages, having had a vent-hole boarded on the opposite side, and a strong iron hoop, with trunnions attached, placed on the centre of the piece.⁵²

Of course, that the Chinese had such impressive military craftsmanship and architecture, yet still lost to the British, requires explanation. McPherson provides this with the view that the Chinese did not know how to effectively use their weaponry.⁵³ Thus, seemingly confirming the view that the Chinese were ‘unwarlike’.

Caution should however be taken that such comments are not interpreted as McPherson claiming that the Chinese are ‘effeminate’ (‘feminisation’ of the East of course being considered a central technique of orientalism).⁵⁴ On the contrary, McPherson frequently describes the Chinese as a ‘brave’, ‘determined’, and, notably, ‘manly’.⁵⁵ Indeed, some of the most striking images of martial valour depicted are of the Chinese: Admiral Kwan advancing alone on British forces ‘brandishing his double-handed sword’⁵⁶; the last stand General Keo and his men who stuck ‘to him to the last’⁵⁷; the unnamed soldier described as ‘boldly waving his flag in spite of British naval cannonade’ until a ‘32 pounder shot finished his career’.⁵⁸

McPherson’s assessment that the Chinese could not effectively repel the British is instead more a reflection of Qing leadership. McPherson makes considerable note of the poor quality of Imperial leadership and the divisions between many Mandarin officers and Chinese soldiers. This is particularly evident at the battles on the Canton River, where McPherson

⁵² McPherson (2013, 53).

⁵³ McPherson (2013, 47).

⁵⁴ See again Said (1978). An example of western literature ‘feminising’ Asian persons can be found in James Mill’s *A History of British India*, where the effeminate nature of the ‘Hindu’s’ is frequently stressed. Mill (1826).

⁵⁵ McPherson (2013, 53, 54, 77, 102).

⁵⁶ McPherson (2013, 52).

⁵⁷ McPherson (2013, 102–103).

⁵⁸ McPherson (2013, 102).

notes how, to his surprise, the Chinese forts opened fire on their own boats. This, he would later learn, was an act of retribution by the common soldiers against their Mandarin commanders who had fled on boats after locking the common soldiers in the forts to hasten their escape.⁵⁹ A similar division existed within the city of Canton itself, where Tartar and Chinese troops had been engaged in a de facto civil war in which ‘Tartar troops ate the flesh of the Chinese that were slain’.⁶⁰

Another characteristic that McPherson appears to confirm in his experiences is the superstitious nature of the Chinese. He describes how British steamships were referred to by the Chinese as ‘*devil ships*’ and believed to have supernatural powers. Indeed, McPherson records this belief in Britain’s ‘unnatural powers’ as critical in convincing the emperor to accept the Treaty of Nanking.⁶¹ Caution should be taken here as clearly some of these claims do not derive from direct experiences. Whilst McPherson may have heard some Chinese refer to steamships as ‘devil ships’ he was not privy to the thoughts of the emperor. Indeed, McPherson had already left China when the Treaty of Nanking was signed.⁶²

Where McPherson does however directly experience Chinese superstition is during a typhoon in Hong Kong. McPherson recording how the ‘natives were running widely about, vainly beseeching succour from their Gods’.⁶³ This seems to have confirmed to McPherson the view that the Chinese were superstitious as well as offered an opportunity to compare them to the technologically minded British: the Chinese detected the storm by ‘indications’ and the British by their barometers. On this occasion though, both were right.⁶⁴

One might observe that, though his readings may have provided extra curiosity beyond medical issues, they are investigated in the same ‘examinatory’ manner. McPherson hears of something, his curiosity is peaked, and he seeks out to examine and give perspective on it. The Chinese are indeed superior craftsmen, he observes. Their inability to repel the British is due to internal division and poor Qing leadership, he diagnoses.

⁵⁹ McPherson (2013, 51).

⁶⁰ McPherson (2013, 75).

⁶¹ McPherson (2013, 122).

⁶² McPherson (2013, 119).

⁶³ McPherson (2013, 85).

⁶⁴ McPherson (2013, 85).

It is also notable that, though giving normative perspective, there is not the same ‘moralising’ that there is in the account bookends. The Hong Kong Islanders are superstitious, that is verified, but McPherson does not labour this into a point of British superiority, he just observes differences in approach. Indeed, McPherson even appears to empathise, remarking ‘the last days of Hong Kong seemed to be approaching. It was a grand but truly awful sight’.⁶⁵ Nor does McPherson ignore aspects of Hong Kong organisation that are superior to the British, such as building shelter in the storm and dressing appropriately for the tropical climate.⁶⁶ This makes a clear distinction between McPherson’s moralising in the bookends and the curious investigations that make up the bulk of the account. It would lead to the suggestion that such moralising was aimed at alignment with current literature, whilst the actual construction of knowledge about China takes a more detached and balanced approach free from such moral baggage.

Nonetheless, what perhaps is the overarching narrative of McPherson’s encounters with the ordinary Chinese is their growing friendliness and welcoming nature. At Chusan, despite initially hiding, the Chinese did ‘gradually regaining confidence, return’, the attraction of the *dollar* and the *rupee* being particularly effective in winning them over. It was not long before the British were being referred to as ‘*fokee*, the Chinese word for friend’.⁶⁷ Such a process is repeated in other localities visited, most notably, Ningpo where local citizens were described as being incredibly friendly and even assisted with the removal of barriers erected by the Qing army.⁶⁸

Such friendliness leads McPherson to make further diagnosis: that the Chinese are welcoming of British intervention. In Canton McPherson judges hundreds would be glad to join the British if they had ‘encouragement’.⁶⁹ In Chusan, McPherson records that the locals demonstrated knowledge and praise for the British Empire.⁷⁰ The citizens of Ningpo

⁶⁵ McPherson (2013, 85).

⁶⁶ McPherson (2013, 83). British poor organisation will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

⁶⁷ McPherson (2013, 15).

⁶⁸ McPherson (2013, 108–109).

⁶⁹ McPherson (2013, 42).

⁷⁰ McPherson (2013, 99).

‘openly expressed a wish to be taken altogether under British protection’.⁷¹ The friendliness of the local Cantonese towards the British is indeed one of the key factors McPherson gives for the de facto civil war that breaks out in the city. Tensions seemingly began when Qing officials sought to record who had been frequenting the British ships. Fearful of retribution, the people assaulted and overcame the officials, subsequently boiling the lead Mandarin alive whilst sending his deputies into the river on boats primed ‘with combustibles of every description’.⁷² The fact that injured Chinese believed British medical staff were in fact torturers meanwhile impressed upon McPherson an idea of how cruel the Mandarin officials could be to those who defied them.⁷³

Such description does notably veer towards the ‘liberation’ narrative of the opening and close of the account. Nonetheless, it should be noted McPherson does not really labour this narrative here nor does he use verbose polemic language. Rather he keeps his dryer and detached observational tone. Indeed, it almost reads as if his experiences are verifying the view that the expedition would be for the benefit of the ordinary Chinese people, thus fitting with the curiosity-driven scientific tone of the main body of the text rather than the polemic bookends.

It also crucially reveals much about how McPherson constructs his perception of the Chinese. Contrary to the opening remarks, it is evident that he does not see them as some complete ‘other’ who is utterly different and alien to all things British. Similar interests and desires consistently manifest as McPherson’s encounters with the Chinese develop, most notably an appreciation for craftwork and a desire to trade. What is clearly evident in the many light-hearted conversations and interactions McPherson vividly recounts is that the Chinese are a people whom one can engage; converse; build a rapport; and even have a laugh with. This reveals a common humanity that McPherson clearly feels with the Chinese he encounters. Amongst McPherson’s last words is notably an expression that the Chinese are a ‘skilful and intelligent people’.⁷⁴

It also however reveals what, in McPherson’s eyes, divides the Chinese and the British. This is most evidently the Qing Imperial regime which is

⁷¹ McPherson (2013, 117).

⁷² McPherson (2013, 37).

⁷³ McPherson (2013, 56).

⁷⁴ McPherson (2013, 122).

committed to preventing the Chinese trade with the outside world and, in the process, oppresses and holds back its people. Beyond this however, at a deeper level, what evidently separates the British and the Chinese is the latter's strange customs and beliefs.⁷⁵

These factors which unite and separate the Chinese and British are particularly well illustrated in McPherson's anecdotal account of the 'foundling-house' of Amoy. It is here that McPherson finds 'evidence' of the 'horrible crime of killing [...] female offspring'. McPherson notes:

not far from the foundling-house, in a tank covered with duckweed, a number of new-born babies were found sewed up in mats; these, apparently, had been drowned.⁷⁶

The anecdote is interesting in two ways. Firstly, it follows McPherson's investigative approach to phenomena he had clearly heard about and sought to verify himself. Indeed, he notes his finding reveals that 'there appears to be some truth in this accusation'.⁷⁷ This reflects very much Medhurst's insistence that infanticide was practised in China, despite the doubts of Europeans.⁷⁸ McPherson's words indeed imply he himself likely doubted that such a practice could truly be carried out and was subsequently driven by curiosity to uncover the truth for himself. Sadly, on this occasion, Medhurst's claims were confirmed.

Secondly, read against the larger discussion of Amoy, it makes for interesting reading on how McPherson constructs his depiction of the Chinese as a whole. The findings in the foundling-house are noticeably followed by a positive note on local merchants, whom McPherson records had great acquaintance with European customs and manners; showed knowledge of the British Empire, Singapore in particular; and spoke in favour of

⁷⁵ This is also reflected in McPherson's thoughts on the Indian soldiers serving in the British Army. McPherson often reflects with pride how Indian and European (British) troops share in a common humanity when serving. When divisions and problems emerge, this is almost always due to the influence of archaic customs, most notably the Indian caste system. See for example McPherson (2013, 73).

⁷⁶ McPherson (2013, 99).

⁷⁷ McPherson (2013, 99).

⁷⁸ Medhurst (1838, 45–49).

the British Empire.⁷⁹ This friendly encounter creates a strange juxtaposition with the previous encounter that is the closest to the ‘horror genre’ in McPherson’s travels through the ‘haunted house’. This is revealing as the anecdote give a clear indication of the duality in which McPherson sees the Chinese: this is an evident common humanity and issues like trade pull the British and Chinese together; yet there are also these ‘horrific’ practices that, when discovered, make the Chinese suddenly appear incredibly inhuman and ‘other’. Indeed, the foundling-house resembles the ‘small foot woman’ in an interesting way: in both cases, there is some common ground found and rapport is built. However, this familiarity is juxtaposed by a practice that seemingly warps the Chinese and makes them incredibly strange and ‘other’. Foot binding clearly separating the Macao women by physically crippling her. Infanticide meanwhile separating the citizens of Amoy on a more fundamental moral level through association with a practice deemed most inhuman.

Interestingly, such construction resembles a stock trait of ‘hauntings’: the ‘uncanny’. The ‘uncanny’ can be understood as ‘a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar’.⁸⁰ This is why a ‘house’ is such a common setting for a haunting, as it is the strange distortion of a familiar, normally comfortable setting, which creates the disturbing presence. ‘Haunting cannot take place without the possibility of internal eruption and interruption within and as a condition of a familiar, everyday place and space’.⁸¹ In McPherson’s account however, it is not the setting that is necessarily uncanny, but the people he encounters. Often the Chinese are friendly and demonstrate relatable interests, conveying a familiar and common humanity. Yet frequently the discovery of strange archaic practices suddenly reveals a very disturbing aspect to these people which renders them different and alien, disrupting any sense of familiarity and common humanity.

5 THE BOLD ADVENTURERS

Having thus understood the Chinese as appearing ‘uncanny’ to McPherson—on account of them being suddenly distorted and made

⁷⁹ McPherson (2013, 99).

⁸⁰ Royle (2003).

⁸¹ Wolfreys (2002, 18–19).

‘other’ by their customary practices—we may turn to consider the protagonist who will free China from this haunting spectre, the Hamlet that will put China ‘back in joint’.

In McPherson’s bookends, this is clearly framed as the British. Depicted as ‘bold adventurers’, the British, it is claimed, are raising ‘the curtain’ in China and ushering in a new ‘moral’ age.⁸² It will be observed that such framing would seem to be overtly ‘orientalist in nature’, indeed, putting the British in the trope of a ‘white saviour’ coming to the Chinese’s rescue. We might, in light of this, expect the British to manifest from McPherson’s pages as brave, heroic and—in contrast to the Chinese enslaved by superstition—‘enlightened’.

Yet, once one gets past the verbose introductory chapter, McPherson’s fellow Brits do not appear as overtly heroic nor enlightened. There are of course elements where such traits are visible. Captain Belcher and Captain Kellet are praised for carrying out ‘careful surveys’; ‘spirited reconnoitre’; and ‘repeated surveys’ up the Canton River.⁸³ In one vivid depiction, McPherson recounts the bravery of Captain Hall of the *Nemesis* who personally ‘thrust his hand’ into one of the ship’s firing ‘tubes’ to dislodge a jammed rocket, thus ‘saving the lives of many with his boldness’.⁸⁴ Such incidents and characterisations are however mostly expressed very briefly and in passing.

If anything indeed appears to represent the virtues of bravery and enlightenment it is the steamship *Nemesis* itself. McPherson often comments on the ship’s ingenious modern design making crucial differences in key engagements. It also receives heroic depiction. Consider for instance how McPherson’s describes the ship during the battles for the Canton River:

The Goddess of Revenge, through the midst of repeated explosions while performing this gallant feat... returned unscathed, decked with Chinese flags and banners, and her crew habited in mandarin’s coats and caps.⁸⁵

⁸² McPherson (2013, 9).

⁸³ McPherson (2013, 49).

⁸⁴ McPherson (2013, 66).

⁸⁵ McPherson (2013, 62).

Yet, it would be incorrect to say that McPherson depicts the British as braver than the Chinese. Indeed, depictions of British heroism are about equally matched, if not superseded, by descriptions of Chinese heroism. Nor is McPherson's account of the British always positive. In fact, when discussing British command, it is largely critical. The initial leaders of the expedition, cousins Charles and George Elliot, are described bluntly by McPherson as 'two... imbeciles'.⁸⁶ Charles Elliot in particular receives more criticism than any other single person is praised or blamed in the entire account. Elliot 'daily become more clouded and veiled in obscurity'; he 'changes opinion every few minutes'; 'the nature of his temperament' is 'vacillating'; he was overly 'conciliating'.⁸⁷ It is 'surprising' that a man who had such extensive 'communication with the Chinese, both officially and otherwise', should yet remain in 'ignorance of their true character'.⁸⁸ Rather than a bold and enlightened hero, Elliot comes across as a blundering 'imbecile' of unbelievable ignorance.⁸⁹

It should be noted that McPherson was not alone in holding a dim view of Elliot. Lord Palmerston was notably unimpressed with Elliot's leadership, eventually dismissing him on the grounds that his appeasing approach to the Qing was treating his orders like a 'waste of paper'.⁹⁰ The poet Emily Eden meanwhile reflected:

he [Elliot] will prevent... taking Canton, for fear it should hurt the feeling of the Chinese, and the Emperor will probably send down orders that our sailors are to wear long tails and broad hats, wink their eyes, and fan themselves, and C. Elliot will try to teach them. I don't think my national pride ever was so much hurt.⁹¹

It would indeed appear Elliot's 'appeasing' nature also irked McPherson, who noted that Elliot seemed desperate to establish peace 'honourable or

⁸⁶ McPherson (2013, 24–25).

⁸⁷ McPherson (2013, 54, 75, 96–97).

⁸⁸ McPherson (2013, 58).

⁸⁹ Beyond the discussion of Elliot which will be discussed, McPherson other criticisms included the 'inferior vessels' used as transport ships and the Hong Kong administration's reluctance to aid in the recovery of those captured by the Qing. McPherson (2013, 35, 111).

⁹⁰ Le Pichon (2006, 39–40).

⁹¹ Miss Eden to her Brother, Robert Eden, Calcutta, April 12, 1841, in: Eden (2012).

otherwise'.⁹² Julia Lovell has argued that frustration towards Elliot was born out of a desire to cease negotiation and engage the Chinese in battle. In her landmark study *Opium War*, she remarks 'British troops were becoming increasingly inured to large-scale slaughter of the Chinese'.⁹³ Interestingly, she highlights McPherson's account as evidence of this, quoting:

appearance of this flag of truce was very disheartening to all who, flushed with the success of yesterday, and not yet satisfied with the quantity of human bloodshed, were eager yet to dip their hands more deeply into it.⁹⁴

Lovell however omits that this is a sentiment McPherson goes on to rebuke:

How little does a victorious army think, when reckoning on the numbers of the dead and wounded enemy, that these, too, had friends who deplore their loss and weep for their fate.⁹⁵

Thus, whilst McPherson conceded such bloodthirsty sentiments were present amongst his comrades, even noting it was the view of a 'callus' majority, it was a sentiment that McPherson does not share.⁹⁶ Indeed, he finds it odorous. A notable anti-war sentiment subsequently can be detected across McPherson's account. 'Alas! What a cruel monster is man, thus to destroy the only bonds which... bind us to each other, and make life a comfort and a pleasure'.⁹⁷ This significantly disrupts the heroic identity of the British sailing east to liberate the Chinese, McPherson's experiences revealing the British to be at times overtly bloodthirsty and acting certainly to the detriment of the Chinese who were slaughtered.

⁹² McPherson (2013, 54).

⁹³ Lovell (2011, 177).

⁹⁴ McPherson (2013, 40) and Lovell (2011, 177).

⁹⁵ McPherson (2013, 40). Lovell also cites McPherson in reference to British disrespect towards the Chinese dead, but, again, does not draw attention to McPherson's rebuke of these 'thoughtless Jacks'. Lovell (2011, 177) and McPherson (2013, 41).

⁹⁶ McPherson (2013, 40).

⁹⁷ McPherson (2013, 42).

McPherson's anger at Elliot rather stems, not from his reluctance to take Chinese life, but how his decisions cost British lives. The unsanitary conditions British troops are subjected to during the occupation of Chusan is a notable point of contention.⁹⁸ A situation further exasperated by the insistence of senior officers that usual ceremonial traditions are continued despite the topical conditions.⁹⁹ Similar incompetency was repeated in Hong Kong. McPherson observed that, being aware of the endemic fevers along the East China coast, the Hong Kong islander subsequently spared 'no expense or trouble to make his dwelling comfortable, and thus protect him from those frequent and sudden transitions from hot to cold'.¹⁰⁰ The British, by contrast, were less thoughtful:

The troops were cantoned on the brow of a small hill, from whence cold blasts of wind and heavy falls of rain were in quick succession followed by burning hot sun... the barracks provided for them were wretchedly ill adapted for so changeable a climate.¹⁰¹

'Is it any wonder', McPherson concludes in frustration, 'disease increased?'¹⁰²

Such mistakes were costly to the British, and indeed, disease would inflict a far greater casualty rate upon them than the Qing. As McPherson laments: the 'catalogue of mortality, far outnumbering the devastation and destruction of the sword'.¹⁰³ McPherson insists these causalities were caused by the neglect of British command. An 'infatuation', he asserts, came over British leadership that made them deaf to expert advice. Medical staff were dismissed as 'croakers' and their 'recommendations

⁹⁸ 'Elliot', McPherson writes, 'out of "dread of exciting bad feeling... among the natives", ordered the "men to live in tents when there were thousands of houses available for that purpose". Tents were "pitched on low paddy fields, surrounded by stagnant water, putrid and stinking from quantities of dead animal and vegetal matter"'. McPherson (2013, 14, 18).

⁹⁹ McPherson (2013, 14).

¹⁰⁰ McPherson (2013, 83).

¹⁰¹ McPherson (2013, 83).

¹⁰² McPherson (2013, 83).

¹⁰³ McPherson (2013, 33).

were neither listened to nor attended to'.¹⁰⁴ This was particularly infuriating as many medical staff had direct experience of the cause and spread of disease in tropical climates: the mistakes being made in Chusan regarding 'military hygiene' were 'self-evident to all who study... the History of the Anglo-Indian army'.¹⁰⁵ Yet expert advice was ignored, and the spread of disease claimed many a British life that could have been saved by 'a very small amount of intellect and trouble'.¹⁰⁶

McPherson's anger over the numerous medical disasters that befell British forces is best surmised by his statement that these tragedies were 'completely in the control of man'.¹⁰⁷ Thus, although McPherson does show irritation at British commands' seeming desire to avoid insulting the Chinese natives at any cost, this is not driven by necessarily a desire for conflict not disrespect for local customs in-and-for-themselves. Rather, it is because such a desire to meet the demands of custom came at the expense of listening to the expertise of medical science, and this cost British lives. This, for McPherson, is irrational. Indeed, a sense of irrationality in British command is conveyed by his claim they became 'infatuated': it is like they fell victim to the mysterious spell and lost sense of their rational faculties.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that it is not only blind adherence to Chinese that McPherson criticises. Clearly a rigid adherence to British practices is also identified as problematic, most notably the rigid obsession with having 'full dress' parades under the tropical sun. Thus, it is not 'Chinese custom' that McPherson is particularly angry at or dismissive of. Rather it is any custom or ingrained tradition that is categorically respected or zealously carried out despite expert knowledge. It is the blind following of custom and tradition instead of engaging one's rational faculties which McPherson finds infuriating.

Thus, in many ways, British leadership is made uncanny just like the Chinese. McPherson's superiors share in his common humanity and, more than this, his British traditions. Thus, he might expect them to share in his rational capacities and be able to recognise and consult good scientific advice. However, the effects of emotion and custom seem to take a

¹⁰⁴ McPherson (2013, 18).

¹⁰⁵ McPherson (2013, 33).

¹⁰⁶ McPherson (2013, 34).

¹⁰⁷ McPherson (2013, 34).

grip of them, overpowering them, and subsequently making them deaf to good advice. They are thus also in a way suddenly deformed, not in a moral or physical capacity this time, but in an intellectual capacity. This ‘infatuation’ which comes over them suddenly makes them intellectually ‘other’ to McPherson and creates epistemic gap which cannot easily be bridged. The cost of this sudden intellectual othering that occurs is however much more costly than the more obvious and cultural ‘other’ that erupts from the Chinese. British loss of rational sense—command’s sudden ‘infatuation’—costs the lives of British troops.

In light of this, we might also consider what truly ‘haunts’ McPherson’s account: what is it that erupts suddenly from his encounters that distorts his surroundings and makes his fellow humans ‘uncanny’. The answer is the emotions and passions of men, and their stubborn desire to hold on to irrational and damaging customs and traditions.¹⁰⁸ It is this spectre which, just when the Chinese are showing a common humanity and building rapport, threatens to erupt from them and render them physically and morally ‘other’. It is this spectre which also erupts from his own British, causing them to make incomprehensibly poor decisions which prove, for many, fatal.

Such reflections shed interesting light on both the construction of identity and knowledge in McPherson’s account. McPherson approaches the issue from the perspective of a surgeon, and this profession gives him a position of epistemological superiority: as a medical professional with experience in India, he comes with greater insight into the nature of diseases in a tropical climate. However, this hierarchy of knowledge does not map on to a hierarchy of identity: McPherson may have an enhanced insight because he is a British surgeon, but this does not mean the *British* have a superior knowledge of this situation, as is evident by British command ignoring medical advice and making mistakes. Indeed, the Chinese are in fact here portrayed to be in a position of superior knowledge of how to remain healthy and avoid disease on the Hong Kong

¹⁰⁸ It may be noted that this ‘infatuation’ is not the only passion in McPherson’s account that cause the British to become ‘uncanny’. McPherson also notes how bloodlust render many of his comrades suddenly ‘inhuman’. In this sense, McPherson’s anti-war sentiments appear to be driven by the observation that war dehumanises his comrades, alienating them from and setting them against their fellow man in the most beastly manner. McPherson (2013, 40).

Islands, effectively reversing the west-over-east hierarchy usually associated with orientalist perspectives and instead putting the Hong Kong islanders in the superior position. Thus whilst professional identity may contribute to a hierarchy of knowledge in McPherson's account, it should be stressed that this does not map on to national or cultural identities.

6 CONCLUSION

McPherson's account is notable for being acutely observant and bluntly honest. His curiosity is driven by both his medical background and what he has heard about China, and he subsequently takes every opportunity to seek out answers and record what he finds. The surgeon also does not mince words. This is true regarding both the Chinese practices he encounters and the decisions of British command. Such an approach makes McPherson's account observant and analytical, but also normative. This makes him very different from a traveller such as Antonio Pigafetta who, as Matteo Salonia has so interestingly discussed in this volume, leaves the 'audience free to complete the author's thoughts and to guess the rationale of what is described'.

As a result, unlike Pigafetta, McPherson creates dichotomies through his normative assessments. The most obvious one is between the guiding light of rational scientific knowledge and expertise (especially when pertaining to medical science) and the obscuring effect of the passions and the blind following of custom. In this, McPherson very much resembles the tradition of the European Enlightenment. Indeed, one might compare this dichotomy emerging from McPherson's account to the views of physician-come-philosopher John Locke: reason is what is central and common to humanity; but those who rely on only tradition and custom are as blind as 'brute beasts' and likely to fall into 'barbarous habits' and 'evil customs'.¹⁰⁹

Yet, to simply map this dichotomy onto a West/East or European/Chinese distinction would be a mistake. Admittedly, McPherson often highlights, and condemns, Chinese practices and customs as 'barbaric'. Yet, despite this, he does not hesitate to admit that they are also highly skilled. McPherson does praise the ingenuity and technology of the British, especially evident in his depiction of *Nemesis*. Nonetheless,

¹⁰⁹ Locke (1997, 82, 85, 127).

he does not hide from the fact that the British can be irrational and also follow tradition blindly, such as when insisting on full dress parades under the tropical Hong Kong sun. McPherson will not hesitate to pay tribute to Chinese ingenuity, nor will he shy away from calling out British command as imbecilic. In McPherson's account, rationality subsequently emerges, not as the sole property of any one race, but rather a faculty common to humanity. Passions and misguided customs haunt all, threatening to erupt from amongst any group to distort and alienate them from humanity's common stock. It is again very telling of McPherson's worldview that he perceives foot binding on a par with the 'squeezing' of English women's wastes. The Chinese are not unique in inflicting physiologically damaging practices on women out of misguided notions of beauty. This is something that is unfortunately inflicted on all females of the human species.

McPherson describes the 1840 expedition as voyaging into a haunted house, and, despite his clinical prose, one does indeed get a sense of unease throughout the account (though what seems to disturb him most is the folly of his fellow British rather than any spectral presence he encounters in China). Nonetheless, we shall take leave of McPherson at a point where he appears most at ease: wintering in Ningpo. McPherson records how confidence between the British and the Ningpo people had been established and excellent markets had been opened. 'The inhabitants were daily nocking back, and now expressed a wish to be taken altogether into British protection'.¹¹⁰ Common interest in trade here notably forms the shared understanding between British and Chinese, whilst there is no mention of archaic practices which rupture their common humanity. Yet, what is perhaps most telling of McPherson's ease is that the men were now being taken proper care of and were in good health. Good sense has prevailed and the surgeon can calmly report:

[S]uch was the care and attention [...] that regimental hospitals [...] did not contain half-a-dozen patients, instead of the hundreds of last year's campaign, and a death was now quite a rarity amongst them. The Navy, too, were equally healthy.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ McPherson (2013, 117).

¹¹¹ McPherson (2013, 117).

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German Dreams of Empire in the Far East: The German Expeditions to the East and Ferdinand von Richthofen's Encounters with Asia, 1850–1880

Christian Mueller

I INTRODUCTION—RICHTHOFEN AND IMPERIAL CURIOSITIES

Ferdinand von Richthofen is maybe the most prominent European traveller of East Asia in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.¹ The German geologist first encountered Japan and China, as well as Siam, Java, and other parts of Asia as a scientific expert on the Prussian expedition to the Far East that was to conclude trade treaties in 1860/1861. He

¹ Chin (2013, 194–219), Wu (2014, 339–363; 2015, 33–65), Mertens (2019, 1–9), and Jacobs (2020).

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left China with a huge repertoire of travel writings and notes after extensive travels throughout Asia and a longer interlude as mining prospector in the American West in late 1872.² Richthofen is best known for his invention of the term “Silk Road.” His seminal pieces on the Ancient Silk Roads and his vision for a modern industrial railway “Silk Road” have made him famous both in his time and in the more recent decades.³ He is also recognised as one of the first Europeans who travelled almost all of China after its opening to foreigners in 1860. As a geologist by profession and an ethnographer by interest, Richthofen presented a reflective combination of human curiosity and European scientific observation that guided him towards the creation of industrial, social, and cultural knowledge of Asian spaces.⁴ As a curiosity himself, he combined a distinct social status of a Prussian *Bildungsbürger* with a claim to act as the herald of Prussian-German civilisation at the perceived Asian frontier.⁵ His “excitement of discovery” paired with the dissemination of knowledge contributed to a more diverse social imagination of different parts of Asia in the context of German dreams of Empire and aspirations to world and imperial power status during the formational years of the German nation-state in the 1860s and 1870s.⁶

Yet it is problematic to apply to the Silesian geologist the sweeping category of an exclusive Eurocentric imperialist from whose tale “colonies were created and ethnocentric perspectives secured.”⁷ This would be a gross over-exaggeration and misinterpretation of many European explorers and travellers in Asia until the 1890s and a misunderstanding of direct observations and curiosities in contrast to the public framing of

² Mertens (2019, 2–4), Waugh (2007, 1–10), Hansen (2012, 7), and Chin (2013, 194–196). The most important studies on Richthofen are: Osterhammel (1987, 150–195), Wardenga (1990, 141–155), Hsieh (2007, 353–368), Marchand (2009, 153–155), Wu (2014, 339–355; 2015, 33–65), and “Richthofen” (2015, 597–615).

³ Richthofen (1874a, 1874b, 1877a, 96–103; 1877b, 495–498, 716–717; 1882, 693–694). See the seminal piece by Osterhammel (1987), further Hansen (2012, 7), Mertens (2019, 1–2), Chin (2013, 195–197), Wu (2014, 340–342; 2015), and Mueller (2019).

⁴ Osterhammel (1987, 167, 170; 2013, 1038–1039).

⁵ Richthofen (1907, I, 204). All translations from the German sources are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

⁶ Osterhammel (2008, 1–3; 2013, 50) and Naranch (2010).

⁷ Said (1978, 117). See also Stoecker (1958, 69–84). Different with good arguments Marchand (2009, 155), Osterhammel (1987, 183–184; 2013, 409–412; 2018, 489, 491–495), and Pratt (2008, 1–4).

Asian images as part of domestic social imaginaries.⁸ Admittedly, in the nineteenth century, geography was utilised as an imperial science to influence both strategic decisions of expansion and a “common understanding that makes possible [...] a widely shared sense of legitimacy” for imperial aspirations.⁹ However, even while parading his imperial mind-set and his claim to a European concept of knowledge through scientific observation, Richthofen showed considerable reflective curiosity and critical awareness of the local and spatial contexts in which he moved. Although research has stressed in different intensity the exclusive Eurocentrism of perspectives on Asia since the early 1800s, many nuances in the perceptions, representations, and constructions of Asia are outside the strict post-colonial framework that assumes rather than evidences simplistic condescending “Orientalism” or Gramscian hegemony.¹⁰

This essay shows instead that by applying different categories of analysis like curiosity, knowledge, identity creation, and the target of German social imaginaries, the German dreams of an Empire in East Asia should be understood in their nuanced differences.¹¹ Like his predecessors Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter, Richthofen to some extent followed a relatively open tradition of scientific curiosity and observation based on the object and not only on hierarchical or racial assumptions underlying the observing subject.¹² Although his observations breathe the air of its author’s self-perceptions as protagonist of educational and scientific Prussian *Kultur*, Richthofen is best understood as a complex character that embodied Humboldt’s view of travels, discoveries, and encounters. “Everything that stimulates movement [... like] errors, unfounded assumptions, instinctive divinations, conclusions based on facts, leads to the expansion of the horizon of ideas and new ways to enforce the power of intelligent knowledge.”¹³ By analysing Richthofen’s travel writings and diaries, published reports, and scientific work based

⁸ Osterhammel (2008, 2–3, 10) and Taylor (2004).

⁹ Osterhammel (2013, 1038) and Taylor (2004, 23).

¹⁰ Morton (2007, 2012, 45–64) and Potter (2014, 68).

¹¹ For a good overview, see Conrad (2013) and Naranch (2014).

¹² Humboldt (1809, 125) and Ritter (1834, 726–729). See also Osterhammel (1987, 162–167; 2013, 378), Wardenga (1990, 142–145), Wu (2014, 339–363, 341–344), and Mertens (2019, 5–8).

¹³ Humboldt (1852, 34).

on his travel observations, the essay places his travels, perceptions, and reflections on Asia in the broader context of a global view of Germany and imperial curiosities in Asia in the 1860s and 1870s.¹⁴ Richthofen's curiosity about what he encountered in Asia and his creation of new knowledge in cultural terms strongly influenced the shaping of European and specific Prussian-German identities through the framing of social imaginaries about differentiated spaces of Asia.¹⁵

2 THE DUAL CURIOSITY OF FERDINAND VON RICHTHOFEN

Richthofen was as much a curiosity as a curious traveller. As the latter, he criticised the typical “globetrotters” of the nineteenth century who would “entertain at each place [...] the same stereotypical programme and expect a standardised experience” and consequently produced repetitive and superficial descriptions of the treaty ports and major cities in China and Japan.¹⁶ “It seems to me that many people travel in China, but very few see anything.”¹⁷ Richthofen's ethos was different. He stressed in his “Travel Guide for Field Researchers” the imperative importance of curiosity in social contacts for receiving vital information and understanding the local population: “Conversation must be held in abundance with the indigenous people.”¹⁸ Curiosity in the situations and constellations of humans was important in guiding the scientific “observation and research [that] were the highest and most difficult capacities to perform [...]; bold spirit of inquiry and decency in [human] encounter are the noblest character traits of an explorer.”¹⁹ This was by no means an impartial curiosity into acquiring knowledge of space but combined

¹⁴ Naranch (2010, 367–368, 379–380).

¹⁵ The following elaborations will focus on Richthofen's ethos and mode of observation as well as some of his social observations, because the creation of the “Silk Roads” and his quest for industrial knowledge have been the subject of substantial research already. See e.g. Osterhammel (1987) and Wu (2014, 339–363; 2015, 33–65). The author is preparing a comprehensive study of the German expeditions to East Asia and the legacies for German imperialism before Empire in Asia, 1850–1885.

¹⁶ Richthofen (1877b, 717).

¹⁷ Richthofen (1907, I, 116).

¹⁸ Richthofen (1886, 32).

¹⁹ Richthofen (1886, 44).

a curious spirit of exploration with a European understanding of scientific inquiry to order and rationalise space with modern methods.²⁰ It would be presumptuous to call this type of ordering an imperial act of conquest *per se*. However, Richthofen's curiosity contributed in its presentation and outcome of knowledge production to a larger imperial project of exploring space for the sake of utilising it for European and German goals.²¹

Richthofen himself was also a curiosity as a person. This might not be important for post-colonial scholars who assume that Eurocentrism exerted itself in the attitude of racial or civilisational superiority over other civilisations. Richthofen certainly cherished his origins in Prussian Silesia and showed an ostentatious feeling of cultural difference when he travelled. He presented himself as a distanced traveller on horseback with European attire and servants,²² praised his cooking skills in producing German dishes far away from home, reflected upon his acquired taste for Liebig's "Fleischextrakt" (instant broth), carried around China his table silver, white tablecloth, and bed linen, and decorated every place possible with the Prussian and later German flags.²³ Richthofen as a curiosity calls for a reflection on the different roles and self-identifications that he performed in displaying this staged "imperial" curiosity within the context of an Asia in transition.²⁴ The tensions between Richthofen as the observing subject exposing an exploring curiosity about Asian social and cultural dimensions and his normative judgement on the observed objects and perceived facts produced an ambivalence that found its repercussions in the political hierarchies of Asian countries in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Both categories of curiosity lead to the question which kind of social knowledge Richthofen generated. The Prussian Ministry of Trade initially

²⁰ Osterhammel (1987, 155) and Wardenga (1990, 145–146). The twofold reality of curiosity to observe with different purposes is also addressed in Matteo Salonia's piece and reflects on the broader problem of narrowing down global history to networks and convergences only.

²¹ Osterhammel (2013, 24–25, 1038–1040) and Wu (2014, 344).

²² Richthofen (1907, 201) and Richthofen (1898, 127). Interestingly, Japanese noblemen would rather walk in front of their horse than sit on horseback. *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung*, no. 935, 1 June 1861, 374. See also Osterhammel (1987, 172, 178).

²³ Richthofen (1907, I, 202–205; II, 30–32).

²⁴ Osterhammel (1987, 174, 177–179).

tasked him as a scientific legation secretary (*Legationssekretär*) on the Prussian East Asia expedition to look out for possible opportunities for mining in 1860.²⁵ From 1868 to 1872, the California Bank of Development and the International Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai extended these professional demands that Richthofen should uncover ore and coal holdings and mining possibilities in China.²⁶ Yet in doing so, Richthofen also inquired into ethnographic observations and political suggestions for a Prussian Empire in the Far East. His industrial knowledge and his reports based on his geological expertise clearly indicated the primacy of development investment in the 1860s and 1870s for the European Empires in Asia.²⁷ Richthofen also proposed through his open curiosity in the “indigenous people” a differentiated social and cultural interpretation of Asia—China, Japan, Korea, and Siam—that reflected both hierarchical imperial thought and genuine interest in understanding and conveying “his” Asia as a system of intercultural relations beyond stereotypical observations. In his writings published before the heyday of German imperialism after 1885, Richthofen presented to the German public a much more nuanced image of Asia than almost all other contemporary accounts.²⁸ These writings explore and expose a nuanced construction of Asia without assuming a simplistic matrix of purely oppressing, exploitative, and dominating narratives.

3 “EVERYTHING IS NEW, STRANGE, INTERESTING.” GERMAN IMAGINARIES OF ASIA, 1850–1870²⁹

In 1834, the German geographer Carl Ritter characterised the interior of China as “a world of its own” and a “Terra incognita” removed from direct observations. Ritter claimed that many parts of China had not seen a European traveller since the accounts of Marco Polo that would be able

²⁵ Prussian Trade Minister August von der Heydt to Ferdinand von Richthofen, Berlin 20 January 1860, *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA, Rep. 120, Ministerium für Handel und Gewerbe*, C XIII 18, No. 9, Vol. 3, fols. 36–39; Richthofen (1907, I, 10–12); Hsieh (2007, 362); Osterhammel (1987, 168–169).

²⁶ Richthofen (1877b, VII–XIII; 1907, I, 26–28).

²⁷ Richthofen (1874a, 115–120; 1874b, 146; 1903, passim; 1912a, 693–704).

²⁸ Osterhammel (1987, 155, 167; 2013, 22; 2018, 495–502), Marchand (2009, 153–155), and Wardenga (1990, 145, 148).

²⁹ Kreyher (1863, 75).

to give an adequate eyewitness account.³⁰ Yet, this observation was one-sided. Jürgen Osterhammel among others has pointed to the fact that by the end of the eighteenth century, Europe possessed much more factual knowledge about Asia and China than about other parts of the world.³¹ Yet this knowledge was abstract and lacked a forceful imagination of travelled experiences, a body of travel literature on “new” areas of the Asian continent that would bring an experienced space “with new methods of observations” to the German reader.³² What was missing were specific imaginations of Asia produced by travellers who physically explored and observed the space that could be mapped on geological and geographical representations. This lack of imaginative landscapes and their people was still apparent for many parts of Asia when Richthofen embarked on his first journey to the Far East in 1860. Despite the forced opening of Asia through British, French, and American expeditions since 1839, knowledge and interest in Asia remained superficial and largely focused on religious and commercial interest in selected ports.³³ Similarly, the early accounts of the treaty ports in China and Japan set the tone and imagery of Asia for decades to come.³⁴ Richthofen himself repeated the stereotypes of “dust and dirt” and “corrupt mandarins” in his early diary entries in 1868.³⁵

It would however be misleading to assume that colonial stereotypes inevitably provided access to a “royal road to colonial fantasy,” as Homi Bhabha has put it.³⁶ Colonial fantasies or imaginaries were not simplistic blueprints for Eurocentric dominance or expansion, but were in themselves highly differentiated, ambivalent, and dynamic.³⁷ Richthofen as a transnational and trans-imperial actor in Asia contributed to this dynamics

³⁰ Ritter (1834, 726–727, 513–514).

³¹ Osterhammel (1987, 157) and Zantop (1997, 2–15).

³² Foucault (1971, 21) and Richthofen (1877b, XXVII). See also Brandt (1897, 19).

³³ Richthofen (1877b, 717; 1912b, 48). See also Morse (1910, I, 563) and Osterhammel (1987, 168–169).

³⁴ Gützlaff (1834, V, IX, 252) and Smith (1847, 164, 170–171).

³⁵ Richthofen (1907, I, 18, 20–21). Peking seemed for him “to swim in dirt. [...] The nerves of smell and vision are constantly affected very unaesthetically. These people do not know any decency.”

³⁶ Bhabha (1983, 25).

³⁷ Zantop (1997, 4–5).

with an equally differentiated and at times contradictory construction of Asian spaces. However, the one clear guidance for exploring Asia was a diffuse fantasy of German cultural influence on the historical progress of the world through German agency in Asia. Richthofen's mind-set in approaching East Asia reflected a guided curiosity of the German public that was stimulated by the political imagination and aspiration of a strong nation-state with a civilisational mission in world politics since 1848.³⁸

The overlapping liberal ideas of nation-state building and imperial outreach to match the British and French claims for global dominance generated imaginations about Asia that channelled middle-class curiosity in cultural, commercial, and industrial trajectories. As early as 1848, the discussions about a German fleet invoked the idea of the expansion of Germany "in Chinese waters" as a sign of virility of the new nation-state to be.³⁹ These ambitions, further fuelled by the hopes of the German constitutional assembly in Frankfurt/Main during the 1848/49 revolution, created a diffuse social imaginary of Asia that in turn fuelled both the commercial and cultural ambitions of German idealism and the discussions over the outward-looking lead of Germany in terms of politics and trade.⁴⁰ Although much more modest than the ambitious fleet projects during the German Revolution, Austria and Prussia started expeditions to the Far East between 1857 and 1861 that triggered these guided curiosities in the German public. Those expeditions mirrored the increasingly competitive political dualism in Germany over the future lead of Germany towards becoming an imperial player and world power.⁴¹ This particular German social imaginary profoundly framed Richthofen's observations, his curiosity and identity as an exploring scientist, and his formation of knowledge about Asia.

The German middle-class public took great interest in the Far East since the 1850s as a potential for commercial activities and a reflection of German moral duties in representing a specific type of European civilisation: *Kultur*. During the 1848/49 revolutions, German overseas movements that took off as part of emigration waves in the 1840s

³⁸ Naranch (2010, 366–370) and Müller (1998, 364–365).

³⁹ List (1850, 210); Adalbert von Preußen (1848, 4, 20); *Deutsche Zeitung*, no. 182, 1 July 1848, Beilage, 1; Wigard (1848, I, 309).

⁴⁰ Wigard (1848, I, 308–309), Taylor (2004, 23–24), and Naranch (2010, 366–380).

⁴¹ Martin (1995, 3–16) and Naranch (2010, 369–370).

attracted great attention, as emigration and settlement met the needs of commercial expansion of the shipping companies from the Hanseatic cities and Prussia.⁴² In 1862, the commercial volume of commissioned German shipping in Asian coastal waters was second only to the British trade and continued to grow until 1897.⁴³ In the 1860s, the older literary images of the Far East from the enlightenment and earlier periods met with guided interests in the “commercial importance of the coastal countries in the Pacific Ocean that seemed impossible a decade ago.”⁴⁴ The Treaty of Tianjin (1858) and the Convention of Peking (1860) legalised travels to the interior of China and opened the gates for merchants and trade agents, consular officials, adventurers, and natural expeditions to explore regions in East Asia that had not seen a foreigner since Marco Polo.⁴⁵ Richthofen was among the first to utilise this opportunity fully when he came to China in 1868. The observation on travelled space in Asia and its production of knowledge raised curiosity in Germany as to the German merchant activities and potential future political aims.

The German states had a vital interest in participating in the new trade treaties with Japan and China to secure their expanding trading position in Asia.⁴⁶ While the Austrian expedition of the “Novara” in 1857/58 failed to deliver any commercial or political results, it triggered in its ambition to establish Germany as a naval power both the imaginations of the

⁴² Bericht (1849, 3) and Müller (1998, 357–362).

⁴³ *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung*, no. 794, 18 September 1858, 178; *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 493, 23 March 1861, 98; *Die Zeit (Frankfurt/Main)*, *Beilage*, no. 218, 15 December 1861, 2670; *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 541, 22 February 1862, 60–61; *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 891, *Beilage*, 7 November 1868, 421–423; Brandt (1894, 109–110); Reichsamt of the Interior to Senate Hamburg, Berlin 26 October 1897, *Staatsarchiv Hamburg (StA HH)*, 132-1/I/2132, no. 5 and appendix 5a. Chinese merchants preferred to hire German shipping companies because they were cheaper and treated the Chinese with respect. See Werner (1873, 120).

⁴⁴ *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung*, no. 828, 14 May 1858, 315; Sturz (1859, 6); *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 541, 22 February 1862, 61; Berg (1863, VIII).

⁴⁵ Morse (1910, I, 563), Sturz (1859, 1–3, 6), Richthofen (1877b, 706–726), Embacher (1882, 359–364), and Roberts (1932, 65–70). For the almost child-like innocent curiosity of the German public about Asia, see Brandt (1894, 1): “If we consider countries like China, Japan, Korea, and Siam, then the scarce knowledge about foreign places gives way to a truly childlike and touching ignorance.”

⁴⁶ Martin (1990, 32–33; 1995, 6–8).

German public and the political action of its German rival Prussia.⁴⁷ The German states feared that other nations could withdraw consular support for German merchant vessels in Asia after the end of the Second Opium War, and that the German Customs Union would miss new chances of world trade in an opening East Asian market after 1858.⁴⁸ To promote its action upon the mercantile concerns and to make “moral gains” in Germany, the Prussian government of the liberal “New Era” decided in late 1859 to establish its own direct relations with China, Japan, and Siam in order to secure the legal means of direct trade for the members of the German Customs Union.⁴⁹ The naval expeditions were seen as part of a “competition of movement and progress” that would decide which power would best represent German trade interests abroad.⁵⁰ Richthofen as an imperial agent aspired to influence the future German policies in East Asia through his first-hand observations, his travelled experience, and his allegedly scientific observation of Asian spaces. His ethnographical studies, though curious and open to new discoveries, remained an element of an imperial framework that tried to make sense of industrial modernisation as part of a larger paradigm of moral and social progress towards human imperfectability and Prussia’s role in promoting this.

4 RICHTHOFEN’S IDENTITY AS AN EXPLORER

Richthofen in his early years held a critical view on formal settlement colonialism and did not favour incursions into the sovereignty of other states. This was very much in line with the Prussian approach to conclude “equal” treaties with China, Japan, and Siam. However, his imperial thinking showed considerable elements of exercising will and capacity

⁴⁷ *Neue Münchener Zeitung, Abendblatt*, no. 95, 21 April 1857, 378; *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung*, no. 727, 6 June 1857, 453–454; *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 412, 3 September 1859, 309; *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 493, 23 March 1861, 99; Harkort (1861, 10).

⁴⁸ Sturz (1859, 2–3, 6) and Wichura (1868, 96).

⁴⁹ Berg (1863, VII–IX); Eulenburg (1900, XVI–XVII); *North China Herald*, no. 544, 29 December 1860, 207; *Wochenschrift des Nationalvereins*, no. 79, 1 November 1861, 650; *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 540, 15 February 1862, 55. See Haupts (1978, 60–65) and Martin (1990, 35).

⁵⁰ *Allgemeine Zeitung (Augsburg), Beilage*, no. 23, 23 January 1862, 373–374.

to shape the affairs of Asian countries by observing, mapping, and re-defining them.⁵¹ He considered sustainable progress under the myth of industrial modernisation and development as the normative yardstick of the modern world.⁵² As a professional traveller with geological missions, he perceived travelling not only as a form of movement between places and across space, but also as a method of generating scientific knowledge and gaining hermeneutic insight.⁵³ His reflection on curiosity as the guided operation that fuelled his observations of nature indicated that Richthofen explored almost everything that would be worth noting in human and physical geography.

Richthofen consciously placed himself between the specialised textual Sinology as an academic subject and the romanticising yet increasing banal literature on Chinese culture.⁵⁴ He assumed that the framework of physical geology and geography as a natural science would produce more objective facts than guided yet presumptuous ethnographic observations. Ethnography as an auxiliary science helped to establish geological facts by producing social knowledge.⁵⁵ He assumed that it was possible to observe without prejudice and to rationally conclude and produce objective knowledge from this disinterested observation.⁵⁶ Thus, Richthofen idealised himself within the context of European approaches to science and its superiority over other forms of knowledge generation.⁵⁷ What made him different was that he insisted on the direct observation and the necessity of curious interaction between the observer and the observed—the natural space of geological formations and the human space of interaction.⁵⁸ In this form, his whole habitus of a scientific empiricist reflected his idealisation as an occidental rationalist who could distinguish out of his own ethos between good and bad information.⁵⁹ This claim of

⁵¹ Cain and Hopkins (1993, 42–43), Martin (1995, 9), and Conrad (2013, 546, 550–553).

⁵² Osterhammel (1987, 183–184).

⁵³ Richthofen (1877b, XXVII; 1907, I, 28).

⁵⁴ Richthofen (1877b, VIII, XXVIII, 717) and Osterhammel (1987, 170–171).

⁵⁵ Richthofen (1886, 23–25; 1877b, VII).

⁵⁶ Richthofen (1883, 45–47, 56–7).

⁵⁷ Osterhammel (2013, 19–20, 779–780).

⁵⁸ Richthofen (1877b, VII).

⁵⁹ Richthofen (1886, 40–41, 44).

superiority of scientific observation and objective knowledge creation runs through his travel writings. In applying a general principle of scientific geology to his human objects, Richthofen the travelling natural empiricist displayed the superiority of Europe and Prussia-Germany in particular in terms of science, morals, and even politics.⁶⁰

Richthofen identified himself not only as an observing scientist but also as a political actor. Certainly, his self-identifications indicated the layers of constructions of Asia that relate to a reflected account of observations about Asia. Besides being a natural scientist and a geologist, Richthofen perceived his mission and work in Asia to some extent as a career project.⁶¹

If I came back now, I would have nothing for the present and maybe in some distant future the remote option for an ill-paid professorial chair. The continuation of my current research travels and the acquisition of profound knowledge of these [Asian] lands is in itself a capital, and solid publications will expand my options. Even if my current observations and travels are mostly scientific, they have practical implications, especially for Prussia.⁶²

The social knowledge in addition to geological and geographical information formed the core of Richthofen's identity as *the* German expert on Asia between 1875 and 1900.⁶³ Richthofen mixed knowledge and curiosity with political ambitions to serve himself and the Prussian and future German government. While being an authority on coal in China, he also engaged with the Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck on the expansionist plans of Prussia, the North German Confederacy and the future small German nation-state for limited colonial activities in Asia beyond trade.⁶⁴ In the broader German discussions on colonial policies, Richthofen positioned himself as "half lost geologist" and knowledgeable man on the spot to influence German choices for a potential colony in

⁶⁰ Osterhammel (1987, 154–155).

⁶¹ Richthofen (1907, I, 141, 282) and Osterhammel (1987, 171–172). See also Paulmann (2013, 677–681).

⁶² Richthofen (1907, I, 141).

⁶³ Osterhammel (1987, 151).

⁶⁴ Richthofen (1907, I, 141, 282), Stoecker (1958, 272–274) and Yü (1981, 157).

the Far East.⁶⁵ “I might have triggered questions of large importance for Prussia that I might follow up later.”⁶⁶

As an imperial actor for Prussia-Germany and for the other European Empires in Asia, Richthofen used his travels to develop a curiosity that would both encompass investment opportunities for the imperial powers and social knowledge that triggered him personally. He conceptualised Asia not only in geological and geographical terms, or in terms of political or career gains, but also through a rather open concept of understanding human constellations and their potential. His letter to his parents in late 1869 indicated his excitement with the encounters while “profoundly researching Liautung, the border between China and Korea, Mukden and Manchuria, Mongolia and finally Peking.”⁶⁷ “From my last voyage, I could tell stories without end.”⁶⁸ It is a pity that he did not tell more stories but these outbursts of more spontaneous curiosity besides his professional reports indicated his curiosity on human stories emanating from his observations in his further encounters.

Richthofen as an academic explorer stood “not without fright at the gates of an immense Empire.”⁶⁹ In his writings, he reassured himself of his scientific ethos and his civilisational mission through staging his self-discipline. As part of his moral representation of superiority to the domestic German audience, Richthofen highlighted the moral discipline of the self through his own cooking, his scientific work, and journal writing at night when his servant slept, and ordering his mineral findings and ethnographic observations. His discussion on food in particular is not only an eccentric curiosity, but also takes place within a broader discourse of European civilisation. His most important provision and the culinary driving force for German expansionism was the indispensable Liebig’s “Fleischextrakt, [...] a huge benefit for travelling mankind.”⁷⁰ In parading different recipes for soup and meat, he repeated a common place in European travel writing that discussed the alleged absence of

⁶⁵ Richthofen (1907, I, 28, 141, 282–283, quote 283).

⁶⁶ Richthofen (1907, I, 141).

⁶⁷ Richthofen (1907, I, 280–281).

⁶⁸ Richthofen (1907, I, 282–283).

⁶⁹ Richthofen (1877b, xxix).

⁷⁰ Richthofen (1907, I, 204).

these two “strengthening” dishes as civilisational weakness in Asia.⁷¹ By doing so, Richthofen combined this civilisational claim with his personal narrative of asceticism and discipline.

The function of this self-assertion was part of his interpretation of moral leadership. He claimed that the Chinese had not perfected anything and lived mostly in an ignorant state of limited interest and curiosity towards foreign knowledge. “Only in one thing the Chinese serve the world as a dubious example: that is their sexual reproduction. In this they are virtuosos.”⁷² In this inscription of lax morals and sensual lack of discipline, his staged asceticism would also serve as a legitimacy to rule. Only the man, who controls himself and shows imperial virility and self-discipline, would be entitled to rule.⁷³

Richthofen’s political and national identity gained shape through his pronounced parading of Prussian symbols. The Prussian expedition in 1860 and 1861 was proud to symbolise the moral duty that Prussia exercised on behalf of the German states through its flag.⁷⁴ Richthofen travelled around China by boat hoisting the Prussian flag and used it alternatively as tablecloth and room decoration in every inn he stayed.⁷⁵ His staging of restlessness and constant industriousness further represented the sacrificing self in control against the moral temptations of rest and decay that dominated the contemporary perception of China. He criticised exactly this kind of observed decay and lack of discipline in the localised missionaries that he met. For him, rigorous self-discipline and asceticism were key to staging European superior virility and Western discipline over Eastern Barbary.⁷⁶ After 1890, the narrative of European moral and physical strength versus Asian weaknesses was part of the wider “Yellow Peril” discourse on imperialist anthropology. In his early writings, the concept of a disciplined European pointed towards the superior rational and reasoning of his scientific observations on Asia through a pointed staging of moral discipline.⁷⁷ His character should

⁷¹ Richthofen (1907, 202–203).

⁷² Richthofen (1907, 264). See already Kreyher (1863, 131–132).

⁷³ Richthofen (1907, 263–264) and Osterhammel (1987, 175).

⁷⁴ Richthofen (1912a, 43–44), Brandt (1901, 103) and Rose (1895, 38).

⁷⁵ Richthofen (1907, I, 77, 202; II, 30–32).

⁷⁶ Richthofen (1907, I).

⁷⁷ Gollwitzer (1962, 201–202) and Schulte-Althoff (1971, 212–214).

seem impeccable to make his claims and observations on Asia and China more convincing.⁷⁸

The self-declared herald of Prussian *Kultur* at the “half-barbarian” frontier⁷⁹ also found respect for the elementary strength at the frontier, presented in the theme of respect for the martial “races.” Richthofen identified between the different provinces’ military discipline and strength, mostly in Hunan province and in Mongolia. He likened this virility and violence to the nomadic origins and more than once referred to them in comparison to the North American Plains Indian nations.⁸⁰ This conclusion led him to apply an enlightenment idea of the noble savage that had not had too much contact with the Europeans “who treat the Chinese badly.”⁸¹ Most of the provinces that had not been influenced so far by the Treaty ports did not match the European cliché of a general xenophobia of the Chinese. In exploring the socio-psychological reasons for some Chinese violent reactions to foreigners, Richthofen pinpointed the reasons to the impact of steam ship companies responsible for the decline of the traditional trade and shipping system along the Yangtze River.⁸²

However, his performance as a traveller made use of a hybrid Prussian and Chinese magic of power from a horseback. Looking back to his experiences in China in 1897, he suggested travellers to stay calm in case people would stir unrest.

Seldom will an excess begin if you ride on a horse [... If you are attacked by someone throwing a pea], then immediate action is in order. Yet, never should the traveller be involved in this action personally, because he would give up his status and position; and one needs to be completely sure of the identity of the culprit. In those case I ordered [my translator] Splingart [sic!] to punish the man. [...] Speed and energy create fear and stir

⁷⁸ Richthofen (1907, I, 142–144, 177, 283) and Richthofen (1898, 41).

⁷⁹ Richthofen (1907, I, 204).

⁸⁰ Richthofen (1907, I, 167; II, 120–121, 204).

⁸¹ *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 541, 22 February 1862, 60–61.

⁸² Richthofen (1907, I, 120).

the emotion of justice between the Chinese that would take sides for the injured and insulted foreigner.⁸³

This magic of power developed through exercising impartial justice from the elevated position of a horse, and as the execution is not carried out by himself, it remains a symbolic superiority without any real power. The Chinese did not necessarily perceive this magic of power as symbolic representation of European imperial gesture.⁸⁴ On the contrary, Richthofen in his representation of power mimicked the authority of a Chinese Mandarin to command, judge, and punish from horseback on the spot through his servants. The magic of power only succeeded because it relied on the local structures of power dynamics and imitated the way in which local higher classes exercised their own authority within the Qing imperial system.⁸⁵ Richthofen was not aware of this cross-cultural aspect. Yet, the Prussian exercise of power to survive and the Mandarin practice of punishment indicate the overlap of exercising hierarchy across the East. Although Richthofen insisted on shaping his identity within a Prussian and European framework of *Kultur* and civilisation against any attempt towards acculturation, he performed Chinese power symbolically and thus constructed an Asia that moves beyond clear lines of foreign imperial hegemony and superiority.⁸⁶

5 CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE—MAPPING ASIA THROUGH INTERCULTURAL OBSERVATIONS

Research has taken great interest in Richthofen's contribution to gathering industrial knowledge about China, and many of his most prominent writings focus on the primacy of industrial modernity. Yet, his wider

⁸³ Richthofen (1898, 127). See also Richthofen (1903, 75–76; 1907, I, 395). For the importance of his loyal Belgian translator and servant, see Spingaerd Megowan (2008, 60–73) and Richthofen (1907, I, 17–21).

⁸⁴ Osterhammel (1987, 179). On symbolic use of power Cohn (1983, 165–209).

⁸⁵ Osterhammel (1987, 179–180).

⁸⁶ An important element of this exercise of power is the staging of calmness in times of distress. The attributes of imperial governance as a sign of superior symbolic power are constructed around Eulenburg and the success of the peaceful Prussian expedition in concluding the equal trade treaties in 1860 and 1861. The essay by Ruairidh Brown in this volume equally stresses the importance of differentiating the overall moralised Eurocentric narrative from the more nuanced travel observations in detail.

anthropological observations created a diversified Asian space of social knowledge that followed his curiosity in human geographies and his moral understanding of Asian cultural spaces. His personal curiosity towards encountering local people showed a reflected mechanism of integrating his knowledge about Asia into a Eurocentric system of morals and identifications, yet also pointed to creating analogies and similarities of different Asian people to the German and European spheres. In this sense, Richthofen's creation of knowledge is exercising a sorting power of evaluating cultures through a Eurocentric normative concept, but that did not mean an inscription of conquest, subjugation, or dominance in the classical imperial sense. Through highlighting relational similarities and peculiarities rather than stark differences, Richthofen created a cultural order of Asia that presented a hierarchy of people and cultures related to his own understanding of their collective intellectual and moral self-consciousness. His specific German idealism thus became the normative yardstick for constructing Asian spaces and hierarchies.⁸⁷

Spaces and Identities: Japan

Richthofen developed a high esteem for Japan between his first encounter in 1860 and his subsequent visits until 1871. Many of his observations try to make sense of a Japan in transition from Tokugawa to early Meiji society. One important factor for the Japan craze among the members of the Eulenburg expedition, Richthofen among them, was the long stay in Japan while waiting for the conclusion of the trade treaty that facilitated many more observations.⁸⁸ Further, knowledge in Germany was much scarcer about Japan than about other Asian countries.⁸⁹ Although

⁸⁷ Richthofen (1907, I, 323).

⁸⁸ Eulenburg (1900, 129) and Wichura (1868, 167). See also *Illustrierte Zeitung Leipzig*, no. 916, 19 January 1861, 35–38; no. 917, 26 January 1861, 53–54; no. 918, 2 February 1861, 67–69; no. 920, 16 February 1861, 111–113; no. 935, 1 June 1861, 374; no. 937, 15 June 1861, 418; *Nationalzeitung Berlin (Morgenausgabe)*, nos. 177, 179, 183, 191, 213, 217, 219: 17 April, 18 April, 20 April, 26 April, 9 May, 12 May, 14 May 1861.

⁸⁹ “Never has Japan seen an expedition like the Prussian that was so well equipped in its scientific means of observation.” *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 493, 23 March 1861; *North China Herald*, no. 544, 29 December 1860, 207. See Dobson (2009a, 123–130; 2009b, 34–36) and Jacob (2016, 69–71).

Japan was constructed as a “new Asia Prussia” by Eulenburg and others,⁹⁰ Richthofen set the tone for an image of Japan as a virile “Prussia of the East,” an upward striving modernising power with moral and intellectual characters aspiring to become European or exceed those standards.⁹¹ His admiration for the “perfection” of crafts and its “pure and noble” taste in details far exceeded European yardsticks and indicated for Richthofen an advanced intellectual maturity. “The industriousness of the people is astonishing. [...] One cannot comprehend how it is possible that a people that is completely closed off and has no connection to the outside world, can produce all of this and developed in diverse directions to such a civilizational height as it has.”⁹²

His curiosity to understand cultural Japan in 1860 also led Richthofen to evaluate other foreign prejudices and to form his own opinions. Parts of the German public criticised the American and British policies because they seemed to be destroying the very essence of civilisation by their “disgusting exercise.”⁹³ Prussia on the contrary would do its utmost to “ensure that Japanese would have the highest esteem for European power and civilisation.”⁹⁴ This general tone of Prussian *Kultur* and appreciation for Japan continued in Richthofen’s later travel reports when encountering fellow foreigners. Upon a visit at the Bellecourts in October 1860, the young Parisian wife of the British attaché in Yokohama (Madame Hodgson) complained incessantly about the “dirty and abominable” character of “the” Japanese. Dismissing the bored woman, Richthofen lamented that “if one listens to such narrow-minded judgements, one understands how wrong and absurd opinions about foreign people and places can gain solid ground.”⁹⁵ The problem with most mid-nineteenth century constructions of Asia were in his opinion that they emerged from these narrow-minded attitudes of the European and American merchant communities. “They do not even get to know the people, they judge

⁹⁰ “Everything looks as if we were in Germany, just more cute and neat. I am totally in love with the country” (Eulenburg 1900, 129).

⁹¹ Japan showed “signs of vital power, intellectual freshness and the ability to higher education” which in turn suggested a likeness between Prussia-Germany and Japan. Sturz (1859, 7); See Richthofen (1912a, 1912b, 37) and Berg (1865, II, 36).

⁹² Richthofen (1912a, 1912b 37). Richthofen called it “geistige Bildung.”

⁹³ *Illustrierte Zeitung Leipzig*, no. 937, 15 June 1861, 418.

⁹⁴ *Illustrierte Zeitung Leipzig*, no. 937, 15 June 1861, 418.

⁹⁵ Richthofen (1912b, 57).

only on the value of money, but without understanding the inner values of society.”⁹⁶ Richthofen as a university-educated member of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* questioned the capacity and indeed the moral quality of his fellow Europeans in Asia to observe and judge upon the character of the Japanese. While he stressed his exclusive Eurocentric view of the superiority of moral qualities in observation and sciences, he warned that the Asia created by European merchant adventurers did not reflect well on European civilisations. On the contrary, while “we might possess more moral and intellectual education than the Japanese, [...] these European elites do not come to Japan. [...] It is the servile excess of a greedy merchant world [...] that clings to Japan like parasites.”⁹⁷

Richthofen distinguished between the people at large and the administrative elites. While he considered Japanese to be generally curious and without prejudice, the *yakunins* as administrative warrior overseers of the foreigners in Japan appeared to him stubborn, strict, and full of xenophobic prejudice. For Richthofen in the light of the merchant community in Japan, the xenophobia of these Japanese elites against the foreigners was understandable. Yet he went even further to argue that state administration was the same everywhere: “Who in our countries likes a tax collector?”⁹⁸ As a country, Richthofen saw the modernising potential in Japan to improve according to his Eurocentric idea of advancement of progress. Japan was giving him “much hope to align with the Germanic people” because the Japanese, though perfectionists in some cultural traits, “have acknowledged the moral superiority of the educated Europeans and burn with curiosity to learn from them and to move to Europe for education.”⁹⁹ In essence, Richthofen’s Japan in line with other contemporary judgements placed the similarity of Prussia and Japan as the interpretative framework for curious observations on Asia.¹⁰⁰ The distinction between greedy merchant interests and higher moral values in the classification of Asian civilisations likened the European controversies about the peculiarities of the Germans versus the French and British commercial interests in imperialism.

⁹⁶ Richthofen (1912b, 57–58).

⁹⁷ Richthofen (1912b, 58).

⁹⁸ Richthofen (1912b, 58).

⁹⁹ Richthofen (1907, I, 264).

¹⁰⁰ Richthofen (1907, I, 282).

Spaces and Identity: Korea

The relational construction of Asian spaces through comparative observation becomes much more pronounced in Richthofen's reflections on Korea and China. One of the most interesting parts of the travel diary surfaces when Richthofen reached the Chinese border with Korea in 1869. He described his encounter with the Korean merchants in late 1869 as "his dearest memory."¹⁰¹ The "Great Gate of Korea" east of Fongwhangtschin (to the Northeast of today's Dandong) was the only gateway for trade between China and Korea with markets on the Chinese side of the border only held in April, June, and October each year.¹⁰² Richthofen observed with considerable surprise the physiognomy and appearance of Korean merchants, describing them as "more handsome, larger, and stronger than any Chinese or Japanese."¹⁰³ Further, Richthofen elaborated in his civilisational observations on the cleanliness and "whiteness" of Korean merchants in clothing, houses, and with a skin even "purer" than the Europeans were. "I believe that they are the cleanliest people on earth."¹⁰⁴ In his observations, the likening of cleanliness to civilisation in a Eurocentric sense also touched upon his concept of sensual encounter as Koreans lacked "the most problematic affection of the smell, a very unpleasant attribute of the Chinese even of the better classes."¹⁰⁵

In describing Koreans as interested and civilised observers towards foreigners, Richthofen contrasted in a relational approach Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans in rather sweeping interpretations. He likened Chinese curiosity in Europeans to the European imperial powers' curiosity in Africa.

The Chinese want to see the Europeans with the same curiosity that attracts us to visit a [circus] menagerie or an exhibition of Zulu Kaffirs. They want to have seen us, talked to us, and observed us while we eat; the act of feeding is for them the main attraction. Not the Koreans: they naturally left the room during our meals and returned when we had finished. In our

¹⁰¹ Richthofen (1907, I, 284).

¹⁰² Richthofen (1907, I, 129–131), Ratzel (1876, 145) and Meyer's *Konversationslexikon* (1885, X, 87). See also Chan (2018, 137–145).

¹⁰³ Richthofen (1907, I, 231).

¹⁰⁴ Richthofen (1907, I, 232).

¹⁰⁵ Richthofen (1907, I, 232).

conversation, they showed curious interest in us and were keen to reflect on our thoughts and to learn from us. [...] Despite their isolation, the Koreans showed more knowledge of foreign countries than the Chinese from interior cities.¹⁰⁶

The opposition between Korean knowledgeable curiosity and Chinese imperial gaze becomes apparent and points towards Richthofen's creation of morally distinct spaces in Asia. Further, he does not only criticise the Chinese practice of treating the Korean merchants and others with disrespect. Implicitly Richthofen condemned imperial superiority and lack of genuine curiosity and thirst for knowledge equally in the Chinese attitude towards foreigners and in his fellow Europeans in their arrogant approach to Africa alike.

The Koreans appeared to him as people of decency as they left the room during his dinner; they developed a keen interest in the world, asked about Prussia, and reflected upon philosophical questions that he judged as a higher "value that indicates an inner feeling, a sympathetic element that stirs our compassion."¹⁰⁷ For Richthofen, Japanese and Koreans showed self-conscious reflection and courage facing the West, even a national pride that he missed between the Chinese. The problem that becomes apparent is the undoubtedly normative appreciation of assumed intellectual and moral proximity of what Richthofen identifies as Korean and Japanese behaviour to his understanding of German *Kultur*. The moral values and their actualisation in political consciousness sets the tone for cruder hierarchies of civilisation between Europe and Asia in the following decades, but also questions Chinese claims to cultural superiority towards Koreans and Japanese through the lenses of German concepts of moral and virtue in judging Asian people.

These rather sweeping observations based on single encounters point towards a referential identification of the similar in the other. Just as Werner Sombart observed some decades later in distinguishing an English merchant from a German *Kultur* spirit, Richthofen criticised the materialism of his Chinese encounters and the merchant mentality of petty shop owners as opposed to a higher spiritual aspiration of Koreans and Japanese.¹⁰⁸ He even likened Japan and Korea to the "Germanic" people

¹⁰⁶ Richthofen (1907, I, 233).

¹⁰⁷ Richthofen (1907, I, 259–260, 233).

¹⁰⁸ Richthofen (1907, I, 234, 260).

of Asia that made up in virility for a lack of Chinese—and one might add English—shopkeeper spirit.¹⁰⁹ In observing Asia at the pivot of three different civilisations, Richthofen’s interpretation of European differences mapped upon his perceptions and constructions of Asia.

Spaces and Identity: China

The reports on China from the Eulenburg expedition had created a socio-cultural space that repeated sweeping stereotypes of stasis and moral deficits of “this peculiar people.” Starting with the description of their quarters at the “Hotel to the Dancing Cockroach” in Shanghai, the participants created a country still struck by the Taiping Rebellion and confined to “dirt” and moral decay.¹¹⁰ This rather negative tone of a static China in comparison with a dynamic Japan set the tone for the expectations with which Richthofen re-encountered Asia in the form of the Chinese Empire in 1868.

Richthofen was impressed by the commercial vibrancy and resilience in China, yet not in a morally uplifting sense. Richthofen condemned outright the lack of curiosity beyond the expected results of knowledge and learning: “They touch upon everything, but we never heard one single question that would run deeper than the mere material surface.”¹¹¹ The essence and nature of an open curiosity seemed to be lacking. This confirmed Richthofen’s judgement that China needed triggers from the outside to overcome a purely materialistic and thus culturally static understanding of the world. “The materialism of the Chinese is beyond description. Buying and selling are their highest aim in life.”¹¹²

He emphasised the rapid decline of European and American trade houses and the take-over of Chinese businesses in the Treaty Ports, to the extent that if Chinese merchants were ever to expand to Europe, the Europeans could pack up their business.¹¹³ “The Chinese are very competent in business and at least equal to the Europeans, but have

¹⁰⁹ Richthofen (1907, I, 260, 263–264).

¹¹⁰ Eulenburg (1900, 181, 197, 228), Kreyher (1863, 193, 252–253), and Rose (1895, 70, 79) (Quote).

¹¹¹ Richthofen (1907, I, 259).

¹¹² Richthofen (1907, I, 260).

¹¹³ Richthofen (1907, I, 80–81).

the great advantage of demanding fewer resources.”¹¹⁴ The commercial competence however differed according to provinces. He likened, e.g. people in Kiangsi to the British as a “shop keeper people.”¹¹⁵ In constructing within Asia equivalent comparisons to European popular images of national characters, Richthofen exposed his equally conceited opinion of Germany as a philosophical country against a morally inferior shopkeeper mentality of British imperialism. Not unlike other contemporaries, Richthofen identified the Chinese as the British of the East against Japan and Korea as their more Prussian stern, “self-conscious and courageous” counterparts.¹¹⁶ His increasing knowledge of the provincial diversity of China however raised doubts in him over these sweeping observations. With more insight into other provinces, he conceded that the merchants from Kiangsi differed considerably from the “intelligent and moral, yet too honest shopkeepers from Shensi.”¹¹⁷ In this continuous curiosity through observing human relations lay a certain self-corrective of Richthofen, very much in line with his claim to disinterested scientific observation.

Richthofen’s process of learning through observation stemmed from his curiosity in his human environment. In applying his own yardstick of living a “spirit of inquiry and decency in encounter,” he changed his initial attitude towards the role and status of mandarins as the source of Chinese stasis and decay. While in 1868, he reiterated the European stereotype that the Confucian mandarins were the source of Chinese cultural decay, in 1870 he realised that this was not the case. The local mandarins as “fathers of the administrative districts” were less of an authority than representatives that had to follow the opinions of the districts. “If the Mandarin does not act according to the will and needs of the people, he risks to be promoted to the afterlife.”¹¹⁸ This learning through curiosity and observation also placed his judgements on the reasons for stasis and decay into a new light.

Richthofen applied an unscientific dual yardstick towards observing China. The main parameters of this normative standard appeared to

¹¹⁴ Richthofen (1907, I, 81).

¹¹⁵ Richthofen (1907, I, 99).

¹¹⁶ Richthofen (1907, I, 233).

¹¹⁷ Richthofen (1907, I, 540).

¹¹⁸ Richthofen (1907, I, 407).

be moral progress and industrial modernisation in conjunction with the German idea of intellectual and philosophical *Kultur*. Richthofen's curiosity was thus channelled towards evaluating his observations through the assumed moral quality of Prussian Protestantism and industry. Just as he exposed a sincere dislike of European missionaries in China due to their ineffective work, he also addressed a "very low opinion of the morals of the Chinese; [...] they lack all the invigorating, warming and healing qualities of the doctrines of Christendom."¹¹⁹ Confucianism as a moral framework would not allow for any development of progress or morals in China. "The Chinese converts see in Christianity a lucrative business."¹²⁰ Thus, he assessed conversions by voluntary association that were made only to gain monetary advantage, again highlighting the assumed commercial mind of Chinese that was incapable of reaching the higher echelons of German inner *Kultur*. He argued that any progress in material development must be accompanied by a progress in morals, and in principle, he saw the potential in China to do so. "If the Chinese changed to modern education and intellectual strength according to their true intelligence, they would with their sheer mass of intelligent labour crush the whole world."¹²¹ Although he recognised the potential, he insisted that this potential must be triggered from European interference and support, as China would be incapable of abandoning the traditions of Confucianism that morally crippled the people and confined the country from the top down to stasis.¹²² This imperialism of development guided his curiosity in observing and constructing China and channelled his social knowledge and construction of China as a moral and social space.

The underlying normative narrative extended to the observation of places in China. In those, Richthofen displayed an open curiosity that leads him to evaluate and reconsider his assumptions. Ningbo is a particularly striking example because open curiosity about the unexpected appearance of the town aligned with an instrumentalised reflection of the usage of knowledge for a German audience. Upon arrival from Yokohama in China in late 1868, Richthofen's first port of call was Ningbo that immediately struck him as "different" from his former experiences

¹¹⁹ Richthofen (1907, I, 142).

¹²⁰ Richthofen (1907, I, 143).

¹²¹ Richthofen (1907, I, 144).

¹²² Richthofen (1907, I, 143–147).

and perceptions of China. “The cleanliness of the streets, the precision in the style of the houses, the plentifulness of temples with groves, the pretty burial sites on the hills, the kind gentleness of its people, the diligence in agriculture – all this is totally Japanese and not Chinese.”¹²³ Richthofen took Japan as the yardstick for progressive and Prussian transformation in Asia and praised Ningbo as a place outside of his imaginary of China. In doing so, Richthofen in his curiosity about the places of exploration added complex layers to the images on Asia and China, in particular, thus responding to the stereotypical descriptions of China in engaging with European discourses on space and place in highlighting the possibilities of progress through science, industriousness, and cleanliness.

Utilising his lenses of modernity, Richthofen further praised Ningbo as a centre of trade and entrepreneurship. In fact, he identified resilience and search for opportunities to forge businesses as a key character trait of the Ningbonese.¹²⁴ By Ningbo, Richthofen meant not only a confined legal space, the place of the city itself. Highlighting the influx of vast capital into the local network of merchants from the connected towns in Ningbo’s hinterland, Richthofen further constructed Ningbo as a space of connected places, so that the perception of Ningbo included human webs of influential families from its surrounding smaller towns, notably Cixi to the Northwest of Ningbo.¹²⁵ The Treaty Port system and the forceful opening of the Qing Empire to foreign powers had a mixed effect on Ningbo. While it had led to a decline of traditional trade connections, it also set free new creative potential among the Ningbonese.¹²⁶ “The influence that the Ningpo [sic!] people have gained in Shanghai is very peculiar and noteworthy.”¹²⁷ He claimed that Ningbonese had taken over the Sampan business and controlled the Coolie business in Shanghai. The small and “Cheap Jack” trade as well as large parts of the commodity trade seemingly fell into the hands of Ningbo merchants, too. Thus, Richthofen concluded enthusiastically “the Shanghai people cannot compete with the

¹²³ Richthofen (1907, I, 38–39). See also Wichura (1868, 168): “My thought are still in Japan, and I think that this will remain the highlight of our travel experiences.”

¹²⁴ Richthofen (1907, II, 6).

¹²⁵ Richthofen (1907, II, 7).

¹²⁶ Richthofen (1907, II, 6–7; 1912b, 157).

¹²⁷ Richthofen (1907, II, 6).

[Ningbo people] in almost any business or direction.”¹²⁸ “In a country, in which everything seems to be amalgamated and undifferentiated, this localized pre-eminence of talents and directions of the entrepreneurial spirit is a most notable fact.”¹²⁹

While occupying key businesses in a trans-local fashion within the Qing Empire, the Ningbo overseas trade and commercial businesses also returned. They did so partly using the smaller “imperial” powers in their attempts to secure a share in the vast domestic and East Asian sea trade, e.g. Prussia and the German Hanseatic shipping companies, and partly through exercising their own might. Richthofen observed this increasing dominance of Chinese trading houses overseas, some of them based in Ningbo, in Yokohama in 1870.¹³⁰ The European trading houses in China and Japan were struggling to survive financially and to get a sustained foothold into the imperial Treaty Port system of trade. One of the main reasons for Richthofen’s extended China travels was in fact the urgent request of the International Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai to explore investment options in coal mining and infrastructure that would make up for the failing trading balance in the treaty ports.¹³¹

His engagement with Ningbo also points to another discussion in Germany that Richthofen tried to influence. The German public opted strongly against acquiring formal colonies but hoped for coaling stations and favourable harbours to establish navy stations along the Indian and Pacific Oceans.¹³² Ningbo and the Chusan (Zhoushan) islands

¹²⁸ Richthofen (1907, II, 7).

¹²⁹ Richthofen (1907, II, 7).

¹³⁰ Richthofen (1912b, 157).

¹³¹ Richthofen (1903, passim); *North China Herald*, 14 November 1868, 557; *North China Herald*, 30 November 1869, 628–629; *North China Herald* 4 January 1870, n.p.

¹³² “Colonies in the old sense are partly unpractical, partly dangerous, and we would rightly be ridiculed as the Don Quixote’s of world history if we wanted to burden ourselves with such Pandora’s boxes at a time when more enlightened nations consider abandoning them. [...] With colonies stay away from us!” *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 816, 1 June 1867, 186. *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 781, 29 September 1866, 332; *Berlinische Nachrichten*, no. 117, 21 May 1867; *Wochenblatt des Nationalvereins*, no. 108, 13 June 1867, 846; *Bremer Handelsblatt*, no. 998, 26 November 1870; Friedel (1867, 6–7, 68); *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen*, no. 32, 7 August 1867, 1278–1280; StBRT (1867, 271–272); Wuellerstorf-Urbair (1880, 190). See Wirth (1898, 123–126), Stoecker (1958, 69–71), Yü (1981, 157–158) and Richter (2017). The leasehold or purchase of Formosa, Chusan, the Nicobar Islands, and even Saigon were under question.

appeared to him the best home for a geopolitical and mercantile base for Prussia. While not in favour of formal colonies, he suggested to the Prussian and later German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck that Ningbo and the Chusan (Zhoushan) islands were the ideal place to invest, trade, and collaborate as Germany was slowly turning its dream of an Empire in the East into an aspiring reality.¹³³

6 CONCLUSION

Richthofen's travel writings created a forceful image of human landscapes in Asia that left lasting impressions on the evaluation of German involvement in China, Japan, Korea, and other places. Richthofen promoted a strong imperialism of development and this shines through in his writings on China. Further, his writings exhibit strong normative yardsticks that underlie his celebration of objective scientific observation, especially the moral and cultural dimensions of his civilisational interpretations of Asia. Yet, this normative yardstick did not hinder Richthofen from developing and exercising an interested curiosity in observing and constructing Asia beyond crude stereotypes or simplistic imperial gazes. The difficulties arise from the ways in which Richthofen stages his curiosity paired with his scientific ethos of rational and impartial observation. This rather naïve assumption finds its limits in the application of moral standards for observation that are also part of his identity creation. As a herald of Prussian-German *Kultur* and civilisation more broadly at the frontier of industrial development and moral progress, plenty of observations move towards an attempt to order Asian spaces in terms of a moral hierarchy related to a developed critical self-consciousness. Richthofen's curiosity also allows for a severe criticism of superficial European observers and creators of fake knowledge about Asia that rules out any meaningful interaction. This perspective triggers many fascinating observations on Asia as it groups the status and potential of Asian countries and their populations in relation to industrial and moral development. Yet in doing so, Richthofen also opens the field for later attempts to create imperial hierarchies in Asia by substituting *Kultur* for race in the decades until 1914 and beyond.

¹³³ See Yü (1981, 155–164) and Stoecker (1958, 62–84).

However, Richthofen did not create the will and might for colonialism through his travel writings. Instead, his observations point to the potentials of German and more widely European interests in Asia and possible opportunities and encouragement of agency—financial, commercial, and political—to pursue a different agenda. That is not an exercise of might, but an evaluation of the possibilities of agency to do so. Jürgen Osterhammel has elaborated Richthofen's understanding of an imperialism of development that lifted different countries of Asia into their specific places in the stages of civilisational and ultimately industrial progress to modernity. This article has shown that this project of imperialism of development relied on a moral concept of self-conscious reflection that Richthofen placed at the heart of the modern progressive individualistic society. In judging Asia through these specific lenses, the appreciation of the numerous observations that add up to Richthofen's construction of Asia is included in an inward-looking moral map of the progressive world that finds its outer repercussions in industrial and eventually political development. Change becomes possible through a Eurocentric appreciation of the enlightened individual, not through the adoption of industrial and technological means alone.

This normative Eurocentric concept does not inscribe an exclusive ethnocentric perspective that degraded people and their spaces in Asia to merely passive receivers of developmental infusions. Richthofen does not start by an inflexible perception of a retrograde Asia, although he sees China in particular as an Empire in trouble lacking self-conscious agency individually and collectively. He is able to correct his value judgements while he travels, and amends his initial perceptions through his thorough scientific observation or through anthropological ways of listening. In changing and challenging some of his images through staged reflections, he diversifies and to some point “destabilises” a coherent image of Asia that was absorbed by the audiences at home.

Further, Richthofen displayed with his observations the ambivalence of European perspectives on Asia in a field of tensions between aspirations for moral and material progress and open awe, sometimes even anxiety, as to the potential of Asia in their main observed entities China, Japan, and Korea. Once his observations had led to a successful stimulation of development through imperial means in Asia, Europe would not be able to keep up with them. In essence, Richthofen's observations indicate a deep fear of the effects of imperialism of development, a Eurocentric infusion

of moral and material progress through incursion based on limited and borrowed time.

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In Search of Textual Treasures: The Ōtani Expeditions and Tibet

Stephen W. Kohl and Ronald S. Green

1 INTRODUCTION

Count Ōtani Kōzui (1876–1948) was a student in London in 1901 when archaeologist Aurel Stein (1862–1943) electrified the scholarly world with news of his discoveries of Buddhist cities buried beneath the sands of the Taklamakan desert along the Silk Road trade routes in Chinese Turkestan. These finds revealed the existence of a Buddhist culture that had thrived in the region prior to the invasion of Islam, reflected the merging of Indian, Greek, and Chinese culture, and continue to be of major importance to Buddhist studies. As the various countries of Europe rushed to launch expeditions into the area for further exploration, Ōtani felt that Japan, eager to prove itself as a newly modern nation, should not be left

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behind. As the Japanese government appeared to be unaware of and uninterested in this endeavor, Ōtani decided to sponsor his own expeditions of exploration and archaeology. As scion to, and later leader of, the largest Buddhist sect in Japan, he had vast financial resources at his disposal that enabled him to do this. In part, he was motivated by patriotism, he felt this would enhance Japan's prestige on the world stage, but he also felt that these were sacred sites and religious relics which should properly be explored and excavated by Asian Buddhists rather than European scholars and collectors.

It is also important to note that Ōtani's objectives were different in nature and far more extensive and ambitious than any of the European-sponsored expeditions. In addition to three expeditions into the Tarim basin and surrounding areas in 1902–1903, 1908–1909, and 1910–1914, he also sent an expedition from Burma into Yunnan and central China to document a southern route for the transmission of Buddhism from India to China and ultimately to Japan. In addition, he led two expeditions to explore sacred sites in India and Sri Lanka. Tibet, inaccessible and isolated, had long been of interest to Ōtani. In 1899 during his first trip to China, he made a point to visit the Yonghegong temple in Beijing, which was the headquarters of Tibetan Buddhism in China. In 1904 when Hori Masuo completed the first expedition, instead of returning to Japan, he was sent to Yonghegong to learn the practices of Tibetan Buddhism. In 1908, the second expedition traveled through Mongolia to study first-hand the practice of Tibetan Buddhism, and at the end of that expedition Ōtani ordered Tachibana Zuichō to return to India via Tibet if possible. Therefore, Tibet was a major focus of Ōtani's interest for many years. This was in part because Tibet adjoined India and particularly Nepal where the Buddha was born and died, and also because Tibet had maintained an uninterrupted tradition of Buddhism. Thus, it was thought that Tibet practiced a purer form of Buddhism than that which had made its circuitous way to Japan. In any case, Ōtani felt that Tibet was a vast repository of Buddhist texts and knowledge, and particularly religious scriptures that may have been lost in India and China, but had survived in Tibet. Indeed, the Chinese characters used to write the word Tibet mean “western repository.” In addition, Ōtani saw Japan and Tibet as the only two major Buddhist countries in the world and as leader of Japanese Buddhism he felt a special kinship with the Dalai Lama who was the leader of Tibetan Buddhism. Thus it is not surprising that Ōtani had a special interest in Tibet.

In terms of religious scholarship, these explorations were all well and good, but in terms of the geopolitics of the time, they were highly problematic. Tibet was an especially sensitive and troublesome area. The Great Game between England and Russia had largely been resolved in the west in Persia and Afghanistan, and by the early twentieth century had shifted to Chinese Turkestan and Tibet. Russia was expanding its interests southward through what is known as Russian and Chinese Turkestan, Britain was determined to defend the northern approaches to India by pushing its influence northward, and China was anxious to hold on to and have recognized all the territories it claimed for its own, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet. Consequently, everywhere Ōtani and his scholar priests went in pursuing their research, they were working in highly sensitive and contested areas and their activities naturally aroused suspicion. Accusations that he and his crew acted as spies are explored and assessed below. In the second half of the chapter, we also discuss the experiences and geographies described in Aoki Bunkyō's travel account.

2 THE 13TH DALAI LAMA AND THE FIRST ŌTANI EXPEDITION

In 1904 Britain launched the Younghusband expedition into Tibet, an invasion by British Indian forces. The proximate cause for this was that Britain was hearing rumors that a certain Buriat Mongol from Siberia, Agvan Dorjiev (1854–1938), a lama studying in Lhasa, had gained the ear of the 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso (1876–1933) and was promoting the notion that the Russian Tsar was a leader who would protect Tibet. This rumor alarmed Lord Curzon (1859–1925), Viceroy and Governor-General of India 1899–1905, who did not want a Russian presence on India's northern doorstep. Determined to block Russian influence in Tibet, he felt he needed to hold discussions with the Dalai Lama to persuade him that Britain, not Russia, would be Tibet's savior. Curzon saw a minor border dispute between India and Tibet as an opportunity to open talks and sent a letter to the Dalai Lama. He got no reply, and in due time sent a second letter. After some months of silence from Lhasa both letters were returned unopened. Curzon was indignant that his letters had not even been read. As representative of His Majesty, King Edward VII (1841–1910), Curzon felt that both he and the king had been insulted by this rebuff. In 1904, he called on Francis Younghusband (1863–1942) to lead a military expedition to Lhasa to force the Dalai

Lama to negotiate an agreement with Britain. It was no accident that the Younghusband expedition set out just at the time when Russia was engaged in a catastrophic war with Japan and therefore was distracted from what was happening in Tibet. One would guess this was the real impetus for the expedition; to steal a march on Russia and to assert British influence on Tibet while Russia was preoccupied.

Younghusband eventually reached Lhasa and forced Tibetan officials to come to an agreement, but what he did not get was acceptance of this agreement by the Dalai Lama, the supreme spiritual and political leader of Tibet. The Dalai Lama had seen the British army coming and had fled north to Kulun (also known as Urga and Ulan Bator) in Mongolia. He had hoped to find refuge in Russia, but the Russians refused to allow him to cross the frontier. Eventually the Dalai Lama withdrew to the sacred mountain Wutaishan in China in 1908, where he waited and pondered his next move. He was in a difficult position. Lhasa was occupied by the British army, the Russians had rejected him and at this point China, which had become alarmed by the British and Russian moves in Tibet, demanded that he come to Beijing to kowtow to the Emperor and the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908), thereby publically reaffirming that he was a subject of the emperor and that Tibet was part of China. Thus weak, isolated Tibet was being squeezed on all sides by the Great Powers of Britain, Russia, and China and the Dalai Lama did not know where to turn.

At this point, Ōtani Kōzui stepped in, not with military force or harsh demands, but by extending a hand of friendship and fellowship as a fellow Buddhist. Ōtani dispatched his younger brother, Ōtani Sonyu (1886–1939), along with Hori Masuo (aka Hori Kenyū, 1880–1949), Teramoto Enga (1872–1940), and others to meet with the Dalai Lama at Wutaishan and reassure him that fellow Buddhists should stand together. Here we can see a clear case of spiritual networks forming across Asian space.

The meeting, on August 2, 1908, was a brilliant display of Buddhist pomp. Teramoto Enga described the scene. The Dalai Lama wore “dazzling yellow Chinese clothing and was wrapped in a crimson Tibetan Buddhist stole.” Sonyu “wore a skirted coat with red autumn leaves, and over it a seven-striped Buddhist stole with a cloud and dragon design embroidered in red.” Teramoto himself wore, “the garb of a Mongolian lama,” while Hori Masuo wore a “five-striped robe of raw silk.” Kai Hironaka wearing a frock coat and a Mongolian lama named Daruwa served as interpreters. Sonyu began with a greeting, “Although the Abbot

(Kōzui) of Nishi Honganji in Kyoto, Japan has traveled extensively in India, the western regions and various parts of China, he has not yet been able to travel the long road to your country Tibet... Consequently he has dispatched me to ask after Your Holiness' safety and wellbeing." The Dalai Lama for his part responded by saying, "Although I ought to send an emissary to your country Japan to reciprocate, for some years now I have been faced with adversity and it is truly regrettable that I have not been able to do so." At a second meeting on August 4, 1908, the Dalai Lama expressed the hope that "students from your country and Tibetan lamas could go back and forth."¹

On September 27, 1908, the Dalai Lama left Wutaishan and traveled to Beijing to kowtow to the Emperor and the Empress Dowager. The Qing court insisted on this in order to demonstrate Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, to make clear to both Britain and Russia that Tibet was Chinese territory. The Dalai Lama did this reluctantly, but felt he had no choice in the matter. Unfortunately, within a few days of his audience with the Chinese emperor, both the Emperor and the Empress Dowager died. Some suspected foul play on the part of the Dalai Lama that naturally increased tensions between him and the Qing court. Toward the end of December, the Dalai Lama left Beijing to return to Lhasa, but for some reason that is not clear he stopped at the Amdo monastery on the eastern edge of the Tibetan highlands and did not return to Lhasa until November 1909. By that time the governor of Sichuan, Zhao Erfeng (1845–1911), had been ordered to send Chinese troops to occupy the Tibetan capital.

3 THE SECOND ŌTANI EXPEDITION

While all of this was going on, Ōtani's second expedition into Central Asia was in progress. Tachibana Zuichō (1890–1968) and Nomura Eisaburō (1877–1964) set out in March 1908 to travel north from Beijing through Mongolia to Kulun, then west to Urumchi, the capital of Chinese Turkestan. Their goal in Mongolia was to investigate the nature of Tibetan Buddhism in that country. Once they arrived in the Tarim Basin, their objective was to follow up and expand on the explorations of the first Ōtani expedition of 1902–3. The pair split up and Nomura made his

¹ Shirasu (2012, 38); Teramoto (1974, 282–284). All translations in this chapter are by Stephen W. Kohl unless otherwise noted.

way along the southern edge of the Tienshan range to Kucha, then on to Kashgar. Tachibana headed south to the fabled and lost oasis city of Loulan along the Silk Road (which had no water at the time) and then followed the route along the southern edge of the Taklamakan desert to Kashgar where he rejoined Nomura.

Once Tachibana and Nomura were reunited at Kashgar in August 1909, problems arose. First, on August 15 Nomura received a telegram from Kyoto concerning their travel routes from Kashgar out to India. The telegram rather cryptically said “If Tibet is dangerous Tachibana is to go from Poru to Leh [in Ladak], otherwise, try the Mustagh Pass. Nomura will carry a light load of important artifacts and cross the Karakoram Pass.... Leave the heavy baggage with the English representative in Kashgar. The abbot will go to India in November, you are to meet him there.”²

At that time, as we have seen, Chinese forces were invading Tibet, so perhaps Tachibana felt it was dangerous to travel in that country. In any case, he opted not to travel through Tibet, but chose to have Nomura go out by the standard route through the Karakoram Pass while he would attempt to make his way through the notoriously difficult Mustagh Pass across the Baltoro Muztagh range that includes K2, the world’s second highest mountain. Years earlier Francis Younghusband had gained some degree of fame by crossing the Mustagh Pass on his epic journey from Beijing to India, and apparently Tachibana was determined to show that Japanese explorers could manage it as well. At that time, Captain A.R.B. Shuttleworth was serving as British representative in Kashgar and when he informed Tachibana that no porters would agree to carry baggage across that difficult pass, and that besides, the Indian government would only permit him to enter India via the Karakoram Pass, Tachibana became obnoxious.

Next, Tachibana and Nomura found themselves to be without sufficient funds to pay for their travel to India and insisted that Captain Shuttleworth lend them 1500 taels (some sources say 2000 taels, in any case, a large amount of Qing currency), Shuttleworth demurred on the grounds that he did not know who these travelers were and could not justify lending such a large sum of public money. He suggested that they ask the Chinese Daotai, circuit officer, for a loan. Instead, they

² Uehara (1937, 542).

wired Kyoto and had the needed money sent telegraphically, but their demand and its refusal created more tension between Shuttleworth and the Japanese travelers. On top of these frictions, Shuttleworth received a report from the governor of Yarkand, located on the southern rim of the Taklamakan Desert, that while there Tachibana had abused and beaten a Chinese citizen. All of this left Shuttleworth ill-disposed toward the Japanese.

In the end, Shuttleworth wrote a letter to Francis Younghusband, who at that time was the British Resident in Kashmir, expressing his doubts and misgivings about the Japanese explorers. He wrote in part that they swagger about and sometimes thrash the natives so that the local Chinese do not think well of them. He told how Tachibana had become impertinent when told he could not cross the Mustagh Pass. He complained that they demanded travel money, and he concluded by saying the Russian consul claimed that Nomura was an army officer and Tachibana a naval officer.³ Shuttleworth also claimed that the Japanese did a great deal of surveying and engaged in secret activities although he did not say what those activities were. He also said they gave him a large packet of letters to forward and he believed, without evidence, that the packet might contain maps and reports of some sort. He said Nomura was seen making sketches in the vicinity of Kashgar and that he himself observed Nomura on the city wall where he appeared to be making a survey. Finally, he said that Tachibana made sketches of the road from Marl bashi to Yarkand and that he was seen measuring the distance between telegraph poles.⁴

Captain Shuttleworth was clearly put off by Tachibana's attitude and behavior, and perhaps rightly so, but he was also willing to believe anything negative he heard about the Japanese, especially false information from the Russian consul who was a well-known troublemaker who frequently went out of his way to create dissension between the British and anyone else who was in the area. The Chinese governor of Yarkand surely had a more reasonable view when he said, "Tachibana's actions were unpleasant, but it is probably because he is so young."⁵ Tachibana was 19 years old.

³ Kaneko (2002, 148–149).

⁴ Kaneko (2002, 148–149).

⁵ Kaneko (2002, 145).

Captain Shuttleworth was also influenced by the English missionary George Hunter (1861–1946) who told him that Tachibana and Nomura had been involved with Hayashide Kenjiro (1882–1970) while they were in Urumchi. Hayashide was known to be an agent of the Japanese Foreign Ministry sent out to collect information on Central Asia, but the fact that he would give assistance to Tachibana and Nomura is only what one would expect any time Japanese travelers encounter a countryman in a foreign place.

Shuttleworth said that Nomura spoke no English and Tachibana only a few words, so it may have been largely a communication problem that led to their misunderstandings, the Japanese simply could not explain clearly their plans and intentions, and Shuttleworth was too willing to listen to rumors and untruths spread by George Hunter and the Russian consul.⁶ In any case, Shuttleworth's negative report went to India and the seeds of doubt had been planted. The British were concerned enough about Ōtani and his project that they ordered Sir Claude MacDonald (1852–1915), British ambassador to Japan, to look into the matter. On November 12, 1909, MacDonald sent a sharp note to Komura Jutarō (1855–1911) the Japanese Foreign Minister. He wrote: "I have received through the Secretary of the Government of India certain confidential information regarding the conduct of two Japanese, Messrs. Tachibana and Nomura who have been, and may still be traveling in Chinese Turkestan, which suggests the advisability of enquiring whether these gentlemen, if they should be known to Your Excellency, are proper persons to receive the assistance of British officials in their travels." He then goes on to document their rude behavior and concludes, "I venture to think it would be of advantage for all concerned if Your Excellency could kindly inform me whether they possess any claim to consideration or title to official recognition."

This was the first the Foreign Ministry had heard of Ōtani's expeditions. On November 22 Komura completely disavowed any connection with Ōtani's men, writing "In reply I have the honor to state for Your Excellency's information that the two persons named above are not Japanese government officials and that as regards the travels of these

⁶ Kaneko (2002, 131).

men in that region the Imperial Government have no concern with or cognizance of them.”⁷

There are two important points about this exchange of notes. First, it seems remarkable that the ambassador would concern himself with something so trivial as a pair of Japanese travelers in a remote part of China asking for travel assistance. Is this the sort of issue that ambassadors and foreign ministers normally discuss? It is a measure of how anxious the British were to know whether or not Tachibana and Nomura were agents of the Japanese government. The second point is equally important, namely that the Foreign Minister was able to say unequivocally that these men had no ties to the Japanese government.

The upshot of all this is that Tachibana and Nomura were marked as suspicious characters by the British government, and the Japanese Foreign Ministry became interested in knowing what Ōtani was up to with his expeditions and were concerned that he might upset a delicate international balance in a way that would be detrimental to Japan. The Foreign Ministry was concerned that suspicion of Ōtani reflected British suspicion of the Japanese government.

It was in this context, then, that Ōtani traveled to India in the autumn of 1909 in order to meet Tachibana and Nomura, and to carry out further explorations of Buddhist sites. We should also note that if the Dalai Lama had not stayed over at Amdo for eleven months on his return from Beijing, he would have been back in Lhasa at this time. It may be that Ōtani planned his trip to India with the expectation that the Dalai Lama would be in Lhasa. The situation Kōzui met in India was quite different from that of his earlier trip in 1902–03. When he arrived from Chinese Turkestan in 1902, he had been allowed to enter India by the Hunza Road, a special military road that was off limits to civilians and certainly to foreigners. But because the Anglo-Japanese treaty had just been signed there was a feeling of goodwill toward Japan,⁸ and because Ōtani was an important person, he was allowed to travel by that road on his journey from Kashgar into India.⁹ In 1909, he faced a very different reality; the British were suspicious of Kōzui’s activities. He arrived at Srinagar in October where he met with Younghusband and explained the nature of

⁷ Shirasu, (2012, 139–140).

⁸ Jansen (2000, 439 ff).

⁹ Uehara (1937).

his research activities and assured the Resident that his men were not spies. Nevertheless, at every turn he ran into roadblocks that inhibited his plans.

After meeting up with Tachibana and Nomura on their arrival from Central Asia, Kōzui and his party traveled to Delhi. There they visited the hospital room of Seki Roka, a reporter from the *Mainichi Shimbun*, who had accompanied Kōzui to India, but who had fallen ill. Seki was astonished when introduced to Tachibana. He had imagined the explorer to be a hard figure with a beard and something of a swashbuckler. Instead, he saw a young man of 19 who stood barely five feet two inches and whose “overall impression was that of an attractive 18 or 19 year old maiden.”¹⁰

From Delhi the party moved on to Calcutta. Tachibana and Nomura had left the bulk of their excavated artifacts at Kashgar in care of Captain Shuttleworth. Following Ōtani’s instructions they had brought with them only a selection of written materials in various languages which they deemed to be the most significant of their finds. In Calcutta in November 1909, they showed these to Dennison Ross (1871–1940), an Orientalist who was an expert in the languages of ancient Central Asia. He immediately recognized the importance of the Li Bai manuscript which Tachibana had unearthed at Loulan. This early fourth-century letter in Chinese turned out to be perhaps the single most important artifact collected by any of the Ōtani expeditions. Though it had nothing to do with Buddhism, it certainly established Tachibana’s reputation in Europe where he was recognized as an archaeologist of importance and elected to membership in the Royal Geographical Society.

4 THE THIRD ŌTANI EXPEDITION, 1910–1914

On December 7, 1909, Japanese Consul General Hirata made a request to the Indian government asking permission for Ōtani, Tachibana, and the student Aoki Bunkyō to enter Nepal to explore the site of Buddha’s death. The Indian government curtly denied this request.¹¹ Although

¹⁰ Seki (1913, 89).

¹¹ The Consul General’s request read: “I have the honour to state that Count Kōzui Ōtani, Lord Abbot of the West Honganji, Head Monastery of one of the biggest sections of Buddhism in Japan and Messrs. Zuichō Tachibana and Bunkyō Aoki, his disciples, who are now staying at Calcutta, desire to enter the territory of Nepal, with a view to

Ōtani's stated purpose for entering Nepal was to examine the site of Buddha's death, it may be that he also planned to continue on to Lhasa to meet the Dalai Lama. At this point both Ōtani and Tachibana had been marked as suspicious travelers by the British government. In refusing to allow them to enter Nepal the government really gave no reason for its decision, only the vague statement that the Nepalese authorities had sometimes objected to the presence of foreign travelers. Unable to meet with the Dalai Lama directly, Ōtani wrote a letter that he gave to Aoki Bunkyō to deliver. Although Ōtani and Tachibana left India on January 29, 1910 bound for Europe, the letter is dated February 7, 1910, so perhaps Ōtani hoped Aoki would somehow be able to make his way to Lhasa by around that date. Ōtani's letter, written in English, reads:

“To His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Your Holiness,

It is with great pleasure to write a few lines to Your Holiness for greeting on your good health and happiness availing myself of the opportunity of my short visit to India on the way for Europe.

I am exceedingly glad to recollect the friendship which happily ties Your Holiness and myself which Your Holiness have kindly extended to my younger brother Rev. Sonyu Ōtani by cordially receiving him when he paid respect on my behalf to Your Holiness in 1908, at Utai Shan, China. It is my sincere hope to see our personal relation thus established continue to improve for ever.

I am sending my private secretary, Rev. B. Aoki for forwarding this letter to Your Holiness.

With kind regard to

Your Holiness

(sd.) Kōzui Ōtani”¹²

searching the actual site of the Nirvana in the valleys of Rapti and Gamdak Rivers...On their behalf, I have to request that you would be good to take necessary steps to get permission for their intending visit from the Nepalese authorities.”

The Indian reply, “I am directed to acknowledge the receipt of your letter... requesting that permission from the Nepal Durban for Count Kōzui Ōtani and two other Japanese gentlemen, to enter Nepal territory...for the purpose of archaeological research. In reply I am to state that the Nepal Durban have lately objected on more than one occasion to foreigners entering Nepal for the purpose of exploration, and in the circumstances, the Government of India regret that they are unable to accede to your request” Shirasu (2012, 99–100).

¹² Shirasu (2012, 105).

Before Ōtani left India for Europe his project suffered yet another setback when Nomura Eisaburō requested permission to return to Kashgar to retrieve the artifacts and other baggage that had been left there. Nomura planned to return via the Karakoram Pass, the same route by which he had entered India just a few weeks earlier. Again the British denied his request without giving any reason for doing so.¹³

Perhaps they thought that if Nomura crossed into Central Asia, he might attempt to enter Tibet from that side. Under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese treaty they could not have denied him that passage if he had been a Japanese government official, so here again it is clear that Ōtani's agents were traveling as private citizens, not as spies for the government.

It was not only the British who were suspicious of Ōtani and his activities; the Japanese Foreign Ministry was also becoming increasingly nervous, especially after Ambassador MacDonald's complaint. In a secret dispatch to the Foreign Minister in January 1910 Consul Hirata wrote:

¹³ On December 7, 1910 Consul General Hirata sent a request to the Indian government:

Dear Sirs,

I have the honour of introducing Nomura Eisaburō.... This man has traveled through Mongolia to explore religious ruins and arrived here by crossing the Karakoram Pass. He would like to return to China proper by the same route, namely, taking the above-named pass via Leh. For this purpose he would like to arrive in Leh at the end of March 1910. Therefore, I would like to request travel permission for him by the above-named route.

Thank you in advance,

Sincerely,

On December 21, 1909, the Indian Foreign Office circulated a request to the Kashmir Resident asking for his opinion. "We have received a travel request dated November 20 (sic) from the Japanese consul for a man named Nomura who would arrive in Leh in late March, and from Leh would return to China via the Karakoram Pass. I don't suppose this route will be open at that early date, but are there other reasons for denying this request?"

On December 23 a Lieutenant Ramsey telegraphed a reply to the Indian Foreign Office, "The Japanese traveler Nomura is not considered a desirable traveler. I myself, however, do not have time to form an accurate opinion."

Then on January 17, 1910 the Indian Foreign Office replied to Consul Hirata:

"In reply to your letter no. 124 dated 7 December 1909 I am directed to say that the Government of India regret that they are unable to grant Mr. Yeisaburō Nomura permission to recross the British frontier via Leh and the Karakoram Pass." Nomura's diary ends just as he was crossing the Karakoram Pass into India.

“With regard to Nomura’s recrossing the Karakoram Pass, the request was denied with no reason given. I cannot help feeling this was a cruel way of dealing with the matter. From the beginning the Karakoram Range has formed a wall on India’s northern border and these mountain roads are strictly closed as a matter of military strategy, but this one road is used for commerce and the local people are allowed to pass through it. For foreigners to get permission is a special case. When they [Tachibana and Nomura] entered the country, however, they were immediately given permission, but now that he plans to pass through again, he has deliberately been denied permission. Perhaps from a military standpoint making a round trip is different, or perhaps it reflects the extensive activities of the Count’s party, or reflects Nomura’s own position as a military man (Because the British representative at Kashgar knew that Nomura had been enlisted in the army), they are suspicious about the real intent of these activities. I wonder if they unjustly suspect that they may have some sort of special orders apart from archaeological exploration concerning religion. Although this is nothing more than my own speculation, when I think the matter over, I must say their suspicions are definitely harsh and inappropriate.”¹⁴

At this point all of Ōtani’s attempts to penetrate Tibet had been frustrated by the British government who were suspicious of his activities and did not want any foreigners meddling in Tibet. The Japanese Foreign Ministry was also concerned as we see by the fact that Consul General Hirata felt a need to send a long and secret report to the Foreign Minister outlining all he knew about Ōtani’s activities as well as the suspicions expressed by the British.

Ōtani’s attempts to cross the Indian frontier and go to Lhasa were thwarted at every turn by the British. He had given up and left India for Europe, but just at that point events took a dramatic new turn. The Dalai Lama who had finally returned from Beijing to Lhasa only in November now felt threatened by the approach of the Chinese army. China wanted a military presence in Tibet to prove to the world its sovereignty over that nation. The Dalai Lama who had always resisted Chinese attempts to impose their authority on his country now sought refuge in India. In February 1910 he and his entourage crossed the Himalayas and established his headquarters at Darjeeling in northern India.

¹⁴ Shirasu (2012, 147).

Once the Dalai Lama was outside Tibet he was approachable just as he had been in 1908 at Wutaishan in China. Aoki Bunkyō wasted no time. On February 24, 1910, two days after the Dalai Lama's party had crossed the border, Aoki handed over Ōtani's letter of February 7 to the Dalai's aide Te Wande. But the matter did not end there. Aoki immediately set out from Calcutta to Darjeeling to meet the Dalai Lama in person. In his diary he wrote: "I left Calcutta and traveled 380 miles to Darjeeling high in the Himalayas. Prior to my arrival the Dalai's party had crossed the Indian frontier and rested a few days at Kalimpong and were just now getting settled in at Darjeeling.... Earlier I had communicated with the Dalai's interpreter and with officials of the British Indian government my wish to have an audience with His Holiness the Dalai, and right away the next day the audience was granted.... I first completed my official audience, then I was granted a second, private meeting in a separate location. With the help of an interpreter I conveyed Abbot Kōzui's thoughts to him and presented some gifts. Furthermore, I expressed my desire to enter Tibet to study. In response His Holiness the Dalai expressed his appreciation for the goodwill of the Honganji abbot and recalled that time some years ago at Wutaishan in China when he met the abbot's representatives and he promised that from now on he would maintain a close relationship with Honganji. For the present he acknowledged the possibility of an exchange of students between us and them. This meeting was, in fact, the first step on the way to my study in Tibet. This was also the first instance of a concrete relationship with Honganji."¹⁵

Immediately, on March 5, Consul General Hirata sent a classified, coded message to the Foreign Minister saying: "...Lama received in audience today Aoki who is private secretary to Count Ōtani and had telegraphic instructions from the count to pay respects on his behalf (sic)." This report of Aoki's audience seems innocuous, but Hirata felt it was important enough to notify the Foreign Minister in a classified, coded message. On March 8, Hirata sent a second, much longer classified and coded report. "As an attachment to classified document #3 dated February 28 I reported that Abbot Count Ōtani of Nishi Honganji passed a letter to the Dalai Lama through his associate Aoki. Because Aoki had received telegraphic orders from Count Ōtani in London to meet with the Lama, when Aoki received word that the Lama had arrived

¹⁵ Aoki (1921, 3–5).

in Darjeeling, he went there... On the morning of the 5th the Lama had a special meeting with him. It was a private meeting with Te Wandei, who had received the earlier mentioned letter in Calcutta, acting as interpreter. Representing the abbot Aoki expressed the substance of the greeting given in the abbot's letter, for which the Lama was very thankful. He inquired about the abbot's current condition and the meeting ended without covering much else. This I heard from Aoki. Although Aoki's meeting with the Lama as an associate of Count Ōtani was reported in the local Calcutta newspapers, it did not attract any special notice from the people here. I report the above along with classified telegram #6 for your consideration."¹⁶

There are several things about Hirata's report that we should notice. First is the fact that he heard all of this from Aoki, this is Aoki's version of what took place. What Aoki did not tell the consul was that there was a second and more substantial audience which went beyond mere pleasantries between two religious leaders. In the second meeting, they dealt with issues of strengthening ties between their two institutions and establishing an exchange of students. Second, we notice that Hirata was at pains to say that the meeting was innocuous, that it had been reported in the press, and that no one was unduly concerned about it. Here Hirata is reassuring the Foreign Minister that this meeting had not upset the British. It is also worth noting that this second meeting, like the one at Wutaishan, was held at a detached location away from where the Dalai Lama normally held public audiences.

Once Aoki had met with the Dalai Lama and laid the foundation for an exchange between Tibet and Japan, Ōtani summoned him to London. There Ōtani was outfitting and preparing Tachibana to lead the third Ōtani expedition into Central Asia.

Ōtani published a notice in the April 1910 issue of *Geographical Journal* outlining Tachibana's forthcoming expedition:

"The young Japanese traveler, Mr. Zuichō Tachibana, who lately carried out an interesting journey of archaeological research through the northern parts of the Chinese empire, informs us that he is about to start on a new expedition to the same region, again under the auspices and at the expense of Count Kōzui Ōtani . The archaeological spoils of the former expedition were left at Kashgar, as permission to cross the Karakoram pass could not

¹⁶ Shirasu (2012, 111).

be obtained from the Indian Government. Mr. Hashiramoto, who will join the expedition as naturalist, will therefore proceed from Beijing to Kashgar via Kwa-hua-cheng and Guchen in order to fetch the collections, and on his return will be met by the leader (who hopes to enter Central Asia from the Russian side) at Hami. At Guchen and Turfan systematic excavations will be carried on by Mr. B. Aoki, the leader meanwhile making a trip to Sachu by the route used as a highway during the Han and Yan dynasties. Returning to Hami, he proposes to go east-north-east to the Yellow River.... Mr. Aoki will also meet the other members of the party at, but will then go direct to Beijing or Hankow with the baggage.”¹⁷

Professor Joshin Shirasu of Hiroshima University has suggested that this notice was a red herring published by Ōtani to allay British fears that his agents were trying to penetrate Tibet.¹⁸ As it turned out, this itinerary was almost pure fiction, but it reassured anyone reading it that for the next few years both Tachibana and Aoki, the objects of British suspicion, would be busy with projects far off in the north-eastern corner of the Tarim Basin and far from the Tibetan border. In reality, neither Aoki nor Hashiramoto accompanied Tachibana on the expedition. Instead, he took a young man named Orlando Hobbs (1894–1911) with him.¹⁹ Hobbs had no experience as an explorer nor as an archaeologist, nor did he know any Eastern languages. For Tachibana his chief asset was the fact that he was an Englishman; how could Tachibana be up to any nefarious activity while in the company of an Englishman who could observe and report his activities? In fact, Hobbs died of smallpox fairly early in the venture and Tachibana went on to crisscross the Tarim Basin and even made two brief forays into the remote northern borders of Tibet.²⁰

5 THE RESULTANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DALAI LAMA AND NISHI HONGANJI TEMPLE

As we have seen, once Aoki had met with the Dalai Lama Ōtani summoned him to London where he arrived on April 30. However, since Aoki did not accompany Tachibana when he set out three months later,

¹⁷ Shirasu (2012, 166).

¹⁸ Shirasu (2012, 164–169).

¹⁹ For details about Orlando Hobbs, see: Galambos (2011, 81–98).

²⁰ Tachibana (1937, 731–799).

we can suppose that Ōtani had called him there to give credence to the plans outlined in the *Geographical Journal*. In fact, Ōtani still wanted Aoki to go to Tibet, and now that he had reached an understanding with the Dalai Lama, he knew that Aoki would be welcomed in Tibet if he could manage to get across the border without the British or Indian governments knowing it.

Aoki spent nearly a year in London and on the continent and was about to return to Japan when he received a personal letter from the Dalai Lama. The Dalai said he was ready now to send students to Japan and requested that Aoki come to Darjeeling to help arrange this. Once Aoki had met with the Dalai Lama and discussed criteria for students, those candidates had to be brought from Lhasa where fighting was in progress with Chinese soldiers. Eventually they chose a young priest of about 30 who would be accompanied by two servants/companions. The Dalai wanted the exchange arranged so that students would be sent officially by the Tibetan government at the invitation of the Japanese government. Aoki explained that given the relationships and tensions that existed among England, Russia, and China with regard to Tibet, the Japanese government could not be involved in this exchange. It was necessary that the Dalai Lama as a private individual send students specifically to Honganji as a private arrangement with Aoki serving as their guardian. Aoki noted in his diary: "For a time the Dalai was dissatisfied with this, but there was no point in making an international incident of it," so the exchange was a private relationship between religious institutions.²¹

The student, Tsawa Teitoru, was an outstanding priest from an aristocratic family. Aoki refers to him as the "bishop." One of his attendants was Waga Sojo, but we never learn the name of the other. As the party traveled to Japan from Darjeeling, they did so secretly in order to avoid drawing the attention of the British authorities. Aoki wrote in his diary: "Of course we felt it was absolutely essential that we keep our travels secret. The bishop and his attendants packed their Tibetan priestly robes at the bottom of their baggage and wore purely European garb. They changed their names to Japanese ones." The group sailed from Calcutta and at one point aboard ship Aoki slipped up and spoke a few words to the bishop in Tibetan which could have blown their disguise as Japanese, but fortunately no one noticed. At Singapore, however, they transferred

²¹ Aoki (1921, 7–10).

to a Japanese steamer with many Japanese passengers, so the Tibetans could no longer pass themselves off as Japanese. From that point on they pretended to be Mongols and eventually made it to Kyoto without anyone guessing their true identity. Aoki explained, “The reason it was necessary for our party to maintain secrecy from the time we left India until we arrived in Japan was because at that time Chinese and Tibetan forces were fighting in Tibet and the Chinese felt a deep enmity toward Tibet. If they had found out that the Dalai had dispatched the bishop to Japan, they undoubtedly would have devised some sort of reprisal, and at the same time they would have had ill feelings toward Honganji which was sponsoring the Tibetans, and more importantly, they would have become suspicious of the Japanese government. For this reason the secret was maintained even within Honganji except for a few officials.”²² Aoki’s description shows how religious faith and friendship had shaped an alternative Asian geography, networks different from and challenging to political maps and interests. This can be formulated as follows: In political terms the Asian landmass was divided horizontally (east–west) into three layers. Britain ruled a southern tier, what is today Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Burma. China asserted control over the middle tier consisting of China proper, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Russia dominated a northern tier consisting of Russian Turkestan and Siberia. In contrast to this east–west horizontal configuration, in Buddhist terms we see a north–south configuration that cuts across the horizontal political tiers. Buddhism prevailed in Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Tibet, Qinghai, Mongolia, and southern Siberia.

At first the students stayed at Honganji where they studied Japanese. “After about six months the bishop could pretty much communicate in everyday Japanese.” Later they moved to Ōtani’s villa, Nirakusō, on the slope of Mount Rokko where they continued to study Japanese language and also the history of Japanese Buddhism.

In October 1911, the Republican revolution broke out in China and many of the Chinese troops were withdrawn from Tibet to help suppress the revolution. The Dalai Lama saw this as an opportunity to free Tibet from Chinese control, and marshaled his troops to drive out the Chinese soldiers who remained in his country. In Japan, the bishop received an urgent telegram written in the Dalai’s special code, “Tibetan forces have

²² Aoki (1921, 11–12).

prevailed, the Qing forces are defeated and the Dalai has decided to return to Tibet. The bishop is ordered to return to India immediately.”²³

For the return to India, they made a party of six, the three Tibetan students, plus Aoki Bunkyō, Tada Tōkan (1890–1967), who had been the bishop’s study companion in Japan, and another Japanese priest named Fujitani Sei. “Because it was necessary, of course, for our group to maintain strict secrecy, the bishop and his attendants, as well as myself, used aliases. Our whole group introduced ourselves as being Japanese and said that the object of our travels was to make a pilgrimage to Buddhist sites in India. Considering the difficult experience we had when coming to Japan, we avoided taking a Japanese ship and chose to go directly to Calcutta aboard an English ship. We secretly set sail from Kobe a little after 5:00 PM on January 23, 1912.”²⁴ On arrival at Calcutta they did not linger, “...but set out the next evening on the express train and hurried to Darjeeling. The Dalai and his entourage had already left and were now at Kalimpong on their way back to Tibet. The Dalai would be spending a week there, so we left Mr. Fujitani in Calcutta to handle communications while Mr. Tada and I accompanied the bishop and followed after His Holiness the Dalai.”²⁵

Although Aoki’s original plan was to reunite the bishop and the Dalai Lama and see them off to Tibet, then return to Japan, he found a confused and uncertain situation at Kalimpong. The Dalai Lama had very little information about the situation in China; the revolution was only minimally reported in the English language newspapers in India. Most of the Dalai’s information was coming from newspapers and telegrams sent from Japan. Given the uncertainty of the situation the Dalai decided to remain in India for the time being and monitor the developing situation. Aoki and Tada also postponed their return to Japan.

For the next few months Aoki and Tada were treated as honored guests at the Dalai Lama’s headquarters. They supplied the Dalai’s people with information about the current situation in the Far East and they encouraged the bishop to continue his Japanese language studies. Finally, on June 24, 1912, the Dalai decided definitely to return to Tibet and the bishop would return to Lhasa with him rather than go back to Japan for

²³ Aoki (1921, 13).

²⁴ Aoki (1921, 14).

²⁵ Aoki (1921, 14–15).

further study. The Dalai told Aoki, “At this time I must definitely take back with me people like the bishop who will be useful. Later, when the time comes to send students to study abroad, I can send other talented people. And as for you two [Aoki and Tada], if it is not necessary for you to return to Japan right away, you should use this opportunity to come to Tibet.”²⁶ At this time the Dalai Lama gave Aoki special authorization to enter Tibet and a travel pass. “I was also given a Tibetan name, Thubten Tashi. This used part of the Dalai’s personal name which is Thubten Gyatso and added Tashi as an honorific. ‘Thub’ means quiet or serene, and ‘ten’ means teacher of the Law. ‘Tashi’ means lucky omen. Mr. Tada was given the name Thubten Gentsuen in anticipating that we would enter Tibet later.”²⁷

Aoki planned to accompany the Dalai Lama on his return to Lhasa, but the British government would not allow it, so he decided to bide his time and wait for an opportunity to cross the frontier secretly. He explained the problem to the Dalai saying he would require some assistance in crossing the border. “The Dalai said that from now on there would be a representative of the Tibetan government stationed at Kalimpong who would be my sponsor and I should wait for him to take care of everything. On the 24th as scheduled, His Holiness’ palanquin headed north out of India.”²⁸

Because Kalimpong was on the direct road leading from India to Lhasa, there were people there from all over the world seeking to enter Tibet, so the British kept the place under close surveillance. “Reckless Chinese and Mongols who tried to enter Tibet secretly were arrested on the road, and during my stay there more than ten people were severely punished. I realize that this place was extremely unsuitable as a jumping off place for entering Tibet.”²⁹

Aoki and Tada withdrew to Gum, a town several miles down the rail line from Darjeeling. There was a temple called Rising Sun there with a Tibetan lama where they went daily to practice speaking Tibetan. “When people asked about our plans we deceived them saying that since we could not enter Tibet we were instead studying Tibetan Buddhism at

²⁶ Aoki (1921, 19–20).

²⁷ Aoki (1921, 20).

²⁸ Aoki (1921, 20–21).

²⁹ Aoki (1921, 22).

this temple.”³⁰ As the second instance we have seen of the Buddhists disguising themselves, this raises important questions of identity as a part of trust conveyed in these situations as suggested by Charles Withers in terms of other travel accounts.³¹ In particular, we see in these particular uses of disguise, the perceived necessity for deceit in order to maintain spiritual networks in the face of prohibitive political boundaries.

At last, on the night of September 8, 1912, Aoki resolved to set out across the border accompanied by Tibetan guides and servants supplied from Kalimpong. In rain and thick fog, disguised as a Tibetan pilgrim Aoki and his party set out from Gum to cross into Nepal. Although tormented by leeches and fatigue, by daylight they were in Nepal and no longer had to fear pursuit by Indian authorities. Because his fluency in Tibetan was still poor, Aoki adopted a Mongol name and passed himself off as a Mongol.³²

On October 15th, Aoki arrived at the Dalai Lama’s temporary headquarters some distance from Lhasa. On the 16th, he had an audience in the Tibetan Buddhist style. “I prostrated my body on the floor and performed this obeisance three times as a way of showing him greatest respect. His Holiness placed his right hand on my head as a blessing and I noticed that he had put on some weight since he was in India.... I said I was grateful that as a result of my entering Tibet relations with Honganji would gradually become closer. Then His Holiness made it clear that he hoped the relationship between Japan and Tibet would not stop with Honganji and the Tibetan government, but would spread to other denominations in Japan and to the Japanese government.”³³

Although the Dalai Lama was now within fifty miles of Lhasa, peace negotiations with the Chinese forces had broken down. The Chinese used the lull in the fighting to secretly resupply their forces with arms, ammunition, and food, and now they made a vicious counterattack on the Tibetan troops in Lhasa. Consequently the Dalai Lama’s entourage remained outside Lhasa until peace could be restored. Aoki adds a curious note in his diary saying, “At this time the only Japanese in Lhasa who had

³⁰ Aoki (1921, 24).

³¹ See Withers (2021).

³² Aoki (1921, 23–24).

³³ Aoki (1921, 125).

a close look at the fighting between Tibetan and Chinese forces was the mendicant traveler Yajima Yasujirō.”³⁴

While waiting to enter Lhasa the Dalai Lama was working feverishly on plans to modernize his country and run it independently. He asked Aoki to search the area for coal deposits and also to obtain specimens of coal from Japan. “At present the fuel used in Tibet is yak dung and a dirty coal which is like peat. There is an extremely limited amount of firewood. All of these produce very weak fire. They have not been able to discover the sort of fuel they need to establish various industries.”³⁵ Not being a geologist, Aoki was unable to locate suitable deposits of coal. As for samples of Japanese coal, he had a friend in Calcutta obtain some from the Japan Mail Line, but it did not arrive until four months later.

In his efforts to modernize the country the Dalai Lama hoped to bring an instructor from Japan to train a new style Tibetan army. He also asked for a complete set of military textbooks of the kind being used by the Japanese army. Again, five months later all those materials arrived in Tibet.³⁶ While waiting at his temporary headquarters, the Dalai Lama also set up a postal system for the nation which was inaugurated in mid-November 1912.³⁷

Waga Sojo, who had accompanied the bishop to Japan, worked with Aoki to set up a study abroad program for Tibetan students. “I must also make special mention of sending students abroad to study. Waga Sojo spent nine months studying in Japan, and because his experience there could not have been better, he selected a number of students to study abroad. First, five young men were sent to study in England. In years past many Tibetans have studied in China or India, but these were probably the first to study in Europe. Also there were two candidates for study in Russia and two for study in Japan (One of them was Waga Sojo and the other was the son of an aristocratic family) and they were waiting for appropriate responses from officials in those countries. Later, the students going to Russia traveled first to Mongolia, and then on to Russia, but the students for study in Japan did not receive any response at all and so naturally they gave up. On the other hand, while His Holiness the

³⁴ Aoki (1921, 130).

³⁵ Aoki (1921, 131).

³⁶ Aoki (1921, 132).

³⁷ Aoki (1921, 136–137).

Dalai was dispatching students to study abroad, he had also decided to set up a new system domestically for education of the general public. For that he planned to use the Japanese model, and for that he asked me to acquire books dealing with common education in Japan at the present time, and a complete set of elementary and secondary school textbooks.... Five months later all those materials arrived in the hands of His Holiness. While in Lhasa I was given responsibility for establishing elementary and secondary schools there. In this way, even while there was still fighting going on inside the city, His Holiness was expending a great deal of effort with regard to both the cultural and martial arts. When I think about it, however, this all resulted from his stay in India for the past two years when he spent some time studying Western culture. If the Chinese army had not attacked, he would not have fled to India, and Tibet would not have had the opportunity to come into contact with world culture.”³⁸

Here Aoki modestly gives credit for all this modernizing to the Dalai Lama who has often been referred to as the “Great Thirteenth” for his efforts to modernize the country, but it was Aoki who was the conduit, and behind him Ōtani Kōzui who was the driving force that made all these initiatives possible. We see here again how religious networks have been important yet overlooked channels in the transfer of knowledge across space. The Tarim Basin expeditions and the expedition from Burma sought to clarify the ancient Buddhist networks across Asia, while the effort to engage Tibet represents the establishment of a contemporary Buddhist network.

In early December the Dalai Lama received a long telegram from Yuan Shikai (1859–1916), President of the new Chinese Republic. He announced that the Qing government had fallen, he regretted the Qing army’s lawless invasion of Tibet, and he pledged the good will of the Chinese republic toward Tibet. His Holiness responded by demanding that all Chinese forces be withdrawn from Tibetan territory and stated that further interference with Tibetan affairs would not be tolerated.³⁹ He hoped that China and Tibet could be linked in a relationship of friendship. By the end of December the Chinese forces in Lhasa laid down their weapons. All military, cultural, and commercial officials, all except those who were naturalized Tibetan citizens, left Lhasa and were repatriated

³⁸ Aoki (1921, 137–138).

³⁹ Aoki (1921, 138–139).

through India to China. On January 12, 1913, the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa. "At that time he communicated this development to the Great Powers who were involved with Tibet, and in the case of Japan, notified the abbot of Nishi Honganji."⁴⁰ Although the Dalai wanted to establish contact with the Japanese government, it did not happen. Either because Nishi Honganji wanted to monopolize the relationship, or because the Japanese government was uninterested, the Dalai was only in touch with Japan through Nishi Honganji. Aoki Bunkyo joined the procession of thousands of priests, officials and soldiers who accompanied the Dalai Lama on his return to Lhasa where they were joined by thousands more who came out from the city to greet the returning Dalai Lama.

Aoki noted that Russia had abandoned its interest in Tibet as a result of its loss to Japan in the Russo-Japanese war combined with its problems in the Balkans and, of course, its own festering revolution at home. Aoki's conclusion: "In short, today Tibet is Britain's exclusive stage. She is serving as the country's protector in place of China. Britain has not yet sent a representative as far as Lhasa, but they have already established a base at Gyantse which is 145 miles from Lhasa. They have a trade representative there, have established a garrison and have commercial rights. According to the most recent information I have, in the Kamu region on Tibet's eastern border fighting between Tibetan and Chinese forces is in full swing and it is hard to say who will prevail, but China will not easily be able to reassert its influence. So now we have to wonder what will happen in the future in terms of the three country relationship between Britain, China and Tibet, and the relationship between Britain and Russia."⁴¹

Aoki goes on to observe that although Tibet had long maintained a policy of seclusion, the Dalai Lama had twice traveled abroad, once to Mongolia and China, and once to British India where he was exposed to Occidental culture. As he became more accepting of foreigners, he welcomed the Japanese who came to his country. But relations with Japan were still of a private nature based on his contact with Nishi Honganji. "Tibet now turns to Japan and Britain for guidance in opening the country and is making many demands. Britain is working adroitly to implement this within the bounds of its various treaties [with Russia and China], but the officials of Japan have completely avoided relations

⁴⁰ Aoki (1921, 139–140).

⁴¹ Aoki (1921, 174–175).

with Tibet and have not responded to discussions or requests from that country.”⁴²

During his three-year stay in Lhasa, Aoki worked closely with the Dalai Lama. “In the capital of Lhasa I was provided with accommodations and a stipend that were above my status. And until I became fluent in the language I was even provided with a tutor by special order. In return for these special favors I consulted with His Holiness from time to time and answered his questions. By means of foreign and domestic newspapers I informed him of important events occurring abroad and sometimes I was charged with translating articles. In this way we developed a relationship and from time to time I had good opportunities to observe the current Dalai Lama.”⁴³

In 1915, there were four Japanese living in Lhasa. By the time Aoki arrived, the itinerant traveler Yajima Yasuijirō was already there. He had arrived in 1912 and was working as an instructor at a military school. Tada Tōkan arrived in the autumn of 1914 and was studying Buddhism at the university at the Sera monastery. Kawaguchi Ekai also arrived in 1914 on his second visit to Lhasa. He was living with an aristocratic family and spent his time collecting Buddhist texts and visiting sacred sites. He was also highly regarded as a physician.⁴⁴ All four men were warmly received by the Dalai Lama’s administration. Aoki left Tibet to return to Japan in the spring of 1916, departing from Lhasa in late January. At a private audience with the Dalai Lama he was informed about a special emissary who was being sent to India. At a formal public audience, the Dalai asked Aoki to work hard to bring about more intimate relations with Honganji, but to also work for close relations between the governments of Japan and Tibet. Later he had another, private, audience. “The following day, January 23, at the Norbulingka detached palace I had my final, private audience. His Holiness dismissed his close retainers and I was told in detail about a special emissary. The man’s mission was to purchase weapons from the British government in India and to study their currency and postal systems. But because Britain was at that time engaged in a war,

⁴² Aoki (1921, 176).

⁴³ Aoki (1921, 359).

⁴⁴ For more on Kawaguchi Ekai, see: Kawaguchi [1909] 2005.

if the above goals could not be met, the emissary was to obtain the good will of the English, but negotiate with Japan. That was the plan.”⁴⁵

After Aoki returned to Japan, Tada Tōkan stayed on and continued his studies there. When the bishop and his companions were in Japan, Tada had been assigned to teach them Japanese, but Ōtani felt that Tada’s strong Akita dialect meant that the Tibetans were learning a rustic form of the language that was not appropriate. Tada was relieved of his teaching duties, but remained close to the Tibetans and picked up some of their language. When they were recalled to India, they requested that he be allowed to accompany them.

After about a year in India, Tada finally managed to slip into Tibet where he studied at the Sera monastery in Lhasa. He also began practicing the austerities of the Tibetan priesthood. During his time in Tibet he had free access to the Potala palace and often was asked to provide the Dalai Lama with information on world affairs. After a decade of study, he received the highest academic degree awarded by Tibetan educational institutions, the equivalent of a doctoral degree. When he returned to Japan in 1923 he brought with him a collection of some 24,000 books and documents including the Deruge edition of the *Daizōkyō* plus many books on medicine, medicinal herbs, and other rare books.

6 CONCLUSIONS

We can see that Ōtani Kōzui’s goal in sponsoring and financing the Ōtani expeditions was to document the origins and transmission of Buddhism from India to Japan, and to collect and study the foundational texts of the Buddhist traditions. This motivation for creating networks of travel tends to fall below the radar of secular accounts of space and modernization that typically focus on political power. Through the Ōtani expeditions, a new religious landscape emerges in Asia that is based on a strong bond of identity among those involved from Japan and Tibet, two major Buddhist countries. Yet, as we have seen, identities can be disguised and often undergo change through the experience gained by traveling.

While Ōtani and his scholar priests have been accused of being spies, the Foreign Ministry archives examined by Professor Joshin Shirasu show clearly that far from being agents of the Japanese government, the Foreign

⁴⁵ Aoki (1921, 375–376).

Ministry was at first not even aware of Ōtani's activities. When it did learn of them from the British ambassador, the Foreign Minister became alarmed that Ōtani's activities would upset an international balance in a way that would reflect poorly on Japan. The suspicion that Ōtani's men might be spies stemmed from Captain Shuttleworth's alarmist report to the Indian government which was the result of his personal antipathy toward Tachibana Zuichō and reinforced by troublemaking innuendos from Russian officials and others. Once the suspicion was raised, those fears were reinforced by the fact that Ōtani's men were probing politically sensitive areas throughout Inner Asia. In terms of relations with the Dalai Lama we see that Ōtani and his representatives were careful to keep the connection limited to Nishi Honganji. The Dalai repeatedly sought to establish official relations with the Japanese government as well, but was rebuffed at every turn. This would not have been the case if Ōtani had been acting as an agent of the government. Ōtani stepped down from his position as abbot of Nishi Honganji in 1914 in the midst of a financial scandal and the third expedition into the Tarim Basin concluded at the same time, but the successful effort to penetrate Tibet continued on for another nine years and eventually proved to be the most fruitful of all the ventures Ōtani sponsored.

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Reconstructing a Spatial Knowledge in Northeast Asia: Rehe Through the Eyes of the Japanese Army in the Early 1930s

Nagatomi Hirayama

1 INTRODUCTION

In late February 1933, the Kwangtung Army started a full-scale offensive against the Chinese resistance forces in Rehe (Jehol), calling it the last holy war (*seisen*) to complete the state-construction project of Manchukuo. Despite the high fighting spirit of the Chinese forces, the Kwangtung Army occupied Chengde, Rehe's capital, within two weeks and established its presence solidly north of the Great Wall by late March. As the Japanese forces threatened to advance into Beiping and Tianjin, with its air power and mechanized field units, the *Guomindang* (Nationalist Party, GMD) government in Nanjing realized that the Chinese army in north China, including various warlord forces led by Zhang

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Xueliang, would not be able to push the Japanese forces back. The GMD thus compromised and reached the Tanggu Truce, which forced the GMD to leave Rehe and other regions north of the Great Wall into the hands of the Japanese. At this point, the territorial realm of Manchukuo was finalized—at least temporarily—for the Japanese military leaders in Manchuria.

Corresponding with the rise of regional or local histories in global and comparative perspectives against the linear narratives of nation-states, a series of studies on Manchukuo/Manchuria in the past three decades emerged. Among them, for example, were the monumental works of Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka and Louise Young, which demonstrated the socioeconomic mobilization of the Japanese empire to occupy and colonize Manchuria. In the same vein, Yamamuro Shin'ichi, Prasejit Duara, Rana Mitter and Dan Shao also highlighted a more complicated nature of Manchukuo that differed from nationalist and Marxist accounts of China and Japan.¹ As we see from these studies, it is certainly unproblematic to treat Manchukuo as a product of Japanese imperialism. But the historical and cultural territoriality of Manchuria should still be approached with nuance due to the differentiated intents and practices of various groups of people to build the Manchurian state.² While these studies helped cultivate a valid platform to discuss the Japanese active contestation of Chinese Manchuria, one puzzle is still missing in the explanations behind the Japanese reconstruction of the spatiality of the newly established Manchukuo: If one Japanese imperial project at this time were to border

¹ Matsusaka (2003); Young (1998); Yamamuro (1993); Duara (2003); Mitter (2000).

² On the one hand, we can still find the Japanese three-decade long infiltration into Manchuria prior to the Manchurian incident in Matsusaka's study, as well as the mobilization of social and economic forces in Japan for the Japanese imperial projects in Manchuria in Young's research. On the other hand, however, we should also make sure that Manchukuo was not simply a puppet state of Japan as we pay closer attention to the actuality of Manchukuo. Yamamuro and Shao, for example, did not reject a certain idealism in the founding of Manchukuo in this vein but found the failures of Manchukuo in the Japanese institutional structuring and actual sociopolitical practices. Prasenjit Duara, also focused on the idealist aspect of Manchukuo, thus explored the authentication projects of Manchukuo through the historical (re)significations of its sovereignty in line with the needs of different peoples in Manchukuo. With this more intricate reality, Rana Mitter could also argue that the binary structure of resistance and oppression between the Chinese nationalists and Japanese imperialists actually did not really exist in the wake of the Manchuria incident.

the borderland of Manchuria out of the sovereign territories of Republican China, how did the Japanese imperial subjects re-narrativize the history and culture of Manchuria as they set their footprints in the borderland of Manchuria? Namely, with what historical perceptions and cultural claims did the Japanese try to confirm the fluid borderlines of Manchukuo as they advanced militarily on the contested bordering spaces? As Kari Shepherdson-Scott has demonstrated through her study of the Japanese exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, Rehe was one important site for the Japanese to claim for the clear borderlines of Manchukuo.³

Based on military plans, field observations, and travel logs from Japanese generals, soldiers, journalists, and scholars advancing into Rehe in 1933, we can find how the historical and cultural spatiality of Manchukuo was authenticated and thereby settled in the eyes of Japanese leading figures. To give readers a historical context, this chapter thus first introduces the Japanese military campaign in Rehe in early 1933. Next, it delineates the Japanese perceptions and justifications in their military missions in Rehe on behalf of the newly established Manchukuo through four types of territorial signification: Historical, geographical, ethical, and socio-political, respectively. In doing so, this chapter demonstrates how the Japanese tried to establish the borderlines of Manchukuo based on their actual warring and traveling experiences in Rehe.

2 THE REHE CAMPAIGN

In the wake of World War I, imperial Japan had democratized further through a series of political reforms. Ironically, this democratization also triggered the rise of radical nationalism due to the established political parties' failure to deal with internal economic recessions and external confrontations with the Chinese nationalists and the UK and US in China in the 1920s. Specifically, as the GMD set out to recover China's national sovereignty in its unification wars and diplomatic negotiations with other countries, the UK and US began to take more non-interventionist policies to confirm the Chinese demands while demanding imperial Japan to follow the same. For Japanese military leaders, however, the GMD regime as well as the US and UK all ignored the Japanese special privileges established through a series of treaties since the late nineteenth century,

³ Shepherdson-Scott (2015).

particularly in Manchuria. Therefore, taking Manchuria as a lifeline in relieving the serious domestic economic problems and preparing for the ultimate war with the Western countries in this context,⁴ the Kwantung Army caused the Manchurian incident on September 18, 1931, and soon occupied most parts of Manchuria. Although the Chinese armies, including both the regular and guerrilla forces, attempted to resist this occupation, without a centralized military leadership and strong logistical support, they were mostly defeated by late 1932. Most of them subsequently retreated to Rehe, a province north of the Great Wall, west of Liaoning, and south of Inner-Mongolia, to continue their resistance wars.

As the Kwantung Army caused the Manchurian incident, it was necessary for its leaders to justify this military action to challenge the Chinese sovereignty, to deflect international criticism, and to further mobilize Japanese national support. Thereby, the Kwantung Army staged the founding of Manchukuo in early 1932, appointing the last emperor of the Qing dynasty, Puyi, first as its supreme leader (*zhizheng/shisei*) and then as its first emperor (*huangdi*) in 1934. It was in the extension to consolidate the governmentality and territoriality of Manchukuo that the leaders of the Kwantung Army found it urgent to exclude all Chinese armies from Rehe. This was due to two reasons: (1) Rehe was an extremely important region for the security of Manchukuo due to its topography, as it was difficult to access from Manchuria but easy for Chinese forces to start an offensive, if the latter were stationing there; and (2) historically Rehe was a bordering land between Manchuria and China proper, and without clarifying a clear borderline in this region, Rehe would cause a difficulty for the Japanese to claim for the ruling legitimacy of Manchukuo. Therefore, with a well-prepared plan to invade, the Kwantung Army started a massive military campaign against the 500,000 Chinese forces (including regular armies, local militias, and volunteer squadrons) in Rehe on February 20, 1933.⁵

⁴ For example, according to Iwasaki Tamio, Manchuria was extremely important for the survival of imperial Japan, because the region could be a solution for the overpopulation and shortage of food and natural resources in Japan (Iwasaki 1932). For the ultimate confrontation with the US of the West, according to Ishiwara Kanji, it was extremely important to occupy Manchuria (Ishiwara 1931). For the overall historical course of the Manchurian incident, see Katō Yōko's explanation (Katō 2007).

⁵ Koiso Kuniaki, "Shōtoku senryō made ni okeru kantōgun kōdō no gaikan" [The overall actions taken by Kwantung Army until the occupation of Chengde], 5 March

Historically, Rehe was a difficult region to conquer due to its steep mountains in the south and vast desert in the north. These conditions made it extremely difficult to send military supplies and maintain consistent mobility for invaders. Stationing forces, on the other hand, found it easy to defend. Therefore, it was an important region for the Chinese dynasties to guard against the nomad invasions in the past. However, this time, with its military superiority, the Japanese army could overwhelm the Chinese forces quickly despite the much larger armies of the latter with its air support and mechanized field units. Backed by the Manchurian forces, the Japanese army advanced through three routes to attack the Chinese forces, respectively from Kailu and Tongliao to the desert areas in the north, from the mountainous regions towards the Great Wall in the centre, and from Jinzhou to Shanhaiguan in the south.⁶ Even to the surprise of the Japanese themselves, the Japanese army quickly captured Chengde on March 4, two weeks after the beginning of this military mission, and soon pushed the Chinese armies into south of the Great Wall by late March.

The Chinese retreating armies had tried to counterattack. Therefore, along the lines of the Great Wall, there had occurred a series of collisions between the Chinese and Japanese forces. To defeat the Chinese forces more decisively, the Kwangtung Army thus started two full-scale campaigns, respectively in early April and early May.⁷ During the April offensive, the Japanese forces advanced south of the Great Wall, and during the May offensive, they arrived at Huairou, Daxia, Shangcang, Linnancang, and Woluogu, standing ready to attack Beiping and Tianjin. Faced with the threat of losing the two most important cities in north China, the GMD government thus decided to compromise. The GMD and Kwangtung Army, thus, reached the Tanggu Truce on May 31. With this truce, China and Japan agreed to set a demilitarized zone south of the Great Wall. At this point, the Chinese side had just lost their control

1933, in *Kantōgun saigo no seisen* [The last holy war of the Kwangtung Army] No. 1, 1 March 1933 (JACAR: C13010019400), 1.

⁶ Kawasaki Shirō, “Nekka tōbatsu ni kansuru manshūkoku gun katsudō no jokyō” [The situation of the actions of the Manchukuo army in the Rehe campaign], 10 March 1933, in *Kantōgun saigo no seisen* [The last holy war of the Kwangtung Army] No. 3, 12 March 1933 (JACAR: C13010019600), 7–8.

⁷ Rikugun chōshahan (1933a, 4–7).

of Rehe and made themselves extremely vulnerable to further Japanese invasions in the future.⁸

3 HISTORY

History is a useful tool in modern nation-building projects, as it is one of the most important elements in shaping people's self-awareness as to their locus in this world, thus concerning the formation of their national identity. For the leading Japanese military leaders in Manchuria in the early 1930s, certainly this was also the case when they endeavoured to establish Manchukuo out of the territorial realm of the Republic of China, whose sovereign legitimacy was derived from the territorial realm of the Qing dynasty. Due to the Chinese civilizational emphasis on the traditional norm of *Tianxia* (world under the heaven)—where ethnic discordance had been subject to cultural and political concordance under a confirmable imperial framework, established in the past two millennia⁹—the Chinese gentry scholars had experienced difficulty in recognizing the essentialist demarcations between ethnic Chinese and others in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. As a result, modern China had experienced significant dilemmas in its modern nation-building process, specifically when it came to forging an ethnically coherent national history out of the often overlapped and blurred self-perceptions about themselves, including both Han and the others. Taking advantage of these dilemmas at this stage, the Japanese historians addressed the historical confrontations between the Han Chinese in the south and the nomads in the north, reconfiguring the Chinese nation ethnically based on the Han on the one hand and establishing the legitimacy of the nomad others in seeking their own national independence on the other. Just as Saitō Shōhei indicates, to incorporate the Manchuria into the Japanese imperium, Japanese military leaders thus resorted to the broader racial narratives both to reject the European domination of Asia as a whole and to reduce the Chinese historical and cultural characters of this particular region.¹⁰ Through the warring and traveling experiences of

⁸ There were no other options, if the Chinese side did not want to start a total war with Japan at this point.

⁹ Ge (2018).

¹⁰ Saitō (2017).

the generals, soldiers, and journalists in the Rehe campaign, we can indeed grasp how they formed and consolidated such distinctive perceptions of Manchuria as opposed to the Chinese.

First, we can see how they constructed the spatial knowledge of Rehe through a linear historical narrativization of the province as one indispensable part of “Manchuria” in the long history of northeast Asian nomad lands as opposed to the sedentary China proper. Therefore, in the Japanese popular literature, as a guidebook published in 1933 in Japan introduced, since the founding of the Yan dynasty almost 1,700 years ago, Rehe had been a strategically important region integrated within the north, including the last Han Chinese Ming dynasty.¹¹ Based on this understanding, as Mainichi News (Mainichi Shinbun) attempted to justify the Rehe campaign of the Kwangtung Army, it emphasized “Rehe” as a region beyond the Great Wall (*saiwai*), through a historical introduction of different nomad groups of people appeared in different periods in Rehe in the past two millennia, such as Donghu, Xiongnu, Xianbei, Tujue, Kittan, Jurchen, and the Mongols.¹² This perception was then further consolidated by Japanese historical researches on the Kittan Liao and Jurchen Jin dynasties in the late 1930s, resulted in a deepened understanding of the binary historical structure of the sedentary south and nomad north throughout the past several centuries.¹³ It was thus in this context, for architect Itō Chūta, that Rehe was an essential part of Manchuria and even more associated with the Korean peninsula rather than China proper, when he conducted a field research in Rehe in 1934.¹⁴ To use a very good example that symbolically demonstrates this understanding of the Japanese in this period, General Okamura Yasuji described the scenery of Rehe he saw on his flight to Chifeng during the Rehe campaign as follows:

“Yesterday, it was an extremely nice day. As I observed the landscape of Rehe from 5,000 meters above, I could see the topographical changes from the steep mountains in the south to the vast desert regions in the north. Since I see almost no signs of human habitation, I confirmed how

¹¹ Manshū bunka kyōkai (1933, 7).

¹² Osaka Mainichi Shinbunsha (1933, 51–52).

¹³ Inoue (2018).

¹⁴ Itō (1936, 200–203).

the brutal rule of the warlords of Zhang Xueliang had made the people here suffer. As I thought of the rise and fall of the nations of Donghu, Liao, Jin, and Yuan on the land of Rehe, I could not help but think of this poem passage: ‘states collapsed, but mountains and rivers remained.’”¹⁵

Second, the leading Japanese in Manchuria addressed the discontinuous moment from the Qing to the Chinese Republic by emphasizing Chengde as a city not in line with the traditions of the Han Chinese south of the Great Wall. On the one hand, the Japanese found a city with beautiful natural sceneries and cultural relics in Chengde during the Rehe campaign. As Iwashita Shintarō, for example, flew over Chengde for investigating and attacking the Chinese army stationing around its suburbs as one of the leading pilots, he found from the sky a fantastic city with a history of thousands of years.¹⁶ Also, as Uda Takeji entered Chengde as an agent from the Dentsū News, he discovered that Chengde was just like the old Japanese capital of Nara with its colourful imperial palace and 50 tiger towers standing behind it under the wind of pine (*matsukaze*).¹⁷ On the other hand, the Japanese also emphasized that Chengde’s history fell exclusively in line with the Manchu court. Therefore, as a military adviser during the Rehe campaign, Sakata Yoshirō emphasized that Chengde was an important fortress surrounded by mountains. At the same time, he also noted its distinctive character through the Qing’s summer palace.¹⁸ Emphasizing that this city had been founded by the Qing emperors and administered by Manchu courts, geographer Tanaka Shūsaku, then traveling in Manchuria on an investigative mission in mid-1933, found Chengde distinctive from China proper. He claimed that Chengde was an alternative name of Rehe, and was only established during the late Kangxi reign, therefore historically more

¹⁵ Okamura Yasuji, *Sabaku ōdan no Sakamoto butai wo sekihō ni tazenete* [Visiting Sakamoto unit at Chifeng], 6 March 1933, in *Kantōgun saigo no seisen No. 1* (JACAR: C13010019400), 7. This was from one of Du Fu’s poems.

¹⁶ Iwashita Shintarō, *Shōtoku bakugeki ni tsuite* [About air attack of Chengde], 8 March 1933, in *Kantōgun saigo no seisen No. 1* (JACAR: C13010019400), 5.

¹⁷ Uda Takeji, “Kōgun dai tsuigeki no jissō [The great follow up attacks of imperial army],” in *Kantōgun saigo no seisen No. 2* (JACAR: C13010019500), 16.

¹⁸ Sakata Yoshirō, “Nekka shōjō shōtoku wo tazunete [Upon visiting the provincial capital of Rehe, Chengde],” in *Kantōgun saigo no seisen No. 2* (JACAR: C13010019500), 9.

closely related with Manchuria but not China proper.¹⁹ For the ambitious Japanese advancing on Manchuria, including Rehe at this time, Chengde was thus a symbolic city, one that demonstrated not coherence between China proper and Manchuria, but rather an exemplary case of difference. Through this perception, they had thus imaged a clear-cut spatiality of Manchuria different from China.

Upon the occupation of Rehe, the Japanese also characterized Rehe's distinctiveness through its cultural relics. The most important one was the hunting ground of Mulan (*Mulan weichang*). According to an introductory book on Manchukuo, various regions of Rehe were indeed offered to the Qing emperors by the Mongolian princes, including the hunting ground of Mulan.²⁰ As the Qing court further utilized it, according to another guiding book of Rehe, the emperors established a routine practice of hunting at the Mulan hunting ground to treat the Mongolian princes and to consolidate the Manchu court's authority over Mongolia.²¹ Another cultural relic was lamasery. Therefore, as Okamura Yasuji tried to make sense of the history of Rehe on his flight to Chifeng, he also said that "as the plane flied over the top of Lama towers standing in the mountain tops of Rehe, I cannot but have a feeling of disharmony derived from his sense of the ignorable temporality and history" reflected from the static mountainous and snowy sceneries of Rehe.²² Hereby he regarded the Lama towers he saw on his plane as symbolic relics of the transhistorical geographical scenery of Rehe. Based on the understanding of Rehe of this kind, just as how the aforementioned book on Manchukuo introduced Rehe's difference from the Han China proper, Lama religion, namely Tibetan Buddhism, became an essentialist cultural and religious marker separating Rehe and China in the Japanese travel accounts.²³ This perception was further confirmed again by Itō Chūta through this field research of the architectures of Rehe in the wake of the Rehe military

¹⁹ For record of Tanaka's trip, see "Gaimushō hō No. 279-Shucchō oyobi ryūgaku [Announcement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs No. 279-Business trip and studying abroad]," 15 July 1933 (JACAR: B13091690100). For his argument, see Tanaka (1933, 147–148).

²⁰ Mashūkoku tsūshinsha (1935, 123).

²¹ Manshū bunka kyōkai (1933, 16–17).

²² Manshū bunka kyōkai (1933, 16–17); Okamura Yasuji, 7.

²³ Mashūkoku tsūshinsha (1935, 124).

campaign. According to Itō, the style of the traditional Chinese architecture had been quite static since the Han time, but by combining both the cultural elements of the Han and Tibetan Buddhism during the Qing time, there then appeared unique gigantic architectures (*Irei no dai kenchiku*) in Rehe, symbolized by the historically and artistically extremely valuable imperial palace and temples.²⁴

History is very important in signifying particular portions of collective memory. As highlighted above, when Japanese forces occupied Manchuria and further attacked Rehe in that extension, they also engaged a particular historical signification of Rehe's past to separate the region from the sovereign realm of China in their war accounts and travel experiences. Furthermore, as the Japanese consolidated its rule over Rehe, the mixed cultural relics of Rehe between the Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism, symbolized by the aforementioned imperial palace and temples, did not become a cultural symbol of the diverse Chinese, but were actively utilized by the Japanese to present the ethnic diversity of Manchukuo outside Han China.²⁵

4 GEOGRAPHY

Geography was another important element that shaped people's imagination about the physical boundaries of their nation. During the Rehe campaign of the Kwangtung Army, Japanese military personnel and journalists maintained a clear perception as to the demarcation between China proper and Manchuria through the historical boundary of the Great Wall and natural boundaries of mountains and deserts in Rehe. In doing so, they justified their Rehe campaign not only through a different frame of time mentioned above, but also through spatializing the particular geography of Rehe as one integrated part of Manchuria, thus constructing a distinctive spatial knowledge about the region.

The Great Wall standing in the mountainous regions of Rehe had been an artificial historical marker separating sedentary China proper and the nomad lands of northeast Asia. As the Kwangtung Army initiated its campaign in Rehe, the Japanese observers had thus made it clear that the

²⁴ Itō (1936, 212).

²⁵ Tanaka (2003).

Great Wall was the historical boundary between China and others. Specifically, for Satō Yaheita, a military advisor for the Kwangtung Army, it was the Great Wall that had separated Rehe from north China, and it seemed to him that this was also why the Chinese armies had fought the Japanese forces most fiercely around the lines of the Great Wall.²⁶ Based on this perception, as we see, the leading Japanese had thus established a goal to push the Chinese army south inside the Great Wall, but not further, at least at this stage in the early 1930s. Therefore, as was often the case, as they described their mission to defeat the Chinese armies, they indicated the Great Wall as their terminal destination. For instance, as a diplomat clarifying the Japanese legitimate campaign in Rehe in front of diplomats and journalists from foreign countries in Beiping and Tianjing, Tsurumi Ken claimed that “our army would not engage in offensives beyond the Great Wall unless the Chinese army challenge our army again or hurt our people in Beiping and Tianjin areas.”²⁷ Also, as a journalist moving along with one of the Japanese field units, Nakajima Kinko confirmed the goal of this campaign by experiencing the Japanese military deployments towards the Great Wall directly. As he described, as his unit took over the fortress of Lengkou of the Great Wall from the Chinese resistance force, the Japanese soldiers just “fled the *Nissō* flag (Japanese national flag) and made the *Banzai* (Long Live) calls three times” to celebrate the completion of their mission.²⁸ Indeed, due to this widespread perception, as the Japanese army propagated the Japanese military mission in Rehe in the following year, the heroic battles of the Japanese soldiers across the Great Wall were widely and repeatedly highlighted.²⁹

The historical boundary between China proper and Manchuria along the line of the Great Wall was further backed up by the natural boundaries of steep mountains and desert regions in Rehe in the perception of the advancing Japanese. According to Tanaka Shūsaku, the steep mountainous geography of Rehe had formed a natural barrier for the Chinese armies to resist the Japanese campaigns from Manchuria, although the

²⁶ Satō Yaheita, “Nekka sakusen no genkyō [The current situation of Rehe campaign],” 10 March 1933, *Kantōgun saigo no seisen* No. 3, 2.

²⁷ Tsurumi Ken, “Nekka mondai to taigai kankei [Rehe issues and Japan-foreign relations],” 8 March 1933, in *Kantōgun saigo no seisen* No. 2, 2.

²⁸ Nakajima Kinko, “Hattori butai ni jūgun shite [Following Hattori unit],” 12 March 1933, in *Kantōgun saigo no seisen* No. 3, 23–24.

²⁹ Kokusai rengō tsūshinsha (1934, 377–452).

former was not capable enough of excluding the Japanese imperial army.³⁰ In line with this perception, one of the aforementioned guidebooks of Rehe thus said that the Mongol princes even tried to support the last emperor of the Qing in Rehe to resist the 1911 Revolution from the south.³¹ For the author of this book, those Mongol princes could attempt to do so because “Rehe neighbours Manchuria, Mongolia, and China, and forms a clear natural barrier by the Great Wall,” with Manchuria and Mongolia staying outside China.³² Furthermore, the vast desert region of Rehe also formed a natural boundary between China proper and the northern lands of Mongolia and Manchuria in the perceptions of the Japanese. As the Japanese armies advanced in the region to attack the Chinese forces from different directions from the north, as was often the case, they experienced logistical issues. Therefore, the more difficult to accomplish the Rehe campaign, the more they felt necessary to complete the final step to integrate the last piece of the land of Manchukuo, reflected in Kawasaki Shirō and Shimada Ryūichi’s mission statements to finalize the last holy war of the Japanese in Rehe for the state-construction projects of Manchukuo.³³

By the Great Wall, steep mountains, and vast area of deserts in Rehe, the leading Japanese in Manchuria and Japan had thus perceived clear-cut national boundaries of Manchuria. In this clear-cut national space, the Chinese could no longer claim a geographical coherence between China proper and its northeast, leaving room for the Japanese to interpret a contestable space in northeast Asia to consolidate the national space of Manchukuo.

5 ETHNICITY

There were different interpretations about the constituencies of the Chinese nation in Republican China. Although there was a general tendency to weaken the racial differentiation between the Han Chinese

³⁰ Tanaka (1933, 147).

³¹ *Manshū bunka kyōkai* (1933, 18).

³² *Manshū bunka kyōkai* (1933, 17–18).

³³ Kawasaki Shirō, “Nekka tōbatsu ni kansuru Manshūkoku gun katsudō no jōkyō [Situation of the Manchukuo army related to the Rehe campaign],” 10 March 1933, 7–9, and Shimada Ryūichi, “Nekka sakusenkan no kūchū yusōtai no katsudō [Air support during the Rehe campaign],” 11 March 1933, 13–14, in *Kantōgun saigo no seisen No. 3*.

and others since the formal founding of the Republic in 1912, the chauvinistic Han nationalism that had taken root in the 1911 Revolution did not just disappear. On the one hand, it is thus true that the leading Chinese politicians and intellectuals tended to emphasize the historical unfixity of the Chinese in the structural and civilizational coherence of China through the past millennia, and thereby legitimized the territoriality of contemporary China based on the historical and cultural legacies of the Qing. However, on the other hand, there remained a strong racial norm centred on the Han, exclusively addressing the racial integration of the Chinese nation from the Han perspective in addition to the aforementioned cultural nationalism.³⁴ Taking advantage of the Chinese racial norm centred on the Han, the leading Japanese intellectuals, politicians, and militarists, such as Ishiwara Kanji and Nagata Tetsuzan, thereby attempted to associate Republican China exclusively with ethnic Han Chinese in order to claim a racially differentiated Manchuria. It was then in this context that the Kwangtung Army actively utilized the independence movements in East Inner-Mongolia to separate the region from China, first for the bordering of Manchuria and then also to securitize the region to face potential encroachment of the Soviet Union from the north.³⁵ This was why it was also important for the Japanese leaders to construct a spatial knowledge of Rehe as one part of East Inner-Mongolia, by associating the region exclusively with the Mongols.

Firstly, in support of the Rehe campaign, the Japanese, who were aiming to consolidate an independent image of Manchukuo, emphasized the Mongol character of Rehe since the Yuan dynasty. Particularly during the Qing time, it seemed to them that the Mongols in this region were important for the Manchu court to stabilize the Qing's rule over China proper.³⁶ Therefore, according to one Japanese intelligence report, the history of the region is exclusively associated with the Mongols. Also, for this reason, for the Mongols living in this region, the Chinese republic representing the hegemony of the Han was not necessarily legitimate for ruling them, resulting in their moves for independence.³⁷

³⁴ Leibold (2006).

³⁵ Suzuki (2005).

³⁶ *Manshū bunka kyōkai* (1933, 8).

³⁷ *Rikugun chōshahan* (1933b, 3-4).

Furthermore, the Japanese also emphasized the distinctiveness of Rehe by separating the Mongols from the Han Chinese by the Qing court's policy of seal and prohibit (*fengjin*). They see that the Qing court was very cautious as to the contacts between the Han Chinese and the Mongols in its early period for security reasons. During this period, the Mongols in Rehe were thus banned from using the Chinese name and speaking the Chinese language. Additionally, they were not allowed to marry the Han Chinese.³⁸ The Chinese could enter Rehe for brief period with permission from the Office of Tribal Affairs, particularly for commercial activities, but they were not allowed to live there for a long time. Therefore, it seemed to some Japanese that Rehe had once been an ideal land (*tōgenchi*) for the Mongols to keep their own way of life.³⁹ This policy was however lifted in the Jiaqing period. As a result, Han Chinese immigrants had increasingly flowed in, making Rehe resemble other parts of China proper more.

As to Han-Mongolian relations, the Japanese addressed Chinese suppressions against the Mongols since the lifting of the *fengjin* policy. Although there were about 3.5 million people in Rehe in the early 1930s, the Mongol population only amounted 700,000 to 800,000.⁴⁰ In the Japanese perception, the region became distinctively Chinese only because of recent Han Chinese immigration. Upon the lifting of the *fengjin* policy in the early nineteenth century, certainly the Mongol princes needed these immigrants to cultivate their lands. However, as the population of Han Chinese got bigger and bigger, the nomad Mongols were pushed up further north. This trend was then accelerated since the founding of the Republic, and even worse, as the GMD came to rule China, it did not care about the interest of the Mongols. As a result, the local Chinese authority in Rehe could obtain lands with small compensation from the Mongols. Once obtaining the land, local authorities then sold it to Han Chinese, resulting in other conflicts between the Mongols and Han Chinese.⁴¹ The Mongols certainly did not like this situation and had even attempted to

³⁸ Tanaka (1933, 149–152).

³⁹ Osaka Mainichi Shinbunsha (1933, 47).

⁴⁰ “Nekkashō no gaikyō [The overall situation of Rehe],” 6–7, in Kantōgun sanbōbu, “Nekka tōbatsu ni tomonau senden keikaku oyobi senden ni kansuru shorui narabi ni senden siryō [propaganda plan as to the Rehe campaign and also related propaganda materials and documents],” 25 February 1933 (JACAR: C01002848000).

⁴¹ Mashūkoku tsūshinsha (1935, 123).

resist the Chinese sovereignty over this region.⁴² Therefore, it seemed to leading Japanese at this time that the Japanese campaign in Rehe was also one way to protect the Mongols from further encroachment of the Han Chinese.⁴³ It was in this context that the Kwangtung Army planned to promote its propaganda project and targeted in particular the Mongol aristocrats to address the true collaborations between the Manchus and Mongols in Manchukuo.⁴⁴

Due to the particular history of Rehe associated with the Mongols, the leading Japanese militarists in Manchuria thus utilized the Mongol ethnicity to justify their Rehe campaign. Certainly, few found the Japanese campaign legitimate. However, from the Japanese propagation of the Mongol character of Rehe, at least we can understand another measure that the leading Japanese utilized to construct the distinctive spatiality of Rehe at this time as they advanced into the land of Rehe.

6 FOR THE LOCALS

While Rehe's history, geography, and ethnicity make it possible to envision it as a different region from China proper, the Japanese military leaders could hardly ignore it as a de facto Chinese region due to the overwhelming majority of the Han Chinese living there. Therefore, they also presented the agenda of their Rehe campaign to the Han Chinese locals. They spoke about the fears and sufferings in their daily lives and welcomed their collaboration and advocacy, respectively on account of two aspects: Namely, to prevent the expansion of communism from outer Mongolia and to protect the locals from Chinese warlord suppression. In doing so, they framed a different spatiality of Rehe and created an opportunity for the Han Chinese to affiliate themselves more with the newly established Manchukuo. That way, they would view Manchukuo as a prospect for a harmonious life and war-torn China proper as something that inflicts pain.

For the Kwangtung Army, the lifeline of imperial Japan was in Manchuria and Mongolia, but increasingly it faced significant threats, not

⁴² Osaka Mainichi Shinbunsha (1933, 6–8).

⁴³ Tanaka (1933, 158).

⁴⁴ Kantōgun sanbōbu, “nekkashō senden taishō [propaganda targets in Rehe],” 13 February 1933, 2–3, (JACAR: C01002848000), Kantōgun sanbōbu, *Nekka tōbatsu ni tomonau senden keikaku oyobi senden ni kansuru shorui narabi ni senden siryō*.

only from the Chinese nationalists but also from the Communists of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Kwangtung Army leaders had paid close attention to the Soviet Union's policies towards the east and carefully monitored Communist activities in Manchuria, certainly including Rehe. What concerned them before the Rehe campaign in particular were the activities of the Mongol communists in south Rehe in the early 1930s. This awareness prompted calls for caution in any further moves.⁴⁵ Upon initiating the Rehe campaign, therefore, the Kwangtung Army leveraged fear of the Communist expansion in their propaganda. Specifically, in justifying Japanese military actions in Rehe, they set out to establish the Japanese as the guardians of the Asian way of life from Communist invasion through Outer Mongolia.⁴⁶

Another subject that the Kwangtung Army actively utilized to justify the Rehe campaign was the chaotic socio-political situation of Rehe under the rule of Tang Yulin, a warlord of Zhang Xueliang's military clique. According to a Japanese investigation of Rehe in the early 1930s, the Rehe people were extremely impoverished due to natural disasters, heavy taxes, and plundering from local bandits. Additionally, large populations of Rehe residents were opium smokers, thus causing various social problems.⁴⁷ Even so, as the ruler of Rehe, Tang Yulin did not care about the lives of the Rehe people. Rather, he only cared about his own fortunes and still allowed massive productions of opium. For example, the annual opium production amounted more than half a million taels in seven of the fourteen districts in Rehe.⁴⁸ Impoverished and poisoned, some elderly people even cherished of the late Qing days more than the Republican era.⁴⁹ As a reflection of this image, one anonymous soldier talked about what he saw of the Chinese villages when his field unit advanced on Rehe:

⁴⁵ "Nekkashō no gaikyō," 6–7, in Kantōgun sanbōbu, *Nekka tōbatsu ni tomonau senden keikaku oyobi senden ni kansuru shorui narabi ni senden siryō* [propaganda plan as to the Rehe campaign and also related propaganda materials and documents], 25 February 1933 (JACAR: C01002848000).

⁴⁶ Kantōgun sanbōbu, "Senden jitsumu sankō [For the practices of propaganda]," 13 February 1933, Kantōgun sanbōbu, *Nekka tōbatsu ni tomonau senden keikaku oyobi senden ni kansuru shorui narabi ni senden siryō* (JACAR: C01002848000), 1–2, 8.

⁴⁷ Sanbōhonbu (1932, 101–105).

⁴⁸ Nekka kinen rinji shidōkyoku, *Nekka no ahen* (Opium in Rehe), 31 January 1934 (JACAR: C13010379000), 0294.

⁴⁹ Sanbōhonbu (1932, 101–105).

As we stepped into the land of Rehe, we found that the villages were completely devastated. Needless to say Chaoyang and Lingyuan, even in the villages surrounding Chengde, we could neither find people nor properties in the devastated homes. As people could only survive the harsh winter at their homes, we were so astonished to find that, as was often the case, they were no windows and ondols in those homes.⁵⁰

This soldier subsequently suggests that a combination of unorganized and undisciplined Chinese villagers, the retreating Chinese armies, as well as the incapable local administration under the warlords' rule led to the villages' devastation. Judging from the chaotic and impoverished situation in Rehe, when the Kwangtung Army engaged in the Rehe campaign, its military leaders thus established plans to publicize the Japanese mission to help the Chinese people constructing their hometowns and to protect them from the suppressions of the warlords in the name of "stabilizing the region and enriching the land (*anxiang letu*)."⁵¹

Specifically, the military leaders specified four directions in the Japanese propaganda projects: To demonstrate (1) no further ambitions of the Japanese beyond Rehe, (2) Japanese sympathy to Chinese sufferings, (3) the need to topple the Chinese warlords for the happiness of the Chinese people and the peace of the East, and (4) the good governance of Manchukuo.⁵² To materialize these missions, the Kwangtung Army thus organized two big propaganda units (consisting of 10 personnel each, half of whom were Japanese and the other half Manchurian), 12 middle propaganda units (consisting of four to five personnel each, with two to three Japanese and two Manchurian), and 18 small propaganda units (consisting of three personnel each, one Japanese and two Manchurian) to move along with the Japanese forces to propagate the acclaimed visions

⁵⁰ Mumeisei, "Shina sanken [Some experiences as to China]," in Konsei dai jūyon ryodan, *Nekka seisen no omoide* [In Memory of the Saint War in Rehe] (Bōei kenshūjo senshibu, August 1933) (JACAR: C14030227200).

⁵¹ Kantōgun sanbōbu, Sendenhan kinmu yōryō [Concise summary of the works of the propaganda unit], 12 February 1933, in Kantōgun sanbōbu, *Nekka tōbatsu ni tomonau senden keikaku oyobi senden ni kansuru shorui narabi ni senden siryō*, 4–5.

⁵² Konsei dai jūyon ryodan shireibu, "Konsei dai jūyon ryodan senden keikaku [Propaganda plans of the Fourteenth Brigade]," 17 March 1933 (JACAR: C14030242800).

and slogans of the Japanese among the Rehe residents.⁵³ Specifically, the army directed these units to create posters, flyers, placards, pamphlets, and other necessary goods to distribute. The units were also instructed to maintain active communication with local residents through various platforms like public speeches and small skits, as well as to establish a solid image of Rehe as an indispensable part of Manchukuo, which had been ruled brutally by Tang Yulin and Zhang Xueliang.⁵⁴ To promote these works, the army further required these units to adhere to the following points as they carried out their works in Rehe: The Japanese personnel should carefully collect information, first concerning the Japanese and Manchurian armies and then concerning the local political situation; the Manchurian personnel should engage in specific propaganda practices; and finally, they all should work with relevant authorities to manipulate news reports in the cities in Rehe.⁵⁵

The socio-political situation was far from stable in Rehe. As was often the case, people were afraid of Communist expansion and also suffered from war and brutal governance. While the Kwangtung Army's military mission also threatened the lives of the Rehe locals, by utilizing the two subjects in its propaganda campaigns through its propaganda units traveling around Rehe, its leading figures at least attempted to establish a Japanese modern, civilized, and just image through the construction of a spatiality of Rehe integrated with Manchukuo. It is in this modernized and civilized image that the Japanese could possibly tame the national conflict with the Han Chinese and mobilize their support for Manchukuo.⁵⁶

⁵³ Kantōgun sanbōbu, "Sendenhan henseihyō [Organization of propaganda units]," 17 February 1933, Kantōgun sanbōbu, *Nekka tōbatsu ni tomonau senden keikaku oyobi senden ni kansuru shorui narabi ni senden siryō*, 1–5.

⁵⁴ Various parts from *Nekka tōbatsu ni tomonau senden keikaku oyobi senden ni kansuru shorui narabi ni senden siryō*.

⁵⁵ Kantōgun sanbōbu, "Sendenhan kinmuyrōyō [Key points as to the works of propaganda units]," 12 February 1933, in op cit., Kantōgun sanbōbu, *Nekka tōbatsu ni tomonau senden keikaku oyobi senden ni kansuru shorui narabi ni senden siryō*, 1–2.

⁵⁶ Agnew (2013).

7 CONCLUSION

Based on recent scholarship, although we know that the territoriality of Manchuria had been contested by various actors, this contestation itself does not obfuscate the fact that the region was undeniably Chinese by the overwhelming majority of the Han Chinese population. Exactly for this reason, Japanese military leaders in Manchuria had to confer upon Manchuria a different identity by reconfiguring a distinctive historical and cultural space while reducing its Chinese characters in their military conquest of the region.

However, while Manchuria as a contested borderland has been discussed extensively in established historiography, it is still unclear as to how the Japanese had indeed tried to border the borderland of Manchuria as far as they attempted to fit their state-building projects in the international system of nation-state. Specifically in regard to the founding of Manchukuo, the Japanese military campaign in Rehe demonstrated the ways of the Japanese observers in perceiving the clear-cut space of Manchukuo through the history, geography, ethnicity, and the particular socio-political conditions of Rehe. In doing so, the Japanese leading figures in the region could not only present Rehe as historically and culturally integrated with Manchukuo but also framed the distinctive historical and contemporary identity of Manchukuo as to its space and people in that extension.

Regardless of this presentation on the surface, the kind of documents discussed in this chapter introduces a new dimension to the discussion of knowledge production proposed by this volume. The Japanese developed strategic concepts in the context of a unique kind of travel—military campaigns—to present Rehe as a hegemonic space. This reconstructed spatial knowledge was to serve the consolidation and expansion of the Japanese informal empire in Manchuria, where Rehe stood as one of its bordering regions. Just as Ueji Torajirō termed the Japanese living in Rehe as the people from the mainland (*Naichi no hitobito*) in this field research in Rehe as a geologist, the Japanese then saw Rehe as a peripheral region of imperial Japan by distinguishing the region from China.⁵⁷ At the beginning of his research report, Ueji too associated the region's history with the nomads, especially the Mongols, while rejecting the Han Chinese historical claim on Rehe due to their experiences there “only”

⁵⁷ Ueji Torajirō (1933, 183–185).

for the past two centuries.⁵⁸ So, for him, now the region returned to the hand of the original owners, whom the Japanese could help modernize and develop in the “orient” of Japan.

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⁵⁸ Ueji Torajirō (1933, 179–180).

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The Challenge of Curiosity During the Cold War: Representations of Asia Between Politics and Consumerism and the Reflections of Goffredo Parise in the 1960s

Matteo Salonia and Christian Mueller

1 INTRODUCTION

Observations on Asia through the lenses of travellers from different parts of the world in the 1960s were hugely diverse. They stretched from critical images of Western automatized modernities over glorifications of exotic temples of consumerism and gazing tourist views to politicized descriptions in appreciation or criticism of different emerging ideological

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spheres in East Asia. However, the experiences and reflections that shine through the accounts of travelling as acts of self-realization, consumption, ideological alignment, identity formation and curiosity deserve a more thorough analysis than scholarly writings on travel and travel writing after 1945 has suggested.

One of the classics on British travel writing, Paul Fussell, remarked bitterly that genuine travelling and thus insightful and remarkable travel writing disappeared after the interwar period. “Because travel is hardly possible anymore, an inquiry into the nature of travel and travel writing between the wars will resemble a threnody, and I’m afraid that a consideration of the tourism that apes it will be like a satire”.¹ Fussell and many scholars after him have thus focussed on the curious and exotic travellers like Peter Fleming, W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood who were widely accessible to an English-speaking audience and reflected the colonial hero adventurer stories that came with a long-standing tradition of adventurer explorers in Central Asia since Sven Hedin and Aurel Stein.² Less known figures like Ella Maillart or André Malraux were equally famous for the interwar travels and literary production of observations.³ In scholarship, these heroes and heroines have been studied with respect to their limited ways of exploring the genuine characters of the parts of Asia in which they travelled.

More generally, the problem with works on travel writings after 1945 is that they evaluate their study objects in respect to two questions: how accurate the descriptions of specific spaces were, and how well the descriptions fitted the assumption of an overtly exoticized Western Orientalism in travel writings following Said’s claims towards power structures in the context of Cold War and decolonization. Studies on the politics of tourism rightly claim that by applying the concept of “gaze” as a skilled cultural practice and socially learned ability reflective of one’s particular filter of ideas, skills, gender, desires and expectations, the specific views on East Asia in the 1960s are heavily influenced by the context of the Cold War and the travellers’ positions in it.⁴ Classic interpretations claim that

¹ Fussell (1980, 37, 175–177).

² Clark (2008, 10–11), Mulligan (2008), Auden and Isherwood (1939, 38).

³ Mulligan (2008), Harris (1996).

⁴ Urry (2002, 1–2). See Berger (1972, 9), Jenks (1995, 10), Foucault (1976, 89). For American middle class orientalism in the 1950s esp. Klein (2003).

Western leftist intellectuals were involved in constructing positive images of communist countries and position travellers as political pilgrims that created favourable ideological “Orients”.⁵ In the context of the escalating Vietnam conflict and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the mid-1960s, in particular China and Hong Kong as adjacent spaces of high political relevance moved to the forefront of travel observations.⁶ However, both tourism and travel writing became highly political phenomena that attracted constructions, consumptions and new curiosities about East Asia beyond questions of social and geographical accuracy and mere Orientalist gazes for the sake of dominance.⁷

This article argues that travel writings on Asia, in particular on China and Hong Kong in the 1960s, are much more nuanced and serve a multitude of purposes that go beyond clear identifications of political pilgrimages, Orientalist marketing and capitalist consumerism in the advent of jet-plane long-distance travel. In unpacking the problematic assumption of ideological “gazes” of Western travellers and the complex constellations of ideology and consumerism in the context of Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China, we argue that travels in the 1960s and their literary reflection diversify and to some extent counter the notions of post-colonial stereotypes that emerge in the political spheres of British and US American presence in East and South East Asia and the rise of Orientalist consumerism. The contribution thus juxtaposes the politicized discourses around East Asia on the Vietnam and China issues and the creation of a specific Orientalist image of Hong Kong and other Asian metropolis in the 1965 Cathay Pacific campaign with an in-depth analysis of a travel account by the Italian writer Goffredo Parise in his article series for the *Corriere della Sera* in Italy—*Cara Cina*.⁸ In Parise’s work, this contrast between the PRC in transition during the early phase

⁵ Hollander (1981, 347), De Pascale (2001, 160, 163, 174). See Liu (2018, 256–258).

⁶ See Lawrence (2008), Dumbrell (2012), Zhai (2000, 130–175); Dikotter (2017).

⁷ Richter (2018, 2), Mark (2017, 161), Mark (2010, 3–5). See the *New York Times* article from 13 February 1966 (p. 401): “Americans simply don’t know the geography of the area. [...] To them, it’s all Asia.” For the connection between American soldiers abroad and the transformation of stereotypes of human landscapes, see also: Baker (2004), Endy (2004).

⁸ There has been a growing interest in Italian travel writing in recent years. See Attanasio (2017), Liu (2018), Castillo (2018), Calzati (2019).

of the Cultural Revolution and his visit to consumerist and tourist capital of the region, Hong Kong, connects the two elements of the analysis. Through the analysis of different forms of creating collective identities under the pretext of rapid and diversified modernizations in Asia, we capture different aspects of the radically diverse agendas of travelling, observing and constructing Asia as a variety of spaces and places. At the same time, we add another layer of analysis to the discussion on knowledge by questioning the dominance of colonial Orientalism during the Cold War through witty and genuine curiosities of authors like Parise, who generate with a European reflectiveness a non-stereotypical China.

2 COLD WAR IMAGINATIONS OF EAST ASIA

East Asia between 1945 and 1970 was a region in rapid transition. The political changes following the Civil War in China and the establishment of a KMT regime to continue the Republic in Taiwan as a political entity apart from the PRC in 1949 was an important, but by no means the only political change.⁹ Decolonization of the former formal Empires in the region, Britain, France and the Netherlands, and the intense legacy of Japanese occupation happened side by side with the continuous presence of France (in Vietnam) and Britain (in Hong Kong) in East and South East Asia.¹⁰ The United States of America as the new aspiring dominant power in the Pacific engaged in active foreign policy, of which the Korean War and the Vietnam War bore testimony to the world and challenged a developing new equilibrium of power in East and South East Asia.¹¹ In all of these re-alignments, rapid industrial modernizations, at times carried through with immense social costs, and efforts of nation-building in post-colonial societies coincided with competitions over ideological supremacies between Communism and Capitalism as economic, and Communism and Western Liberalism as political systems. The travel writers, their personal or political preferences and alignments, and their pre-conceptions of Asian spaces in political and social terms reflected these rapidly changing political landscapes without necessarily being accurate in their descriptions of them.

⁹ See the Contributions in MacFarquhar and Fairbank (1987).

¹⁰ For an overview of decolonisation in Asia see Burbank and Cooper (2010, 413–442).

¹¹ See Anderson (2002) and Lawrence (2008).

The perceptions and “gazes” on Asia influenced the way in which the landscape of the Cold War and readjustments in international relations in Asia unfolded. Beyond mere stereotypes of Orientalism, the political scenario around the escalation of the early Vietnam War and the tensions between the PRC and the United States of America over the US American presence in the region and in Hong Kong in particular put France on the plan. As former colonial power in Vietnam, France under de Gaulle tried to pursue its own strategy in East Asia towards China that was not aligned with the United States of America in strategic or ideological terms.¹² For the French government, the key to “understanding” China better in its ambitions and sensitivities towards Hong Kong and Vietnam in particular was a proliferate intellectual and travel writer who had travelled China in the 1920s and early 1930s and had written one of the most influential fiction reports, “Man’s Fate”, on the political turbulences in 1927 Shanghai—André Malraux (1901–1976). In his own words from the novel, “Europeans never understand anything of China that does not resemble themselves”.¹³ But with this reflexive advantage and his history as an ardent non-Stalinist communist before the Second World War, Malraux thought that he would be able to come to a better understanding of China’s policy towards Europe, Hong Kong and Vietnam.¹⁴ Here the travel writer and his constructions of Asia take on a political mission towards negotiating collaboration and peace.

André Malraux was a highly influential novelist and art critique but he also served as first Minister of State for Cultural Affairs to the Republic of France under Charles de Gaulle from 1959 to 1969.¹⁵ Besides his belief in enhancing the educational level of the masses, he was a prominent supporter of decolonizing movements in Africa and Asia, among them for Algeria and Bangladesh. But more importantly, Malraux had travelled Asia extensively as a young literary scholar, Cambodia and French Indochina between 1923 and 1927, and China continuously since 1931. He became highly critical of French colonial administration in Indochina

¹² Gildea (2002, 246–248).

¹³ Malraux (1933/2008, 111).

¹⁴ Malraux stated this in his seminal interview with *Der Spiegel (Hamburg)* in October 1968 Malraux (1968, 138–139, 142, 145).

¹⁵ Gildea (2002, 200).

and remained a keen interest in bridging the alleged dialectical relationship between Orient and Occident, East and West.¹⁶ Very much like the Swiss traveller through Central Asia Ella Maillart, Malraux was curious about the human condition in its search for creating forms of existence and the spiritual world as part of this creative process.¹⁷ However, he also criticised severely in “Man’s Fate” the way in which Europe still dominated China and the way in which it perceived China. Clappique, one of the characters, states in the book as he leaves Shanghai: “Europe, the party is over”, indicating that Malraux observed the decline of a system where all the European heroes played on an exotic stage of China with the native population only having a supernumerary role in a scenario largely written for and by a westernized elite.¹⁸

His own stance on politics changed from a revolutionary leftist in the 1920s to an outspoken critic of communism as it emerges from the end of the Second World War into the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁹ This change in political bias however does not automatically indicate a change in perception of Asia or China in particular. Malraux claims to separate ideology from observation of countries and people especially because of his curiosity about humans and their agency in a given space. In his “Anti-Memoirs” published in 1965, Malraux reflected on the rapid change of Asia within his lifetime and the ways in which technological acceleration had revolutionized travelling and the conditions of observation since the 1920s: “Not so very long ago, a journey to Asia was a slow penetration into space and time combined. [...] Now [I] contemplate the upheavals which [...] have convulsed Asia – on my way to rediscover, at the other end of the earth, Tokyo, where I sent the Venus de Milo; Kyoto, changed beyond recognition; and Nara almost intact despite its gutted temple [...]; and China, which I have not yet seen again”.²⁰ What guided his travels and made his observations influential beyond a mere gaze is his open curiosity for what he calls the human condition “What interests me in any man is the human condition; in a great man, the form and the essence of his greatness; in a saint, the character of his saintliness. And in all of them,

¹⁶ Malraux (1926/2006), Malraux (1933/2008). See Harris (1996, 6).

¹⁷ Malraux (1926/2006, 25).

¹⁸ Malraux (1933/2008, 97), Harris (1996, 110–111).

¹⁹ Malraux (1968, 138, 140, 145), Harris (1996, xiii).

²⁰ Malraux (1967/1968, 2–3).

certain characteristics which express not so much an individual personality as a particular relationship with the world".²¹

Within Malraux two personalities emerged—the travel writer novelist and the French minister in support of Charles de Gaulle. The open curiosity of his early writings and his self-idealization in his *Anti-Memoirs* is not always in line with his efforts to limit the damage done to France both internationally and domestically by its colonial warfare in Algeria and his rhetoric against Communist subversion in France. Malraux's turn against Soviet Russian Communism after the Moscow trials in the 1930s however did not mean a general retraction from his interest in the masses as an agent of social change.²² He increasingly perceived the human condition as a comparative effort to understand human agency within national frameworks and thus regarded his earlier observations on China as part of his effort to understand and reconcile Mao's aim towards Chinese nation-state building with a revolutionary agenda.

As the first Western minister to enter long political talks with the People's Republic of China, in particular with Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong, Malraux staged the outcome of French re-alignment strategies in foreign policy that de Gaulle had orchestrated since the late 1950s. Through the rapprochement with Western Germany under the equally USA-sceptic chancellor Konrad Adenauer, manifested in the Elysée Treaty in 1963, de Gaulle felt in charge of a stronger economic bloc in Western Europe to counter the USA and the Soviet bloc, respectively.²³ The chance emerged to utilize the Sino-Soviet split in friendly relations in 1963 and 1964 to re-establish diplomatic relations with the PRC, also through Chiang Kai-Chek's withdrawal of Taiwan's ambassador to France, to tacitly fulfil Beijing's claim of a one-China policy recognition.²⁴ Malraux's mission to China in 1965 was thus seen as a major coup in the Cold War international relations which France leveraged against the alignment of too strong a supportive Western bloc to support Washington's containment policy in Vietnam. Malraux himself was seen as the travel

²¹ Malraux (1967/1968, 9).

²² Malraux (1968, 138). See the English translation in the *Times of India*, 9 March 1969, 6.

²³ Bozo (2010), Zhai (1999).

²⁴ Zhai (1999), Radchenko (2010).

novelist turned political spy, “President de Gaulle’s 007” who created “a novel out of [his] own life”.²⁵

Within the French strategy for the future of Asia and France’s place in it as a benevolent and decolonizing power, de Gaulle aimed at capitalizing on Malraux’s socialist legacy and his prestige as being a curious travel writer and intellectual critical to Western imperialism and open to rewriting stereotypes of Orientalism towards China. In reflecting on Mao’s China, Malraux stated in 1965 that he saw in him “a man who dominates [China’s] problems absolutely as a life-long intellectual”, likening him in a Nietzschean fashion to his French counterpart and head of state, Charles de Gaulle.²⁶ The rebirth of nationalism to form radically new nations would only be possible through what he considered great men in history. Mao emerged in his own perception as the creator of “a China that will be fundamentally national, and unlike the old Imperial China”.²⁷ Malraux thus signed responsible for establishing “the only channel of communication between China and the West” to stress the point in a conflict between the United States of America and a Vietnam supported by the People’s Republic of China, “neither side can hope to achieve a full military victory in Vietnam”.²⁸ In autumn 1965, Malraux served with his openness towards China and his reverence to Mao a window for de Gaulle and France to stage its new diplomatic ambitions and hopes for closer ties with a rising China.²⁹

France did not follow up the rather idealist mission of a negotiation between the USA, China and Vietnam over the growing hot phase of the war and the US military campaigns in Vietnam in August and September 1965. With the declaration of Luo Ruiqing on Radio Peking on August 1st, 1965 that China would be ready to fight the USA again as they had in Korea, the focus of the world shifted in 1965 towards East Asia as the new scenario of conflict in the Cold War. Malraux’s mission and his positive and open take on China was one side of the political game. The

²⁵ *The Guardian*, 23 August 1965, 8.

²⁶ Malraux (1968, 138, 140), *The Guardian*, 9 August 1965, 1; *The Times of India*, 9 March 1969, 6.

²⁷ Malraux (1968, 138).

²⁸ *The New York Times*, 19 August 1965, 2. See also C.L. Sulzberger “Foreign Affairs: De Gaulle, Mao and Russia,” in: *The New York Times* 22 August 1965, E10.

²⁹ *The New York Times*, 22 August 1965, E10 and C.L. Sulzberger, “China will be an enormous power in fifty years,” in: *The Times of India*, 26 August 1965, 8.

US stationing of a large number of soldiers in Hong Kong also sparked China's sharp protest.³⁰ Hong Kong had been transformed into a major export hub that focused increasingly on the USA business since the late 1950s. In the years following the beginning of the Vietnam War, Hong Kong also saw the constant influx of an increasing number of US military personnel taking "rest and recreation" (R&R) leaves in the British Crown Colony.³¹ The US American soldiers next to numerous businessmen created a rather different space of imagination of Asia than the one that the French minister of Culture Malraux had publicized in his works on China. In the 1960s, Hong Kong was "constructed, represented, and performed as the 'exotic' East with Western colonial characteristics".³²

3 BEYOND THE "WORLD OF SUZIE WONG"—TOURIST IMAGINATIONS OF EAST ASIA IN THE 1960S

The 1960s in particular saw a new interest in East and South East Asia both in the region and from Western travellers into it. For the US soldiers, the image of Asia was largely formed by stereotypes of the exotic and sensual East. "The World of Suzie Wong", a British-American motion picture released in 1960, featured prominently in the stereotypical representation of a bohemian Westerner meeting impoverished pretty Chinese prostitute in the precarious district of Wan Chai. The cliché romantic story made Hong Kong and Wan Chai in particular attractive for the R&R retreats from the Vietnamese battlefield despite strong Chinese protests.³³ Even during the 1967 Hong Kong riots, both the local Maoists and the Chinese government did not turn on visiting American personnel, and Beijing in particular was not prepared to jeopardize the "tourism space" of Hong Kong.³⁴

³⁰ "Chinese Warn Britain on GIs in Hong Kong," *Chicago Tribune*, 2 September 1965, 1.

³¹ Hamilton (2011), Mark (2017, 160–161), Tucker (1994, 226–230), and Jones (2002). Hong Kong had been used as a "liberty port" by the US Seventh Fleet since the Korean War of 1950–1953. See Mark (2010, 1–28).

³² Sum with So (2004, 119), Mark (2017, 167).

³³ Luk (n.d.).

³⁴ Mark (2017, 172). See Roberts and Carroll (2017), Holdsworth (2002), Shaw and Williams (2004), and Baker (2004).

What emerged between 1965 and 1969 was a strong concerted campaign emanating from Hong Kong to sell new images of East Asia to the world. In a move to guide and channel Western and intra-Asian curiosity about travelling and visiting places with the advent of faster jet travel, the Hong Kong based airline Cathay Pacific launched several major campaigns to create an image of ambivalent yet distinct Asian imageries to attract Europeans, US Americans and Asian tourists alike to its growing inter-city services. In the 1967 brochure “The Cathay Pacific Story”, the company advertised itself as “the airline that knows the Orient best”, thus playing with notions and imaginations of Orientalism.³⁵ “The travelling public in the Far East will continue to be offered the fastest and most modern aircraft [and] first class British crews and maintenance”.³⁶ The route network marketing focused on creating Asian city spaces that would attract tourists beyond the growing ideological tensions and war-time impediments on tourism, covering “the major cities from Tokyo to Calcutta, and from Seoul to Singapore”.³⁷

This corporate image of an Asian experience tied into the marketing of Hong Kong and Cathay Pacific since 1965 when the airline had launched a major “Contemporary Art in Asia” exhibition throughout their flight destinations to exhibit the diverse imaginations of Asia. Lu Pan has impressively shown that these exhibitions focussed on air hostesses as agents of generating empowered female images of Asia.³⁸ In presenting the diversity of Asia through works of art, the focus shifted from national or colonial stereotypes to an intra-Asian network of cities that showed inter-Asian cosmopolitanism as an alternative identity for tourism and travel images.³⁹ Cathay Pacific’s active usage of “Orient” beyond the binaries of East and West in all its brochures, pamphlets, exhibitions, travel magazine (*Oriental Travel*) and luggage tags indicates a change in semantics towards more equal intra-Asian recognition of diversity than an outside perception of the “Orient” by the “West”.⁴⁰

³⁵ Cathay Pacific Story (1967, 10).

³⁶ Cathay Pacific Story (1967, 7).

³⁷ Cathay Pacific Story (1967, 7).

³⁸ Pan (2020, 308, 323–24), and *passim*.

³⁹ Pan (2020, 312). See also Crawford (2015).

⁴⁰ Ellis (2018, 17–18), Mark (2017, 167–168). The typical colonial slogans meeting the pre-1960s East meets West trope were “Riviera of the East”, “Pearl of the Orient”

The United Nations General Assembly reacted to the growing trend in tourism with long-distance jet travel also as a means of envisaging to promote peace through closer encounters and travels. With its motto “Tourism, Passport to Peace”, the UN hoped that the tourism industry would “contribute even more strongly towards the welfare of mankind”.⁴¹ For Asia, this rise in tourism numbers at a steady growth of 12% from 1961 to 1967 meant a considerable rise in turnover and income for many businesses located in tourism spots. Hong Kong in particular, but also other cities like Tokyo, Singapore or Bangkok felt this economic development strongly. This in turn generated a whole different form of images of Asia that were designed to attract tourists not only with the promise of cultural sites and landscapes, but straight forward shopping consumerism. The new capitals of tourism generated Asian images of consumerism that showcased in its diversity different forms of Asian modernities in which post-colonial images, capitalist features, Western lifestyle and Asian traditions were merged into city-based shopping paradises. A stunning example of these consumerist-guided travel offers provided Hong Kong with its annual brochures issued by the Hong Kong Tourist Association. Flanked by colonial events like the “British Week in Hong Kong” (in March 1966 under Princess Margaret) by the British Board of Trade and the British National Export Council, the Hong Kong Tourist Association increasingly focused on the diversification of offers and generation of images and experiences “to cater to the widest range of tastes and interests”.⁴² Overseas publicity indeed sold Hong Kong as a temple of modernity and consumerism with photos depicting modern empowered women in both Western style trouser suits and traditional Chinese dresses. Under the slogan “Hong Kong has more to sell”, the Hong Kong Tourist Association in Toronto promoted the shopping and hospitality experience in Hong Kong in 1968 as key to the travel experience.⁴³ Asia emerged in these advertisements and in prominent

or “Europe in China”. For the stereotypical representations see e.g. Nach (1963), Rea (1965/1969), Vittengl (1964).

⁴¹ UN Resolution 2148 (XXI), 1966, in: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/203177?ln=en>. See also Anon. (1967).

⁴² Hong Kong Tourist Association (1968): Chairman’s report for 1968.

⁴³ Hong Kong Tourist Association Toronto tourist brochure, 1968. The Australian branch of the HKTA also praised Hong Kong as a travel destination with the slogan “A Whoopee Bargain”.

newspaper comments in North America as the humane face of modernity apart and beyond the automated anonymity of North American highway cities, motels, and malls.⁴⁴

4 SEEKING CHINA'S HEART—GOFFREDO PARISE, *CARA CINA*, AND CURIOSITY

In the 1960s, Western readers consumed and absorbed also a radically different genre of travel literature on Asia: war reportages by journalists at the war front in Vietnam and other countries torn by armed conflicts.⁴⁵ Goffredo Parise (1929–1986), one of the most important figures in twentieth-century Italian literature, and sophisticated novelist, author of masterpieces such as *Il Prete Bello* and *Sillabario n.2*, would contribute to this kind of writing with his work on the Vietnam War (and later, beyond Asia, covering Biafra and Chile).⁴⁶ But here we would like to explore Parise's earlier articles on China. In 1966, he used and to some extent reinvented for the Italian readership this genre of realist travel writing when he was sent as a reporter for the *Corriere della Sera* to Maoist China, which was not a war front but was on the edge of the most tragic phase of the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁷ Parise was moved by a genuine desire to learn the true character of the Chinese people and to understand their civilization, but he could not have chosen a less propitious historical period to accomplish such endeavour, because Chinese society in 1966 was thoroughly imbued with the political ideology of Marxism. Chinese culture and customs would have already been hard to grasp for a foreign traveller under normal circumstances, but they risked to become a complete mystery in a context shaken and obfuscated by a contingent ideological rhetoric, a totalitarian notion of politics that touched every aspect of daily life, and a distracting, omnipresent cult of personality.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Hong Kong Tourist Association Toronto tourist brochure, 1968; Seth S. King, "A Thruway Traveler in Search of an Exit to Asia," in: *The New York Times*, 6 August 1967, 353.

⁴⁵ Taylor (1985, 451–461), Delli Carpini (1990, 125–156).

⁴⁶ Parise (1967), Parise (1968), Parise (1976). See also Bandini (2012).

⁴⁷ On the Cultural Revolution, the seminal work is Dikotter (2017).

⁴⁸ For the problem of using techniques of hospitality to influence foreign travellers, see Hollander (1981, 347), De Giorgi (2017, 173, 181, 188), Liu (2018, 257).

Yet Parise's persistence and intelligence allowed him to succeed where other visitors of China had failed even in more promising periods. His articles for the *Corriere*, soon collected into a volume entitled *Cara Cina*, had to unavoidably depict the oddities and tragicomic dialogues resulting from the politicization of everything in contemporary Maoist politics, but each of them also introduced the readers to some non-contingent, permanent and pre-political aspect of China's millenarian mentality, value system and social patterns. This is the reason why the book, even after so many decades, remains a fascinating reading: the Cultural Revolution, with its slogans and its banalization of violence, has passed, but the sense of wonder felt by Western travellers entering China has remained. Parise has been able, amidst some frustration, to find words and silences that come close to shed light on the object of his curiosity, which under those circumstances was truly a treasure underneath mountains of ideological viciousness and emptiness: the Chinese people's heart. The images and dialogues, the misunderstandings and mysteries, the smiles and colours contained in *Cara Cina* confound any attempt to generalize the perception of Asian spaces received and absorbed by Western readers in the 1960s: the sensitive, humanist realism in Parise's pages existed side by side with consumerist portrayals of the East as a tourist destination for mass consumption.

The first article, which corresponds to the first chapter of *Cara Cina*, functions almost as a blueprint for the entire book. Parise immediately introduces the reader to a frustrating dialogue that he had with one of his translators, a young Chinese man who brings every conversation and every imaginable subject back to political issues and the teachings of Mao. The Italian traveller attempts repeatedly to know a bit more about the character, hobbies and affections of his Chinese interlocutor, but everything, including the relationship with his wife is considered as "political".

I ask if politics is truly above all. He looks at me scandalized:

'Of course, not only we have to put politics above all, but politics is, in reality, above all. What is our life if not politics?'

'But are your relations with your wife and your family political relations?'

'Of course.'

'In what sense?'

‘In the sense that we both work, under the leadership of president Mao Tse-tung, for the socialist edification of our country.’⁴⁹

This surreal conversation exemplifies many (if not all) dialogues that Parise has during his months in China. In Beijing, he visits a church where he realizes that all the usual smells (incense, candles) are missing, alerting him that there is something strange, and indeed he then sits for hours discussing with a Chinese priest who not only attacks the Vatican but even bizarrely denies that Catholics in China are persecuted.⁵⁰ And yet, already here at the start of the volume, Parise finds a way to insert themes and brief reflections that show his interest towards more permanent, perhaps timeless characteristics of the Chinese. For instance, he explains to the reader how Chinese people exhibit the most positive traits of children, allowing themselves to be amazed (*stupefazione*), to experience carelessness (*distrazione*), but also expressing genuine kindness (*dolcezza*) and love (*amore*).⁵¹

The reader is therefore drawn into Parise’s own curiosity. An Italian reader of the *Corriere* or of *Cara Cina* would have wondered how the rest of the articles and chapters could substantiate these intuitions, while at the same time testing the limits of concepts and ideas across cultures. Parise is acutely aware of this problem, and he soon declares that there is little hope of reaching a true understanding of Chinese culture, not only because of the difficult political circumstances, but also because of the intellectual and psychological baggage that a Western traveller carries. He writes:

[...] only by becoming at least a bit Chinese, and abandoning at least in part humanist education and Western individualism with all their tools of knowledge, it is possible to understand (a little) the Chinese of nowadays and their way of life.⁵²

By the expression “of nowadays” in this instance Parise is not hinting only at the ideological fumes of Marxism, but rather he is completing a reflection on the long history of China and its partial continuity from

⁴⁹ Parise (1968, 22). All translations from Parise’s book are our own.

⁵⁰ Parise (1968, 47–54).

⁵¹ Parise (1968, 21).

⁵² Parise (1968, 41).

empire to Communism that he begins in the paragraphs above the one just quoted. Parise first introduces the idea that Maoist China is in fact an enormous seminary where instead of Christianity people learn a “political theology”, then he reconstructs the situation in imperial China, where individualism had already failed to develop: “the individual, individual freedom, individual expression have never mattered in China”.⁵³ The conclusion is hypothetical, but the suspicion that Maoism matches somehow a previous predisposition of the Chinese people, “a centuries-old soul and habits of collective” (*animo e abitudini secolari di collettività*), remains.⁵⁴

As a travelogue, Parise’s pages on China are unexpectedly missing descriptions of landscapes or detailed analysis of architectures. The author himself acknowledges this towards the end of the book, explaining how the Chinese countryside maintains the same character and colours for vast tracts, changing too slowly for the eyes of a European, which are used to “a rapid variety”.⁵⁵ Parise is however a meticulous examiner of human geographies and spaces where people show their character and inclinations, so he gifts his audience with brief descriptions of the atmosphere of streets in general, or parks in general, when he pens incisive passages such as these:

Just like it happens to stare for hours at a line of ants that bump into each other and each ant seems to greet the one that proceeds in the opposite direction, similarly one contemplates the Chinese crowd in the streets and it looks as if they greet each other with the gesture used by ants. But in reality, they greet each other with their heart.⁵⁶

And again:

Early in the morning, the men go to public parks and do some exercises. The youngest practice modern gymnastics [...], but they also try to learn from the older and especially from the elders traditional Chinese gymnastics. In this gymnastics, every person moves by himself, yet if seen from afar they form a large dancing unit. [...] Seen for the first time, the parks

⁵³ Parise (1968, 37–38).

⁵⁴ Parise (1968, 43).

⁵⁵ Parise (1968, 221).

⁵⁶ Parise (1968, 59).

peopled by elders with long white beards moved by the dawn's wind and by youths with wooden swords look like backyards of insane asylums. Seen for the second time they are one among many, almost infinite verses of a poem called China.⁵⁷

Aby avoiding coordinates of specific streets or names of particular parks, Parise transfers the impression of a vast area where the traveller is surrounded by repetitive spaces and encounters; after all, he describes the Forbidden City precisely through the idea of an incredible, endless and "hallucinating" repetition, but one upon which an order at once abstract and figurative rested, symbolizing the perfect harmony that was at the core of the empire's ideological narrative.⁵⁸ Still, Parise delves deeper, and realizes that apparently repetitive spaces and encounters nevertheless never cease to surprise, teach and tease one's curiosity. Furthermore, actions and movements, such as nods revealing the heart and gestures from a traditional dance, replace here in Parise's China both words and sounds, which have been shown to be more easily polluted by politics and obscured by the intermediate step of translation.

The visit to the Great Wall is another example of how Parise attempts to take advantage of some of the most famous symbols of China's past to sideline the contemporary political ideology saturating China in the 1960s. It is not by chance that he describes some clumsy and unconvincing military exercises that he spots while crossing the countryside, on his way to the monument. He promptly uses this episode to dismiss the militarist rhetoric that so many Chinese officers and citizens (have been conditioned to) repeat. In fact, according to Parise, it is not true that the Chinese people is warlike, ready and eager to fight a future war against the US.

For now, they [the Chinese] have only the aspect of a meek people, scarred by great pain, leaning towards defence, unity, self-enclosure, peasant diffidence, ethnic pride, in one word: a centripetal people, not a centrifugal one.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Parise (1968, 61).

⁵⁸ Parise (1968, 28–31).

⁵⁹ Parise (1968, 82).

This thorough rejection of the regime's warmongering propaganda is followed by the description of the Great Wall:

But the drawing on the page of a notebook by the child-poet is also the greatest construction in the world, the most gigantic example of collective labour in the world, the greatest act of pride in the world: it demonstrates, at once and in just one instant, what idea of itself China had, to what point it could desire peace and autonomy, and finally what was its opinion about the rest of the Earth.⁶⁰

Although here one can still perceive Parise's genius writing style, and although the analysis is fascinating, its level remains unsatisfactory, for both the author and the readers. There is more that can be uncovered about the Chinese heart, and Parise in the following articles goes back to dialogues and meetings that while apparently repetitive help him and his readers to suddenly get glimpses of the Chinese identity that cannot be accessed merely through space and historical remnants.

In an article entitled "New Generation", Parise focuses on his visit to Peking University, where he hopes to meet students at the Institute of foreign languages and literature, in order to speak with them directly and without using a translator. After being welcomed by officers, and after a bizarre conversation with professors who seem to label every canonical writer as "bourgeois", he is finally introduced to a group of six students. Parise is struck by one of them in particular, a girl, who is less shy than the others and speaks an excellent French. He correctly guesses that she must come from a bourgeois and intellectual background, and then he reports the conversation, without commenting on the most shocking passages such as the following:

I ask her what she will do after graduation.

'I will do whatever the Party will order me to do.'

'But don't you have a preference? Teaching, translations, interpreting...'

'I will do what the Party will determine is the most useful job for my country, and I will do it as if I had chosen it. To me what matters is not the job but rather the end of the work. The end of every job must be the triumph of the Marxist idea in the world.'⁶¹

⁶⁰ Parise (1968, 84).

⁶¹ Parise (1968, 96).

The astonishing and saddening dialogue is the price that Parise has to pay to obtain some glimpse of the Chinese heart, to open a small window on the deeper mentality and culture of the Chinese people. And he is not disappointed, because towards the end of the meeting with the students he mentions the word *psychologie*, which none of them, not even the talented girl whose name is Li-Pai-Pien, can understand. Even after one of the professors tries to explain the meaning of this word to the students, they fail to grasp it. Parise continues:

We go to the sport fields where some students play basketball while a small orchestra practices traditional music and songs. [...] they play for me a boring melody [*nenia*] that must be extremely difficult, considering the concentration on their faces, but that keeps repeating itself and I do not understand. However, I clap.⁶²

It is important to notice here Parise's own repetition of the words "do not understand". First, the students cannot understand the term psychology, then immediately after, he is the one who does not understand the point of a musical piece played for him by the university orchestra. This, rather than the bland and unsettling discussions polluted by political ideology, is the core of the article and points to the idea behind the whole book: capturing each of the brief moments of misunderstanding and understanding that allow Parise and his readers to glimpse at China and partly satisfy their curiosity. The chapter, in fact, ends abruptly with one of such moments:

The students leave. But Li-Pai-Pien cannot find peace. She wants to know what exactly *psychologie* means, and she asks me to please explain it to her. I try to do it in the simplest possible way, translating from Greek: the study of the soul. She reflects for a while with her hands folded and finally, with a whisper, she tells me:

'I believe, sir, that the soul of man cannot be studied. Either it exists or it does not, and that's it.'⁶³

Parise does not comment, leaving the readers free to draw their own conclusions, but it is clear that Li-Pai-Pien's response is intriguing. To

⁶² Parise (1968, 98).

⁶³ Parise (1968, 98–99).

some extent it illustrates the intellectual distance separating two philosophical traditions, but also the possibilities and limits of cross-cultural communication. The Venetian novelist deliberately avoids measuring the depth of this intellectual, metaphysical distance, and refuses to flesh out its historical consequences. The last word is Li-Pai-Pien's, the next thought is the reader's.

This is a literary choice that somehow recalls Antonio Pigafetta's colourful yet ambiguous descriptions of apparently strange behaviours or rites: there is no clear judgement or evaluation on the part of the author. Another example of this in *Cara Cina* is the abrupt ending of the article recounting Parise's informal meeting with an unidentified party officer (*un uomo politico*) out of Nanjing. After the usual, tedious political discussion, which in this case lingered on the Italian Communist Party, China's military organization and the impossibility of coexistence of Marxism with capitalism, Parise and his interlocutor walk towards a small shop that sells coloured stones.

The small shop is crowded with customers who examine the stones, chat, bargain and finally buy them. I ask to my companion what do they do with them.

'Nothing. They bring them home and look at them.'⁶⁴

This same article is important because it juxtaposed with Parise's experience at a rural school in the Nanjing countryside. I would suggest that these two articles are significant because Parise offers examples of individual agency, even in the context of a millennial civilization that has favoured the collective, and even in the contingent circumstances of Mao's totalitarianism. When visiting the school, Parise is initially pleased and touched by the pupils' excitement and friendliness, expressions of their curiosity towards him, since "curiosity is an unpardonable defect in China".⁶⁵ However, during a meeting with the school staff, Parise has the first and only argument with a Chinese in the entire trip, when for the first time he dares to contradict some of the most absurd stories spread by the Party. The school principal asks him how many people are murdered by Americans with their jeeps in Italy, before declaring that China is ready to

⁶⁴ Parise (1968, 165).

⁶⁵ Parise (1968, 151).

fight not only against the US, but also against “Khrushchevian revisionists” who have reduced soldiers to beg and are to blame for the extremely low living standards of the Soviets.

This time I do not stay silent. I respond that it is not true, that the Americans are not killing anybody, at least not in Italy, with their jeeps, and that it is not true that the living standards in the Soviet Union are extremely low. I know that country and I can witness to that. He [the school principal] insists, repeating in its entirety the same sentence. I insist as well. He repeats once more, with an angry tone. At this point I realise that he is turning pale and starts to tremble. The traits of his face become sharper, tense, the mouth becomes a thin cut, from which an ever shriller and louder voice comes out, the gestures express violence and the hand cuts the air like a sword. Eventually, he stands from the chair and his words become screams. He looks ashen, and he tries to control the stutter with acts that are at once trembling and sudden. I think that he may be ill and that it could be epilepsy. Instead, it is fanaticism. This is the first time in my life that I see political fanaticism face to face: it is repugnant and pathetic at the same time, but also terrifying.⁶⁶

The principal’s reaction is easily understandable in the context of the horrors that the Chinese countryside had lived through in the previous decade. For instance, even in the years preceding the Cultural Revolution, Mao had “herded the villagers into giant people’s communes that heralded the leap from socialism into communism. In the countryside, people lost their homes, land, belongings and livelihoods. In collective canteens, food, distributed by the spoonful according to merit, became a weapon used to force people to follow the party’s every dictate”.⁶⁷ But as I said above, in *Cara Cina* this sad episode of fanaticism is juxtaposed with a very different example of human agency, because in his encounter with the party officer Parise experiences a mutual respect and the desire for friendship. He immediately recognizes in his interlocutor a calm, intelligent man, who often pauses to think in silence. Parise also ventures to imagine that this man must have been an intellectual, perhaps a poet, and then he takes care to report an interesting digression, even in the midst of the dull discussion on Marxism and the structure of China’s military forces. This digression is, in reality, the most important part of the chat:

⁶⁶ Parise (1968, 153–154).

⁶⁷ Dikotter (2017, 30–31).

He often smiles and is, after all, almost a European. Unexpectedly he says: ‘I know that you are a writer and will write articles for an important Italian newspaper. Before you, ten years ago, another Italian writer came here, Malaparte, whom however I did not meet. I know that he has died and he left his villa in Capri to the Chinese writers as a gift. Unfortunately Italy and China do not have diplomatic relations, so the Chinese cannot enjoy this gift. Let us hope that these relations will start soon, just like they were born between you and me at this very moment, walking peacefully together. Perhaps we will be able one day to walk together in Capri. The island must be very beautiful, and every time I hear its name, I wonder why, it makes me think of Homer.’⁶⁸

This brief, splendid passage is a literary pearl, paradoxically dense of those humanist and individualist undertones that Parise himself had promised to at least partly leave behind to understand China. The officer’s friendly, melancholic words are not only a counterpoint to the mad fanaticism of the school principal, an example of human agency moving in the opposite direction, but also a delicate, almost poetic introduction to the theme of curiosity.

The motive of curiosity, both personal and collective, both felt by the author towards China and by the Chinese people towards him, embraces almost every page of *Cara Cina*. In a 1968 interview, Parise himself drew a connection between the strong emotional attraction towards a core “idea”, placed at the centre of one of his novels, and the emotional force leading him to write as a journalist in Vietnam and China: “*Un viaggio, un’inchiesta in un certo Paese, m’interessa come un romanzo*”.⁶⁹ But at one point in the volume, Parise takes some time to more explicitly analyze the concept of curiosity, the multiform obstacles on its path, and how they change over time:

Today’s man is not anymore the same man of Marco Polo’s times, a single individual directly feeding his own knowledge, but rather now he is the ideological and political convention of the ethnic group to which he belongs. In other words, instead of the individual (Marco Polo) there is now the mass (the capitalist West) and instead of the object of knowledge that used to be unpredictable, mysterious and direct (China in the

⁶⁸ Parise (1968, 158–159).

⁶⁹ “L’odore casto e gentile della povertà. Conversazione con Goffredo Parise. *La fiera letteraria* XLIII, n. 34, 22 August 1968, 16–17.

thirteenth century), there is now the predictable, unshadowy and indirect mass (Communist China), because it belongs to an identical albeit opposite convention. To sum up, at least with regard to our planet, between man and object, or the variety of objects that he, indefatigable traveller, wishes to encounter, the unknown abyss (always fascinating) is not opening anymore, but there is the plain (and always boring) road of the convention. Nonetheless, curiosity still remains a powerful impulse and the heart of men still unexplored.

Hence it is to the heart that Parise turns and keeps returning throughout the articles composing *Cara Cina*. In Shanghai, at the end of a pleasant if perplexing conversation with the most famous neurologist in China, he receives both a warning—that the Chinese heart can never be fully understood by a foreigner—and an encouragement—as if precisely the idea of a people’s heart should be the dignified object of any thoughtful traveller entering China. In the words of the professor, as reported by Parise:

But the structure of relations among Chinese would have appeared to you as paradoxical even five centuries ago, because even five centuries ago it was very different from the Western one. Five centuries ago in Italy humanism was at its apex while in China, instead, the great Chinese empire, and not man, was at its apex. We [Chinese] can understand you because European culture is more explicit than implicit, and in general, way younger than Chinese culture. [...] in China, you should not try to understand the reason of the Chinese, which is very simple, sound, and almost child-like, but rather the heart of the Chinese: which is rather complicated, has suffered from many sorrows, and is old, extremely old, so old that only an ear used to Chinese sounds could perceive its beat.⁷⁰

Parise seems to test his ability to detect the Chinese heartbeat immediately after, in the article recounting his meeting, still in Shanghai, with six women of the female association. He proposes to his readers a delicate reflection on womanhood, Chinese identity and the boredom of bureaucracy. The latter encompasses all the political reasons for which these six women have been selected to speak with him, and it surely represents an obstacle to his intention to explore the Chinese heart, yet he guides the reader through an analysis of the dichotomy of beauty, with regard

⁷⁰ Parise (1968, 176–177).

to women, in the West and in China: instinct (*intuito*), not the eye, is necessary to appreciate a Chinese woman's true beauty.⁷¹ The dichotomy is developed by Parise in a later article, where he admits the inadequacy of his conclusions but seems to imply that these are more real (or more worthy of discussion) than all the false dichotomies with which the ideological conventions of contingent ideologies blind the modern traveller. The inadequate and imperfect yet still captivating conclusions about the Chinese heart unavoidably lead Parise to the topic of love, so central to so many of his novels:

Love is, for the Chinese, a feeling so personal, delicate and fragile that not only you cannot touch it, but you cannot even express it in a way that anybody, including the loved one, can ever see or touch it. Indeed all the feelings, but especially the love between man and woman, are to the Chinese an absolute and almost sacred property of the individual who feels them, and to manifest them would mean not only manifesting oneself but also losing automatically such property. However, to love is also to possess, and nobody can prevent the instinct [*intuito*], if not to the reason, to grasp what it can. But the instinct [*intuito*] proceeds in the dark, and in these conditions, it possesses only the illusion of possessing, just like a blind man has the illusion to see what he touches.⁷²

Nothing could be further from the consumption literature that we discussed in the first part of this chapter. What is more, Parise's curiosity does more than merely confounding monolithic notions of European attitudes towards Asia in the 1960s. His inquisitiveness is yet another example of a literature that, far from sustaining colonial discourses, escapes any sort of centrism. Orientalism here reacquires its old meaning, before Saidian narratives turned it into a "bad word". Parise—though in his uniquely Venetian, ironic, minimalist yet meticulous realism—witnesses once again the long Western tradition of self-criticism that we mentioned in the Introduction chapter of this volume. This anti-imperialist stream erupts more powerfully in *Cara Cina* when Parise describes the city of Shanghai:

⁷¹ Parise (1968, 181–183).

⁷² Parise (1968, 207).

Actually Shanghai is a perfectly Northern European city, but instead of being in Europe it's in China, in a country that has nothing, absolutely nothing in common with Europe. It's as if the Chinese, but this the Chinese would never do, had built, say, a city filled with pagodas on the coast of Normandy. In sum, it is a folly that can be understood only for two reasons: on the one hand, the irrationality into which Europe fell at the end of the past century and from which it has yet to re-emerge, and on the other hand the freakish and insatiable industrial colonialism that in those years accumulated enormous fortunes in China.⁷³

Obviously, what matters here is not the accuracy of Parise's historical evaluation of nineteenth-century Sino-European trade, but rather the extraordinary promptness with which he perceives and artfully describes the most bizarre and sad consequences of modern European imperialism.

Goffredo Parise was one of the last Italian writers who visited China before the market-oriented reforms and the economic development brought by Deng Xiaoping. His eyes encountered poverty, but—as he repeated several times in his articles—never misery. This was partly due to that profound dignity, composure and kindness, which he found to be a lasting trait of the Chinese people's character. He tried to give a name to this trait, calling it *stile*:

[...] the Chinese are a people that possesses *naturally* that quality that can be acquired, and with the greatest efforts, only *historically*. That quality is style.⁷⁴

Still, beyond the important limits on the path of any Westerner who wished to understand China in the 1960s, Parise's own curiosity and literary abilities offered to the Italian readership of the *Corriere* (and, later, of his volume) a unique form of reportage, a sort of expressive realism. China emerges as a country where the traveller finds himself both overwhelmed by anonymous, enormous and repetitive crowds and spaces and drawn into conversations and images of people in their individual embodiments of a Chinese heart and style shaped by a millenarian history. Emotions and ideas are in no way less real simply because they remain mysterious to the Western mind. In fact, Parise himself attempts

⁷³ Parise (1968, 170).

⁷⁴ Parise (1968, 218).

a synopsis of his experience in the Conclusion of the volume, where he writes:

the Chinese have an urgent need to learn from us, Europe, two things: analysis and synthesis: that is, freedom. And we should learn from them two other things, not less important: the life style [*stile della vita*] and mutual help: that is, love.⁷⁵

Yet not even the most superficial reader is allowed to draw from these words a comforting or self-congratulatory feeling. Just a few pages earlier, Parise ends the last article, written in Hong Kong, with the bitter description of the sensations that he felt when crossing the border to leave China and return to the West. A West that appears prisoner of its own modern cults, oddities and materialisms, where everything is for selling, and “where ideas are the only things that are worth nothing”.⁷⁶

5 CONCLUSION

The complex political analysis produced by André Malraux, the shining consumerist visions of the “Orient” diffused through marketing campaigns by Hong Kong and Cathay Pacific and the realist travelogue on China penned by Goffredo Parise represent three very different instances of a quest for authenticity that characterized the Cold War period. This chapter has suggested that even as Western inquisitiveness became apparently more guided than ever, ideas about the East did not lack a genuine effort to discover a reality that went beyond simplistic cultural and ideological divisions. In fact, by the 1960s, Western curiosity disintegrated into a multiplicity of curious attitudes that generated, invited and made sense of collective and individual human agency. Knowledge, a key concept in our volume, needs to be fleshed out of these sources and considered seriously, beyond the dated categories of post-colonial theoretical frameworks. In fact, our findings suggest that, at a time when France’s geopolitical repositioning questioned the dichotomy of monolithic blocs, the travel and tourist industry was reinventing narratives about urban Asia, and Italian readers were enthusiastically responding to delicate and self-critical yet also frank descriptions of Maoist China.

⁷⁵ Parise (1968, 224).

⁷⁶ Parise (1968, 213).

Parise's account in particular met with a great success, with his articles being soon republished in the volume entitled *Cara Cina*, which itself quickly went through several editions. This can be explained by the Italian public's interested response when offered a piece of travel literature that was more realistic and less ideological than, for instance, Curzio Malaparte's 1959 book on China—which had been sponsored by the Italian Communist Party and pushed an overall rosy picture of Mao's regime.⁷⁷ Still, Parise's work is fascinating not merely for its relative lack of political bias; rather, the Venetian novelist articulates a credible search for China's heart, paced by the authentic struggle with the various obstacles on the path of any modern Marco Polo. That Parise was able to vividly express at least “the illusion to see what he touched like a blind man” is a testament to his literary brilliance. *Cara Cina*, Malraux's humanism, and the inventiveness of the tourist industry together exemplify the diverse wealth of images of Asia in the 1960s. In addition, they represent a serious challenge to the assumption that Western travellers moved across Asian spaces exclusively (or even mainly) with pettily and unsympathetically colonial eyes.

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⁷⁷ Malaparte (1959). On the European leftists' long fondness towards the figure of Mao, see the essays edited in Tesini and Zambernardi (2018).

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Mobility and the Middle Kingdom

K. Cohen Tan

1 TRAVEL AND MOBILITY IN CHINA

Movement has been associated in its long history with notions of freedom, progress, and agency. Similarly, it has also been treated with suspicion, distrust, and at times outright hostility. In other words, movement is hardly, if ever, empty of significance. Meanwhile, the identities and knowledge we form through it are the result of the various meanings we attach to what might otherwise be a simple fact of displacement or travel. The meaning that emerges through movement constitutes our understanding of mobility and identity according to Cresswell, who considers places as imbued with contested meaning and power. This becomes readily apparent when we consider religious pilgrimage as an example of mobility practice, where the identities of pilgrims and their sense of agency or purpose are inseparable from the meanings attributed to a sacred place of worship and the journey undertaken towards it, whether this is Lhasa in Tibet or Mecca in Saudi Arabia. It is in this sense that we

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can understand Cresswell's claim: "If movement is the dynamic equivalent of location, then mobility is the dynamic equivalent of *place*."¹ In a more secular sense, we may also understand the identity formation of migrants because of physical displacement from their homeland. From an ontological perspective, if being alive is to be animate in one way or another that presupposes movement, then mobility can be considered a manner of living and thinking² or a way of being in the world.³

Since the reform and opening up policy four decades ago, China has 285 million migrant workers in 2020,⁴ approaching the population of the United States as well as the largest annual human migration on the planet during the Spring Festival, which CNN estimated to involve some 3 billion trips in 2020.⁵ A review of the literature confirmed that this is the case, with attention largely focused on rural–urban migration involving "floating labourers";⁶ student mobility for Chinese scholars in terms of tourism and travel⁷; or in relation to the hukou system in China.⁸ However, there are only two studies that specifically focus on lifestyle mobility in China.⁹ Apart from conventional tourism, what is immediately clear is that mobility and travel in China tend to take place at both ends of the spectrum: between the rural–urban migrants and affluent retirees.

This chapter adopts the mobilities paradigm as a theoretical lens to examine travel in China within the context of information revolution to see how they contribute to meaning and identity formation. As a paradigm, mobilities was conceived as a sociological concept that could overcome the categories of migration, exile, tourism, nomadism and encapsulate the movements of goods, people, capital, and information. Despite the large numbers of migration and tourism within China, a recent study noted that mobility is not a common theme within China.¹⁰

¹ Cresswell (2006, 3). Highlighted in the original.

² Urry (2002).

³ Cresswell (2006).

⁴ Statista (2021).

⁵ Wong (2020).

⁶ Fang et al. (2009), Taylor et al. (2003), Huang and Zhan (2005), Fan (2005).

⁷ Yang (2011).

⁸ Bosker et al. (2012).

⁹ Xu and Wu (2016), Zhang and Su (2020).

¹⁰ Xu and Wu (2016).

This is interesting because the mobilities paradigm has become increasingly prevalent within sociology. What are the reasons for this difference in relation to travel, what are the implications for identity formation and how can we better understand this? By examining lifestyle relocations within China made by Chinese retirees in recent years, this chapter employs the mobilities paradigm to understand how this lifestyle mobility differs from the mobile sociality exhibited by other groups in the West and what this difference reveals in terms of their fundamental orientation.

Cohen et al. introduced the term “lifestyle mobilities” as a way of exploring the intersection between travel, leisure, and migration in relation to digital nomads and their chosen lifestyle practices, which they claimed to “provide both a unique sense of personal identity to their adherents on the one hand and a distinct and recognisable collective identity on the other.”¹¹ In other words, lifestyle mobility is intrinsic to identity formation as it is also a sustained and fluid process carrying over time, as opposed to more temporary forms of mobility such as tourism and its associated consumption practices noted in various studies.¹² It is also useful to note here the asymmetry between the two modes of travel, with migration associated with displacement and economic necessity while lifestyle mobility tends to be related more to agency and choice as a result of economic affluence. To better understand what constitutes lifestyle mobility, this chapter will also briefly discuss digital nomads and see how their mobility practice compares with mobility practices in China.

Xu and Wu adopted the concept of lifestyle mobility to illuminate complex social changes concerning retirees in Sanya and lifestyle entrepreneurs in Lijiang who pursued self-realisation despite having no prior business experience. Their study revealed a degree of alienation from locals in addition to their dominant purchasing power in the local housing market.¹³ Meanwhile, Zhang and Su looked at lifestyle migrants and the “simultaneity of alienation and belonging” in making second homes in Lijiang, or downshifting for the purpose of pursuing leisure.¹⁴ They noted that “[d]riven by a conscious ethos of autonomy and comfort,

¹¹ Cohen et al. (2013).

¹² D’Andrea (2006), Richards (2015), Reichenberger (2018), Jarrahi et al. (2019), Wang et al. (2018).

¹³ Xu and Wu (2016).

¹⁴ Zhang and Su (2020).

lifestyle migration is often regarded as a privileged mode of mobility. Nevertheless, being privileged does not necessarily mean that lifestyle migrants can escape from this not-so-ideal world and indulge themselves in a self-centric living condition.”¹⁵ Conversely, downshifters and lifestyle migrants share a common ground since they are aware of the negative consequences brought by “a high-speed, work-dominated, consumerist lifestyle”¹⁶ and they make efforts to discover what they need in their life journey. Therefore, privilege or political asymmetry cannot be divorced from the fact of travel for the Chinese lifestyle migrants and constitutes a crucial aspect of their identity formation.

While being on the move has arguably become a normative state for many people in late modernity, this was also amplified by advances in information and communications technology (ICT), which have enabled a new form of mobility practice by offering the possibility of location-independence. With nearly one billion internet users and 67% mobile internet penetration with 5G networks at this time of writing, it is difficult to ignore the network effects this may have on mobility practice in China, although the lack of attention in current literature makes this even more intriguing. Although this may now seem self-evident in a post-COVID world characterised by online meetings and the reality of work from home for many, this was hardly the case in 1997 when the idea of digital nomadism was first proposed.¹⁷ Makimoto and Manners speculated that the pace of silicon chip development would eventually result in what they called “location-independence” as information networks matured sufficiently to enable real time video-conferencing between different locations on the globe. Instead of substituting the need for travel, this technological development would in fact intensify the need for co-presence as people became more aware of other cultures and places, ushering in what Makimoto and Manners called digital nomadism.¹⁸

If we accept that movement contains within it asymmetries represented by social actors—such as refugees (war/conflict), exiles (political), migrants (economic), tourists (leisure), and nomads (classless)—then the

¹⁵ Zhang and Su (2020, 118).

¹⁶ Zhang and Su (2020, 112).

¹⁷ Global internet usage then numbered around 70 million users, representing only 1.7% of world population. This is compared to 4.66 billion users in 2021, with 92% accessing the internet via mobile devices.

¹⁸ Makimoto and Manners (1997).

answer to that question may well have subversive potential, because it can loosen the statist control of governments whose sovereignty is delimited by geographical borders, or disrupt social norms and traditions that have acculturated over time in a place.¹⁹ To better understand this, the chapter will juxtapose the form of lifestyle mobility in China with the recent emergence of digital nomadism as a mobility practice, since current discussions have predicated heavily upon the concept of home for these lifestyle migrants in China, yet without fully taking into consideration how technological advancements have also blurred the boundaries between “making and unmaking home.”²⁰

In both studies on China (Xu and Wu, Zhang and Su), the use of lifestyle mobility was useful in exploring “the changing relationships between individuals, communities and the state, between rural and urban contexts, and between the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘away’ in China.”²¹ Just as digital nomads balance life-work and blur the conventional dichotomies of home and away, these Chinese lifestyle migrants engage in a similar practice although they do so for quite different reasons. In the case of pre-modern China during the late nineteenth century, the free movement of individuals was restricted, and in 1958, the hukou system was implemented to prevent Chinese cities from becoming overpopulated due to rural–urban migration. According to Bosker et al., there were two main purposes to the implementation of the hukou system. The first served as a restriction to accessing public provisions such as education, healthcare, and housing, while the second provided a demographic distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural workers.²² Not only did this have the intended effect of restricting movement domestically, acting as a form of domestic visa to travel within the country, this also limited international mobility.²³ The consequence was that hundreds of millions of Chinese workers were unable to fully exploit their earnings

¹⁹ For this reason, Bauman claims that “we are witnessing the revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality and settlement. In the fluid stage of modernity, the settled majority is ruled by the nomadic and exterritorial elite” (Bauman 2000, 13).

²⁰ Zhang and Su (2020).

²¹ Xu and Wu (2016, 510), Zhang and Su (2020).

²² Bosker et al. (2012).

²³ Xu and Wu (2016, 511).

potential.²⁴ In other words, the hukou system stemmed to a large degree both capital and human flows, and rather than living in a liquid form of modernity, the moorings of the hukou system as a political expedient or state science of classification discouraged mobility within China.

The other factor that accounted for the difference between mobility in China and global mobility was cultural. The sociologist Fei Xiaotong described Chinese traditional society as an “acquaintance society,” which meant that people built small social circles based on personal relationships that subsequently orient their interactions.²⁵ More commonly known as *guanxi*, these are relationships that are also based upon kinship and belonging, which is also expressed in the notion of *laoxiang* (meaning “hometown folk”), which is an imaginary provincialism based around a nostalgic sense of place. Trust is more readily accorded to folk who hail from the same town or city. This is not surprising, because according to Cresswell the moral geographies of place and mobility interact to inform ontology, epistemology, politics as well as both practice and material culture—which he referred to as a form of sedentarist metaphysics. The sense of place serves “as an authentic insurer of authentic existence, and as a center of meaning for people” while mobility threatens or disrupts the moral sense of place.²⁶ In this way, place and rootedness is an extrinsic criterion of authenticity and morality for the Chinese. If we take into further consideration that China has been a landed agrarian empire for most of its 5,000-years of recorded history, then it is easy to understand the form of sedentarist metaphysics that Cresswell is forwarding. Writing about European history rather than China, Cresswell noted: “Feudal society was intensely territorial. Kings, as figures close to God, granted land to their vassals and demanded obedience in return. These new landholders could, in turn, collect tribute from those who worked on their land.”²⁷ In China, this would also foster a sense of collectivism, the nuclear family becoming the syntagm of power for ruling emperors within a Confucianist social order. The question here is, would technological advancements and internet penetration in China be capable of “melting

²⁴ Bosker et al. (2012).

²⁵ Fei Xiaotong quoted as in: Xu and Wu (2016, 515).

²⁶ Cresswell (2006, 30).

²⁷ Cresswell (2006, 10).

the solids” and enable a similar mode of lifestyle mobility that has been observed in the West?

2 DIGITAL NOMADISM AND THE SPACE OF FLOWS

Manuel Castells’s *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996) theorised a distinction between space of flows and space of places. According to Castells, the space of flows refer to the “simultaneity of social practices without territorial contiguity,”²⁸ and within the space of flows information and capital are intersected by nodes of communication infrastructure while hubs organise exchanges or movement of people (such as airports, harbours and bus stations). Calling for a sociology without recourse to a rigid and sedentary view of society, John Urry proposed viewing the “social as mobility” instead, thus establishing the mobilities paradigm.²⁹ This means that any understanding of society needs to take into consideration the flows of movement enabled by advances in communication technologies. This on the one hand increases similarity in travel practices between China and the West in view of China’s internet penetration, but on the other hand also reveals some fundamental differences.

To further understand the impact of technology on travel and mobility, it is useful to consider existing literature that connects nomadism as a conceptual metaphor with the fluidity of network society. The information revolution is seen within the historical context of similar revolutions that have hitherto shaped human society, following the agricultural and industrial revolution. Media theorist McLuhan first argued that with the advent of electric media humans became nomadic gatherers of knowledge and information,³⁰ and this was extended by Meyrowitz to claim that the development of wireless communication would finally untether us from a fixed place or territory, reverting to a prelapsarian state of being “global nomads.”³¹ Understood in this sense, the nomad emerged as a metaphorical figure of mobility that embodied the principles of movement, freedom and connectivity according to the network logic of the information revolution, and her revolutionary character was that she also formed a sort

²⁸ Castells (1999, 294).

²⁹ Urry (1999, 2).

³⁰ McLuhan (2001).

³¹ Meyrowitz (2003).

of classless unit beyond the classification of state science or control.³² It is therefore not difficult to see why the nomad is often romanticised as an ideal or even ethical state of existence within the space of flows. As human civilisation had only settled down around 8,000–10,000 BCE to practise agriculture, the possibility of location-independence would ultimately raise questions as to whether we are settlers or nomads at heart, since life-sustaining labour is no longer tethered to a specific place or territory.³³ Would the information revolution finally bring us full circle to a time before the sedentary forms of life and society which were necessitated firstly by agriculture, and later the factory, freeing the human potential to move unhindered by government control? In a time marked by travel restrictions, border closures, and COVID lockdowns it becomes easier to understand the emancipatory appeal represented by the figure of the nomad.

As an example of mobility practice that arguably captures this form of movement within the space of flows as well as providing a useful analogue to understanding lifestyle mobility in China, we will briefly consider the emergent phenomena of digital nomadism in the West. Digital nomads can be considered within the subset of global nomads, and the latter is described by Kannisto as location independent travellers who stay away from home for extended periods of time rejecting the ideology of settled society.³⁴ What distinguishes digital nomads from global nomads is that they are the most connected travellers, using social media extensively to generate knowledge about their lifestyle.³⁵ This in turn creates a “mobile sociality” as an added layer of identity, which refers to their ability to stay connected with home despite being on the move, blurring the boundaries between home and away as digital nomads construct, edit, filter, and share their trips interactively.³⁶ The digital nomad is therefore a hybrid identity that intersects work, leisure, and travel. I will look at the inward and outward motivations behind this choice of lifestyle, before finally turning my attention to China to see what the lack of digital nomadism or lifestyle mobility might reveal about its social fabric.

³² Braidotti (1994, 22).

³³ Makimoto and Manners (1997, 3).

³⁴ Kannisto (2016).

³⁵ Richards (2015).

³⁶ Mascheroni (2007), Paris (2012).

Reichenberger offered a working definition of digital nomads based on three levels of activity and independence drawn from respondents:

Digital nomads are individuals who achieve location independence by conducting their work in an online environment, transferring this independence to mobility by not consistently working in one designated personal office space but using the possibility to simultaneously work and travel to the extent that no permanent residence exists.³⁷

According to Reichenberger's definition, one may be considered a digital nomad if one were to work on an ad hoc basis at different cafés or at different coworking locations in the same city without a consistent designated office space (level 1). One might also travel intermittently with returns to a designated home base (level 2), or travel full-time without a designated home base or permanent residence (level 3). With each increasing level the ties to a sense of place becomes progressively weakened as the transference of location independence towards mobility is maximised. A useful distinction may also be drawn between digital nomadism as an assemblage of work and living that is technologically enabled at a macro level, and the practitioners who adopt location-independence as part of their lifestyle design in pursuit of their self-directed goals and motivations at a micro level.

Freedom is a key motivating factor in the decision of many digital nomads, and while there is professional freedom and personal freedom because of location independence, the freedom to pursue their chosen leisure activities supervenes both. In doing so, digital nomads re-prioritise intrinsic values that are self-determined over external forms of hierarchical evaluation.³⁸ However, the pursuit of leisure and enjoyment inevitably comes with the cost of social isolation and loneliness.³⁹ Stebbins' theory of "serious leisure" is relevant here, as the choice of location for many digital nomads is oriented by their leisure interests rather than local employment possibilities.⁴⁰ This is not entirely different from the Chinese lifestyle entrepreneurs who move and relocate to seek self-actualisation. In

³⁷ Reichenberger (2018, 371).

³⁸ Hamilton-Smith (1992), Müller (2016), Paulus (2018).

³⁹ Thompson (2018), Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017), Orel (2019).

⁴⁰ Müller (2016), Thompson (2018).

this sense, digital nomads are different from migrants who travel to work in a sedentary job at the place where they land.

Travel constitutes the key part of the mobility practice of digital nomads. A meaningful question here is to ask how does their mode of travel differ from conventional tourism apart from the duration and degree of immersion? Or, in choosing locations for their leisure pursuits how do they differ from regular tourists? The first distinction is that within the field of tourism and migration studies, the assumption of a home is implied as the origin and end of travel. Tourists travel, depart, enjoy leisure time and return home while migrants move from one home to another.⁴¹ Meanwhile, as part of their mobile sociality, digital nomads are at home wherever they are; or, to put it differently, they revel in their state of homelessness. As a result, they develop a reflexive attitude of cosmopolitanism. Genuine cosmopolitanism is described by Hannerz as “first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity.”⁴² In this way, Kannisto suggested that global nomads (and by extension digital nomads) can provide us with a useful mirror of society,⁴³ recalling the Simmelian figure of the stranger whose objectivity is due to his distance, being near and far at the same time.

Digital nomads tend to regard their own mode of travel as being more authentic or embedded than regular tourists, although their consumption habits show little perceptible difference. Thompson noted that “the behavior of the digital nomads in these decidedly tourist destinations does not distinguish themselves from the tourists or ex-pats in their selection of living with other Westerners, staying oblivious to local culture, traditions, and language, and socializing with other foreigners and service workers.”⁴⁴ For many digital nomads, this is a source of alienation despite the mobile sociality and their ability to maintain contact with home. In the absence of a curiosity that focuses on the encountered landscapes, objects, and people in which digital nomads live, the curiosity generated through the lifestyle change reflects much more on the inner self. Digital

⁴¹ Kannisto (2016).

⁴² Hannerz quoted as in: D’Andrea (2006, 103).

⁴³ Kannisto (2016).

⁴⁴ Thompson (2018, 33).

nomads hence become curious about the impact of travel and space on the possibility to remake home.

Location independence is an enabling factor that is common to all digital nomads, just as freedom as a motivating factor is common to all. This is deeply significant, because pursuing digital nomadism as a lifestyle first involves a choice that is not forced upon its adherents due to an inability to find regular sedentary jobs. This is not a decision most of us within the sedentary population would consider lightly as it involves planning, commitment, and sacrifice—unless the freedom involved also consisted in the freedom *to* do something in addition to the freedom *from* something else. The pursuit of leisure therefore constitutes the pull factor of that freedom; while conversely, the escape from alienation constitutes the push factor towards the need for freedom. In the following section, I will consider the effect of alienation and how it affects identity of Chinese lifestyle migrants.

3 ALIENATION AND THE STATE OF CONSTANT CONNECTIVITY

In the Chinese context, capital flows and forces of modernisation have resulted in a sense of self-alienation. It is worth noting that the nomadic state also involves alienation from others as a result of isolation from family and friends back home as well as local culture, although it seems that digital nomads would rather experience estrangement from others than self-estrangement since they can just as easily end their nomadic state.⁴⁵ This sense of alienation is found in work that is devoid of personal meaning commonly known as the rat race in the West or the recent phenomenon of involution in China⁴⁶ that manifests itself as a desire to understand the self through encounter with alien culture,⁴⁷ or the alienating nature of digital infrastructure itself. Many respondents in Zhang and Su's study look at how affluent Chinese lifestyle migrants withdraw to Lijiang from metropolitan Chinese cities to pursue a different lifestyle characterised by greater ease and slower pace of life: "I was so engrossed in my work that my body and spirit became disorganized. Hence, I

⁴⁵ Merton quoted as in: Seeman (1959, 783).

⁴⁶ Reichenberger (2018), Schlagwein (2018).

⁴⁷ D'Andrea (2006).

decided to migrate to Lijiang for rest and recovery. When you work very hard and spend over 14 h every day doing business in big cities, you suffer from mental disorder and an irregular life.”⁴⁸ The sense of alienation experienced in the lack of meaning in one’s work pushes these lifestyle migrants to seek autonomy and self-actualisation. One may also note here the paradoxical consequence of the network society, as humans become self-estranged nodes that are bereft of meaning despite the surfeit of information/capital flows. At the same time, the lifestyle migrants in China are motivated by a recuperative need for holism and balance between work and life,⁴⁹ and in this regard, it is not different from those in the West: “In the morning, I carry a basket and walk through the old town to buy vegetables in the fresh market nearby. This is an authentic life, replete with autonomy and ease.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, there is a difference in terms of how Chinese lifestyle migrants view their estrangement from others due to a more collectivist culture, which necessitates them to make and unmake homes in order to find that balance.

A common aspect that features prominently in both digital nomadism and Chinese lifestyle migrants is the dichotomy between home and away. Migration studies have pointed out that as a consequence of constant connectivity and global cultural flows, the home is “not so much a local, particular or self-enclosed space, but rather [...] more and more a ‘phantasmagoric’ place.”⁵¹ The consequence of this is that while digital nomads are able to practice a form of mobile sociality that is location independent, this is not the case for the Chinese lifestyle migrants. They engage in an idealised process of home making that consists in “an experience of ideal lifestyle, a place of comfortable dwelling, and a site of control and resistance.”⁵² This form of dwelling is related to an ordinary manner of inhabiting a place. While both digital nomads and Chinese lifestyle migrants suffer from a degree of isolation and uprootedness as a result of mobility, the reasons behind it are quite different. To understand this, Cresswell’s distinction between sedentarist and nomadic metaphysics is useful here:

⁴⁸ Zhang and Su (2020, 115).

⁴⁹ Zhang and Su (2020), Xu and Wu (2016).

⁵⁰ Zhang and Su (2020, 116).

⁵¹ Morley quoted as in: Mascheroni (2007, 541–542).

⁵² Zhang and Su (2020, 113).

The first (sedentarist metaphysics) sees mobility through the lens of place, rootedness, spatial order, and belonging. Mobility, in this formulation, is seen as morally and ideologically suspect, a by-product of a world arranged through place and spatial order. The second (nomadic metaphysics) puts mobility first, has little time for notions of attachment to place, and revels in notions of flow, flux, and dynamism. Place is portrayed as stuck in the past, overly confining, and possibly reactionary.⁵³

For Chinese lifestyle migrants, the notion of home is always tied to an originary sense of place and rootedness as a form of dwelling and belonging, which is defined in territorial and thus sedentarist terms. Having said this, it is interesting to note that Chinese lifestyle migrants bear some similar attitudes towards place as described by Cresswell, because they view themselves as more “modern” in seeking self-actualisation and potential while viewing natives in Dali and Lijiang as being “backward.”⁵⁴ However, this is probably more motivated by relative economic class and privilege than simply the sense of place. This bears some correlation to Zhang and Su’s observations: “I think I am a local. Tourists also regard me as a local. Nevertheless, I never regard myself as a Lijiang native.”⁵⁵ Being local (by choice) is not the same as being native (by birth), since it is the exercise of autonomy due to economic privilege that marks the identity of these lifestyle migrants as being hegemonic or superior. Nevertheless, these nuanced differences cohere with Cohen’s observation that “the destabilisation of home and away characteristic of lifestyle mobilities engenders tangled senses of identity and belonging.”⁵⁶

At the same time, home making is a process of creating a sense of belonging that draws upon both material and imaginative elements, through social and emotional relationships.⁵⁷ However, because of the collectivist culture in China, “the boundaries of home can go beyond rooms and walls to touch upon neighborhoods, cities, and even countries.”⁵⁸ This is quite different from the mobile sociality that digital nomads in the West are able to construct via social networks and online

⁵³ Cresswell (2006, 26).

⁵⁴ Xu and Wu (2016).

⁵⁵ Zhang and Su (2020, 117).

⁵⁶ Cohen et al. (2013, 166).

⁵⁷ Zhang and Su (2020).

⁵⁸ Zhang and Su (2020, 112).

communities, where the ability to stay connected with home through communication networks creates a travelling community centred on the traveller rather than the native community.⁵⁹ This mobile sociality exhibited by digital nomads also allows individuals to portray, construct (and reconstruct), and relieve their trips interactively within their mobile sociality as they experience them.⁶⁰ The dislocation of homeness takes place both through the replicated co-presence of one's personal communities (which become mobile, accessible anywhere and anytime) as well as the perpetual contact with everyday life. By contrast, Chinese lifestyle migrants may choose to “unmake home, that is, leave for a new destination for another ideal home or return back to their original place.”⁶¹ This homing orientation is strong for the Chinese due to the sedentarist metaphysics that is implicitly assumed in their culture so that they “make” and “unmake” home as physical sites to dwell in despite being on the move.

In comparison, the boundaries between home and away are blurred for digital nomads due to digital technologies so that they can be “at home” while at the same time being “away.”⁶² This practice of travelling beyond the spatial boundaries of home and not home generates knowledge specific to the technology based nomad lifestyle and in turn transforms the identities generated through digital nomadism in China. Digital nomadism as a lifestyle mobility assumes there is no singular or originary place of return, and “pre-supposes the intention to move on, rather than move back. Through lifestyle mobility, there is no ‘one’ place to which to return, and through time there may be multiple ‘homes’ that one can return to and/or visit.”⁶³ This should also clarify why Chinese lifestyle mobility is ultimately different from the mobile sociality demonstrated by digital nomads due to a difference in sedentarist and nomadic orientation, which is informed by culture. Although the literature also points to the importance of informal social circles or *quanzi* as sources of support for Chinese lifestyle migrants,⁶⁴ this does not constitute a mobile sociality in the sense significant for digital nomads. Natives are excluded

⁵⁹ Mascheroni (2007).

⁶⁰ Paris (2012).

⁶¹ Zhang and Su (2020, 111).

⁶² Mascheroni (2007).

⁶³ Cohen et al. (2013, 159).

⁶⁴ Xu and Wu (2016).

and Chinese “lifestyle migrants still retain their original local and familial relationships in their home areas, which leads them to visit home at certain times every year and allows them to go back if they face difficulties.”⁶⁵ In other words, Chinese lifestyle migrants retain an ordinary place of return despite being on the move due to a fundamentally sedentarist orientation that can cause dissonance or difficulty for a hybridised identity.

A useful place of discussion can be found in the history of Chinese diaspora and migration. In particular, sinologist Wang Gungwu recommends understanding historical Chinese migration patterns through the lens of the sojourner: “Migration was simply not an option; only sojourning on official duty or as a trader was permissible [...]. Leaving home was feared, and seeking settlement elsewhere was an unwelcome prospect.”⁶⁶ In this sense, the Chinese sojourner or *qiao* suggests a journey marked by a temporary stay as a prelude to eventual migration with extended options. For the overseas Chinese population, this continues to have significant implications for their sense of identity despite centuries of movement, leading Ang to comment: “What I would like to propose is that ‘Chineseness’ is a category whose meanings are not fixed and pre-given, but constantly renegotiated and rearticulated both inside and outside China.”⁶⁷ As China becomes increasingly a mobile society with a rising middle class that is able to exercise its privilege and autonomy,⁶⁸ this renegotiation of meaning and identity is likely to have social effects as we observe an opposite move from urban to rural or touristic destinations, just as the labour migration of floating observers towards cities have in the past. For this reason, lifestyle mobility is likely to become an emergent area of research interest despite the current dearth of studies.

4 CONCLUSION

This chapter looked at the lifestyle mobility of Chinese lifestyle migrants relocating to rural or touristic destinations in China to escape from the sense of alienation in urban city life. Taking into context postmodernity

⁶⁵ Xu and Wu (2016, 515).

⁶⁶ Wang (2003, 8).

⁶⁷ Ang (1993, 5).

⁶⁸ Xu and Wu (2016).

and the information revolution, we looked at the mobile sociality exhibited by digital nomads in the West as an analogue to understanding the motivations and implications for this social demographic in China. While there are certain similarities shared between Chinese lifestyle migrants and digital nomads in their search for self-actualisation, meaning and self-identity, the discussion also revealed important differences. By employing the mobilities paradigm to understand this emergent social trend in China, we were able to draw a useful distinction between sedentarist and nomadic orientations to understand the process of identity formation and knowledge production in relation to their mode of travel. We noted that the lifestyle mobility of Chinese lifestyle migrants did not reach the level of mobile sociality exhibited by digital nomads in the West, and this is interesting despite the large internet penetration in China and the prevalence of social media usage. Will this change in the future? Looking briefly at the history of Chinese diaspora and movement suggests that despite centuries and generations of migration the Chinese have generally viewed this as a sojourn or temporary travel despite making and unmaking homes in new destinations, which result in a constant renegotiation of hybridised identities.

What is common to both Chinese lifestyle migrants and digital nomads is that alienation constituted a push factor towards the adoption of a mobile lifestyle to recuperate a sense of holism despite triggering other forms of alienated identities in relation to their local communities. Despite the enabling factors of network logic and communication technologies in facilitating movement and travel, the Chinese lifestyle migrants do not appear to be “at home on the move” in achieving mobile sociality as a substitute for family ties or originary notions of home. Future research should focus on their use of social media to stay in touch and how they construct a local community as part of their identification process that is distinct from the native community while they travel.

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