Mirror of the "Other": Western Views on China in *The Canton Miscellany*

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Abstract

Published in 1831, *The Canton Miscellany* is a special textual carrier intertwined with Sino-Western cultural collisions and colonial expansion before the Opium War. This study takes the existing five issues of *The Canton Miscellany* as the research object, and based on the "Other" theory and the perspective of Orientalism, reveals its dual characteristics as a cultural mirror of the Western community in China through textual content analysis and historical context restoration. It presents exotic descriptions of China during the Qing Dynasty, and implicitly contains the early penetration of colonial discourse. *The Canton Miscellany* constructed China as an "Other" opposed to Western modernity through a binary oppositional discourse system of progress vs. stagnation and civilization vs. barbarism. It not only reflects the cultural superiority of British colonizers in the 19th century, but also implies the deep intention of serving commercial expansion and colonial legitimation, thus providing media evidence for understanding the evolution of Western views on China in the first half of the 19th century.
Keywords: *The Canton Miscellany*, the "Other", Orientalism, Views on China

In the early 1830s, China was a declining empire fraught with crises yet clinging to outdated systems; meanwhile, the Western world, driven by the Industrial Revolution and political transformations, was brimming with expansionary vitality. These two vastly different systems were on the verge of a violent collision sparked by the Opium Trade, which would profoundly alter the course of Chinese and world history. This was the historical background when *The Canton Miscellany* was first published. As one of the earliest periodicals edited by Westerners in China, *The Canton Miscellany* was an English journal published in 1831 in Macao by senior officials of the British East India Company stationed in China. The detailed

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accounts of this journal have opened a window for Western readers to understand China, rendering it a text of undeniable historical significance. This study aims to answer the following questions: How did *The Canton Miscellany* construct China as the "Other"? What discursive strategies were employed? What ideological motives underpinned these representations?

1. The Evolution of Western Views on China

The Western views on China refer to "the Western understanding and perception of China, which contain both objective descriptions of reality and subjective personal feelings" (Wang, 2010, p.100). The history of exchanges between China and the West dates back a long time, and the image of China in Western eyes has been constantly changing with the development of history. According to historical records, as early as the 13th century, Willem de Rubruck, a monk who was sent to China by King Louis IX of France, recorded in his report *The Journey of William of Rubruck*, "There is a city in that country where walls are built of silver and battlements are made of gold" (Mo, 2006, p.20). Marco Polo also described "the prosperity and magnificence of Hangzhou, and the prosperity of Sino-foreign exchanges at the port of Quanzhou" (Mo, 2006, pp.23–24) and so on in his travel notes. For a long period of time, the image of China in the West was mysterious, positive, and beautified. After the 15th and 16th centuries, with the rise of Western capitalism and the acceleration of external expansion, Western civilizational superiority began to take shape. However, at that time, China's comprehensive development level in economy, politics, culture and other fields was still far higher than that of the West in the same period. "Faced with a powerful country that was stronger than itself, the West had no choice but to adopt a more moderate and equal policy" (Wu & Zeng, 2000, p.7). But from that time on, the late Ming and Qing governments in China successively implemented a closed-door policy and keep being complacent, which caused social development to stagnate for a long time. On the contrary, Western capitalism began to break through the stage of workshop handicrafts in the mid-18th century, especially the

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outbreak of the Industrial Revolution, which made the West surpass China in many fields such as science, technology, and military affairs (Gao & Zuo, 2007).

After the 17th century, Europeans no longer praised China unreservedly. For example, in his *Descripción de China*, Matteo Ricci not only talked about China's vast territory and rich products, but also discussed about China's closedness, exclusiveness, and blind arrogance (Zou, 2011). After the mid-17th century, there were scholars who praised Chinese culture, represented by Voltaire and Leibniz, as well as scholars who criticized and negated Chinese culture, represented by Montesquieu, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel. At the end of the 17th century, due to the fact that China was in the "Prosperous Age of Kangxi and Qianlong", a Chinese craze of worship emerged in Western social and cultural life. In the first half of the 18th century, views on China from the British elites inherited the European Chinese craze since the mid-17th century, which was manifested in their strong admiration for Chinese art. However, in the mid-18th century, the Western views on China underwent an obvious transformation, and gradually became negative. After the failure of the Macartney Mission to China in 1793, it took a sharp turn for the worse and deteriorated rapidly. The entourage of the mission, including the counselor Sir George Leonard Staunton (1737–1801) and the physician Sir John Barrow (1764–1848), described a negative image of China. "From the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century, the negative views of China gradually became dominant and reached its peak. China was no longer an ideal country in the present world, but a stagnant, autocratic, barbaric or semi-barbaric empire" (Lu, 2016, p.1). One of the reasons for this change was the disparity in economic and military strength between the East and the West; on the other hand, "the newly industrializing and supremely confident West now observed a declining China with eyes totally different from those with which their predecessors of not long before had viewed an empire that appeared to be at the height of its glory" (Colin, 1999, p.39).

2. *The Canton Miscellany*: A Description of the "Other"

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The Canton Miscellany was a rare periodical that deserved people's attention. "Its contributors were prominent figures and scholars in British society at the time, including John Francis Davis, who served as the Chief of the East India Company in Canton and later became the British Superintendent of Trade and the second Governor of Hong Kong" (Li, 1999, p.25; Bai & Xie, 2022, p.72). Through their narratives about the East (especially China), they deal with the Orient "by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1979, p.3), which was essentially a form of Western power discourse dominating the East. The contributors' writings about China formed a mirror image of the "Other", reflecting their self-examination of Han culture. Under this mirror image of the "Other", they conveyed a certain image of themselves as observers, speakers, and writers (Meng, 2001). Articles of this journal were edited anonymously, targeting well-educated Britons. With culture as their central theme and excluding current affairs reports, the content covered various aspects of China, including politics, law, social life, customs, and Chinese language learning.

Up till now, academic research on *The Canton Miscellany* is relatively scarce. Pan (1980) and Li (1999) briefly mentioned basic information about the journal, such as the fact that it was an English monthly published by the East India Company, with a silk-bound hardcover cover and a price of two silver dollars per copy. Bai & Xie (2022) only referred to the preface of *The Canton Miscellany*. Lin & Wang (2024) focused on verifying the background of the journal's founding, the motivations of its main founders, Thomas Manning and John Francis Davis, and pointed out that *The Canton Miscellany* played an important foundational role in the professional development of British Sinology journals. Peng's thesis *Research on the 19th Century Sinology Journals: The Indo-Chinese Gleaner and The Canton Miscellany* (2024) introduced the founding background and general situation of *The Canton Miscellany*,

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covering some translated contents related to Chinese social and cultural knowledge in the journal, as well as the cross-cultural communication issues of Westerners in China reflected in the travel notes of the Amherst Mission. This has been the few research achievements that examined the specific contents of the journal so far. Besides, there is controversy in academic circles regarding the number of issues published of *The Canton Miscellany*. According to WorldCat, *The Canton Miscellany* is collected by fifty libraries, including the library of Hong Kong Baptist University, library of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Academia Sinica, one each in Australia, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands, five in the United Kingdom, eight in Canada, and thirty in the United States. The publication information of *The Canton Miscellany* on the official websites of the library of Griffith University in Australia, Library of University of Cambridge, and Library of the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom, the King's University Library in Canada, and the Stanford University Library, University of Michigan Library all show 1–5 issues. American sinologist Roswell and Professor Fang Hanqi from Renmin University of China both believed that *The Canton Miscellany* had a total of five issues (Roswell, 1933; Fang, 2014). Pan also held that the journal only published five issues and ceased publication at the end of 1831 (Pan, 1980). However, Portuguese scholar Braga claimed that it had published ten issues, the first number in June, 1831 and the last in May, 1832 (Braga,1963). Lin & Wang also considered the ten- issues viewpoint more credible (Lin & Wang, 2024). From the existing research results on *The Canton Miscellany*, it is found that no scholar has conducted research on the overall Western views of China reflected in it. Therefore, this study attempts to interpret Western views on China presented in *The Canton Miscellany*, which describes China as the "Other". *The Canton Miscellany* is like a prism, reflecting the China seen by the West through the lens of colonial interests and a sense of civilizational superiority at the historical juncture of 1831. As one of the important media for Westerners to peek into China in the early 19th century, *The Canton Miscellany* is a precious

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historical material for Sino-Western cultural exchanges.

3. Views on China Reflected in *The Canton Miscellany*

The "Other" is an external perspective or a heterogeneous cultural group that stands in contrast to the "Self". In cross-cultural studies, the "Other" often represents an exotic culture outside the observers' perspective, such as the East from a Western viewpoint. China was the "Other" in the eyes of the contributors, and when they examined China from the identity and perspective of Western authors, their writings took on the meaning of the "Other". Therefore, the contents published in *The Canton Miscellany* exhibit cultural shocks arising from different lifestyles, behaviors, and ideological concepts. As pointed out in the introduction of Editors' Note of the first issue,

> Its moral and political Institutions have long been regarded with that respect and admiration which ignorance is ever willing to pay to mystery, and which even the superior intelligence of an enlightened mind will offer at the secret and hidden shrine, which defies the powers of its penetration. But sufficient insight has been afforded us into the Chinese character to suffer us no longer to remain in this state of deluded ignorance. The illusion, which has lasted for many hundred years has been despelled, the veil of mystery, which shadowed the face of Truth has been withdrawn. We see little to excite our unqualified approbation, but much to rouse the spirit of ingenious enquiry. Should this publication become the means of exhibiting the results of such enquiry the object, which We have in view will be fully attained. (*The Canton Miscellany*, 1831, p. IX)

Editors of *The Canton Miscellany* claimed that, based on their "in-depth" understanding, China was no longer a country shrouded in mystery that deserved universal respect and admiration. On the contrary, they believed that China's reality, especially its morality, political system, and social characteristics, was filled with problems that needed to be thoroughly

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explored, analyzed, and criticized. *The Canton Miscellany* acted as a mediation that presented an interpretive other image which had undergone editorial curation, linguistic translation and intellectual selection, and such mediation "can validate, alienate, or reshape readers' self-conception" (Chen, 2025, p.4).

The journal aimed to tear off the mystical veil of the past, break the centuries-old illusion, and present readers with a disenchanted China, one predominantly characterized by negative images, which required calm, and even potentially condescending, scrutiny and criticism from Western observers. Its tone was far more critical and scrutinizing than appreciative. This has reflected a shift in the attitude towards China among Westerners in the 19th century, particularly among groups with close commercial ties and conflicts with China, such as the Western merchant community in Canton. Their views on China have shifted from early curiosity and admiration to more criticism, accusations, and a sense of superiority. The author has collected and collated the contents of China in *The Canton Miscellany* to provide a clearer insight into the multi-dimensional perceptions of China held by Westerners during that period.

3.1 Political Narratives Under Despotism: Diplomatic Conflicts, Imperial Power Construction, and Gender Power

The Canton Miscellany devoted considerable attention to accounts of Chinese politics, with several articles indicating that the power of the Chinese government was highly centralized, marked by a strong tendency toward monarchical despotism. In handling diplomatic affairs, the Qing government maintained extremely strict attitudes and ritual requirements toward foreign envoys, which was vividly reflected in the records related to British missions to China. Issues 1 to 3 of *The Canton Miscellany* serialized *Extract from a Journal of the last Embassy to Peking*. In 1816, during the British mission's visit to China, a fierce dispute arose between the two sides over the etiquette to be observed when meeting the

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emperor. From the perspective of the Qing government, the Amherst Mission's visit to China was an act of paying tribute, so it insisted that the British envoys perform the "three kneelings and nine prostrations" ritual, believing that this was a sign of respect for the emperor and recognition of China's suzerain status by foreign countries. However, the British envoys considered such etiquette to be damaging to national dignity and firmly refused. This incident fully reflected that the Qing government, in its foreign exchanges, was still in the fantasy of being the Celestial Empire, striving to maintain its own authority and the traditional hierarchical order. It also reflected the prejudice of the mission members toward foreign cultures, "The Chinese are such an ignorant and illiberal a people, that their good opinion and consequent good treatment of us are not to be gained by undue concessions in essential points" (*The Canton Miscellany*, 1831, pp. 3–4).

"'the Other' serves as a powerful lens to unpack power, identity and marginalization" (Guan, 2025, p.155). In *The Canton Miscellany,* the most typical records related to imperial power construction and gendered power dynamics appeared in the fourth issue *Memoir of the Empress Woo-How*. The article elaborately described how Wu Mei-niang (Wu Zetian) used extremely cruel tactics to frame the empress, and ruthlessly killed the former Empress Wang and her one-time rival Consort Xiao after they were imprisoned. From that point until her death, this once talented lady (a court attendant of the rank "Cai Ren"), Wu Zetian, commanded the entire Chinese empire's awe. After Emperor Tang Gaozong's unremarkable reign, he passed the throne to a son born to him and Wu Zetian. Since the son was still a minor at the time, he was deposed by Wu Zetian and merely granted the title of prince. At this juncture, Wu Zetian became the sole ruler of the empire, doing as she pleased in all matters. She bestowed prominent honors upon some members of her own clan, while eliminating siblings who defied her will. She also poisoned several of her own children and sought to exterminate all descendants of Emperor Tang Taizong, the very ruler who had lifted her from obscurity. While

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committing these heinous crimes within the imperial court, she simultaneously strove to win over the common people outside the palace. She issued edicts to lighten the people's burdens and formulated a series of laws and regulations. The story ultimately concluded with a successful uprising plotted by one faction of Emperor Taizong's sons, who had been enfeoffed as kings across the empire. The Empress Wu was then moved to her own residence, where she passed away peacefully.

From the above articles, in the narratives of diplomatic conflicts in *The Canton Miscellany*, the Qing government maintained the autocratic imperial power's fantasy of being the "Heavenly Kingdom" by adhering to the kowtow ritual (three kneelings and nine prostrations), exposing its autocratic nature of clinging to hierarchical order and refusing to compromise in foreign relations. In the descriptions of imperial power construction and gender power, Wu Zetian's rule, who had seized power through cruel means, not only demonstrated women's subversion of traditional gender norms under autocracy but also revealed the tyranny and turbulence brought about by the extreme concentration of imperial power.

If political narratives present a rational-critical dimension of China as a "despotic other" in the eyes of Westerners, then the selection and translation of Taoist stories in *The Canton Miscellany* reveal another layer of "othering", which have portrayed China as a "primitive other" full of mystery and reliant on supernatural forces. These two seemingly different narrative strategies, in fact, serve the same purpose of establishing Western superiority in the opposition between reason and mysticism.

3.2 The Construction of Oriental Mysticism: Religion, Mythology, and Cultural Imagination of the "Other"

The first issue of *The Canton Miscellany* featured the Taoist immortal tales. An aged man, with unusual figure and strange countenance in tattered clothes, tried to enter the city but was stopped by the guards. He addressed the guards, "If you place confidence in me, I have

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power to avert calamities and misfortunes from your whole City, but if you act towards me with suspicion, evil and distress will overwhelm you" (*The Canton Miscellany*, 1831, p.25). He then left. The guards at the city gate reported the incident to the government officials, who placed order to arrest the old man. However, before they arrived, the old man, who was a prophet, sighed and said, "You come out to apprehend me, but hereafter how great will be your misfortunes" (*The Canton Miscellany*, 1831, p.25). That very year, pirates and bandits ransacked the city and slaughtered all the inhabitants. Earlier, when the old man had asked a woman drawing water by the river for a drink, he was scolded by the woman. He then tapped her bucket with his cane, causing the water to dry up instantly. This is a typical Chinese folk Taoist legend. It employs the image of a Taoist immortal and elements of magic to construct a moral fable about blessings from respecting the gods and disasters from slighting them.

Another story tells of Yuen-kung, who suddenly fell seriously ill and was on the verge of death while serving in Nan-Hae. A mysterious Taoist priest took the initiative to visit him and presented him with medicine. His favorite concubine, Han-she, applied the medicine for him, and he recovered quickly. However, the Taoist priest had vanished without a trace, and only then did they realize they had encountered an extraordinary being. The silver box containing the ointment was cherished by Han-she, which confirmed the authenticity of the supernatural healing. This is a fusion of religious aesthetics and secular needs. In essence, the story is a Taoist missionary text wrapped in a supernatural narrative style. Through techniques such as empirical evidence of the silver box and involvement of the favorite concubine, it constructs a narrative paradigm where illusory miracles are embedded in reality. The physical object of the silver box strengthens the authenticity of the story, while the favorite concubine Han-she serves as a link to add a touch of secular human sentiment, demonstrating the Taoist religious aesthetic of hiding traces and manifesting virtues. Although the title indicates that the story here is translated from a Chinese Taoist tale, the original source of the story has undergone

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cross-textual circulation and adaptation in translation, making it difficult to verify the exact corresponding source text.

Another story about Hwang, who attained immortality through alchemy and practiced medicine to help the world, can be traced to versions such as Volume 4 of *Luofu Zhi* (Records of Luofu Mountain) and Volume 28 *Strange Tales of Guangdong Xinyu*. Through Hwang's typical cases of curing diseases with immortal arts, such as treating a woodcutter's foot disease, peeling tree bark and applying it to the foot, telling the woodcutter to close his eyes and endure the pain. once the pain stopped, he (Hwang) vanished, and the foot disease was instantly cured. Healing hunchback, scraping the lips to cure lip diseases, and using soil to heal sores, these "natural therapies" embody the Taoist thought of treating form with form, restoring nature with nature in alchemical arts.

The Canton Miscellany was founded by Westerners, who were mainly missionaries, merchants and diplomats in China against the background of expansion of British trade and the rise of colonial power in the 19th century. Their selection of specific Taoist stories for translation was a cultural screening behavior with strong subjectivity. By repeatedly presenting supernatural and irrational elements in Chinese Taoism, including terms like "prophet", "becoming immortal" and "instant healing of illnesses", China was solidified as the "mysterious other", a backward civilization relying on miracles. This image contrasted sharply with Westerners' self-positioning of rationality, science and progress, thus providing a legitimacy argument for colonial expansion and missionary work at the cultural level since the East is ignorant, the West has the responsibility to "enlighten" it.

The above two sections have constructed the "Other" image of China from the perspectives of political system and religious beliefs respectively. Then, the analysis of social ethics in *The Canton Miscellany* extends this construction from the institutional level to the level of daily life. Through ordinary practices such as marriage customs and family order, it

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further solidifies China's positioning as a backward civilization, thereby providing more solid arguments for the superiority of Western civilization.

3.3 The Anatomy and Critique of Social Ethics: Family Order, Individual Predicaments, and Civilizational Comparison

In terms of social ethics, particularly in marriage customs, traditional arranged marriages were prevalent in China. Marriages between men and women were often decided by their parents, and daughters might be betrothed to men they had never met, all to serve the interests of the family or maintain social relations. Sirr once pointed out, "Woman is placed in a more degraded position in Asia than in any other quarter of the globe, and we believe that in China her humiliation is complete; being rendered more conspicuous, by the extent to which civilization and education has been carried in all connected, with the male population of this vast and mighty empire" (Sirr, 1849, p.35), which fundamentally shaped a culture of female oppression. The third issue of *The Canton Miscellany* published a Chinese story titled *The Maid of Ho-Nan*. The heroine's father, once a highly respected official, was extremely greedy and married her off to a wealthy young man from a neighboring county who owned vast farmlands and enormous wealth. Out of a sense of filial duty, the heroine could only obey meekly in silence, but her days were spent in loneliness and tears. Gathered dark clouds foretold an impending storm, and the fiercest wind and rain in living memory surged through the valley. Flowers in the garden were torn off and scattered by the violent wind; an ancient tree, long regarded as the pride of the forest, was uprooted. "The poles of the Mandarin residence, the emblems of official rank, were shivered by the lightning" (*The Canton Miscellany*, 1831, p.180). Through these descriptions of scenery, the tragic fate of the heroine is mirrored. The only way for such women to resist was to commit suicide.

Featuring both images and text, the second issue of *The Canton Miscellany* vividly illustrated the part of *Chinese Rules for Servants: Taken from the Section of the "Family Cems"*

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which is entitled *Good Signs* (*The Canton Miscellany*, 1831, p.141).

Chinese Versions	Translated Versions and Notes
家人见**客**至低声缓答	When servants see a **visitor** come (to their master's house,) They should speak to him in a low voice, and answer him mildly;
小心婉容门前见**客**过	and they should be careful to have a good natured countenance: When they see a **gentleman** passing the door of the house，
皆起身直立	they should all rise, and stand upright：
遇诸途皆侧立让行	when they meet a **gentleman** in the street, they should stand on one side, and yield the pathway to him；
如至其家问话皆低声缓答	when sent to a **gentleman**'s house to make inquiries, they should always speak slowly, and in a low and mild tone of voice.
此虽小事主人之忠厚不忠厚 家人之生事不生事俱因此而可知也	Though these are trifling matters, yet the sincerity and generosity or otherwise of the master，as well as the disposition of the servants to make disturbance, or the contrary, are to be known thereby.

From the perspective of lexical choices in the translation, the term 客 was initially rendered as the relatively neutral word *visitor*, conveying the meaning of guest, caller or visitor, emphasizing spatial movement and temporary presence. However, it was later repeatedly translated three times as *gentleman,* a term whose core meaning is "a man", particularly one who is polite, proper, and well-mannered, functioning as an honorific for males. In the social context of 19th-century Britain, "gentleman" was far from a neutral title; it carried a clear social hierarchy connotation, referring to upper-class men who owned land, did not need to work, and possessed gentlemanly demeanor and moral cultivation. It is not only a symbol of social status but also a representation of cultural capital. Translating 客 as *gentleman* seems to be a choice of translation wording superficially, but in fact, it is a underlying discourse operation.

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Presupposing the 客 as the upper class of society above the servant and depicting it as a fixed and insurmountable hierarchical relationship. The servants, through various behavioral cues, such as rising, standing aside, yielding the way, and responding softly and slowly, demonstrate absolute deference to the gentleman.

In terms of behavioral norms, the translation meticulously describes the postures and verbal protocols that servants must adhere to when encountering a gentleman in different settings, whether at the gate, on the road, or in another's home. These behavioral details were perceived by Western observers as emblematic of the externalized and ritualized manifestations of China's social hierarchy, serving as a crucial lens for understanding its social structure. These translations have presented Western readers with a highly structured and ritualized depiction of Chinese society: the first one is Chinese strict hierarchy. There are clear and unbreachable boundaries between social members, particularly between masters and servants, the superior and the subordinate. The second one is primacy of ritual**.** The cornerstone of social order lies in the intricate and omnipresent *ritual propriety* (礼)*,* reflected in every gesture, expression, and tone of daily life. The third is externalized morality and master-servant unity**.** An individual's inner virtue was believed to be directly and inevitably expressed through their own and their subordinates' outward conduct. A servant's behavior acted as a barometer of the master's moral character, binding the two together in moral evaluation. The fourth is that great significance is embodied in seemingly small matters. What Westerners might regard as trivial daily behaviors were, in the Chinese cultural context, endowed with significant functions, judging character, family upbringing, and even the stability of social order. The translations in this part have constructed an image of Chinese society where hierarchical distinctions are rigidly maintained, ritual propriety governs interactions, morality is performative, and seemingly minor actions carry profound ethical weight, an interpretation that resonated with Western perceptions of China's social dynamics.

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The Canton Miscellany has presented a distinctive perspective on Chinese society through its analysis of social ethics: on marriage customs and family order, taking arranged marriages as an example, it critiques the suppression of women and the disregard for individual autonomy in the pursuit of familial interests. From a civilizational comparative lens, through details such as servant protocols, it highlights the rigid hierarchies within Chinese domestic order, reflecting the strict regulation and constraints imposed on individual behavior in traditional society. By framing these observations, the journal constructs an image of China as a culture where patriarchal structures dominate, personal agency is often subordinated to collective demands, and social discipline is maintained through meticulous codes of conduct.

From political systems and religious beliefs to social ethics, *The Canton Miscellany* has constructed Chinese society in progressively deep layers. Yet behind all these critical observations lies an even more hidden but crucial dimension: the presentation of language and cultural symbols. The translation and interpretation of Chinese idioms, moral concepts, and auspicious symbols constitute China's otherness at the level of discourse operations. By selective presentation, quantitative categorization, and biased translation strategies, the core symbols of Chinese culture are incorporated into the Western rationalist cognitive framework, ultimately stereotyping of China as the "Other".

3.4 Representation and Translation of Linguistic-Cultural Symbols: Comprehension and Divergence

Both the first issue and the second issue of *The Canton Miscellany* featured a dedicated column titled *Chinese Phrases*. The contributor provided headings for each Chinese phrase, and notably offered English translations with explanations to aid readers' comprehension. Among these, the entries that best reflect the views on China are as follows:

Example 1： UNACCOUNTABLE PREDELICTIONS (*The Canton Miscellany*, 1831, p.28).

Chinese Versions	Translated Versions and Notes

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好为僧者**梁武帝**	The **Emperor Woo-te**, of the Dynasty Leang, was fond of being a Budh Priest.
好作道士者**宋徽宗**	**Hwuy-tsung,** an Emperor of the Sung Dynasty, was fond of being a Priest of the Taou Sect.
好偷狗屠沽并受杖者**东昏侯**	And the Nobleman **Tung-kwăn How**, was fond of stealing dogs, butchering and selling them; and then getting bastinadoed for the same.

This example reflects an exoticized and stereotyped portrayal of Chinese rulers from an Orientalist perspective. The entry deliberately focuses on monarchs from Chinese history who were later deemed eccentric or met tragic ends, such as Emperor Woo-te, whose excessive patronage of Buddhism led to his dynasty's collapse; Emperor Hwuy-tsung, whose devotion to Daoism resulted in his capture; and Tung-kwăn How, whose debauchery led to his assassination, labeling their behaviors as "unaccountable predilections". The title "Unaccountable Predilections" carries connotations of irrationality and strangeness. While the translated annotations are factually accurate to some extent, the selective emphasis on these specific cases, framed as inexplicable quirks, reveals the compilers' or editors' (missionaries/observers from the West) viewpoints: portraying certain actions of Chinese rulers, particularly those involving religion or unconventional lifestyles, as curiosities or irrational Oriental traits. This reinforces Western stereotypes of Chinese autocracy and Oriental mysticism, presenting them through a lens of otherness and reinforcing reductive tropes about Eastern despotism and exoticism.

Example 2： MANDARIN MERITS (*The Canton Miscellany*, 1831, pp.69-70).

Chinese Versions	Translated Versions and Notes
捕蝗尽力	To persecute locusts with intense zeal.
遇小歉设法煮粥赈济	when a bad harvest occurs to adopt measures to boil congee and give it to the poor.

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时疫盛行开局医疗	when epidemics prevail to open dispensaries to cure the sick, constitute **fifty degrees** of merit.
人命细验伤痕或故或误	In homicidal cases to ascertain with care, the wounds and scars thereby to know whether the Killing was intentional or not.
禁溺女恶习	To interdict the wicked custom of drowning infant girls.
禁秽溺字纸	To interdict sinking in dirty water, printed written papers, **One hundred degrees** of merit.
禁宰耕牛	To interdict the killing of agricultural cows.
祈雨祈晴至诚动天	To pay for rain，or to pray for fair weather with so much sincerity as to move Heaven to grant what is prayed for
兴行教化风移俗易	To promote education so as to reform the manners of the people---Constitute **ten thousand degrees** of merit.

This case exemplifies an attempt to quantify and systematize the understanding of China's bureaucratic system, social customs, and moral concepts, particularly the notion of merit influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism. The entry meticulously enumerates various actions through which local Chinese officials (Mandarin) were believed to accumulate "merit" (功德), covering diverse domains such as public administration (locust eradication, disaster relief, medical aid), judicial justice (meticulous handling of homicide cases), social reform (prohibiting female infanticide, forbidding the desecration of written paper, banning the slaughter of plough oxen), religious rituals (praying for rain or clear weather) and moral education (promoting virtuous teachings among the populace). The compilers painstakingly quantified and ranked these actions by perceived importance (e.g., 50 degrees, 100 degrees, or 10,000 degrees of merit). Notably, the annotations highlight that "drowning female infants" and "defiling written paper" were considered equally meritorious, while "banning ox slaughter" held the same merit value as "prohibiting female infanticide". This reflects the compilers' effort

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to interpret and rationalize China's unique moral logic, such as Confucian filial piety, the reverence for written words in the Wenchang cult, and Buddhist non-violence combined with agrarian society's reliance on cattle. The highest merit (10,000 degrees) was reserved for acts like sincerely moving Heaven through prayers and transformative moral education, demonstrating the compilers' recognition of Confucian concepts like "Heavenly Mandate resonance" (天人感应) and governance through virtue.

Overall, this entry reveals a strong Western impulse to fit China's complex, context-dependent moral norms, bureaucratic duties, and folk beliefs into a quantifiable, categorizable, and rationally understandable framework. While it demonstrates meticulous observation, it also reflects the 19th-century Western tendency to analyze distinctly Chinese (or Oriental) concepts through foreign paradigms, such as quantifying "merit". This approach, though containing elements of objective description, inevitably involves simplification, categorization, and to some degree, misinterpretation. It epitomizes the Western colonial-era endeavor to systematically know China while simultaneously refracting its realities through an external lens.

The concluding section of the second issue in *The Canton Miscellany* featured an article titled *Specimens of Chinese Writing and Printing,* accompanied by multiple illustrations. One of these page displayed three Chinese characters:福(*Fú*), 禄 (*Lù*), and 寿(*Shòu*), handwritten by the contributor, each annotated with English translations: *Prosperity, Government annuity*, and *Longevity* respectively. *Prosperity* emphasized material prosperity and wealth accumulation, which was the quantifiable well-being that utilitarianism paid the most attention to. This translated term *Prosperity* emphasized material abundance while neglecting the spiritual dimensions of well-being, peace, and health intrinsic in the Chinese concept. 禄 as *Government annuity* directly linked to the salary of official positions, simplifying the pursuit of fame and fortune in the Chinese civil service system into materialized annuity income. Its true cultural connotation, career success and social advancement, would be better captured by

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a translation like "career success".寿 was translated as *Longevity, which was* relatively neutral, but it was also incorporated into the framework of pursuing worldly blessings. A note at the bottom of the image stated "these are the three words which comprise the sum of Chinese bliss" (*The Canton Miscellany* 1831, p.141). The choice of the word sum has reflected the quantitative idea of utilitarianism. It infers that happiness can be summed up and calculated. But in fact, 福,禄, and 寿 are among the most fundamental auspicious symbols in traditional Chinese culture, embodying a holistic vision of the good life.

The core symbols of Chinese culture have thus been stripped of their spiritual connotations and ethical implications in the eyes of Western readers, and have become quantitative indicators within the framework of utilitarianism. These translation strategies have constructed China as a material East that pursues secular happiness, while the West possesses the superiority of civilization in the pursuit of spirit. While this perspective reflects the historical limitations of 19th-century cross-cultural encounters, it also reveals a genuine Western attempt to interpret Chinese culture through its own epistemological logic, a telling artifact of early Sino-Western intellectual engagement.

4. Causal Analysis of the Western Views on China in *The Canton Miscellany*

At the beginning of 19th century, Western perceptions of China underwent a critical shift, transitioning from earlier idealization to gradual demonization and vilification. The formation of views on China in *The Canton Miscellany* was by no means accidental, but rather the result of multiple interacting factors, reflecting the historical context and social environment of the time.

4.1 Western Fascination with China and the Quest for Exploration

In the early 19th century, the West was undergoing rapid development, with an ever-growing desire to explore the world. As an ancient Eastern civilization, China, with its profound historical heritage and splendid cultural legacy, had long captivated Western attention. There

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was a keen interest in understanding China's politics, economy, and culture, driven by both intellectual curiosity and the pursuit of material gain. Advances in navigation technology facilitated increased contact between the West and China, further fueling Westerners' fascination and prompting them to seek deeper knowledge through various means.

The Canton Miscellany, as a prominent media outlet of the time, aligned with this trend by actively disseminating information about China, satisfying Western readers' thirst for knowledge. However, an analysis of its content selection reveals an Orientalist perspective that inherently upheld the West as the benchmark of civilization and progress while framing the East as a backward "Other". As Ziauddin (1999, p.60) critiques, "the achievement of the Orient, their contributions to science and learning, were deliberately ignored or suppressed. On the whole, they were deemed to be of little or no value and denigrated…Colonialism was thus absolved from all guilt". Consequently, the editors often operated with preconceived biases, favoring works that either exoticized or disparaged non-Western countries. This tendency laid bare the deep-seated roots of Western exceptionalism and its ideological drive to reinforce its own values. The subjectivity of editorial choices in *The Canton Miscellany* laid bare the rising cultural hegemony, ethnocentrism, and discriminatory attitudes toward other cultures that became increasingly pronounced of the West in the 19th century.

This desire for exploration is not a pure pursuit of knowledge, but is inseparable from the will to power of colonial expansion. Just as Foucault (1980，p.93）said, "basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse". The establishment and operation of *The Canton Miscellany* were led by the East India Company, and its knowledge production naturally served the commercial and political interests of the United Kingdom in China. This kind of knowledge serving power in turn constructed

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China as an "Other" that needed to be examined, judged and transformed by the West, thereby providing cultural legitimacy for colonial expansion.

4.2 The Impetus of Commercial Interests

As one of the key institutions of British power in China in the first half of the 19th century, the East India Company not only monopolized trade, its hired personnel also constituted an important source of the author group of *The Canton Miscellany*. These knowledge producers transformed their observations into authoritative knowledge about China. However, the production process of this knowledge was always constrained by the framework of colonial interests: the negative description of the Qing government strengthened the narrative of civilizing China, the repeated exaggeration of trade barriers provided reasons for military intervention, and the assertion of stagnation in Chinese society hinted at the necessity of colonial management.

At that time, the commercial forces of Western nations were continuously expanding, and China's vast market and abundant resources held tremendous appeal for them. To better conduct trade with China, Western merchants needed to understand the political, economic, and social conditions of China to formulate appropriate business strategies. The contents in *The Canton Miscellany* regarding China's commercial policies, market conditions, and other aspects have provided valuable references for Western merchants. For example, reports on China's trade regulations and taxation policies in this journal helped Western merchants understand the rules and costs of conducting business in China, enabling them to better plan their commercial activities and secure greater profits. However, as Wang (2011, p.28) observed, "In the grand Western imagination, the 'Orient' serves as the 'Other' that validates the Western cultural mirror". Lin (2018, p.158) further notes, "The 'Oriental image' constructed by the West does not truly aim to understand or represent Eastern reality but rather functions as a metaphorical expression of Western cultural self-identity". The perception of China reflected

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in *The Canton Miscellany* was predominantly negative, not to help Western readers understand Chinese culture but to regard China as the "Other" to reinforce Western self-identity and superiority. By portraying China as barbaric and backward, the West highlighted its own civilization and progress. China became the mirror of the Western "Self", embodying the early Orientalist mindset. As Said (1979, p.1) pointed out, "The Orient is one of [Europe's] deepest and most recurring images of the Other". China, as this mirror, reinforced Western superiority. Orientalists believed that the West was advanced, superior, progressive, and civilized, while the East was diminished as backward, stagnant, barbaric, and ignorant (Wang, 2006). Thus, this deliberately constructed "Other" essentially served as a discursive tool for Western commercial capital to legitimize its market expansion strategies, cloaking economic interests in the guise of civilizing missions.

From *The Canton Miscellany* in the early 19th century to contemporary Western media, Orientalism, as a discourse of power, has persisted throughout the historical trajectory of Sino-Western interactions. Its influence extends beyond commerce and is deeply embedded in cultural cognition, shaping perceptions to this day.

4.3 Cultural Differences and Misunderstandings

In Said's view, "Orientalism was a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them'). This vision in a sense created and then served the two worlds thus conceived" (Said, 1979, pp.43–44). The Orientalist's narcissistic complex drives the construction of the Orient as the "Other": the more the identity of the Orient diverges from Western self-perception, distorted into the antithesis of Western consciousness, the more it serves to inflate the West's sense of cultural superiority through binary opposition. As Ziauddin (1999, p.105) asserts, "The Orient is there always as a measure of Otherness, as a permanent witness to the superiority of the Western civilization and an eternal justification for the domination of the West over the

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non-West". The profound cultural differences between China and the West inevitably led to misunderstandings in Western interpretations of China. While Western culture centers on individualism, freedom, and equality, Chinese tradition emphasizes collectivism and hierarchical order. This divergence made it challenging for Westerners to comprehend China's political systems and social customs. Politically, they struggled to grasp the mechanisms and cultural underpinnings of China's imperial autocracy; culturally, they often interpreted Chinese customs and conceptions of happiness through their own lens, resulting in reductive critiques. These misperceptions permeated in *The Canton Miscellany*, distorting Western readers' understanding of China.

Despite increased Sino-Western contact during that period, information remained limited. Authors of this journal relied primarily on foreign merchants, missionaries, and other expatriates in China, sources whose perspectives were inherently constrained. Their exposure was largely confined to coastal urban centers, leaving interior regions poorly understood; their focus on commercial and diplomatic affairs overshadowed nuanced engagement with Chinese culture and social life. Such narrow channels of information and observational biases resulted in a conspicuously lopsided portrayal of China in *The Canton Miscellany*.

5. Conclusion

As Lin (2025, p. 192) advocated a shift "from perceptual to cognitive intelligence through explainable, knowledge-integrated reasoning", cross-cultural inquiry should go beyond the surface-level text and strive for deep reasoning about ideological and cognitive structures. The contributors to *The Canton Miscellany* articulated a multifaceted perspective on China through their writings on its political institutions, social culture, and folk customs. While undeniably subjective, these records crystallized a historical community's concrete observations of Chinese society. "The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said, 1979, pp.1–2). Yet *The Canton*

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Miscellany epitomizes a classic mirror of the "Other". Its interpretations of China's politics, religion, ethics, and symbolic systems were steeped in the Orientalist paradigm of the 19th century's colonial expansion era.

Through narratives of autocracy, such as depictions of diplomatic clashes between the Qing government and the Amherst Mission over ceremonial protocols, or sensationalized accounts of Empress Wu Zetian's tyranny, it shaped readers' impressions of Chinese politics as inherently barbaric. By exoticizing Daoist mysticism and marvels, it reinforced notions of Eastern "irrationality". Demystifying symbols like 福, 禄, and 寿, or quantifying bureaucratic merit systems, it constructed a binary opposition between a materialistic China and a spiritual West. Even seemingly "objective" details, such as codes for servants' conduct or itemized lists of officials' virtues, served Eurocentric cognition, reinforcing civilizational hierarchies that justified imperial expansion. Today, while acknowledging these texts' value as historical mirrors, we must expose the undercurrents of power in their knowledge production. When China was reduced to a set of symbols as autocratic, mystical, and utilitarian, what emerged was not an authentic portrait of civilization, but the projective desires of a colonial West seeking self-validation.

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