Concepts and Methods of Transcultural Imagology: Western Images of China as an Example

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Translator Note

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Abstract

The study of Western images of China in transcultural imagology unfolds across three levels: image, type, and prototype. While images in specific texts serve as the primary sources of analysis, focus is placed on the socio-historical process by which these images are programmed into overarching types, which function as the fundamental units for investigating the (re)production of Western images of China. Prototypes signify the inheritance and interrelation within lineages of images; they represent the basic, generally commensurable modes of understanding in the history of images—those that transcend individual texts and eras to remain embedded in the collective unconscious. The two primary modes of prototypes—utopianization and ideologization—provide the fundamental frameworks for interpreting the historical evolution of Western images of China. Transcultural imagology ultimately centers on these expressive and creative prototypes, analyzing the knowledge and power embedded in (images of) China as a discursive practice of Western modernity, as well as the discursive hegemony in transcultural interactions manifested within the modern world order. The prototypes of China as utopianized and ideologized images are linked to two forms of Orientalism; the tension between these two poles endows Western cultural expansion with its specific character. This is precisely the issue that warrants serious consideration in relation to the theme of Chinese cultural self-awareness.
Keywords: image, type, prototype, ideology, utopia

In my book *The Distant Celestial Empire: A Study of Western Images of China* (Zhou, 2004a), I explored Western images of China within the framework of Western concepts of modernity, analyzing the ideological structure of China's image across three levels—image, type, and prototype—and examining the cultural function of China's image within the

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Vol.2 No.1 2026
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discursive practices of Western modernity. Reflecting on the significance of this research, the issues most worthy of consideration and in need of clarification are the concepts and methods of transcultural imagology. What are the fundamental questions, objects and fields of study, theoretical premises, key concepts, and disciplinary paradigms of—and derived from—this research? These are foundational questions that transcultural imagology should address.

1. Fundamental Questions and Epistemological Stance

Transcultural imagology research on images of China primarily encompasses "three sets of inquiries"[1]: (a) how Western images of China, as a system of knowledge and imagination, are generated and disseminated within the Western cultural context, how they control related topics through discursive power, and how they participate in the practice of Western modernity; (b) the formation of global images of China and a worldwide network of China's images, and related issues of the transcultural hegemony of Western images of China, as well as the phenomena of "self-Orientalization" and "self-Westernization" evident in images of China across different countries and regions; and (c) how external images of China, primarily Western ones, influence or shape modern China's self-image, and how the "self-Orientalization" and "self-Westernization" in China's self-image identification affect modern China's cultural self-awareness and cultural reconstruction. These three sets of issues are interrelated: theoretically, they point to the problem of China's modern self-identity and cultural self-awareness; practically, they focus on China's cultural "soft power" and the cultural background of its geopolitical strategies. The study of Western images of China marks the starting point for transcultural imagological research on China. In the process of globalization, the cultural hegemony of Western modernity has permeated various fields worldwide, and

[1] For more detailed discussion, see my "Introduction" for the Studies of World Images of China book series (Zhou, 2010).

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

Western images of China, along with the expansion of Western modern thought, have more or less controlled the narrative of China in different countries or cultural regions.

Western images of China constitute the starting inquiry in such transcultural imagology research. The study of Western images of China is further specified into three levels of inquiry.

First, how are Western images of China generated? Theoretically, this requires analyzing how Western images of China, as a discourse about the "cultural Other," are structured, produced, and distributed. Historically, it requires establishing a starting point for China's image, allowing the discursive construction of China's image in Western culture to be traced back to that point in terms of both institutional formation and meaning making. Second, how is the discursive tradition of China's image perpetuated? The study examines the ways of thinking, imagery traditions, and internal consistency and continuity of the discursive system in Western narratives about China, revealing the process by which Western images of China exhibit certain stable, shared characteristics that tend to form certain types, prototypes, and a mode of a cultural formula. Third, how do images of China operate within the Western cultural system? The study not only interprets the meaning of China's image within the Western conceptual system of modernity but also analyzes how Western images of China, as a power discourse, become disciplined and institutionalized in Western culture, forming a component of colonialism, imperialism, and globalist ideology, and participate in the construction of Western modernity and its cultural hegemony.

The research objects defined by these three levels of inquiry include not only images of China expressed in individual texts but also the collective representations constructed through the cross-referencing and mutual citation of different texts, which constitute a general socio-cultural imaginary. Therefore, we can analyze images of China in individual texts, whether fictional literary works or serious academic writings. We also find that texts with completely different modes of thinking and expression often repeatedly express the same image

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

of China, forming a certain image type. Once such a typified image of China is formed, it may provide imaginative materials and frameworks of thought for the expression of individual texts, establishing themes and meanings. Based on the characteristics of China's image itself, *The Distant Celestial Empire* develops its research on three levels—image, type, and prototype—focusing on both the knowledge and practice aspects of discourse and their interrelationship: how China's image is constituted on the level of knowledge and how it functions on the level of practice.

Transcultural imagology research on China has two general epistemological stances: one is modern and empirical, the other is postmodern and critical. The differences between these two stances are reflected not only in research objects and methods but also in theoretical premises. The modern, empirical stance assumes that Western images of China reflect Chinese reality, with both understanding and misunderstanding, truth and error. The postmodern, critical stance assumes that Western images of China are Western cultural "representations"[2] that constitute or create meaning in themselves, with neither objective knowledge nor true or false in any conventional sense. Working from the postmodern, critical theoretical premise, the study of Western images of China need not be troubled by whether they are "true" or "false"; rather, it asks how, as a system of knowledge and imagination, they are generated, disseminated, control related discussions through discursive power, and participate in the practice of Western modernity within the Western cultural context. The understanding of "image" here is structural and non-essentialist; it does not deny "truth" but does not take the meaning of "truth" based on the relationship between signifier and signified as the object of inquiry—reflections on discursive structure neither negate nor replace reflection on truth.

[2] When studying the meaning of ideology, Louis Althusser used "imaginary" to avoid the traditional epistemological distinction between truth and falsehood, saying that ideology is a system of representations, including concepts, ideas, myths, or images, in which people experience their imaginary relationship to existing reality. When studying the meaning of culture, Stuart Hall (1997) used the term "representation." He believed that "representation" is the basic way members of the same culture produce and exchange meaning, linking ideas and language, and can point to both the real world and the imaginary world.

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

Transcultural imagology differs from Sinology and comparative literature in its research objects, premises, concepts, and methods. Reviewing this research several years later, I feel more strongly the necessity of clarifying its theoretical premises, disciplinary significance, and research paradigms.[3] It is worth noting that recent academic studies of Western Sinology frequently use the term "Chinese image." Such intentional or unintentional conceptual confusion is methodologically dangerous. The significance of Western Sinology lies in the assumption that it is a discipline or system of knowledge. If one replaces Sinology with the study of China's image, one assumes the ideologization of Sinology, that its knowledge contains fiction and imagination and coordinates power, thus making it impossible to assume its truth. I previously wrote an article titled "Sinology or 'Sinoism'" (Zhou, 2004b), questioning the legitimacy of Sinology as a discipline from a postcolonial cultural critique perspective and attempting a deconstructive critique, hoping to alert the academic community to the dangers of "Sinoism" and "academic colonialism" within the disciplinary unconscious. Western Sinology focuses on questions of knowledge, whereas the study of Western images of China focuses on the relationship between knowledge and imagination and the operations of power that permeate both knowledge and imagination.

Transcultural imagology differs from comparative literature and is more closely related to cultural studies, revealing the cultural-political meanings implicit in images. The study of Western images of China examines the issue of China's image in terms of general social conceptions, involving different types of texts—from social science writings on China, professional Sinology research, journalistic reports, travelogues, missionary reports, diaries, and other documentary works on China, and diplomatic and other official documents

[3] After the publication of *China's Image: Western Theories and Legends*, I had a written dialogue with Binghui Song proposing the necessity of clarifying the theoretical premises, disciplinary significance, and research paradigms of the study of Western images of China (see Zhou & Song, 2005). When later writing *The Distant Celestial Empire: A Study of Western Images of China*, I became aware of the concepts and methods of the research, but due to the large content of the book, reflections on the research framework were often submerged in the complex discussion; the core ideas are only reflected in the preface and the third part of the book.

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

concerning China, to fictional literary and artistic works such as novels, poetry, drama, and film. The research objects thus extend beyond the scope of comparative literature imagology, which focuses only on foreign images in literary works. Transcultural imagology research focuses on foreign images in general social conceptions or general social imagination and the unconscious—images woven together through the cross-referencing, mutual permeation, and co-construction of different types of texts. Comparative literature imagology mostly confines itself to describing the characteristics of China's image in a particular work or in works of a particular period, being aware of what it studies but lacking reflection on why it studies it. Comparative literature imagology is a discipline without questions, whereas transcultural imagology is a question without a discipline. Comparative literature imagology remains literary studies research, while transcultural imagology is first and foremost cultural studies research.

2. Image, Type, Prototype: Three Levels of Research

Transcultural imagology research on Western images of China unfolds across three levels: image, type, and prototype. The first level is about image, which includes its concept and method. "Image of China" refers to a system of "representations" or "expressions" about "China" prevalent in society, incorporating both knowledge and imagination, truth and fiction, and having both knowledge and power functions of discourse. From the perspective of knowledge and imagination, the image of China contains three levels of meaning: (a) Western cognition and imagination of actual China to a certain degree; (b) Western self-perception, anxiety, and expectation regarding Sino-Western relations; and (c) metaphorical expressions of Western cultural self-identification. As the "Other" for Western cultural self-identification, the image of China is less about representing China than about expressing the West; less about knowing China than about identifying the West. It changes with changes in Western culture itself and in Sino-Western relations, not determined by China's reality. From the perspective of discursive practice, the image of China, once formed as a representational system or

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

discourse, influences Western "views" and "statements" about China with a certain plausible truth, providing the vocabulary, imagery, and various rhetorical devices for expressing China in texts produced in different contexts. It embodies a certain power structure within concepts and culture and begins to infiltrate political, economic, and moral power. In different periods of modern history, it serves as a symbol of Western self-criticism and self-expansion, participating in the construction of Western modernity's concepts and practices.

"Image" as a cultural metaphor or symbol is an imaginative, arbitrary representation of something absent or barely present, mixing cognitive and emotional, conscious and unconscious, objective and subjective, personal and social experiential content. Our analysis of the variations and extreme manifestations of Western images of China in different eras is not intended to prove that one image of China is wrong and another right, or that one is more objective or truer than another, but rather to reveal the structural principles of meaning in Western images of China. The true meaning of Western images of China is not to know or represent China's reality, but to construct a necessary image of China for Western culture—an image that contains some knowledge of China's geographical reality, as well as anxieties and expectations about Sino-Western relations, and, more importantly, metaphorical expressions of Western cultural self-identification, fusing concepts, ideas, myths, or fantasies into a space of the "Other" projected by Western culture itself.

The second level is about type. Over the seven-century-long process, Western culture has transformed countless, constant individual experiences—information sporadically accumulated from exploration, missionary work, trade, and military activities—into images of China with specific characteristics and meanings. When specific images are repeatedly expressed in specific historical periods, they show a tendency toward typification, eventually forming types that provide conceptual, imagistic, and lexical systems for expressing images of

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

China.[4] *The Distant Celestial Empire* focuses not on images of China in individual texts, but on image types that transcend individual texts, appearing as discourse and possessing disciplinary power. Literary studies focus on the innovative meaning of images, while cultural studies focus on the ritualistic or formulaic nature of images—that is, how different texts repeatedly express the same image and construct image types. The image of China is no longer knowledge about China but becomes a symbol in Western modern imagination, a discussable theme, a cluster of concepts or characteristics, a fictional narrative determined not by China as the object of discourse, but by the common history, tradition, and discursive system of Western narratives on themes related to China.

Type is a key concept in transcultural imagology and the basic functional unit for analyzing the history of Western images of China. The history of China's image is thus a history of the formation, succession, and evolution of a series of image types. We can study the image of China in a single text or in a particular historical period, but the image of China in a single text is often a manifestation of the image of China in that particular period. Fundamentally, images are primarily collective representations—they are manifestations of the unconscious of socio-cultural psychology. *The Distant Celestial Empire* studies Western images of China at the level of general or socio-cultural total imagination. Individual texts provide documentary foundations, but the analytical category is the image type. Images are acquired through socialization and are part of society's total mythology about foreign lands. When discussing Western images of China at the level of total social imagination, the fundamental question becomes: How do people from different fields express China in different types of texts? How do various texts cross-reference, correspond, collaborate, and co-propagate?

[4] The concept of type is similar to "stereotype" used in comparative literature imagology. "Stereotype" refers to a set of phrases and images repeatedly used by a culture to describe a foreign culture; it implies a fixed, seemingly apparent, basic "preconception" or "pre-existing image" for the culture to "understand" the external world. It is often continuous and is revealed in various contexts. The reason I use "type" instead of "stereotype" is to avoid the rigid formulization implied in "stereotype"; image types are active, creative, and rich in meaning.

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

How does a whole set of vocabulary, imagery, concepts, or discourse about China form, and how does this discourse govern the production of Western images of China, subordinating individual expressions to this whole or type?

Transcultural imagology directly analyzes images of China in individual texts, but the research question concerns how individual images are programmed into overall image types, how they are constrained by the general Western representation of China in a particular era, and how they participate in the production of that vocabulary, imagery, concepts, or discourse about China. Starting from individual texts, transcultural imagology first conducts semantic analysis of the image itself, then delves into the semiotic level to analyze the structure and meaning of type formation. Analyzing the image of China in any individual text—whether *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, *The Great Empire of China*, *The Philosophy of History*, or *The Character of the Chinese*—must point to its semiotic function and reveal its typified meaning: that is, their respective meanings within different types of China's image, such as "the Great Khan's Continent," "the Great Empire of China," "Confucius's China," or "the Stagnant Empire," "the Despotic Empire," "the Barbaric Empire." In different historical periods of Western culture, images of China have formed certain stereotyped types. For example, early Renaissance Western legends about China's wealth, post-Enlightenment discourses on the despotism and stagnation of the Chinese empire, and post-imperial-era descriptions of Chinese national character have all become types that transcend time, history, and individual expression.

The basic theoretical framework of *The Distant Celestial Empire* is established at the level of image types. Western images of China over more than seven centuries have formed a complete symbolic system with certain continuity and interrelation. This symbolic system consists mainly of six image types, divided into three types from the pre-Enlightenment era—"the Great Khan's Continent," "the Great Empire of China," and "Confucius's China"—and three types from the post-Enlightenment era—"the Stagnant Empire," "the Despotic Empire,"

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

and “the Barbaric Empire.” The first three types succeed each other with ruptures and transformations, but they show more consistency and continuity of beautification and utopianization. The latter three types are related and parallel; their materials are interpenetrated and interwoven, their image features and viewpoints are mutually related, and they show increasing arbitrariness and generalization of vilification and ideologization. The first volume of *The Distant Celestial Empire* focuses on the first three types based on the concept of utopia, while the second volume discusses the latter three types based on the concept of ideology.

Finally, there is prototype. “Image of China” as a discursive or thinking mode has its own history and tradition. Specific images are repeatedly expressed to form types, and a series of successively interconnected, repeatedly expressed types may deepen into one or several prototypes. Prototypes signify the inheritance and interrelation within the lineage of images themselves; they are the most basic, generally commensurable modes of understanding in the history of Western images of China—those that transcend individual texts and eras to remain embedded in the collective unconscious. Any specific text concerning the image of China is both a statement of individual experience and a manifestation of a shared cultural psychological prototype on that level. Prototypes are universal yet residing in different forms of text, from popular literature to political commentary, from news reports to academic writings. The research methods of transcultural imagology combine deductive analysis and inductive synthesis: selecting exemplary texts for analysis, seeking relationships of collaboration and mutual confirmation among different texts, and finally summarizing them into universal modes of meaning making.

Beginning around 1250, the first images of China to appear in the West were a series of beautifying image types. Three primary image types—the Great Khan’s Continent, the Great Empire of China, and Confucius’s China—from material to institutional to conceptual levels, continuously beautified China, making it an ideal state desired by Western modern society.

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

This trend of continuous beautification reached its peak around 1750 and then began to decline. Around 1750, when Voltaire was writing *Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations* to praise China's long history and enlightened politics and religion, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* was sweeping through Europe. In *The Spirit of the Laws*, the Chinese empire, supposedly ruled by enlightened monarchs and philosophers, was proved to be a despotic empire ruled by the cudgel. If around 1750 Western images of China showed a turning point, with both light and dark, good and bad coexisting—contradictory attitudes appearing in the same author (e.g., Diderot both praised China's noble wisdom and vilified the Chinese as evil and degenerate), in different authors of the same period (e.g., Voltaire and Montesquieu), or in different European countries of the same period (e.g., England tending more to vilify China while France tended to beautify it)—then after 1750, Western images of China were clearly vilified. Although there were some who did not follow the tide, the vast majority of Westerners—from England, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States, from missionaries, philosophers, and ordinary merchants, sailors, and soldiers—had a very poor impression of China. What is striking to researchers is that within less than a century, "Western impressions of every aspect of Chinese culture underwent a radical and thorough change" (Blue, 1999, p. 70). The vilifying image types of China in the West began from this point and have continued to strengthen; by the early 21st century, this trend or mainstream has not been reversed.

When specific images of China interweave across different texts, appear repeatedly throughout history, and show consistency of meaning, they suggest a certain prototype. Prototypes manifest as intertextuality on the synchronic dimension and as consistency on the diachronic dimension. Regarding intertextuality on the synchronic dimension, we find that different types of texts from the same period often express the same typified image of China. For example, Samuel Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" and Thomas De Quincey's autobiographical *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* construct the same image of China

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

as an intoxicating "Opium Empire" interweaving fantastic beauty and terror—China surpassing all other Eastern regions as "the most Eastern, even more Eastern than the East"; The same image of China expressing extreme Easternness also appears in missionary reports and philosophers' philosophies of history (Zhou, 2003). Regarding consistency on the diachronic dimension, we find that the West praised China in the inclusive modern narratives of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, then criticized China in the self-sufficient modern narratives of colonialism and imperialism.

The Western images of China in the three image types before and after the Enlightenment contain two clearly opposite prototypes: one is the beautifying prototype, which idealizes China as a paradise of happiness and wisdom, serving as a utopia that transcends, criticizes, and subverts Western social ideology of different eras. The other is the vilifying prototype, which constructs a passive, degenerate, and evil image of China through exclusion, belittlement, and hostility, becoming a carefully designed Other of Western modern ideology.

Transcultural imagology studies images of China at three levels—image, type, and prototype—constructing six image types from vast historical materials and finally condensing them into two prototypes: the utopian prototype that beautifies China and the ideological prototype that vilifies China. These two prototypes have appeared repeatedly in Western modern cultural history, and the images of China that emerged in different historical periods of Western modernity can be traced back to these two prototypes as their different expressions.

At the prototype level, the core question of transcultural imagology is: How do the two prototypes of China—utopianized and ideologized—appear, transform, repeat, and structure the historical evolution and logical framework of Western images of China? The question is not how beautification or vilification occurs, but why they occur, and what their significance and function are in the spiritual structure of Western modernity. The West constructed positive and negative images of China with 1750 as the dividing line—this is the trajectory of the

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

evolution of China's image we see in the grand historical period. To borrow the title of the second volume of Rene Etiemble's *L'Europe chinoise*, it is "from Sinophilia to Sinophobia" (Etiemble, 1989). However, Etiemble pointed out that "Sinophilia" and "Sinophobia," repeated by many, only illustrate the change in Western attitudes toward China, not an in-depth analysis of changes in its internal spiritual structure and function. The key to our research is to identify the logical starting point of these two mutually opposing and negating Chinese imaginations.

Mannheim's sociological analysis of human knowledge found that all knowledge, whether in natural or social sciences, is not purely objective; its imaginative inner logical starting point is either utopian or ideological, with the difference lying only in the relationship between knowledge and the existing order. Utopia negates the existing order, while the function of ideology is to maintain the existing order. Utopia points to the future, while ideology consolidates the past. Utopia and ideology are a pair of opposing yet interdependent and mutually transforming categories in both historical process and logical structure. The ruling group consistent with the existing order determines what is seen as utopia (an impossible idea). The socially ascending group in conflict with the existing order determines what is seen as ideology (the official explanation of effective power). If the socially ascending group becomes the ruling group with social and historical change, its former utopia becomes ideology to some extent. In historical processes, utopia may transform into ideology, and ideology may replace utopia.

The concepts of utopia and ideology in the sociology of knowledge provide the logical starting point for explaining two opposing images of China. As a general social imaginary, the beautified image of China is utopian, while the vilified image of China is ideological. Mannheim analyzed utopia and ideology only in terms of "knowledge," but Paul Ricœur directly applied the analysis of utopia and ideology to the "social imaginary." Because knowledge itself expresses people's imaginary relationship with existing reality, using "social

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

imaginary" can avoid the traditional epistemological distinction between truth and falsehood, just as Althusser used "imaginary" to define ideology. Ricœur (1986) pointed out that the diverse manifestations of social imaginary practices in history can ultimately be reduced to the poles of utopia and ideology. Utopia is a transcendent, subversive social imaginary, while ideology is an integrative, consolidating social imaginary. The historical movement pattern of the social imaginary is based on the tension between centrifugal transcendence and subversion and centripetal integration and consolidation (Mannheim, 1999; Ricœur, 1986, pp. 194-197).

From the perspective of transcultural imagology, the image of China possesses both the individuality and richness of images and the universality and consistency of prototypes. The two prototypes—utopianization and ideologization—provide the basic patterns for interpreting Western images of China and correspond to the historical evolution of Western images of China. I take around 1250 as the starting point of Western images of China and around 1750 as a fundamental turning point, dividing the history of Western images of China into two periods: the first period, from around 1250 to around 1750, when China's image was generally inclined toward utopianization; the second period, from around 1750 onward, when it in large turned toward ideologization.

Transcultural imagology research requires both concrete analysis of individual, exemplary texts and abstract synthesis of overall history and meaning prototypes. The prototypes of China's image were already established by the 19th century. Thereafter, regardless of changes in the world situation, Sino-Western relations, or even China's reality, the two prototypes—utopianization and ideologization—have always dominated Western narratives of China. In the 20th century, Western images of China wavered and changed unpredictably, with major changes almost every 25 years (Zhou, 2004c). However, despite all changes, the two prototypes are discernible behind these images. Even in the early 21st century,

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

the popular Western "China threat theory" and "China rise theory" still reveal the power of the ideologized and utopianized prototypes of China's image.

Prototypes often demonstrate strong discursive productivity. As collective cultural psychological motives, the two prototypes of China's image—utopianization and ideologization—do not refer to the real world outside the image but create meaning-rich images through their own structure, through the relationship between concept and form. In 2009, Martin Jacques published *When China Rules the World*, which became a bestseller. Perry Anderson considered it a continuation of two Western traditions of China's image, belonging to "scare literature." *When China Rules the World* mainly discusses two issues: first, that China's rapid economic development will lead it to "rule the world" in the near future; second, that China's rise is the rise of Confucian culture, which not only maintains such a vast "civilization-state" today but will also "rule the world" in the future. Perry Anderson, the left-wing critic, could easily identify the shadow of the "Confucian utopia" in the "China rise theory." Gang Le's (2010a, p. 37) analysis goes further:

> "Threat theory" and "rise theory" share the same origin in intellectual history and complement each other; the former has now become an important component of the latter. Far-sighted Western scholars have pointed out that although Jacques's original intention was to cheer for China's rise, the world ruled by China that he describes would only terrify ordinary Westerners, as if the "Yellow Peril" were about to descend again.

We discuss the prototype of China's image in a dual sense: it is both a "collective representation" existing deep in socio-cultural psychology, giving specific form and meaning to the image of China and intellectually and conceptually dominating Western narratives of China; and a creative force of transcultural cognition with conceptual structuring power. Important concepts in the grand narratives of Western modernity often need to use China's image as the "typical Other" for representation. In moments of crisis, confirmation,

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

construction, or reconstruction of Western world-conceptual systems, the image of China plays a role in inspiration, memory confirmation, and pattern recognition,[5] and the two prototypes of China's image exhibit extraordinary vitality. The imaginaries of "China rise theory" and "China threat theory" can be traced back respectively to the utopianized and ideologized prototypes of China's image formed in the 19th century, and the two discourses are interwoven, sharing common cultural psychological motives.

Le (2010a) mentions the "Jeremiah complex" behind the "China threat theory". Whether "China rise theory" or "China threat theory," the common cultural psychological motive is Western modern self-consciousness. "China rise theory" implies a concern about "Western decline"; with anxiety and melancholy, they revive the "Confucian utopia," as if "the Chinese empire is being reconstructed on its original framework" (Le, 2010a, p. 38). While emphasizing the achievements of China's economic development, the China-rise theorists see only the upper and surface prosperity of Chinese society, not the poverty at the bottom and social problems. "China collapse theory" also arises from "Western problems." In another article, "Geographical Imagination and Geopolitics: The World Picture of Rise and Decline," Le (2010b) analyzes Robert Kaplan's recently published "The Revenge of Geography" and "The Geographical Puzzle of China's Power." He finds that the geographical-environmental determinism from Montesquieu to Karl Wittfogel has been revived on the basis of the Orientalist ideological prototype in the geopolitical myths of the post-Cold War era. Kaplan directly cites Halford Mackinder's "Yellow Peril" theory, replacing Mackinder's hypothetical Tsarist Russia with today's China; he also extrapolates a sensational hypothesis from Karl Wittfogel's concept of "hydraulic civilization": that contemporary China combines "an extreme, Western-style modernity" with the ancient "hydraulic civilization," thereby

[5] I use "prototype" in the dual sense of "Archetypes" and "Prototype," related to Carl Jung's concept of archetypes in collective unconscious psychology and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's "collective representations" in *Primitive Mentality* (see Jung, 1977, p. 30; Lévy-Bruhl, 1986); also related to the prototype theory in cognitive psychology of Eleanor Rosch and others.

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

exhibiting a "relentless dynamic" that democratic societies lack (Le, 2010b, p. 32). The significance of prototypes is extraordinary, with strong self-replicating or reproductive power.

3. Prototype: Ideology or Utopia

In studying Western images of China within the framework of transcultural imagology, we must first clarify from what angle we raise questions and at what depth we analyze them. We raise questions from an imagological perspective, studying the constitution and meaning of images, their typified characteristics and prototypes. We analyze problems at the depth of Western modernity, discussing the function of the generation of China's image in Western modern culture. Transcultural imagology cannot be satisfied with merely describing and analyzing the characteristics and historical evolution of China's image; it must also interpret its meaning within a specific knowledge framework. Such research requires extracting the structure of thought from the luxuriant and tangled history of images, establishing one or several abstract, instrumental, unified analytical structures that connect individual phenomena, like Max Weber's "ideal types."[6] When I began my research on Western images of China fifteen years ago, few in China were paying attention to this issue. Today, China's image has become a trending topic, with a sudden emergence of many related books and papers. However, most of these can hardly be called "research"; they are at most commentary on current events and policy thinking. Academia must face major contemporary issues in an "academic manner";

[6] Weber first proposed the concept of "ideal types" in his 1904 article "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," and later discussed this concept and its significance for social science research in many works including *Economy and Society*. "Ideal types" are a subjective construction of the researcher's thinking. Weber proposed the concept of "ideal types" to try to provide an operational method for social science research, establishing a "unified analytical structure" that connects scattered and complex individual phenomena and abstracts them into a spiritual structure beyond empirical description. The basic characteristics of ideal types are manifested in two aspects: first, this type is an idea, formed by the researcher through the one-sided accentuation of one or several points of view and through the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena (Weber, 1949, p. 90). It exists in human concepts, not in reality. Second, this type is also typical; it represents and approaches certain phenomena or types of phenomena while being abstracted from phenomena, embodying the inner logic and rules of socio-cultural phenomena of a particular era.

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

theoretical rigor is the key. There must be systematic theory and method, clear concepts, logical clarity, and exploration of the historical depth and intellectual structure of current issues.

China's image was generated within the spiritual structure of Western modernity, and its meaning can only be systematically and deeply explained within the Western modern imagination. The first image of China to appear in Western culture was the legendary, secular-utopianized "Great Khan's Continent." The "Great Khan's Continent" expressed the nascent secular capitalist spirit of the late European Middle Ages, including an aspiration for commercial wealth, monarchical unity, and a lifestyle of sensory luxury. China's image could become an expression of Europe's nascent capitalist spirit, and it was precisely this nascent capitalist spirit that structured the symbolic meaning of the earliest image of China. Through this symbol, Western culture could not only examine and understand itself but also express certain subtle and hidden feelings, imaginings, desires, and fears deep in the native cultural unconscious. Regarding the latter point, our research focuses on two aspects: first, from what conceptual perspective did late medieval Westerners shape the image of China? Second, once this image was formed, how did it change late medieval Western social life and inspire Western modern culture? China's image may not be the decisive or necessary cause of the Renaissance, the emergence of capitalism, or the West's entry into modernity, but it is at least one of the causes. Without the discovery of foreign lands and the classical West, without secular enthusiasm and Protestant spirit, Western modernity could not have emerged.

We conduct research on China's image in the context of Western modernity, focusing on the issue of how the West used the image of China to accomplish modern self-foundation in the transcultural public sphere. In the complex, differentiated, and changing spiritual structure of the West's transition from medieval to modern times, what meaning did the three early types of China's image have as cultural Others? How did they express the emerging Western modern concepts of the city, the monarchical state, secular capitalist spirit, natural and

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

scientific consciousness, rational philosophy and political philosophy, historical thought, and artistic inspiration? How did they participate in the construction of Western modern experience as a utopian force of Western cultural self-criticism and self-transcendence? These are the most important questions concerning the historical depth and intellectual structure of early Western images of China.

From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, the three types of China's image constructed by the Western modern imagination emphasized different meaning aspects of China's image—material wealth, institutional civilization, and ideological belief—marking the three stages of the positive construction of Western modern experience through China's image: the stage of artifacts, the stage of institutions, and the stage of ideas. The climax of the Enlightenment was a dividing point. In the post-Enlightenment era, Western images of China were gradually vilified, with completely opposite types of China's image appeared: the stagnant Chinese empire, the despotic Chinese empire, and the barbaric Chinese empire. These three image types, narrated by Enlightenment thinkers and politicians, were fully "philosophized" and received complete interpretation in Hegel's philosophy of history, thus becoming standardized discourse. The three types of China's image appearing in Western grand narratives of the post-Enlightenment era are the "Other" of Western modern self-identification in the age of imperialism and colonialism. China's image, as the negated "Other" of the dominant values of Western modernity—progress, freedom, and civilization—both provides the imaginative basis for Western modern self-identification and serves as effective ideology for Western colonial expansion.

The study of Western images of China belongs to interdisciplinary, conceptual historical research, specifically research on Western modern conceptual history. It is based on the theoretical assumption of "foreign image as cultural Other," analyzing Western modern images of China within the dynamic structure of Western modern self-confirmation and self-

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

doubt, self-legitimation and self-criticism, and analyzing the process and manner in which China's image participated in the construction of Western modern experience in the transcultural public sphere. "Other" is an important concept here. The "images" studied in transcultural imagology all originate from a particular culture's conscious awareness of the relationship between self and "Other," native and foreign. Individuals and societies identify themselves by establishing the "Other." Daniel-Henri Pageaux (2001, p. 202) repeatedly emphasized the significance of "Other" in imagological theory. Image is the description of a foreign land as a cultural "Other," through which the individual or group that shapes—and endorses—the image reveals and expresses its own cultural, social, and ideological space.

Transcultural imagology studies the function of China's image in the Western system of "cultural Others" at the level of knowledge/power in discourse. China's image as the cultural Other of Western modernity not only helps the West confirm its own identity within the Western modern conceptual system but also helps Western modernity confirm the Western-centered world conceptual order.

To identify itself, Western culture has constructed different "Others" in different historical periods and cultural horizons: Persia in ancient Greece, the Islamic world after the Middle Ages, and the so-called ancient East in modern times. China's image appears within the modern Orientalist horizon, becoming an important "Other" in the Western modern imagination. The function of the "Other" is based on the relationship of difference and opposition between cultural self and Other, and this relationship of difference and opposition is structured into a total imaginative world order. Western modern culture constructs the image of China, establishing the position of China's image in the Western world conceptual order and the relationship of difference and opposition formed between China's image and Western culture in the process of Western self-identification.

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

The function of China's image is not to reflect or know China's reality to some degree, but to help confirm the Western conceptual order of geo-civilization as an Other. For example, China's image as an Other helped the West complete its self-identification and the world conceptual order of East-West binary opposition. Friedrich Hegel believed that China and Europe represented the two poles of world geography (space)—East and West—and the two poles of human history (time)—beginning and end. The world order was embodied in a series of opposing categories represented by China and the West, such as slavery and freedom, stagnation and progress, ignorance and civilization. This Sino-Western binary opposition also implies a value order: China is the negative side, and human civilization represented by the West will ultimately overcome Easternness in the process of historical progress. Jacques Derrida said that binary opposition also implies a hierarchy and value relationship. Establishing the meaning of China as an Other means establishing a world order based on a system of differences in culture, endowing thought with power.

The Distant Celestial Empire studies China's image in the depth of Western modern concepts, analyzing the types of China's image in Western modern concepts before and after the Enlightenment, attempting to delineate the historical meaning and logical framework for the study of Western images of China, and further reflecting on the process and manner in which China's image participated in the construction of Western modern experience. Facing the history of Western images of China of more than seven centuries, *The Distant Celestial Empire* takes around 1750 as a turning point and, based on a large number of historical materials, constructs three types of continuously utopianized images of China before this point and three types of systematically ideologized images after it, providing an intellectual structure and analytical framework for further theoretical research based on phenomenological descriptions.

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

Once the intellectual structure and analytical framework are established, problems and explanations have historical and logical bases. Proposing explanatory questions for the study of China's image and attempting explanatory analysis is a sign of theoretical self-awareness in the study of Western images of China. We use types and prototypes as necessary analytical structures or "ideal types" for research as an abstract knowledge device for theoretical analysis and meaning interpretation. It explores the inner rationality of image features, emphasizes logical completeness in inference, does not seek purely descriptive, all-inclusive coverage of historical materials, and cannot summarize nor attempts to summarize all features of China's image appearing in different texts in a particular era.

Transcultural imagology research on China's image at the three levels of image, type, and prototype ultimately centers on the expressive and creative prototypes deep in cultural psychology. It focuses on the knowledge/ power issues embedded in China's image as a discursive practice of Western modernity, ultimately manifested in the discursive hegemony of transcultural interaction within the modern world conceptual order. In Western modern intellectual history, China's image was idealized as an earthly paradise three times by Western culture in different ways. Although the meanings differed—some being expectations of social modernity, others as expectations of aesthetic modernity—the basic pattern of utopianization and the intellectual stance it implied were the same. We call this idealized image of China in the West the "Confucian utopia."

From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, Western culture continuously beautified China, projecting its thoughts and enthusiasm for foreign civilizations onto the material wealth, institutional civilization, and ideological beliefs of the Chinese empire. The "Confucian utopia" became a symbol of Western modern social expectations. After the climax of the Enlightenment, the "Confucian utopia" image in Western social modernity expectations dimmed. The "Confucian utopia" shifted to the horizon of aesthetic modernity, becoming

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

aesthetic, mysterious, fantastic, and even decadent in Romantic and Modernist literary texts—a "Confucian utopia" with political clarity and moral purity. The meaning of the "Confucian utopia" in the Western modern imagination changed from an engaged social utopia that intervenes and reforms reality to a detached aesthetic utopia that escapes reality. Modernity includes two levels: one is the social level, including rational spirit, democratic politics, market economy, etc.; the other is the aesthetic level, including the rebellion against and transcendence of social modernity from Romanticism to the entire Modernist aesthetic movement. Social modernity was established in the Enlightenment, while aesthetic modernity as a "concept of division" emerged with the Romantic movement.

The Western modern "Confucian utopia" successively manifested three meaning types, undergoing two transformations: from social modernity expectations to aesthetic modernity expectations, and then from aesthetic modernity expectations back to social modernity expectations. In the 20th century, the "Confucian utopia" returned from Western aesthetic modernity expectations to social modernity expectations, becoming a banner of Western left-wing cultural movements. Radical intellectuals discovered in New China a model of human progress within world history. With a political pilgrimage mentality, they imagined the "red sacred land" as an "ideal country" of material progress and moral perfection. Their unreflective enthusiasm not only excited the Western radical intellectual tradition but also moved modern Chinese intellectuals. Transcultural cognition and imagination exchanged a recessive "leftist" relationship.

The "Confucian utopia" provided a critical stance for Western modern radical thought but also exposed the utopian foundation of Sino-Western transcultural interaction and modern cultural critique. Analyzing the discursive genealogy of the "Confucian utopia" can help us understand the conceptual characteristics of Sino-Western transcultural interaction, the internal structure and production mechanism of Western images of China, and also serve as a warning

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

about the utopian stance of modern intellectuals in cultural critique and the naivety and danger of "literati politics."

Studying Western images of China in the depths of Western modernity raises the issue that as modern China entered the Western-centered modern world system, it also entered the Western-centered world conceptual system. The Enlightenment was an era of "cultural discovery." Enlightenment philosophy, initiated by the comparisons between the ancients and the moderns and East and West, constructed the conceptual order of the world in Enlightenment grand narratives: space is divided into East and West in binary opposition; time extends from the past through the present to the future in three-stage development. The comparison between the ancients and the moderns established the superiority of the modern over the ancient, finding the temporal order of Western modernity. The comparison between East and West established the superiority of the West over the East, forming the spatial order of Western modernity. What determines the spatial-temporal order of modernity is, in turn, a value concept. What won in the first comparison is the value of "progress"; what won in the second is the value of "freedom."

The Western Enlightenment grand narratives mainly contain three types of China's image: the stagnant and declining empire, the Oriental despotic empire, and the barbaric or semi-barbaric empire. As "cultural Others,"[7] they appear in the world conceptual order of binary opposition between ancient and modern, East and West, confirming the core values of Western modernity: the order of progress, the order of freedom, and the order of civilization.

[7] The concept of "Other" in cultural studies mainly comes from the theories of Michel Foucault and Edward Said, referring to a cultural image constructed by a culture to establish a value and power order centered on itself and to identify itself—an image opposed to and inferior to itself. "Other" as a concept opposed to "self" or "subject" can be traced back to Hegel's theory of the subject of desire; the Other is the externalized boundary for the subject to know and expand itself. Jean-Paul Sartre's dualistic ontology assumes the Other as the object of desire for the subject pursuing unity with its world. In Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, the Other becomes a symbolic order or symbolic place in the unconscious that opposes and confirms the self, manifested in the form of discourse, determining what the subject lacks and what the subject must pursue, thereby guiding the subject's desires and destiny. Derrida assumes the Other as infinitely "différance," an unidentifiable alterity. For Emmanuel Levinas, the Same and the Other constitute a pair of most basic concepts: the Same refers to the totality of the world, while the Other is something higher than the subject self that cannot be contained in the Same (Butler, 1987; Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999, pp. 177-178; Brooke, 1999, 183-185; Wyschogrod, 2000).

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

The progress grand narrative constructs the image of a stagnant and declining empire, confirming the modern subject of Western progress. The freedom grand narrative constructs the image of an Oriental despotic empire, confirming the modern subject of Western freedom. The civilization grand narrative constructs the image of a barbaric or semi-barbaric empire, confirming the modern subject of Western civilization. As a "cultural Other", the image of the barbaric or semi-barbaric empire is the one that can fully express the values and meanings of Western modernity. Because "barbarism," as opposed to the general concept of civilization, can simultaneously contain multiple aspects: historical stagnation, economic backwardness, political despotism, corrupt customs, spiritual slavery, etc., and can also confirm the overall meaning of Western modernity. If Western modern culture manifests itself as an identity unified around civilization, then only by shaping a "barbaric East" as its Other can it accomplish self-confirmation.

Of course, in studying China's image within the spiritual structure of Western modernity, transcultural imagology often faces complex issues. Images and types that once appeared may sediment into prototypes of the collective unconscious, appearing alternately and repeatedly in different historical periods. Even images of China under two opposing prototypes may appear simultaneously in the same era, forming a relationship that is both conflicting and complementary. For example, in the early period of Western modernization, while China's image was being utopianized, there were also ideological discussions; it was just that the ideological function was accomplished by Christian faith. I have noted that the European image of China at that time contained an inner anxiety or conflict. While praising China's secular wealth and political-religious system, they also belittled the spiritual life of the Chinese from an orthodox Christian perspective; pagan China concealed some unforgivable sin. In the post-Enlightenment era, the ideologized image of China dominates Western narratives of China, but the utopianized image of China did not disappear; rather, it shifted from social modernity

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

expectations to aesthetic modernity expectations, and its former meaning on modernity transformed into modernism. Images of China under two mutually opposing and negating prototypes may appear alternately and repeatedly in different historical periods, or may coexist, hidden or visible, in the same era, constituting the inner richness and vitality of Western images of China.

4. Two Forms of Orientalism: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Critique

The ideologized image of China entails the cultural hegemony of Orientalism. Said's postcolonial cultural critique has exposed its carefully planned dangerous structure. However, a radical theory, while revealing, can also obscure. Postcolonial cultural critique reveals the conspiracy of cultural imperialism hidden in Orientalism: constructing a passive, degenerate, evil image of the East to lay the ideological foundation for Western colonial expansion. However, postcolonial cultural critique also obscures the open, positive, admiring, and self-critical side of Orientalism. This not only misinterprets the cultural spirit of Western modernity but also misguides China's modern self-construction. The same theory may have different meanings in different cultural contexts—in the Western modern cultural context, postcolonial cultural critique embodies the open spirit of self-doubt and self-criticism, while in the Chinese modern cultural context, such critique may manifest a narrow, nationalistic spirit of suspecting and criticizing the foreign, which is something that we need to be vigilant about.

There are two forms of Orientalism in Western culture: one is negative, ideological Orientalism; the other is positive, utopian Orientalism. One constructs the political, economic, and cultural-moral power of imperialism, allowing it to interpenetrate and coordinate in the Western enterprise of expansion. The other dismantles this ideological power structure, manifesting the self-doubting, self-transcending side of the Western cultural tradition. The two forms of Orientalism constitute two spiritual aspects of Western modern world expansion. One manifests as crude, narrow, arrogant chauvinism and racism. The other manifests as humble,

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

open, reflective relativism and skepticism. The true vitality of Western modern civilization lies precisely in this cultural structure of mutual opposition and inclusion. Postcolonial cultural critique, by obscuring the other form of Orientalism, also obscures an important spiritual aspect of Western modernity. The two aspects—material and spiritual—of the expansionist character of Western civilization often show opposite tendencies: on the one hand, greedy plunder and conquest; on the other, humble admiration and emulation. On the surface, these two tendencies seem contradictory; in fact, in the organic combination of Western civilization, they complement each other. Positive, utopian Orientalism enables Western culture to continuously expand, adjust, and transform itself, endowing Western culture with a devout, enthusiastic, broad, and humble spirit. Negative, ideological Orientalism prevents the West from losing itself in turbulent change, maintaining self-confidence and dignity, manifesting the Western cultural tradition of self-preservation and integrity. These two contradictory yet complementary forms of Orientalism constitute the West's attitude to the East. Postcolonial cultural critique has focused excessively on negative, ideological Orientalism. We wish to draw attention to the positive, utopian side of Orientalism and its significance in the overall structure of Western culture.

The two prototypes of China's image—utopianization and ideologization—point to the two forms of "Orientalism." Starting from these two prototypes of China's image, I reflect on the meaning of postcolonial cultural critique in the Chinese context, alerting against the narrow-minded or ulterior-motivated application of postcolonial cultural theory in nationalism, which misinterprets the West and misguides China. In Western culture, the relationship between the West and the world can be divided into two interrelated yet distinct levels. One relationship is manifested in the broadest political, economic, and military fields, expressed in political, military, socio-economic, and sometimes even ecclesiastical missionary terms. The other relationship exists entirely in people's minds; it is the imaginary field, filled with various

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

images of non-Western people and the world in Western culture. These images exist deep in the Western cultural unconscious, possessing a value beyond reality. The expansion of Western modern civilization advanced comprehensively in political, economic, and cultural fields—initially through trade and missionary work. After the Enlightenment, expansion also claimed to carry the mission of spreading and implementing modern civilization. This expansion was self-affirming and externally negating. The external world was the object of economic expansion, military conquest, political domination, and also the object of spreading Christianity or implementing modern civilization. Yet at the same time, there was another impulse in Western civilization at the conceptual and psychological level: a tendency of self-negation and external affirmation. When conquering America, they invented the image of the "noble savage" to criticize European decadence. When colonizing Asia, they continuously narrated the so-called Eastern myth, imagining the East as a place where paradise appeared.

In the relationship between the West and the world, the tendencies at the level of reality and the conceptual level are completely opposite, yet mutually reinforcing. We should study the cultural psychological motives and background of the history of Western expansion—that fervent yearning for foreign lands. Why did Westerners, while expanding and conquering the external world on the political and economic levels, admire and praise the very world they were conquering on the cultural level? The imagination, longing, and admiration for overseas worlds provided the inspiration and spiritual motives for initial expansion. When Western world expansion reached its peak, Western admiration for the noble savage of America and the enlightened monarchs of Asia also reached its peak during the Enlightenment. Longing and admiration for the world propelled political and economic expansion; expansion enriched wealth and knowledge, which in turn fueled existing expansion enthusiasm. Material expansion advanced into the external world, while the accompanying cultural criticism advanced into the inner world. Criticism could alleviate or dissolve the cultural tension caused by expansion,

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

changing the structure of the mind while changing the structure of the world. Only with full cultural self-confidence can one produce and accommodate this kind of negating self-criticism. Only by accommodating this self-criticism can one preserve spiritual freedom and cultural health. Only through this mechanism of cultural confession can one achieve and maintain a moral balance, preventing the cultural tension caused by expansion from collapsing. The most dynamic structure of Western modern civilization—from the self-supervision of political democracy to the self-negation of cultural criticism—entails such opposition.

Misinterpreting the West may lead to misguiding China. Positive, utopian Orientalism and negative, ideological Orientalism delineate the scope of Western Orientalism. The tension formed between the two poles of the two forms of Orientalism endows Western cultural expansion and development with its unique vitality. This is precisely the issue that non-Western cultures should seriously reflect upon in the process of modernization. Arrogant conquest and humble knowledge-seeking, self-expansion and self-criticism—these two mentalities are reflected in the West in approaching the world. China's modernization character, in cultural concepts, longs for and admires the West; yet in political and economic terms, it is oppressed and invaded by Western expansionist forces. Outward longing and admiration are often accompanied by inward self-abasement and self-contempt, creating an imbalance in cultural mentality and social structure, thus tending towards another extreme: politically and economically, resistance is expressed through self-closure; culturally, xenophobia is expressed through arrogance. Between concept and reality, a healthy tension between inward and outward orientation could fail to form, and a narrowness of cultural spirit could be created—either extreme admiration or extreme hatred, either extreme self-abasement or extreme arrogance. This is also a common problem faced by the Third World or the entire East in the process of modernization.

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

Postcolonial cultural critique in China has problems both in theoretical thinking itself and in the cultural and intellectual issues caused by deficiencies in such theoretical thinking. Beginning in the mid-1990s, postcolonial cultural critique theory was introduced to China and became a prominent intellectual trend. First came theoretical introduction, then research application, and finally critique and transcendence. These three stages all show a certain incompleteness or deficiency: theoretical introduction focused mostly on Said's theory, with insufficient attention or sustained research interest in theories before or after; research application tended to simply borrow or compare with Western postcolonial theory, with even the theoretical premises and methods being Western, and even the research problems and cases being Western (post)colonial ones; finally, regarding critique and transcendence, Chinese scholars have hardly attended to the particularity of Chinese issues in postcolonial theory. The re-discussion of the national character issue in postcolonial cultural critique reveals the rashness and shallowness of theoretical thinking. Regarding the development and transcendence of Western postcolonial cultural critique, scholars of Indian, Arab, and African descent have been more accomplished than Chinese scholars. Postcolonial theory in China has been neither digested nor developed, and the immaturity of theoretical thinking itself has led to naivety and extremism in cultural and intellectual trends.

The immature theory leads to deficiency in related cultural thought. Postcolonial cultural critique has different meanings in different cultural contexts. In Western cultural context where it originated, it signifies the openness and inclusiveness of Western culture itself and the vitality of self-reflection and self-criticism. In postcolonial or semi-postcolonial societies, however, it may be used by narrow cultural conservatism and fervent nationalism as a weapon to oppose the West and modern civilization. Scholars are busy manipulating theories but neglect the realistic concern that intellectuals should have. In the context of China's modernization and the craze for postcolonial cultural critique, uncritically criticizing negative,

Vol.2 No.1 2026
DOI: 10.64699/26OKKN7449

ideological Orientalism can easily cultivate a cultural self-enclosure, a confrontational and hostile nationalist sentiment, and even cause the bizarre combination of pre-modern or anti-modern fanatical localism with postmodern, fantastic nationalist theory (Zhou, 2004d).

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Vol.2 No.1 2026
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