

Cultural Self-identity in "the Other"

A Study on Chinese Images in *Country Driving**

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Abstract—The paper starts with a theoretical statement of "the Other", explaining "China in the Other" under the perspective of Orientalism, on which, a practical deconstruction will be related to details in *Country Driving*. And the changing of "China in the Other" and its essential will also be figured out, that is, the new presentation of "China in the Other" and the orientalist Chinese images. By observing a certain theory connected with the cultural self-identity, it is derived out that the thinking model of binary opposition needs to be deconstructed. A set of valuable bases from anti-essentialism to anti-intermediateness to the viewpoint of identity, and the thinking routine or practical direction from self-orientalization to self-westernization to the Orientalism-occidentalism, have stated that the cultural self-identity had to run away the west-tropism, at the same time, regarding it as an example or pathway for drawing its good. But the most significant is to focus on our traditional culture in a real self-identity.

Keywords—the Other; the self; self-orientalization; self-westernization; the orientalism-occidentalism

I. INTRODUCTION

Both "self" and "identity" are of cultural significance. The Self is opposite to the Other, and different objects mean different things. "Identity" refers to individual image or national image as a whole. The identification of cultural self-identity, in the cross-cultural sense, refers to the thinking path, value basis and forming process related to the verification of "cultural identity" in Chinese image or the image of China.

Firstly, the theoretical expression of "the Other" mainly involves the "China in the Other" from the perspective of Orientalism. It is stated from the concept of Orientalism to the presentation of "the Other" in Orientalism, the purpose of which is to touch on the expression of "China in the Other" and to point out that essentialism is the basis for the dilemma of the thinking mode of binary opposition between China and the West. Secondly, the paper will combine with the deconstructed practice derived from the author's vision in the targeted literary text, to analyze the change and essence of "China in the Other", that is, Hessler's new presentation of "China in the Other" and Chinese images interpreted by the

Orientalism. Hessler's perspectives, seemingly, have a new illustration. In fact, it still reveals the nature of Orientalism. Finally, the theoretical expression of cultural self-identity mainly includes three levels of value basis which mean "anti-essentialism", "anti-intermediateness" and the viewpoint of identity. In addition, from "self-orientalization" to "self-westernization" to "Oriental-occidentalism", the thinking path or practical direction all directs to deconstructing an idea of binary opposition between the Self and the Other, at the same time, leading to an integration of the Self and the Other, promoting a formation of cultural self-identity.

II. THE THEORETICAL STATEMENT OF "THE OTHER"

The theoretical expression of "the Other" mainly is reflected on the "China in the other" from the perspective of Orientalism. The concept of Orientalism and "the Other" in Orientalism are interpreted to indicate the expression of "China in the Other", thus leading to the essence of the thinking mode of binary opposition between China and the West.

Said's Orientalism has multiple interpretations. He believes that "Orientalism is a set of western knowledge structures about the eastern world; it represents a binary opposition between the East and the West, and in this relationship the West uses different texts to shape the image of the East; it is also a privileged discourse, which is a mechanism dealing the East with the methods of description, teaching, colonization, and domination etc.; the concept of the East in Said's awareness is not a realization of geography, but a cultural and political reality" [11].

According to Said's Orientalism, it can be known that "the Other" in Orientalism is based on western knowledge structures about the East which lies in a subordinate position in the binary opposition and is echoed on the western way of thinking and values, assuming the role of the weak under the western system of powerful discourse. "The Other is opposite to the Self, which means that people and things outside of the Self in the fields of western philosophy, psychology, literature, cultural research and so forth have an interpretation of the Other. The Other in western culture signifies marginal, subordinate, inferior, oppressed and excluded" [13]. In Said's Orientalism related to the relationship of binary opposition, there is even an idea of "intermediateness" [11]: The intermediate object is a middle

*Fund: Supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities, Southwest Minzu University. Item Number: 2018YXXS09.

of binary opposition, that is, a middle of the Self and the Other; At this moment, the East is not "the Other" and is outside of "the Self". In other words, it lies in an intermediate state. This is actually another expression of the Other. The East in the binary opposition that was originally dominated by the West is only the Other in silence. More embarrassingly, the East becomes the identity of intermediateness between the binary oppositions. On the one hand, the East has long been shackled by the Western central discourse system. Therefore, the East could only accept passively the stereotype of Orientalism in the Western context. On the other hand, the East needs to bear the responsibility of local culture for the Self's cognition. At the same time, it is necessary to define the Other correctly and objectively.

The expression of "China in the Other". China under the perspective of Orientalism is the Other which is utopian and ideological. "From the standpoint of postmodern knowledge of cross-cultural imagology, the image of China is a metaphor of western cultural spirit with modernity. Meanwhile, it also is the cultural Other constructed by western culture to identify with itself in the conceptual order of world"[15]. The so-called "cultural Other" is essentially embodied in an idealized utopia or dreadful ideology. "The image of China is the Other's mirror, that is, image of modern Western culture. It can be an idealized utopia for a desire or yearning, representing self-denial and self-transcendence. It may also be of ugliness, showing the ideology of fear and rejection, and meeting the needs of self-confirmation and self-consolidation" [9] [16]. Karl Mannheim had a further understanding to the utopia and ideology, that is, "the utopia is transcendent and subversive social imagination, while ideology is integrated and consolidated social imagination. In a specific historical process, a utopia may be transformed into an ideology, and an ideology may be replaced by a utopia" [10]. The specific connotation of utopia and ideology reflected by two kinds of the Other's mirror, in fact, it revealed that the self-construction of western modernity benefits from the realization of Western Chinese image.

The thinking mode of dual opposition between the West in the Self and China in Other is truly an ideological dogma operating on the basis of self-consciousness in "essentialism", which places western values in the image of China and constructs its inherent Chinese image of Orientalism. "Essentialism is a doctrine which ascribes some fixed qualities or natures as a universal existence to certain persons... The basic principle of the stereotypical categorization in any culture is to operate in an essentialist way" [2].

III. HESSLER'S DECONSTRUCTED PRACTICES OF "CHINA IN THE OTHER"

Hessler is an American journalist and writer. *Country Driving* is the last work of his trilogy related to China in documentary literature. By experiencing a journey through China, the author describes a lonesome and dilapidated northern countryside along the Great Wall, the rapid development of China's automobile industry made a great

change in the countryside, as well as the urban life of the industrial towns in southeast China. It involves the images of farmers, workers, businessmen, intellectuals, officials and politicians and so on. The author places these Chinese images in the background of reform and opening up, trying to capture the pulse of modern China and the external or internal changes that people have experienced. Hessler's deconstructed practice of "China in the Other" mainly includes two aspects, namely the new expression of "China in the Other" and Chinese images interpreted by the Orientalism.

The new expression of "China in the Other" from the author's perspective, on the one hand, makes the West a weak utopian imagination to China in the traditional sense. *Country Driving* belongs to a non-fiction novel, which contains documentary features to a certain extent dispels the inherent impression of "China in the Other" in the West. Hessler's journey from east to west and from north to south penetrates into the contemporary reality of China and the lives of ordinary people, making China step out of the definition of "cultural and political reality" and getting into a real geographical existence. China has become an aesthetic image rather than a completely subordinate that is the Other. Hessler tries to view China with an equal and objective assessment in line with increasingly similar political, economic and socio-ecological definitions from the West. On the other hand, he tried to banish the influence of socio-political ideologies in the West. In the early days, along with the founding of new China, the West and China are embodied in dual opposition between socialism and capitalism in terms of political system and economic development. Through the description of China's poverty and backwardness in the eyes of the West, it represented the superiority of the Western capitalist system and social development.

By going through the reform and opening up, China's economy is developed rapidly. Therefore, the discourse of "China Threat Theory" has emerged around the world, especially in the West, "the real source is from the United States of vigilance or worry" [9]. The China Threat Theory, essentially, is still a production impacted by the thinking model of dual opposition between China and the West. However, Hessler is trying to shield the Western traditional ideology in this text, namely the negative impact of Orientalism. He positively steps into normal persons' life in China today and feels deeply the development of China. Meanwhile, he brings about skeptical observation and affirmative attitude in the respect of China's development, using a multi-angle and multi-level anatomy to depict the reality and change in contemporary China. Based on the process of change in this land, Hessler describes colorful details in individual experience connected with ups and downs, exploring the individual's spiritual predicament and its root under the background of reform and opening-up. In some degree, the author breaks the absoluteness of dual opposition between China and the West, recording a relatively objective and real China and describing a number of new Chinese images. In fact, the Chinese images in the novel are a partly deconstructed attempt to the thinking mode

of binary opposition. Even if not completely deconstruction in Hessler's view, the cultures between the two sides based on the continuance to deepen the communication are to be influenced each other and interconnected increasingly. At the same time, the cultural self-identification of Chinese characteristics in a new age also has been gradually formed and developed.

Chinese images interpreted by the Orientalism refer to essentially that the Chinese image interpreted by Hessler is still the continuation of the western utopian imagination and ideological prejudice. His objective and true description cannot relatively change his potential "orientalist thinking". This is why he is limited to "partial deconstruction" rather than "complete deconstruction". Western utopian imagination of China is a completely set of western explanation and cognitive system on Chinese, which is continual, collective and distorted. Hessler's description with a utopian style is reflected as "a social imagination divorced from reality and beyond reality" [10]. He observes between ancient China and modern China. And he investigates between the multi-ethnic relations in China and the political discourse of western imagination. The presence of Chinese history with the transition from the old to the new contains a continuation of the nation, which is a kind of mysterious, time-honored and perfect cultural image, conveying Chinese imagination of many western countries. Ideology is dormant in the western-centered discourse system and exists for the purpose of maintaining the western-dominated world order and colonial thinking. A lot of description of China's political and social transformation showed by the author reflects the ideological bias of the western way. In his sense, the formation of Chinese imagination or Chinese image is a fusion of ancient China and contemporary China, as well as a combination of documentary style and literary techniques. It is a kind of "half-real and half-illusory" exotic image.

The author's initial understanding of China is still based on the previous consciousness of "the image of China in the West". The difference between Chinese culture and American culture in the political system is different between socialism and capitalism, as well as different between Chinese irrationality and western rationality. In the writing, through a comparison between Chinese and western cultures, Hessler strengthened his recognition and sense of superiority to the American political system, which indicates that his narration about China still cannot escape from the bondage of American values. In most cases, Mao's images are depicted as "political dictators", representing cultural revolution and spiritual disaster which are an ignorant and arrogant stereotype [6]. In ancient China, the relationship between the Han Chinese in central plain and ethnic minorities in northern China or southern China has been misinterpreted as the relationship between the modern United States and al-Qaeda [6]. All of these are the result of influencing from western utopian illusion and political ideology. In the novel, he describes many "Chinese problems", such as, people's loss of social responsibility and the prevalence of speculation adventurism, imperfect establishment in community, the rapidly economic growth at the expense of polluting environment as well as unhealthy

development model [6], which are that the author puts China in the western context, ignores the particularity of Chinese society, and abandons the basic national conditions of that the development in China stays a special phase.

As a foreign writer, Hessler is destined to be unable to represent and understand deeply the subjective expression in the presence of China. The explanation of "China problem" in the work has congenital deficiency and tends to be "unreal China". Hessler's illustration about China leads to the loss of subjectivity, which is the result of his growth in the Western context and his personal professional identities. The inevitable tendency stays merely to strengthen China's side as an objective existence. The interpretation of "China in the Other" is still a continuation of the same western values, that is to say, China is still a side of weakness in need of salvation. Chinese utopia as an image meets with Chinese reality which is in a relatively objective and true, falling back into "unreal real" and "real fantasy". He cannot still escape western utopian imagination and ideological bias. Starting from deconstructing Chinese images in the West, he ends in the inherent image of China in the West. Hessler lost himself in the trap of "partial deconstruction".

IV. THE THEORETICAL EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL SELF-IDENTITY

In Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space theory, the three levels of "anti-essentialism", "anti-intermediateness" and the views on identity all lead to the deconstruction of the binary opposition which in fact relates to the thinking mode of "the Self" and "the Other" between the East and the West. The deconstruction will provide a specific value foundation for the confirmation of cultural self-identity. In addition, the thinking path from "self-orientalization" to "self-westernization" to "Oriental-Occidentalism" reflects that it has to avoid the dilemma of self-orientalization and self-westernization, to understand the practical direction of Orientalism-occidentalism in intercultural communication, and to direct to the idea of deconstructing absolute dual opposition for establishing a thinking routine of cultural self-identity.

In reality, people often "confused about their own cultural identity, pressed by a psychology of identity loss, and pursued the cultural identity under the influence of the multicultural mixture of heterogeneous culture and local culture"[14]. In multicultural context, the search for cultural self-identity can't deviate from the existence of "the Other". But at the same time, Chinese society is not perfect to digest western values. Therefore, the confirmation process of "the Self" via "the Other" can only regard the western standard as references and ways, and to study the local culture as the core object for seeking self-value and pursuing the establishment of the voice. This case, in form, exists consistency with that the West has built a cultural self-identification on the basis of "the image of China in the West". When China is in the process of building self-image, it's easy to walk into an embarrassment of "self-orientalization" or "self-westernization". However, the real claim is to pursuit a difference from western approach by the

deconstruction of the thinking mode of binary opposition in interconnection of "the Self" and "the Other".

A. *The Three Levels of "Anti-essentialism", "Anti-intermediateness" and the Views on Identity*

The idea of anti-essentialism is based on the thought of "essentialism" mentioned above. It is a deconstruction of the thinking mode of binary opposition between the East and the West. Homi K. Bhabha argued that "...in the process of cultural translation there opens up a 'space-in-between', an interstitial temporality, that stands in contention with both the return to an original 'essentialist' self-consciousness as well as a release into an endlessly fragmented subject in 'process' [1]. The spatiality and timeliness are actually operated under the thought of "anti-essentialism", which emphasizes the subjectivity of the reconstruction for cultural self-identity. Anti-essentialism is related to the multi-cultural view of cultural identity and the reconstruction of self-identity, that is to say, "anti-essentialism cultural identity is to use the multi-cultural view for integrating initiatively the internal culture and foreign culture, and is the reconstruction of original identity" [14]. Based on the thought of "anti-essentialism", the East and the West are no longer in the absolute binary opposition, but are with the purpose to achieve the goal of cultural identity reconstruction through the thinking path of "anti-essentialism".

The idea of "anti-intermediateness" [1] is derived from Said's thought of intermediateness which is used for interpreting the conditions between the East and the West. Said argued that the West holds the East's right of speech. Homi Bhabha considers that the eastern discourse is not necessarily in the hands of the West. "The expression of western discourse to the East reveals a profound state of contradiction, which points to 'the nature of Other' that is both the targets of desire and ridicule" [12]. The relationship between the East and the West is in a complex and contradictory situation. It is not a simple binary relationship. The Eastern world also has its own right of speech and aims to break the western colonial thinking on the East.

The idea of identity in Homi Bhabha's concept of "anti-intermediateness" connects the Self to the Other closely. He argues that "identity is an intersubjective, performative act that refuses the division of public/private, psyche/social. It is not a "self-given" to consciousness, but a "coming-to-consciousness" of the self through the realm of symbolic otherness – language, the social system, the unconscious" [1]. To clarify the inseparable relationship between the Self and the Other, especially the attempt of the Self construct itself through the Other, is a deconstruction of the binary opposition pattern, and the construction of self-identity and the pursuit of multicultural identity all depend on such a practice of deconstruction.

The self-identification of China's image needs to break out of the shackle of "China in the Other" under the western discourse system, and reconstruct a new set of self-mechanisms with the help of "anti-essentialism", "anti-intermediateness" and "the views on identity". This process is related to the course of cultural self-identity confirmation.

B. *The Practical Direction from Self-orientalization to Self-westernization to the Orientalism-occidentalism*

The self-orientalization derived from Said's orientalism, which is "an extended understanding of orientalism. It mainly refers to that writers with Oriental cultural identity imagine and create themselves in the way that the West imagines themselves, and affirm and confirm themselves from the differences between themselves and the western culture, and 'self-reproduction' in cross-cultural creation" [4]. Zhouning believes that there are two kinds of "orientalism", "the one is negative and ideological orientalism and the other is positive and utopian orientalism. The former constructs an inferior, passive, depraved and evil eastern image and becomes such a 'careful planning' of the western imperialist ideology. The latter, however, idealizes the East as a paradise of happiness and wisdom which becomes a utopia beyond criticism of western social ideology in different times". [17] Thus it can be seen that the self-orientalization draws more nutrients from the affirmative and utopian orientalism. The East is forced to play a role of passive party so that the western political, economic and cultural values can be presented in the eastern countries, which is the process of realization of "self-orientalization". Zhouning explores that "the process of 'self-orientalization' includes the eastern tendency to identify with the West, the radical westernization of the East through 'de-orientalization', or the expression of so-called 'Oriental tradition' in the western ideological order"[9]. The former is a complete negation of its own tradition. The latter tries to emphasize its own tradition through "de-westernization" in many cases, but it is still in the western value system. Behind the "orientalization of the Self", there exists an essence of operational mode that is western modernity discourse. The consequence of which often leads to the absolute dilemma of the binary opposition between the East and the West.

Self-westernization is an extension of the concept of Occidentalism. "Occidentalism is the self-orientalization of the East and the imagination of fight back or revenge against the West... a set of fictions and discourses about the West in non-western countries or regions with a strong ideology of dual opposition". [9] Occidentalism is just as a definition of "negative, ideological, inferior, passive, degenerated and evil image" in Zhouning's works, but the considered object has changed from the negative side of Orientalism in the West to the negative side of Occidentalism in the East. Similarly, Zhouning also believes that there are two kinds of "Occidentalism". In addition to the negative side of emphasizing resentment, religious and nationalist fanaticism mentioned above, "Occidentalism also includes proactive contents and rational moderation. The self-imagination of non-western countries (or nations) to beautify and westernize the West is also a part of Occidentalism". [9] Like the self-orientalization, the self-westernization, whether from the negative side or the positive side, will re-enter an absolute dilemma of the binary opposition between the East and the West. Both "de-westernization" and "de-easternization" contain the same western nature.

Self-orientalization or self-westernization is an embodiment of self-imagination in Chinese modernity. The

image of China in the West is deconstructed in Cross-cultural imagology which should also deconstruct the image of China in China or China's self-imagination. The difference of self-imagination in Chinese modernity lies not only in knowledge and idea, but in value and power [16]. On the one hand, the East has long been under the western discourse, in this situation, it has always desired to seek the self-value and the rise of power; On the other hand, the confirmation of cultural self-identity or the construction of national image depends on a part of values in western discourse. If the Self cannot break away from the chain in the shadow of the giant Other, it is bound to enter a traditional dilemma of binary opposition.

Therefore, "what really needs to be deconstructed is not western modernity itself and the knowledge-power network of China's image constructed by western modernity, but the modernity thinking mode of the binary opposition between China and the West"[16]. The self-confirm for the image of China can be built on the western outstanding values which are without distortion in an objective position. The definite identification for the modern scientific progress in the West, political democracy, the rational civilization is different from the nature of the Occidentalism which is in contrast with the Orientalism that have revealed. That is to say, what it has mentioned above is not "a fiction and narration of the western discourse with a strong sense of ideology", moreover, it is also not "to beautify the West and westernized self-imagination". Recognizing the excellent values of the West is not the only choice of China's self-identification, but only a way where the western standard is a reference. In this process, China needs to avoid the two extremes of "self-orientalization" and "self-westernization", escaping the absolute dilemma of binary opposition between the East and the West.

It seeks "active ingredients" from the long-standing Chinese civilization, which do not contradict with pursuing the "valid reference" from the western civilization. In the situation of globalization and integration of the world, it can be built a relatively complete and productive image of China and Chinese value. Both deciphering the thinking model of binary opposition between China and the West, and cognizing the cultural identity of the Other are parallel, which don't interfere with each other. Zhouning has put forward a concept called "Orientalism-Occidentalism" so as to prove "the most complete expression of the most constructive cross-cultural practice in the modern world", that is, "Orientalism and Occidentalism are interrelated and exchanged with each other, and there is a so-called 'correlational region' between the two. The Occidentalism not only draws the resources of self-affirmation from the romantic eastern sentiment of Orientalism, but also establishes its own direction of modernization from the ideological resources of self-affirmation of Orientalism the West has absorbed". [9]

V. CONCLUSION

From the theoretical expression of "the Other" to Hessler's de-constructual practice of "China in the Other" to the theoretic illustration of cultural self-identity, it is the

embodiment of the style of "theory-text-theory" in this paper. The former with theory-text reflects the idea of extending theory to text and mapping theory from text. The latter with text-theory reflects the exploration and analysis of the text, which provides a certain reference and approach for another theoretical expression which is also the core of this paper. However, the two parts related to the theoretical expressions are far away from each other, which actually imitates "the interpretation of the interpretation" based on theoretical level. Such a style of writing points to the same problem, that is, the problem of cultural self-identity. Its core is to deconstruct the binary opposition between "the Self" and "the Other".

To be specific, the image of "China in the Other" in the western context is in the contradiction of the binary opposition. Deconstructing the image of "China in the Other" in Orientalism is actually the thinking mode of deconstructing the binary opposition between "the Self" and "the Other". In the literary text, the author's deconstruction of "China in the Other" is the embodiment of "the Self" who is regarded as "the Other" in the eyes of "the Other". Whether "new change" or "invariable essence", it provides a thinking direction for the confirmation of cultural self-identity. On the one hand, the cultural self-identity cannot be confirmed without the presence of "the Other"; On the other hand, it is easy to enter into a dilemma of "self-orientalization" or "self-westernization".

From "anti-essentialism", "anti-intermediateness" to "the views on identity", and from self-orientalization, self-westernization to the Orientalism-Occidentalism, which all point to the deconstruction of thinking mode of binary opposition between the East and the West. At the same time, it provides valuable base, thinking path and practical direction for the cultural self-identity confirmation. To confirm the cultural self-identity, it is necessary to get out of the western-centered discourse system and reconstruct a new set of self-mechanisms with the help of "anti-essentialism", "anti-intermediateness" and "the views on identity". It is necessary to take the western standards as a reference or approach, avoiding the preexistent dilemma of "self-orientalization" and "self-westernization", and clarifying the basic trend of cross-cultural communication in the Orientalism-Occidentalism. It is necessary to absorb the "effective elements" of western culture, simultaneously, to pay attention to our own traditions by selecting the essence and discarding the dross, can construct a complete and true image of the Self and realize the confirmation of cultural self-identity.

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