

China's Image in *Profiles from China*

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Abstract: Eunice Tietjens, subeditor of *Poetry*, who has travelled the Middle East and the Far East. She was familiar with various Chinese culture, customs and lifestyles of Chinese people from all walks of life. The anthology *Profiles from China* paid attention to China's image in the eyes of Western people during the period of early 20th century. During this period, westerners depicted some China's images in their literary works, and the image of China is formulaic and stereotyped. When Eunice Tietjens first came to China, she learned about the Chinese nation through her contacts with people from all walks of life. The social collective imaginations in American society also exert influence on her literary works. This paper attempts to analyze the image of China created by the anthology *Profiles from China* under the novelty seeking of Western society from the perspective of Comparative Literature.

Eunice Tietjens and *Profiles from China*

Eunice Tietjens (1884-1944), subeditor of *Poetry* who wrote the anthology *Profiles From China* with the purpose of introducing unique Chinese elements to western readers. At the beginning of 20th century, as an American female travel reporter, Eunice Tietjens came to China and lived here. When looking at a nation from foreigner's perspective, in addition to focusing on the descriptions in literary texts, the most direct way is to integrate into native peoples' life. Only by penetrating into the Chinese society can writers better know and introduce China as otherness to western readers. In this anthology, she described some beautiful scenery, custom, and portrayed a series of Chinese people in the form of free verse poetry. Based on her own experiences and feelings living in China, Eunice Tietjens created some poems to introduce Chinese society as well as common people's life in the very period of early 20th century. Social collective imagination is the interpretation of a different nation or society by another nation or society. It is the expression of one culture to another. China's images that Eunice Tietjens have depicted in her poems are greatly affected by the social collective imaginations in American society. *Profiles From China* is an anthology which is written in free verses, and introduces Chinese commodities and unique living circumstances of common people in China. In 1917, after the publication of *Profiles From China* with the long title *Profiles From China: Sketches in Free Verse of People and Things Seen in the Interior*, westerners especially Americans were attracted by the portrait of China from the perspective of novelty seeking. This paper attempts to explore how Eunice Tietjens depicted China's image to cater to the western readers' novelty seeking, and to focus on the changes of the China's image after the founding of the People's Republic of China.

China's Image under Westerners' Novelty Seeking

The study of Imagology focuses on how the image of a country or a nation is shaped and represented by the foreign writers. "The image is created by the writer according to the social and cultural system in which he is located. It is an behavior that the writer, as a communicator, spread information to foreign people. In the process of dissemination, the entire social culture has always been a system that reflects the image." [1] The images which full of Chinese elements created by Eunice Tietjens, on the one hand, objectively describe the Chinese social appearance. On the other hand, they cater to the novelty seeking of westerners. It reflected how the west viewed China. In the

eyes of western readers, China was unenlightened and Chinese people were ignorant. Specific images such as primitive labor tools, backward production methods, weak citizens all showed the declining of China's international image. Besides, the changes of image were constrained by historical, periodical, and socio-psychological factors. When talking about the variation of images, factors such as historical, ideological and socio-psychological factors should not be ignored. To a certain extent, Imagology is the study of the variation of one nation's image from the original one to the imaginative one. During the process of cross-culture communication, China's image has changed with the change of westerners' impression.

In the early 20th century, China missed industry revolution and Chinese society gradually derailed the world. In the eyes of American readers, Chinese people in this period were living poor and miserable life. They believed that the Chinese people were living in dire straits and the society was on the verge of collapse. They also thought that the Chinese people were struggling every day for basic necessities such as food and clothing. And all of these social collective imaginations show the entrenched tendency of China's negative image. Western countries regarded China as a country of poverty and backwardness. They paid attention to the life of peddlers who come from the bottom of this society. All these practices to a large extent satisfied their novelty seeking psychology.

After the Opium War, foreign capitalist forces entered China gradually. "From these enterprises came China's first workers, and by the early 1890s there were more than 100 foreign-owned factories in China, employing more than 34,000 workers." [2] Eunice Tietjens, who has traveled various Asian countries, was good at introducing foreign culture and customs from one country to another. Through careful observation, Eunice Tietjens found her source of inspiration from distinctive and dramatic Chinese people's life and created anthology *Profiles From China*. Whether it is the dignitaries of the upper class or the civilians who struggle with fate, these characters have no exception all became her source of inspiration. The poem *Meditation*, which is collected in *Profiles From China* reappears the physical and psychological damages exerted on Chinese labors. This poem describes the hardships and the miserable life of poor workers which caused by the overload workload in China. "And between them lies the Orient--struggling and suffering, / spawning and dying--but what it is / I shall never know." [3]

During this period, Chinese people were living under pressure. And in the poem *Meditation*, focused on Chinese workers, Eunice Tietjens observed their lives and mind with sympathy and censure. And the portraits of Chinese workers' life cater to westerners' novelty seeking to China in that period. Eunice Tietjens in her anthology *Profiles From China* inevitably reflects her own impressions and understanding on China. She selected materials from local landscape, customs and daily life based on her own preference. All the portraits of Chinese people and Chinese traditional custom in western literature shows the novelty seeking of westerners. Eunice Tietjens incorporated her own impression on China into her works, which to a certain extent reflects the stereotype of Western writers' understanding of China's image and caters westerner's novelty seeking.

As a social subject, people are influenced by different moral, geographical environment, social environment, historical background and national psychology, and create different cultures. Among them, the Western society has the typical commercial nature, and the mercantile aspect also displays in its literature work. As an ancient country advocating agricultural civilization, Chinese traditional culture advocates that people live in harmony with nature. The mutual exchange of Chinese and Western culture is conducive to the mutual learning of Chinese and Western cultures, and jointly promote the prosperity of world literature and human civilization. It is undeniable that the ancient Chinese traditional culture had a profound impact on the West and the world. Because of this, Western countries have developed a strong curiosity and westerners also look to China with strong curiosity.

The Changes of China's Image

Western countries have a long history of the communication with ancient eastern countries. Early in the 13th century, Marco Polo, a Venetian from Italy, came to China for business and travel. Based on his 17 years' experience living in ancient China, he wrote the book *Travels of Marco Polo*. Once

the book was published, it caused the first wave of adoration to the orient. People in Europe were greatly attracted by the mysterious and prosperous ancient China and a large number of westerners rushed to join the establishment of the Maritime Silk Road. The economic exchanges and cultural communications between the west and the east were gradually deepened. In the first half of 18th century, China and its culture was respected by the world. Chinese commodities and literature were both highly praised by the world. Nevertheless, from the second half of the 18th century to the 19th century, Hegel and Montesquieu made their critical remarks toward China in their works after the outburst of Opium War. Since then, China's images of diligence, kindness, loyalty and simplicity were completely replaced by the images of ignorant and cunning. The image of the Chinese nation is synonymous with evil and crime. DE Quincy argued in his book *Confessions of an opium-eater* that China was full of addicts in the early 20th century. Helen Navies mentioned a stolen case of a family item in the book *Life in China* that: "If one wants to talk about the story of his life in China, the story will be incomplete and uninteresting without mentioning robberies." [4] Even in 21th century, western readers still have these kind of bias when talking about China.

The year of 1750 is considered as the turning point in the history of China's image. Before 1750, as one of the four ancient civilizations, China was the cultural Utopia in westerners' eyes, especially in those pathetic people who were suffering under the persecution and those heretic who handled dissent. After 1750, China's image has changed totally. The image of China, in the eyes of western literary critics, has gradually lost its miracle and charm and meanwhile the whole country was shrouded in sorrow and suffer. Living in turbulent times, Chinese people were suffered and poor both psychologically and physically, thus the image of Chinese people changed from smart, hardworking and kind into ignorant and superstitious. This comic depiction of China's image caters to the horizon of expectation in western world. In the study of world literature, as otherness, a series of China's image have been entrenched. "If western scholars analyze China by looking for similarities between China and the west, they will find out that China is in stagnant. Since in Chinese society everything is almost static and over these years, no change has been made in China." [5]

In the 20th century, China was plagued by disaster and poverty. China's images mentioned in the western literary works were controlled by the formulaic expression, especially the bias which has strong subjective judgement and conventional impressions. What western writers want to convey is nothing more than orient sentiment. The practice of incorporating oriental elements into Chinese society in literary texts is not to shape the image of the east, but to cater to the curiousness to the east. The practice of integrating all elements into China's image will lose the authentically. The decline of a nation's culture can be reflected in the stagnant of thoughts and culture at the first time. Since this time, China's international status has plummeted.

The poems collected in the anthology *Profiles From China* disclosed the unknown side of China. Eunice Tietjens integrated her own opinions on China by selecting the archetypes from the bottom of the society, and this approach reflects the entrenched tendency of China's negative image. It is artistic process to meet the Western readers' understanding to the orient, especially to China. Western writers portrait China as otherness in a negative way by discovering the poverty and corruption of China in that period, so readers have an indelible impression on China. Eunice Tietjens was good at grasping western readers' psychology by introducing the current situation of China in the very period of 20th century. To a large extent, it met the needs of self-identity of westerners and their expectation of ancient orient.

The image of a nation has strong historical permeability and inherence. Once the image is formed, it will infiltrate into the deep psychological structure of a nation and release its energy intermittently in a certain period of time. It has a subtle influence on future generations. "In general, in terms of shaping the image of China, most writers who mention China or its people in their literature have formed partnerships with the Western public. Their views construct and strengthen the image of China as otherness from all aspects of society, thus affirming the entrenched tendency image of China in people's mind." [6] Tracing back to the history before Opium War, China's reputation and prestige in the world were positive. However, the tremendous social transformation

in the western society gradually widened the gap between China and the west, and China's image also changed.

Reconstruction of China's Image

The works of Western writers are aimed at their readers who use their own language. Literary works that introduce foreign cultures are first influenced by social collective imagination formed in the social environment and influenced by social ideology. Secondly, it is influenced by the author's thoughts and feelings, and impressed by the author's subjective preference. "The Orient was a word which later accrued to it a wide field of meanings associations, and connotations, and that these did not necessarily refer to the real Orient but to the field surrounding the word..." [7] Social collective imagination changes with the change of times and the deepening of people's comprehension. It is a phenomenon involves society, psychology, history and policy, and it is a general impression of the public from one nation on another nation. Chinese thoughts and images in western literary works are redefined through a series of complicated acceptances and filters. The image that Western writers have made is a reconstruction. Chinese scholars publicize China's excellent culture and try to make western public realize the charm of Chinese culture, change the misunderstanding and exaggeration of Chinese image from the perspective of observe. Since 1949, Westerners could feel the tremendous changes in Chinese society when they came to China, and reflect the huge changes in Chinese image from the perspective of observers. Recently, a video became popular on the Internet. The video was shot by an Australian who has settled in China for more than a decade. On December 29, 2019, he shared a video after returning to Australia on social media, complaining that life is very inconvenient in Australia. As he was used to the convenience of life in China, he did not adapt to the local life after returning to Australia. In the video, he said: "You are lucky living in China!" From the perspective of foreigners, it confirms the changes that have taken place in China, and the image of China has also changed.

The spread of the image of a foreign country or a foreign nation is based on the facts, and the process is deeply influenced by external factors. In the Western society, the image of China has changed in the spread, and various factors have shaped the image of China. And this kind of phenomenon is closely related with the foreign nation's novelty seeking to the eastern countries. In the first half of the 20th century, underdeveloped China failed to change its negative image in world literature. China's disadvantage in the field of world literature also puts China in a state of misunderstanding. The shape of China's image in the West is influenced by the difference between two nations. And in Western literary works, China's image has also been deliberately misunderstood.

In the 21st century, the development of globalization, convenient transportation and communication make it possible to make a dialogue between the west and the east. Western people in modern society have a new impression on China and China's image is getting more and more positive. But there's still a long way to go to eliminate the inauthentic image of China. China's image has been influenced by the author's imaginations and opinions. In the eyes of Westerners, Chinese people are thin, weak, uneducated and poor-minded. The old image of Chinese people that they are weak, thin, superstitious and ignorant might have some changes. Over the years, China's image around the world is remained weak. However, as an image of a nation that has been used for a long time and repeatedly mentioned, the social collective imagination better reflects the impression of one nation to another nation, and this impression has been deeply rooted.

Today, Chinese comparative scholars are committed to changing the international image of China and building a positive international image in order to suit to China's current situation. Under the globalization, countries conduct political, economic, and cultural exchanges. Chinese scholars have built China's international image in the exchanges of culture. From the perspective of the observer, they change the way observers construct otherness, and provide a new way for foreign countries to understand China. It aims to reduce the misunderstandings and exaggerations of China's image which have been caused by the lack of communication. As a Chinese saying goes that: "Appreciate the culture of others as do to one's own, and the world will become a harmonious

whole.” Focusing on the category of world literature, Chinese scholars aim to promote traditional Chinese culture and rebuild China’s image. On December 10, 2019, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying said on Regular Press Conference that: “The Chinese people have the best say in the human rights situation in China. Just as only Chinese people can objectively evaluate human rights in China, only Chinese people have the best say in China’s image.

At present, Chinese scholars are working hard to build the Chinese school of Comparative Literature, in order to rebuild an objective and positive image of China. After nearly 3,000 years of baptism in history, today’s Chinese culture has accumulated a deep cultural deposits and a harmonious academic atmosphere. Now, China actively participates in the process of globalization, and reconstructs China’s image on the world stage. Chinese scholars seek the way to introduce the beauty and harmony of ancient Chinese civilization. On November 10, 2019, President Xi published an article *Let the Wisdom of Ancient Civilizations Shine into the Future* in Greek media. In this article, President Xi emphasized that “Great civilizations have much in common to offer each other...Nikos Kazantzakis, a giant of modern Greek literature who had visited China twice, commented that ‘Confucius and Socrates were two masks that covered the same face of human logic.’” Chinese invaluable traditional literature is the accomplishment of world literature, and it is also the treasure of human’s civilization. Literature has no national boundaries.

Conclusion

It is hard for western scholars to change their impressions to the Chinese nation in a short period of time. Since the Opium War, China’s positive images in the international arena have gradually lost and westerners had negative impressions on China. After the outbreak of Opium War, a series of China’s images have been made in westerners’ mind. In the long run, China’s negative images in the international stage are gradually solidified. Once the negative images are formed, they will take many centuries to change the misunderstandings and exaggerations of China’s images, and build new images with the combination of traditional culture. The reconstruction of China’s images contributes to the economic, cultural, and religious exchanges between the east and the west. It also conducive to the scientific promotion as well as cultural dissemination.

Most of the foreigners know other nation through literary works. At the beginning of 20th century, Eunice Tietjens directly introduced China in the special era by publishing the anthology *Profiles From China* to Western readers. China is an ancient country of civilization. “Each nation has its own culture, each culture has its own unique path.” Chinese culture cannot be duplicated. The path taken by Chinese culture today reflects national characteristics, contains profound historical characteristics. It cannot be copied. Though China’s image has been damaged and sullied in the history, it still attracts attention of the western readers. Chinese culture is still worth learning, that’s why scholars devote to the study of ancient China. Some scholars such as Chen Yinque and Wu Mi who have once studied abroad also found that the study of Chinese culture in foreign countries far exceeded domestic research. In order to fill this gap, contemporary Chinese writers conduct Comparative Literature research in order to supplement foreign studies of China’s image. China’s image in western literary works is the self-reflection of the western society to a certain extent. The image of the otherness is like a mirror. While shaping the image of foreign nation, it also reflects society’s self-recognition and reflection. After the image is created, it has an impact on the creator’s society and promotes reflection of the creator’s nation. Chinese comparative literature scholar Meng Hua said in his book *Imagology on Literature Comparative* that: “Emphasis on ‘subject’ can be seen as the most significant change in the tradition of contemporary Imagology research. It means a fundamental change of the research direction which converts from the nation being watched to the image creator.” [8] China’s original image is changing from the perspective of image Creator’s.

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