FOREIGNERS' ARCHIVE --- CONTEMPORARY CHINA IN THE BLOGS OF
AMERICAN EXPATRIATES

QI TANG

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2008

Committee:

Radhika Gajjala, Advisor

Donna Nelson-Beene
Graduate Faculty Representative

Bettina Heinz

Canchu Lin

Copyright 2008

Qi Tang

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Radhika Gajjala

In this study I scrutinize blogs written by American expatriates in China of the 21st century. Two primary objectives are involved. One is to explore how China is represented in such blogs. The other is to understand the discursive processes through which the American bloggers utilize the blogging technology to narrate their (mis)conceptions of the Chinese realities. Equally important to these two focuses is an emphasis on revealing a delicate interplay between the production of the digital discourses about contemporary China in blog sphere, the bloggers' assumptions of the Chinese government's encompassing control of the Internet, and the surging nationalism exhibited by the Chinese readers of the blogs.

Drawing from the postcolonial and discursive perspectives of Edward Said, Mary Louise Pratt, David Spurr, and Nicolas Clifford, I see those blogs not merely as a platform for self expression, an open field of identity experiment, or a grassroots journalistic outlet. Rather, I argue that the blogs examined here consist of a distinct discursive space of cultural representation and contestation. They are also interpreted as a digital extension of conventional Euro-American travel writing as they share with the genre a set of rhetorical conventions and face the same set of problems of representing the cultural Other. These assumptions guided the multimodal discourse analyses of the blogs by three American individuals. The study revealed that the bloggers used three prominent metaphors to convey their perceptions of contemporary China, which echo the conventional Western knowledge of the country. During the process, the bloggers are concerned with the Chinese censorship of the Internet and give little attention to the challenge voiced by nationalistic Chinese readers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After nearly three years of researching and writing I finally put a period to this dissertation, but only temporarily. In the back of my mind, I know the completion of this manuscript marks a beginning, not an end. What I finished is laying down the very foundation upon which future and more in-depth academic interrogation will be built.

As much excited as I am about and fully committed to the future undertakings, I'd like to pause momentarily to recognize the people whose advice, support, encouragement, friendship, and love kept me believing in myself and kept pushing me to give my very best throughout the research and writing process. Even though a dissertation is usually considered as a creation solely of its author's individual's time, toil, and tenacity, I seriously doubt I could go thus far without being surrounded and counseled by these wonderful people.

My foremost appreciation goes to Dr. Radhika Gajjala. She is the kind of advisor that anyone could dream of. It was she who has tirelessly encouraged me to pursue a career in academia. She has introduced me to critical perspectives and has challenged me to embrace new theoretical advances. I have always been amazed by the genuine passion and curiosity that she demonstrates in keeping up with the latest research trends in the field of computer-mediated communication. And how I enjoy those conversations I had with her, in which not once did she hesitate to share her knowledge and expertise. My favorite moments of those conversations were when her great ideas sparkled with spontaneity and intellectual sharpness. They never failed to take me by pleasant surprise. As an advisor, Radhika has been very open-minded to my thoughts and opinions. I respect her for giving me the freedom to pursue what interested me. But most importantly, I want to thank her for having continuous

faith in me and my project. When I faced setbacks in the process she nudged me to move on and pumped confidence into me with her comments, insights, advice, and patience. I can't thank Radhika enough for being there for me. A great mentor and a trusting friend, she has been and will continue to be my inspiration.

The same gratefulness also goes to the wonderful committee that I have the fortune to work with. I want to thank Dr. Bettina Heinz, Dr. Canchu Lin, and Dr. Donna Nelson-Beene for showing a genuine interest in my dissertation project and investing their precious time and energy to the review and critique of the manuscript. Their incisive advice made me re-think the research process and guided me to improve the final project in various ways.

Researching and writing a dissertation can be a lonely and struggling journey. In my case, I experienced and struggled with all sorts of hurdles along the way. But thanks to the extraordinary friendship of my colleagues Dr. Miki Crawford and Dr. David Lucas at Ohio University Southern Campus, of my fellow graduate friends Omedi Ochieng, Chin-Chung (Joy) Chao, Hsin-I (Cynthia) Cheng, Chris Bollinger, Ako Inuzuka, and Yahui Zhang of Bowling Green State University, and of my longtime friends Timothy Gleason, Jincao Yu, and Xiaomu Tang that I am able to endure the process without feeling isolated. With admirable generosity, they discussed ideas with me, offered to read my chapters, recommended valuable book lists, listened to my research plans, lent a sympathetic ear to my occasional outcry of frustration, and put my hard work into perspective. I am forever indebted to their unflagging support and encouragement.

No one should be subject to the torture of deciphering my sometimes convoluted writing. Therefore, I want to thank Susan Weinstein and Mary Jo Nosse for volunteering to proofread

the manuscript and to provide helpful advice. If there remained errors in this manuscript, they are entirely attributed to my negligence and stubbornness.

My most sincere love and deepest gratitude, however, belong to my husband Wei Wang, the only person who has selflessly accompanied me everyday in this mentally and emotionally arduous journey called dissertation project. Many times he went through the same anxiety as I had as an inexperienced writer/researcher and tolerated my terrible mood swings. Never once did he lose confidence in me, even when I was wrapped up in serious self doubt. He is the one who always showed me hope through his gentle but strong love.

Lastly, my love and appreciation go to my family. Thanks to my father XianJing Tang and mother LiXiang Huang for their tough love and all the sacrifice they made in support of my project. Thanks to my dearest son Yi Jie (Jason) Wang for enriching my life with laughter and a sheer wonder of life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	1
The Diverse Space of China Blogs	1
A Virtual Community About and For China	6
The American Perspective	7
Who are the Americans?	11
Research Focus	13
The Road Map.....	14
CHAPTER ONE: REPORTING CULTURE FROM BLOGS – OLD CHALLENGES AND NEW POSSIBILITIES	18
China Blogs: A Contact Zone of Cultural Representation	18
China Blogs: A Discourse of Cultural Othering	23
Others in Discourse/Discourse of Othering	28
China Blogs as Travel Narratives	30
Blogs as a Discursive/Rhetorical Space: Contribution to the Field.....	35
CHAPTER TWO: CHINA IN WESTERN EYES, A BRIEF HISTORY	41
China in Western Travelogues: A Brief History, Prominent Themes, and Rhetorical Strategies.....	41
Orientalism, Travel Writing and the Difficulties of Representation	50
Rhetorical Conventions in Euro-American Travel Writings.....	57
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL DILLEMAS	62
Multimodality in the China Blogs.....	62
Research Design & Data Selection	65
Categories of Analysis	68
Researching the China Blogs: Ethical Challenges.....	71
CHAPTER FOUR: THREE BLOGS, THREE CHINAS	77
Generalization Not Intended	77
Three Blogs: A Sketch	78
Tying the Sino-U.S. knot --- Sinosplice.....	81
Introduction.....	81
Local Context & Mission.....	83
Theme I: Landscape and Living Conditions.....	92
Theme II: Cultural Practices	97
Theme III: Chinese Characters & Society	100
Theme IV: Politics and the Government.....	106

Off the Beaten Path ---The Opposite End of China	111
Introduction.....	111
Local Context and Textual Surface.....	113
Theme I: Into the History.....	115
Theme II: Into the Red China	119
The Guest Voices	120
A Romance with China – Speaking of China	121
Introduction.....	121
Local Context and Textual Surface.....	123
Theme I: China, Land of Ancient Culture	129
Theme II: China, The Good Old Earth	133
Theme III: China, the Feminine Land of Romance	136
CHAPTER FIVE: CHINA REVEALED AND AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE ISSUES OF THE OTHER’S VOICE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	144
The Metaphors	144
Voices of Resistance	154
Conclusion and Future Directions	162
REFERENCES	167

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: www.chinabloglist.org	2
Figure 2: The Glimpse of the World	4
Figure 3: China Net Investor.....	5
Figure 4: The Weifang Radish	5
Figure 5: The Kangaroo and the Dragon.....	5
Figure 6: Sinosplice Homepage	81
Figure 8: Number of China-related Entries in <i>Sinosplice</i>	85
Figure 9: Title Banner of <i>Sinosplice</i>	86
Figure 10: Flag of <i>Sinosplice</i>	87
Figure 11: China Section of <i>Sinosplice</i>	88
Figure 12: Life Section of <i>Sinosplice</i>	89
Figure 13: Photo Section of <i>Sinosplice</i>	90
Figure 14: Images from Sinosplice's Photo Section	94
Figure 15: The Opposite End of China Homepage.....	111
Figure 16: Images from The Opposite End of China	116
Figure 17: Speaking of China Homepage.....	123
Figure 18: Typical Icons Used in Speaking of China.....	126

PREFACE

The Diverse Space of China Blogs

This study is about a particular social space in the making. In a literal sense, this space is digital and technological as it consists of frequently updated online journals, known as weblogs, or blogs. But such a space doesn't refer to any weblogs that are out there on the Internet. Rather, it refers to a cluster of blogs created by and shared almost exclusively among the foreign sojourners who have come afar and have crossed geographical, national, and cultural borders in order to taste and experience *contemporary China*¹ to the fullest extent possible. With a unifying focus on China-related issues those weblogs are meaningful social and cultural space in which the foreign sojourners share with the world their observations of China of the 21st century. In the current study I reserve the term "China blogs" for this group of weblogs. And as for the foreign sojourners who blog about China, I call them China bloggers.

Although China blogs can be used as a convenient conceptual category to describe any weblogs of the abovementioned nature, it is impossible to gauge the number of those weblogs. In fact, in the infinite world of the Internet it is likely that some China blogs will never be known to people. Yet, thanks to the digital portal of www.chinabloglist.org shown in Figure 1 we are able to access most China blogs that have been shared in the foreign expatriate circle in China. As a web portal and directory, www.chinabloglist.org was launched in 2002 to collect

¹ In this study, contemporary China refers specifically to China between the late 1990s and early twenty-first century.

and compile China blogs on the Internet.² In January 2006 it identified and listed 347 China blogs.³ There are fifteen overlapping categories to describe the wide range of the topics covered in those China blogs. They include Business, Chinese View, Culture, Current Events, Diary, Expat Life, Food, Language, Media & Advertising, Photography, Politics, Student Life, Teacher Life, Technology, and Travelogue.

Figure 1: www.chinabloglist.org

To some, the sphere of the China blogs may be of no importance. But admirers of China would love to visit such a space to hear stories about the country and its culture. Also it can be a useful web source for would-be China travelers to prepare for their future journeys by reading the accounts and noting the recommendations from the veteran China sojourners. To this end, the information stored and shared in China blogs is abundant and informative, covering every

² The number of the China blogs listed in this directory changes everyday with the addition of new blogs.

³ This number was accurate on January 1, 2006.

imaginable aspect of contemporary Chinese life ranging from serious political commentaries to a mundane list of the price of vegetable in a Shanghai market.

The demographic of the China bloggers is as diverse as the subject matters covered in their web journals. Most of the bloggers are from the West, or Western countries⁴ such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Spain, Germany, Sweden, and Netherlands. In addition, there are a handful of Chinese bloggers along with a few bloggers whose nationalities are not disclosed. English is the dominant language in this blog sphere. Chinese follows as the second most popular language. These language preferences come as no surprise given that English is the dominant language of the Internet to begin with, and the majority of the China bloggers come to China either to teach English, or to learn Chinese.

Individual China blog varies tremendously from one another in terms of topical focus, tone, and medium format. Some resemble sophisticated news and political commentaries from major Western newspapers. An example of this type of China blogs is *A Glimpse of the World* at <http://www.howardwrench.com/> shown in Figure 2. It is maintained by *New York Times* China correspondent Howard French. Some China blogs focus on one or two aspects of China that the bloggers find particularly interesting. *China Net Investor* shown in Figure 3 at <http://china-netinvestor.blogspot.com/> is representative of this type of China blogs. It aims at providing up-to-date information about the Internet companies and the technology development in China. The vast majority of the China blogs, however, do not reflect a clear focus. They look more like personal diaries in which the bloggers ramble about day-to-day

⁴ By using the term ‘The West’ and ‘Western’ I am reifying the Euro-American culture in which most China bloggers were born and raised. The China bloggers might feel that they share in certain cultural traditions that are different from those they encounter in China.

lives in China. Blogs such as *The Weifang Radish* at <http://kevinsmith.wordpress.com/> shown in Figure 4 and *The Kangaroo and the Dragon* at <http://www.waze.net/china/> shown in Figure 5 are typical of this type of China blogs.

The China blogs also demonstrate various personalities. Some are serious; some are witty; some are frivolous; and some are dull. Most of them strive to show the positive sides of China. A few choose to focus on the negative. The three bloggers of *Talk Talk China*, for instance, were committed to disclosing the inconvenient “truths” about China. They filled their blog with condescending jokes and angry rant about China and earned some reputation in the foreign expatriate circle in China. In addition to different topics and tones, China blogs also come in diverse medium formats. Some of the China bloggers believe that a good picture is worth thousands words. Therefore photos become key elements and take the center stage of their blogs with textual entries being kept to minimal. In summary, the multiplicity of the subject matter, narrative tone, presentation style and medium format makes the world of China blogs nothing short of a kaleidoscope. Depending on whose China blog we read we will form different and even contradicting impressions of the country.

Figure 2: The Glimpse of the World

Figure 3: China Net Investor

Figure 4: The Weifang Radish

Figure 5: The Kangaroo and the Dragon

A Virtual Community About and For China

Despite the abovementioned varieties, the China blogs have at least one thing in common. That is a shared effort made by the China bloggers to distance their accounts of China from those of the mainstream Western media known for being uniformly critical of China. (Liss, 2003; Jespersen, 1996) Many China bloggers believe that by immersing themselves in the Chinese society they gain certain credibility as independent, objective, and trusted sources of anything people want to know about contemporary China. Consequently, they are confident in projecting China in a more fair light because their accounts are “unsmeared by media fear-mongering, political agendas, or economic goal” (Pasden, 2002b, Network section).

Such a sense of mission to provide alternative perspectives to look at and to comprehend contemporary China is pervasive among the China bloggers. It serves as an invisible bond bringing these men and women of different racial, national, and cultural backgrounds together in the creation of a unique space of the China blogs.

At this point, Howard Rheingold’s (2000) formulation of the “virtual community” provides a useful way for us to grapple with the implications of the creation of a social and cultural space such as the China blogs. In Rheingold’s sense, a virtual community is a social aggregation that emerges from the net when enough people carry on public discussions long enough and with sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships. In the case of the China blogs community, even though the bloggers are scattered throughout China, they are nonetheless connected to each other by the Internet and blogging technology. They are also connected by a common life experience and a shared goal to challenge the traditional media’s discursive monopoly on reporting China. In their virtual habitation of hundreds of

interconnected China blogs, the foreign expatriates in China exchange information and knowledge, share life stories, engage in discussions, argue and gossip, and provide emotional support to each other. Through these activities they form real relationships that are often materialized in physical world. Offline the bloggers make arrangements to meet with each other. When traveling outside their provinces of residence to other parts of China some of the bloggers often receive help from other China bloggers who happen to live in those regions. No doubt the China blogs are emerging on the Internet as a real virtual community about and for China. Its most amazing activity so far is to discover and to present to the world the many faces of the country in the early 21st century. And those faces or imageries are not monolithic because they are grounded in the bloggers' everyday negotiation with their perceptions and misperceptions of the Chinese realities. Nevertheless, the existence of such an online community is likely to change the world's experience with China as the blog accounts offer a grassroots standpoint from which the world could view and understand the country and its culture.

The American Perspective

Given the possibility that what takes place in the China blogs community has direct or indirect influence on the world's attitude toward the country, it would be ideal to conduct a comprehensive survey of all the China blogs listed in the web directory. However, the large and ever-increasing number of the China blogs makes it an unattainable research project. A much narrower study of the China blogs may be more appropriate as long as it sheds light on the processes through which certain imageries of China have emerged from the discursive

activities of the China blogs community. The research focus on the processes, not on the authenticity or the validity of the stories told in the China blogs, is important because it could reveal how personal blogs are transformed into a discursive space of grassroots cultural representation.⁵ Moreover, such a focus is relevant as the similar discursive processes are also happening in hundreds and even thousands of other blogging communities.

Although China blogs community is the home of the bloggers from several nations, this study only explores how American expatriates portray contemporary China in their online diaries. There are a couple of reasons why the American perspective is of particular interest to the current study. First of all, Americans are one of the largest foreign groups in today's China (Macleod, 2005). Second, the overwhelming majority of the China blogs are written by American citizens. Therefore, to know how American bloggers portray China is to get a glimpse of the dominating perspective of the China blogs community. Third, such an emphasis is also determined by the historical and present specificities of the Sino-U.S. relations. In history, the two cultures have long been associated with each other ever since Captain Samuel Shaw landed on Chinese soil between 1784 and 1785. In Burstein and Keijzer's words (1998), such a relationship even "predates the birth of the United States" because "when the Declaration of Independence was drafted, the clipper-ship era of the China trade was already in full swing. It was Chinese tea that American revolutionaries threw into Boston harbor in 1773" (p. 28). At present China and the United States are two of the world's largest political, economic, and military powers who have similar if not equal capabilities to influence the world

⁵ By grassroots cultural representation I mean any practice or attempt of an individual or a group of individuals rather than media or other social institutions to depict the reality of a culture. The reality is always perceived. Therefore the depiction is subject to the biases and social norms of the individuals who create it.

affairs. Despite the long historical association, the tie between the two nations “remains one of the trickiest relationships in global politics.” (Kluver, 2001, para. 4) Generally speaking, up until now the American attitudes toward China have swung like a pendulum between excessive enthusiasm and all-out criticism.

Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American missionaries saw great prospect in evangelizing Chinese heathens into good old Christians. In the 1930s and 40s it was their sons and daughters, such as Henry R. Luce and Pearl Buck, who envisioned for China a future in an *American century*⁶ where it would eventually be transformed into a capitalist bonanza for trade and investment and a full embodiment of American values. The same historical period also witnessed the strengthening of the relation between the two countries. When Japan invaded China the United States was China’s ally supporting its defense of sovereignty. A few years later it was deeply involved in China’s civil war as it sided with and became the most generous benefactor of the Chinese Nationalist Party, only to witness the Communist takeover of the country. After the birth of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Washington’s policy toward China was that of military intimidation, political and diplomatic isolation. The compassionate concern for China in the 1930s and 1940s was turned into the fear, hatred, and even paranoia of the 1950s and 1960s. The Korean War of the early 1950s and the Vietnam War of the 1960s were, respectively, the direct and indirect military confrontation between the two countries. Then during the U.S.-Soviet Cold War, China was regarded by the U.S. as “Moscow’s junior partner in aggressive pursuit of the triumph of global communism”

⁶ The term American century is coined by Henry R. Luce to claim the historical role of the United States during the 20th century. Today, it is usually used to illustrate the United States dominance of much of the 20th century. It refers to the political, economic, and cultural influences of the United States.

(Burstein & Keijzer, 1998, p.35). By the early 1970s, the two countries resumed diplomatic relation. But the U.S. policy toward China still sways between engagement and containment. And the Sino-U.S. relation has been concomitantly clouded by the United States' criticism of China's human rights conditions and China's resentment toward the U.S.'s backing of the de facto government in Taiwan, whose recent move toward independence infuriated the Chinese government.

Over the past two decades the United States has been increasingly uneasy about China's rapid ascendance. First the threat comes from China's fast economic growth. For example, cheap Chinese labor and China's surging trade surplus with the United States have been blamed for the large-scale loss of the U.S. manufacturing jobs. According to a Pan (2004) a U.S. congressional panel conducted a survey and found out that since 1992 "at least 760,000 U.S. manufacturing jobs have migrated to China" (p.307). The number and other similar statistics have made radical conservative Americans fear that the rising Chinese economy will inevitably lead to Chinese military expansionism and cultural hegemony in the Asian Pacific region. At the official ideological level, the Chinese communist government has long been labeled by the United States as being undemocratic and authoritarian (Cohen, 1990). And that image has been reinforced after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989.

The historical grievances compounded by a fear of the disruption of the U.S.-China power balance have given rise to a discourse of "China threat". Its followers have urged the U.S. government to take a tougher stand on China. If the White House failed to do so, it would be accused of being a typical Manchurian candidate corrupted by secret campaign contributions from China. The strong criticism of the Clinton administration's engagement with China was

just an indicator of that toughening stance toward China. Although China is not a prime target of the U.S. containment in the post 9/11 era, it is still viewed and treated with suspicion as long as its interests entangle and compete with those of the U.S. at many levels.

Through much of contemporary history the rise and fall of the Sino-U.S. relation has impacted the world in general and the stability of Asian Pacific region specifically. Given the stakes involved, a look into the American expatriates' portrayals of contemporary China in blog sphere is worthwhile as it would shed light on the not-so-obvious and often overlooked opinions that ordinary American citizens have about China at an interesting historical moment when the U.S. dominance of the world faces challenges from a rising China. This approach is necessarily predicated on an assumption that personal blogs of American expatriates constitute a unique digital, transnational, and discursive space in which a particular kind of American representation of the cultural Otherness of China happens.

Who are the Americans?

In this research, the word "American" has several connotations. Literally speaking, it refers to the China bloggers whose citizenship is the United States of America. But the word "American" doesn't refer to any U.S. citizens who reside in China and blog about it. In fact, this study only focuses on a specific group of American expatriates who come to China through language exchange programs either as students of Chinese language or as English teachers at Chinese schools. In most cases their travel expenses and part of living costs are covered by the Chinese organizations they work for. Yet, compared to the American expatriates who work for U.S. government, news agencies, or international corporate, the American bloggers targeted at

this study are far less well-off financially. On their own part, these bloggers also tend to differentiate themselves from their more privileged compatriots. In their eyes, many of the better-off American expatriates are real snobs in China who, while living in China, are obsessed with maintaining Western life styles and care less about learning Chinese language and culture.⁷

Although the distinction between the American bloggers and their better-off compatriots is real in an economic sense, it doesn't mean that the American bloggers in our study do not enjoy certain privileges. I'd like to point out that in order to travel to China one still needs to possess substantial economic resources and cultural capital, which are not affordable to every U.S. citizen. Even back in their own country, the majority of these American bloggers can be comfortably described as male, white, well-educated, and middle-class Americans. Their journeys to China are a journey of choice, not a journey of necessity or forced displacement. In fact, most of them chose to come to China out of a curiosity toward another culture. Some made the trip to fulfill their burning desires for adventure and self-actualization. In that sense, they play comfortably and confidently a role of a vigilant observer who is willing to experience and experiment with a culture such as China as long as it is different from the familiar United States. Moreover, their sense of contentment is sometimes heightened by them standing in front of young Chinese students and believing those students have sort of built-in inferiority complexes about their status in life and international community.⁸ For those reasons the label

⁷ See discussion of Snobs in China at

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2005/10/18/snobs-in-china#comments>

⁸ This comment was retrieved from a China blog www.onemanbandwidth.com on January 4, 2007. It expressed an opinion of an American professor/expatriate in China. Unfortunately, the link to the comment is no longer accessible.

“American” needs explications here. In the current study this is a term tagged with economical, cultural and racial capitals. To put it another way, being an American in China certainly frames the way our American bloggers view the Chinese world and influence their depictions of that world in the digital space of the China blogs

Research Focus

Although an investigation of a particular kind of American representation of contemporary China in the discursive space of the China blogs is informed by the change of the political and economic climates surrounding current Sino-U.S. relations, we should also take into considerations of other factors that play equally important roles in shaping the American expatriates’ interpretations and portrayals of China in their blogs. Some of these contributing factors include conventional Euro-American views of China; the burgeoning nationalism openly and widely expressed by the Chinese people; and the American bloggers’ perception of Chinese Internet censorship. Understanding all these forces and the interplay among them are vital to finding answers to the following research questions that have guided the present inquiry. These research questions are:

1. How do the American bloggers utilize the blogging technology in their portrayals of contemporary China?
2. What aspect(s) of contemporary China is/are highlighted in the China blogs?
3. What metaphors about contemporary China emerge from the blogs of the American expatriates?
4. Have the rhetorical conventions used to portray China in previous travelogues of

Euro-American sojourners been recycled or transformed in the digital discourse under investigation?

5. How are the rising Chinese nationalism and the Chinese government's exercise of Internet censorship perceived by the American bloggers? And how does that perception influence, intersect with, and even challenge the production of the digital discourse about China?

The Road Map

In raising the above questions I wish to explore the processes through which a particular group of American expatriates pass on knowledge about contemporary China to both domestic and global audience, and use blogs as a new platform to share their observations of Chinese culture, people, and society with the world. With this framework in mind, I start Chapter one by recognizing the China blogs as a unique technological and discursive space of cultural representation. Then I go on to argue that not only do the China blogs constitute a representational space, they are also dialogic zones of cultural encounter because of the interactive nature of blogging technologies. In addition to interpreting the China blogs as a particular discursive space worthy of critical inquiries, I also point out the similarities between the China blogs and conventional Euro-American travel writing in terms of writing motifs, subject matter, and historical associations. This effort shows how the China blogs benefit from and are constrained by the genre of travel writing in areas such as representational and rhetorical strategies. The last part of Chapter one is devoted to a brief survey of current blog research and a short discussion of the possible contributions that the current study can make to

the field of computer mediated communication.

Chapter two serves two purposes. First it spells out and elucidates a series of theoretical assumptions that the current inquiry is deeply indebted to. Edward Said's (1978) formulation of orientalism, David Spurr's (1993) meticulous analysis and classification of the rhetorical tropes and patterns that have consistently appeared in colonial and postcolonial Euro-American travel writing, and Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) conceptualization of the contact zone are key theoretical lenses through I view and understand the discursive processes through which certain images of contemporary China are constructed in American expatriates' China blogs. Duncan and Gregory (1999) once nicely put that there are "the continuities between a colonial past and a supposedly post-colonial present and ... the ecological, economic and cultural implications of globalization projects of modernity" (p.1). Hence, the second part of chapter two traces the historical continuity of what the American expatriates have to say about China in their blogs with the words of former Euro-American travelers to China. By doing so it goes back to history and reviews the dominating themes and recurring rhetorical and representational strategies employed in those accounts of previous travelers.

Chapter three provides details how the current investigation is conducted. In regards to methodology, the study adopts a qualitative approach by applying critical multimodal discourse analysis to individual China blogs. The ontological assumptions and the advantages of such a research approach are discussed in this chapter. Another part of chapter three deals with the ethics involved in observing the bloggers' activities online and collecting data. I acknowledge the value of respecting and taking measures to protect research subjects' rights of privacy. At the same time I also point out that the unique nature of weblogs presents a special

challenge to blog researchers and calls for an unconventional data collecting method. In addition to a discussion of research method, chapter three describes the research procedures I followed in detail.

As the heart of this research chapter four presents individual discourse analysis of select China blogs by three American bloggers. In this chapter the three select blogs are analyzed with special attentions being given to the processes through which the discourse about today's China is produced. In those analyses I took a close look at the structural features of those blogs, categorized the blog components based on their functionalities, and identified and discussed the major themes and rhetorical strategies employed in each China blog. Visual and hyper-textual elements of these blogs were also examined in tandem with the scrutiny of the blog texts. The similarities among the blogs as well as their differences are also revealed.

The unraveling of the discursive elements in the three China blogs in chapter four should provide us an opportunity to get a glimpse of the representational politics at play that give shape to the conceptual images of contemporary China in the community of China blogs. Chapter five summarizes those images and metaphors, and compares their differences. Given the fact that a thorough understanding of the discourse should be anchored in an acknowledgment that the China blogs are byproducts of voluntarily transnational and trans-cultural boundary crossings initiated by young, white, and middle-class Americans who have tried to take advantages of the global reach of American influence in terms of capital, culture, and language, it is important to note the dynamics between the expression of the rising Chinese nationalism in those blogs and the reactions of the American bloggers to the Chinese voices because the interplay between them affects the discourse we study. Lastly, chapter five

concludes the research with a brief summary of the critical interpretations of the three blogs.

And it also offers reflections on the shortcomings of the research and suggests directions for future critical and cultural engagement with weblogs.

CHAPTER ONE: REPORTING CULTURE FROM BLOGS – OLD CHALLENGES AND NEW POSSIBILITIES

China Blogs: A Contact Zone of Cultural Representation

Having laid out the road map for the research, I now return to the two basic assumptions about the blogs upon which the whole inquiry rests. The first assumption is that the China blogs can be interpreted as a contact zone of cultural representation and contestation. Of course, the literal meaning of blogs refers to frequently-updated online diaries often arranged in reverse chronological order so visitors usually read the latest entry first and then proceed to previous entries through archives, a common feature of most blogs on the Internet. Bloggers, the persons who maintain and update blogs, can write about virtually anything in their blogs. As the fourth genre of Internet communication, blogs are considered to be a more individual and intimate form of online expression. Recently blogs have been hailed as “fundamentally different from what came before, and as possessing a socially transformative, democratizing potentials” (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004b, p.1) According to pioneer blogger-turned-blog-historian Rebecca Blood (2002), blogs came into existence either in the middle or late 1990s. As a form of individual expression uninhibited by gatekeepers from the state or large media corporations, blogs are becoming a way of net-dwelling for many people online. And numerous blogging communities have been evolving into spaces where information, ideas, and opinions are shared so much so that they start to exercise influence upon the public’s perceptions of various issues. To date, blog research has focused largely either on analyzing blogs as an Internet genre or studying the potential of blogging as an alternative and grassroots journalism to print media. In current study, I take a different path by

looking at the discursive practices of blogging and by investigating the cultural implications of using blogs to report about other cultures.

The idea for the study, however, began rather accidentally. While surfing the Internet I came across a blog about China by an American expatriate living in the country. Following the links provided by that blog, I was brought to a web directory devoted to collecting more blogs of the similar nature. The web directory is <http://www.chinabloglist.org> It introduced me to a community of foreigners living in and writing about China. The community is a by-invitation only club with most of its members coming from North America and Europe. By-invitation means the blogs are selected and listed on the directory by the web administrator only when they enjoy certain word of mouth reputation in the foreign expatriate circle in China.

It is of vital importance for current study to look beyond the literal definition of weblogs simply being a more intimate genre of Internet communication. Rather, the discursive, cultural and critical approach that I adopt in current study made it necessary to interpret those blogs as a space of cultural representation and a place where cultures encounter and contest in a digital age. First, the conceptualization of those blogs as a space can trace its origin as far back as to the postulations of Henry Lefebvre and Pierre Bourdieu (Munt, 2001) who understood space as a social construct. Two dimensions of space as a social construct are relevant to current study. Sally Munt provided a succinct synthesis of the two. First, the lived, or space of representation, is the practice of people such as their daily movement. The conceived, or the representation of space, is what people know about and think of the space in which they are immersed and put on their social performances. These two dimensions of space are intertwined with each other, and each of them affects and modifies the other in a way that the totality of social practices defines

the space where those practices take place, and the reflected nature of those spaces in return sets parameters for those social performances.

Such a dialectic approach to space is closely related to the sphere of knowledge, and such a proposition registers the close links among knowledge, ideology, and practices in the perceptions of space. Lefebvre believed that space is intrinsically productive and performative. Therefore, he felt it is vitally important to apply critical attention to the examination of those spaces that can produce real social consequences. It needs to be pointed out that space in Lefebvre and Bourdieu's sense is more figurative and akin to a whole gamut of human performances constructed and bounded within geographical, physical, temporal, and social specificities. Yet, the formulation of active and operational space offers a viable and meaningful entry point for critical inquiries of social actions and subsequent ramifications contextually and historically. Sally Munt (2001) further extended Lefebvre's proposition and argued that the interrogation of the lived spaces should also include that of new media such as the Internet. According to her, spatial metaphors are abundant in the discourse of science and technology. Moreover, she emphasized the spatial properties of information and communication technology and coined the term "technospace" in reference to the Internet and the activities people conduct there. She argued what happen in technospace, such as playing a role in a virtual game, or posting a comment to a bulletin board, or forming a virtual community are concrete and complex expressions often inscribed by various "social taxonomies" (p.4) such as race, gender, class, and sexuality. And those intrinsically performative activities can and are producing real perceptible and discursive consequences.

Following Sally Munt's line of thinking (2001), we could easily recognize that the

blogging activity of the foreign expatriates in China also belongs to one of the many significant social performances that are carried out in the technospace. We could even imagine a scene in which the busy work of the China bloggers such as writing and publishing narratives, deciding between graphics, choosing and putting on photos in their blogs eventually stage the China of twenty-first century for an invisible but also very real international audience. And that collective production of a mixture of a place, a mental image, and certain sentimentality offers a perfect chance for critical researchers to investigate the process of producing and spreading the knowledge about the cultural Others in a digital age.

The blogs represent not only a social and digital space of cultural representation but also a contact zone where cultures encounter and clash. Such a notion stems from Mary Louise Pratt (1992). In her influential book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Pratt defines the “contact zone” as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (p.4). To be more specific, the contact zone is “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (p. 6). The notion of contact zone is originally predicated on the unequal power geometry of colonial encounters that usually involve white Westerners and non-Western cultures in the officially bygone era of colonization. Moreover, judging from Pratt’s vigorous analysis of travel writing produced by Euro-American travelers to South America and Africa in the age of Western colonial expansion, there was much space for the Others’ voices in the

contact zone. Still, I find the term offers much insight to my study of the blogosphere⁹ created by American expatriates in China for the very reason that the asymmetrical relations between the West and the East, the U.S. and China in particular, are lived out in the age of post-colonization and the globalization of capitalism. Furthermore, the term with its connotation of cultural contestation and wrestling is best exemplified in the interaction between the American bloggers and their Chinese readers. Such an interaction doesn't happen at the surface level at which the American bloggers play an active role of rightful and "objective" observers, describers, and even evaluators of Chinese culture and produce oftentimes unreflective accounts about China. What makes the interaction possible in this space dominated by the American bloggers is the interactive nature of blogging technology. It is quite common that the majority of the blogs today have comment sections that enable visitors to leave feedback on the blog entries they read. In my view this integral component of blogs creates the potential for the blogs under investigation to become a dialogic space. In the case of the present study, Chinese visitors to those blogs constantly leave comments on the American representation and interpretation of Chinese reality. They question, challenge, correct, and even reject the American perceptions of their culture, and they are not shy about voicing their opinions. In a sense, the Chinese contributions to the blogs call into question the privileged position the American bloggers occupy while writing about a China they know. The Chinese participation also reveals the hidden prejudices and stereotypes the American bloggers hold about China. I would argue that the sheer presence of the voice of the Other transforms the China blogs from a mere American showroom of contemporary China society and culture into a zone of

⁹ Blogosphere is a collective term referring to all weblogs as a community or social network.

contestation where real cultural dialogue could happen given certain conditions. By centering on the dialogic dynamic inherent in the blogosphere, it is the goal of current study to frame the discussion about the politics of American cultural representations of Chinese otherness in a new light. By adopting this approach in current study I recognize the agency of the represented and the seemingly voiceless, and address the possibility of the power of blogging technology in subverting the conventionally unidirectional and top-down Western discursive processes in representing non-Western cultures.

China Blogs: A Discourse of Cultural Othering

My interest in the China blogs grows out of my own experience of straddling between Chinese and American culture. As a Chinese living in the U.S., I feel related to the American diarists of the China blogs because, like mine their perceptions and values have been challenged in China. However, my feeling towards these blogs is often mixed. At first, I applauded their efforts trying to show their families and friends back home what China really is, although I question their premise that a “truth” about China can be discovered through their depictions. Also, I admit that many blogs are quite a fun to read. Yet, the more I read into those blogs, I began to ponder over the consequences of such types of cultural representation, and started seriously researching the blogs as a particular American discourse about contemporary China, more specifically, a discursive practice of cultural othering.

The reading of the China blogs as a discourse of cultural othering is predicated on understandings of a series of questions including: what accounts as a discourse; how it tells us about the articulation of power relationships among social actors; and, how it is intrinsically

linked to the materialization and dissemination of the ideology of otherness. The answers to these questions also provide rationales to applying critical multimodal discourse analysis to the select blogs. Therefore it behooves me to discuss briefly issues relevant to discourse and the study of it.

First and foremost, discourse, as a concept, was introduced to humanities and social science by sociolinguists in the 1970s after a long tradition of classical rhetoric. (Dijk, 1997, 2001) At the beginning, discourse was narrowly defined as linguistic statements or utterances longer than a sentence or clause. Following this definition early studies of discourse were primarily concerned with studies of formal and grammatical aspects of language, both written and oral. For example, scholars used to record details of naturally-occurring conversations to study turn-taking mechanism. With the concept of discourse getting incorporated into the vocabularies of other academic disciplines such as sociology, literary studies, and various branches of communication, discourse has acquired more social dimensions. Still, the exact meaning of discourse is elusive. And there is no agreed-upon definition of discourse. The most widely known and accepted definition of discourse comes from Teun Van Dijk (1999). According to him, discourse is “text and talk in context”(p.291). Discourse analysis, therefore, is a study of language use, texts, conversational interaction, or communicative events in various social contexts. In addition, many other discourse analysts (Fairclough, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2001; Hammersley, 2003) believe it is more than a research method but a perspective and a self sufficient paradigm to approach and study the social world.

Depending on either the structural or socially functional prominence of a discourse is emphasized, the studies of discourse fall into two distinct paradigms. One is structure-oriented

with an emphasis on micro-level examination of the texts of a discourse including examination of lexical choices, grammar, structure of sentences, and even sound system. It also includes analysis of textual organization above sentence/clause including the ways in which sentences are connected together. The other approach goes beyond the limit of examining surface structures of language, but pays more attention to social, cultural, and historical dimensions of discourse, and that is where the power relations among social actors are played out.

Rather than abandoning the examinations of micro level discursive properties all together in favor of a total and full embrace of macro level investigations of discourse in bigger social contexts, critical discourse analysts make efforts to combine the strengths of the two approaches. They try to pinpoint the crux at which the macro-level social relations get materialized and manifested through discursive arrangements at micro level. Critical discourse analysts such as Norman Fairclough (1995a) saw discourses as coherent bodies of representations that do not faithfully reflect “reality” like mirrors but are artifacts of language through which the very reality they purport to reflect is constructed. Fairclough’s take on discourse was apparently influenced by Foucault who attributed the dubious relationship between words and “truth” to the spontaneous and intertextual natures of statements. Another important theoretical contribution that Foucault made to the studies of critical discourse is that he didn’t see discourse as a mere reflection of ideology. Instead, he recognized the constitutive power of discourse in terms of shaping, (re)producing, and maintaining social orders. In this regard, discourse is ideologies in the making; and it is a process and an end product at the same time.

From a critical standpoint, since ideology, knowledge, “truth”, and power are intrinsically

intertwined, the real issues at stake in discourse analysis are issues of power and inequality. To put it differently, critical discourse analysts understand discourse as enactment of power and the unequal relationships among social groups because discourse naturalizes certain ways of thinking and speaking about certain topics and defining what is considered to the acceptable ways of describing and labeling things.

It is worth pointing out that the nature of power is not personal but political, and it can be exercised by individuals who belong to specific social groups. This power, according to Van Dijk (1985), is based on “privileged access to socially valued resources, such as wealth, income, position, status, force, group membership, education or knowledge”, and it involves control of “action and cognition” (p. 254). The control of action as it pertains to violent state apparatus was considered by Van Dijk as more elementary recourse to force. In comparison, the often more effective and “modern” power is mostly cognitive. Therefore, managing the mind of others is essentially a function of text and talk, a function of discourse. It is noted that such a discursive management of mind is not always bluntly manipulative. On the contrary, dominance may be enacted and reproduced by subtle, routine, and everyday forms of text and talk that appear “natural” and ‘acceptable’. In that regard, even the seemingly insignificant personal discourses could be closely associated with the legitimizing of certain ideology, forms of social and cultural stratification, unequal group relations, and ultimately, the enactment of power.

My approach to the select China blogs is influenced by these assumptions about discourse, and its relations to ideology, inequality, and institutional power enacted on individual basis.

With the growing ubiquitous connectivity to individuals who have access to the World Wide

Web, blogs have increasingly become popular among people as important sources of information and new channels for the articulations of the self, which make them the strong candidates of new discursive territories worthy of investigation.

In the specific case of the China blogs, I would argue that these blogs are unique lenses through which online readers obtain glimpses of contemporary China. The China blogs constitute a cohesive discursive body of cultural representation despite of the demonstrated formal and subject differences among them. It is true that the China blogs come in various forms with diarists utilizing a wide spectrum of semantic means, and focus on one or multiple aspects of Chinese life such as politics, language, educational system, economy, technological development, scenery, art, and culture. They are not, however, individual expressions that can be isolated from the main discourse of the community for the following reasons. First, they have a shared goal of reporting China from personal and non-institutional point of view. Second, the China blogs are highly intertextual. Not only are the veteran bloggers constantly referred to by other bloggers, cross-reference is also a quite common and frequent practice within the community with some blogs' statements often echo or are interpreted against the backdrops of other blogs' statements. In addition, the China bloggers often mention about offline communicating with other bloggers occasionally. In all respects, the China blogs under investigation collectively constitute a loose but connected community; they are a magic kaleidoscope of either eternal or fleeting images and moments of life in twenty-first century China.

Although the China blogs purport to portray China in a "truthful" fashion, their versions of China adventures are not the exact slice-of-life documents about or faithful reflections of the

reality of the country. After all, what we usually get are fragmented snapshots or impressions of the country, and the encompassing “truth” about the country is always elusive and beyond our comprehension. The ambiguity and the intertextuality of the discourse-making processes determine that our bloggers are unwittingly and almost inevitably trapped in a world of biased perceptions and stories that exceed or shortchange “reality” despite their desire to be truthful and accurate. The China depicted in the blogs, therefore, are only a selection, an interpretation, and a dramatization of a China observed and examined from a particular point of view. Further, the examination of the demography of the American bloggers illuminates the nature of that particular vantage point. To be more specific, the China that is presented in these blogs, in most cases, is a China observed and understood by a specific group of young, male, white, well-educated middle class Americans. And I would argue that this particular representation, in essence, is a digital discourse of cultural othering.

Others in Discourse/Discourse of Othering

There are a number of presuppositions to refer to in order to make sense of the conceptualization of the select China blogs as a discourse of cultural othering. In the introduction to *The language and politics of exclusion: Others in discourse*, Stephan Harold Riggins (1997) discussed the relevance to critically examining the discourse of racial and cultural othering in “an age of civility and official tolerance” (p.7). He acknowledged that the politics of multiculturalism have led to a general decline of prejudice in today’s societies. Yet, he also implied that this change or improvement of the attitudes doesn’t suggest a total eradication of ethnocentrism and cultural intolerance. The public expression of racism,

ethnocentrism, and intolerance is far more complex than it was in the past. Therefore instead of blatant outcries we are more likely to encounter subtle and implicit expressions of racial and cultural intolerance. For example, people, consciously or unconsciously, tend to employ the discourse that mitigates or disguises their prejudices in the public but reveal more severe and cruel opinions within their circles of family and friends.

The China blogs present an interesting case to look at the exercises of such differentiating discursive politics in public and interpersonal contexts. On one hand, American expatriates use the blogosphere as a public forum to promote intercultural understanding and respect. On the other hand, they can't help resorting to old stereotypes and prejudices when they speak about China directly to their families and friends back home. In an inevitable way, the lenses they put on to examine China have already been colored and shaped by the ontological and epistemological binary construct of Self and Other that has historically influenced the formation of Euro-American subjectivity. Ontologically the Other is integral to the development of self identity. Being opposite and external to the Self, the Other is located in categories of differences. Riggins (1997) was right to assert that the Other is a relative category, and the Others are not just social groups marginalized and silenced by dominant groups. However, for the purpose of this study, I use the term Others to refer to the Chinese differences perceived by American bloggers.

At the epistemological level, the Other is constructed discursively in representation that emphasizes differences rather than similarities. Value judgments are easily passed on in this realm. Differences are either presented as fearful or incomprehensible, or strangely inviting and attractive. The aestheticization of the differences of the Other is clearly an expression of

exoticism. Although it is inevitable to generalize about cultural Others in intercultural encounter, there is an obvious danger to apply the observed differences to all the members of the cultural others without taking into considerations of specific local contexts. As the result, stereotypes are created as fixed and essential categories in which cultural Others are trapped. The discursive construct of the Self/Other(s) dichotomy can be observed in a reliance on stereotypes to signal and explain cultural differences, in the absence of the Other's voice, in the lexical choices that distinguish "us" from "them", and in the explicate and implicit evaluative statements about the Other.

China Blogs as Travel Narratives

The metaphoric blogosphere of cultural encounter, representation, and contestation is the direct result of the transnational and trans-cultural boundary crossing made by the American expatriates into China. Maybe it is more appropriate to call them travelers, because most of them come to China not to settle down, but to spend a couple of months or years doing business, exploring the country, learning the language, or simply gaining experience. Few of them actually stay. Filled with the seemingly mundane trivialities of life in China their blogs are also the records of passage and markers of their crossing to the other side of physical and mental horizon.

There are practical reasons why those China blogs were created and maintained diligently. First of all, blogging opens an immediate communication channel with their home. Initially those blogs are digital correspondences sent to home in which the moments and scenarios of the bloggers' Chinese encounter are shared among families and friends without the constraints

of time and space. Second, besides being an economical solution to family bonding over a long distance, keeping a blog can also be a stress reliever. It is a way to channel the frustration one faces when living in a foreign culture and struggling with a new and difficult language. Writing blogs helps stimulate the sojourners' minds. In addition to the practicalities, there is an unstated collective ambition among these American bloggers that they wish, to various degrees, their accounts of China will capture and reveal some essence of the country. Of course, China has been written about numerous times before. But who can portray the country in such an immediate, vivid, and intimate manner better than those who more or less immerse themselves in the culture? Too often tourists talk, and even brag, about their trips to China, but in the eyes of the China bloggers those talks are no more than shallow and fleeting impressions. Journalists report on Chinese events almost daily, but the media coverage of the country is perceived to be overtly driven by political motivation and agenda. Then there are knowledgeable China hands, scholars of sinology who produce deep academic journal articles and thick books on subjects concerning China. Still, common readers tend to find their erudite writings inaccessible and less fun to read. Maybe what the readers back home or online need is the descriptions of China provided by insiders who have a refreshingly personal take on the country. And this is precisely what the China blogs promise to deliver.

It is this very promise that establishes the kinship between the blogs and what we generally know as the genre of travel writing. The only differences between the two can be noticed on at least two levels. First, the majority of the writing in the China blogs is much less literarily polished than travel writing. Second, travel writing is often for publication purposes. Therefore, it has often been "unabashedly commercial" and command "large advances, wide distribution

and substantial returns” (Clark, 1999, p.1). The profit motive of travel writing is less obvious in the China blogs. With regard to the number of readers, China blogs have less audience than travel writing. But the number of their readers could increase exponentially given the Internet itself is an indefinite pool of readership. People come to visit the China blogs because of word of mouth. Once they like what they read they will come back and even become regular subscribers to the blog feed. In this sense, the China blogs have no less impact on the public’s perception of Chinese culture than conventional travel writing. In fact, the China blogs can be regarded as a set of informal travel books about China with individual writings devoted to aspects of Chinese culture and life. And they can exert as much impact on the public as the print travelogues. For example, in a short ten month period after its launch on the web one China blog receives 10,000 visitors.

Despite the minor differences, the affinity between the China blogs and travel writing is out of question. The desire that drives young Americans to travel to China is not different from the “salutary curiosity” (Kowalewski, 1992, p.8) toward the dimensions of other cultures felt by travel writers of the past. The American expatriates who leave the relative comfort and security of home and venture to a Far East land are attracted and thrilled by the unknown Chineseness. They may come to taste the exotic, or they may genuinely wish to enlarge their cultural horizons. Maybe they even come to China with a wish to better understand themselves through an encounter with the Chinese culture. It is also likely that they travel to China because they want to seek a sense of freedom from simply being away from the monotonous routines of home that are either too politically and artistically limiting, or socially intolerant. In that sense, travel to them is a form of escape and liberation. Beyond these possible reasons, we may

perceive if we look deeply enough what Fogel (1996) suggested a deeper psychic urge in those American bloggers to make the Chinese others more familiar the unknown is dangerous, so it is better to find and conquer it than to wait for it to come to you.

It is worth pointing out that people do not always travel voluntarily. In the essay *Traveling Cultures*, James Clifford (1992) identified two types of travel. According to him travel can be a negative experience associated with “transience, superficiality, tourism, exile, and rootlessness” (p. 105) as much as it can be viewed in positive light when it invokes “exploration, research, escape, transforming encounter” (p. 105). Talking about American China bloggers we know they are all voluntary travelers. Therefore, their encounters with the Chinese Otherness are more aligned with explorations and discovery than forced displacement. Moreover, the freedom most of them enjoy in terms of moving to China and living a respected and comfortable life as foreign students and English teachers has to be understood in a context where an offshoot of the political, economical, cultural, and even racial privileges that are entitled to them as travelers from the developed metropolitan centers of North America and to the so-called developing “third world” of China.

For whatever confusing and contradictory reasons, those Americans come to China. Their lives in this new territory are not easy. Language stands in their way to having effective communication with the locals. It is difficult to decipher street signs and understand newspaper headlines. And they have to adapt to Chinese cultural manners and occasionally put up with “comfortless conditions” and “endure a kind of alienation and panic in foreign parts for the after-taste of having sampled new scenes” (Theroux, 1985, p.131). Even by the strictest standards set by the most sophisticated and elitist explorers of foreign cultures such as Paul

Theroux, these bloggers are real travelers who enjoy a higher reputation than tourists.

Therefore, in this study I use American travelers and China bloggers interchangeably. Also, in my examination of blogs produced by American travelers, I purposefully exclude blogs written by Americans who are in China for business or political purposes because the former are only passers-by and the latter are constrained by their career objectives. Thus, I leave out blogs written by political commentators, professional journalists, businessmen, and scholars of sinology.

Motivated by the desire to experience the Chinese otherness, the American travelers/bloggers come to China. What they choose to do with such experiences is similar to travelers writing about foreign cultures: they write about those experiences and publish them online in their own blogs. In that sense, the China blogs are digital and online versions of travelogues, albeit very rough and unpolished products of “crossing cultural frontiers” (Gray, 1992, p.36) or an example of one civilization reporting on another. (Thubron, 1989)

By definition, travel writing is “texts concerned with journeys and written by authors who are themselves frequent, if not continuous and compulsive travelers” (Philip, 1993, p. 241). It is unique in terms of the distinctiveness of each journey. It has also been extensively influenced by a wide range of discourses including news reporting, anthropology, sociology and even ecological science concerning other cultures. In terms of its form or subgenres, it borrows freely from “letters, guidebooks, confessional narratives, and, most important, fiction” (Gray, 1992, p. 36). But it also distinguishes from related modes of expression. For example, guide books are addressed to people who plan to follow the traveler, doing what the traveler has done, while confessional diaries tend to be written and read by “internal audience of one” (Fogel,

1996, p.8). Since travel writing tends to be looked down upon by literary critics, I am afraid that the blogs under investigation will face the same dismissal. However, as much as travel writing can be considered “the literature of fact” (Kowalewski, 1992, p.2), blogs warrant our attention because the study of them brings into light many of the cultural, political, and historical issues that influence the of Sino-U.S. relationship.

Blogs as a Discursive/Rhetorical Space: Contribution to the Field

Although blogs have been rapidly integrated into the lives of millions of Internet users worldwide in recent years, the research focus on weblogs is rather limiting. In the first book ever devoted to blogs, *We’ve Got Blog: How Weblogs Are Changing Our Culture* (2002), early adopters of blogs such as Rebecca Blood, Cameron Barrett, and Giles Turnbull along with many others looked back at the early days of blogging and predicted its future development. Among them, Blood categorized blogs into three genres including filter, personal journal, and notebook. Filter refers to blogs only containing links to external sources. Personal journal features bloggers’ inner thoughts. And notebook is a combination of the two. Overall, this book presented a quite comprehensive picture of weblogs as a new Internet communication but fell short to address the wider implications of weblogs.

Following the publication of this book, blog research has really taken off in a short time. Relevant literature has exploded and increased our understanding of weblogs. The majority of the literature though has been descriptive and quantitative. Empirical research focused on describing the basic structures of weblogs, studying the characteristics of weblogs as a new Internet genre, and investigating blogger demographics including age, geographic location,

and personal interest. Kumar, Novak, Raghavan and Tomkins (2004) surveyed some 25,000 blogs on www.livejournal.com in order to unearth fascinating insights into bloggers' behavior. Their analysis was informed by two distinct perspectives. One was temporal, which means the analysis dealt with the evolution of blogs over time. Informed by a spatial perspective the researchers examined how bloggers congregate in terms of their personal interests. The survey revealed that three out of four bloggers at that time were in the age group between 16 and 24. It predicted that bloggers of similar age tend to form a social network that is tightly clustered based on shared interests. It also revealed that on a global scale blogging was much more active and popular in the U.S. and European centers of computing activity such as California, Florida, New York, England, Russia, and Australia. In terms of the evolution of blogs, Kumar et al. also noticed that a small number of individual bloggers, usually about 3 to 20, tended to form a local community. Within this blog community the bloggers would refer to each other through *blogroll*, a sidebar within blogs that lists other blogs. Comparing their findings of the blog community's burst of activity to the early days of blogging in 2003, the researchers concluded that "blogspace is a rich and complex social environment that admits study at many levels" (p. 39), and the behavior of the bloggers has changed toward more community-oriented activity.

In a content analysis to quantify the structural and functional properties of the blogs, Herring et al. (2004b) identified four types of blog. According to the researchers they were personal journals, filter, K-log, and mixed. Except for the same three subgenres of blogs suggested in the book *We've Got Blogs*, Herring and her colleagues nominated K-log as the fourth subgenre that is restricted to knowledge-sharing among members of specific communities. The other contribution of this survey showed the impact of gender and age

differences on bloggers' behaviors. According to the result, female bloggers and teenage bloggers tend to favor personal journals more than their male and older counterparts do. On the other hand, male bloggers are more inclined to maintain either filter or K-logs. The research also discovered a sharp increase in the frequency of blogging activity among bloggers in the early 2003. Such increase was attributed it to the evolution of blogging software that pushed the adoption of weblogs among Internet users. In 2005, Herring et al. conducted another quantitative social network analysis to investigate the extent to which blogs are interconnected in what patterns. Another objective of this empirical study was to test the conversational nature of blogging. Through analyzing the textual and hyper-textual exchange among clusters of interconnected blogs the researchers found out, contrary to earlier predictions, that blogosphere is only partially interconnected and sporadically conversational.

Besides documenting and mapping the activities in blogosphere, more researchers were becoming interested in studying the social ramifications of blogging. They were interested in unveiling people's intention to blog. (Rosenbloom, 2004; Nardi et al, 2004; Baker & Moore, 2008) Their studies revealed that people blog for various reasons. They use blogs to document their lives, to channel their thoughts and feelings, to cope with stress, to publish their everyday drama, or to reach out for larger audience. The shifting of the research focus away from emphasizing the formal and structural components of the genre to unearthing the motives of bloggers and evaluating the social relevance of the blogging activity has answered the call of critical Internet scholars (Gajjala, 2001; Munt, 2001; Wakeford, 2004; Wellman, 2004) who ardently emphasized the importance and value of incorporating social, cultural and critical perspectives into the study of online practices. In this new trend weblog research has proven its

potential of covering diverse social issues and providing insights to those issues. Among them the most discussed and relatively well-researched topic about weblogs concerns the social and transformative capacity of blogs as a new type of media and a new means to encourage political activism. Scholars (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Kerbel & Bloom, 2005; McDougall, 2005; Wall, 2005) have been excited about the socially interactive nature of blogs the arrival of a new era where grassroots journalism is encouraged by blogs' potential to empower ordinary citizens to engage in civic and political debates that have been long dominated by institutions. Not only did they consider blogs to be an embodiment of the public spirit of a democratic Internet, they also predicted that blogs are able to start the "next evolution of web-based experience" (Khan & Kellner, 2004, P. 91). And they applauded bloggers who are "techno-activists favoring not only democratic self-expression and networking, but also global media critique and journalistic sociopolitical intervention" (p. 91). Kahn and Kellner also argued that personal weblogs reconfigure politics around people's everyday lives, increasing "the realm of freedom, community, and empowerment" (p. 93). There was different opinion also. Matheson (2004), however, disagreed with Kahn and Kellner's argument as to what degree weblogs can revolutionize traditional and institutional journalism. His scrutiny of a weblog produced by the British *Guardian* newspaper indicated that blogs can resemble old media in the sense that they link to established news institutions, preserve the journalistic role of gatekeeper, and construct a journalistic claim to authority. In the end, he argued that blogs don't "provide a new personalized democratic space in which the mainstream media are held to account" (p. 460).

Aside from discussing blogs' potential to facilitate a more participatory public sphere, blog scholarship (Bortree, 2005) has also expanded to issues such as community formation and

identity construction (Blanchard, 2004; Turkle, 1995) in the blogosphere. Another strand of blog research (Huffaker, 2005; Sade, 2005) has centered on exploring blogs' strength in promoting learning in educational setting. Despite the growing research on the social and political implications of blogs and blogging, critical and discursive engagement with the medium has been relatively scarce. Yet, some blog research pioneers have already ventured into this rather new territory. One early attempt was made by Susan Herring and her colleagues (2004a). It was more a study about public and media's perception of blog community rather than blogs and blogging per se. What the researchers found in a random survey of mass media reports on weblogs was an apparent lack of interest on the media's part in reflecting the diversity of the blogging population especially in the areas of gender and age. Media's unbalanced report misled the public by projecting that only technology-savvy young males are interested in blogging. Herring and her colleagues believed that androcentric rule was the reason behind, which values male authors over female authors in blogosphere. Not only is the offline status quo reproduced in the gender dynamics of blogging communities, it is also reflected and perpetuated in the discourse being produced within weblogs. In a combined survey and ethnography research, Ratliff (2004) interviewed bloggers in a female blogging community. Later and found out that dominant ideologies such as sexism, racism, and classism still very much influence blogging practices.

Barbara Warnick (2001), a communication scholar, once discussed the possibility of conducting critical and rhetorical research in a new media environment such as the Internet. According to her, "to the extent that electronic messages are designed, ordered, and organized to privilege certain ideas and to influence the thinking of their users and readers, rhetorical and

discursive criticism can be fruitfully applied to the Internet” (p. 63). She further argued that the Internet of today is much more structured and organized than it was a few years ago. Therefore, it is much easier for web messages to present coherent positions, to inform, influence, and persuade those who log onto them. The observations made by Barbara Warnick also rings true with blogs. Moreover it points to a new direction into which critical blog research could be heading. When we take a closer look at discussion around various issues being produced in blogosphere we will conceptualize blogs not merely as static link lists or new forms of personal webpage but an interesting social and discursive channels that occupy an ambivalent position on the Internet by stranding the public and the personal. The talks about seemingly trivial events in blogosphere connect with the larger and wider universe of events. The personal could have a far-reaching influence on the formation of public opinion in subtle but no less powerful ways. In that regard, critical examination of blog discourses is of great significance to the study of weblogs and it has to be done with considerations of the larger social, cultural, and historical contexts in which the blogs discourses are situated. It is based on such an understanding of the social relevance of blogs that I conducted a critical multimodal discursive analysis of American expatriates’ China blogs as a contact zone of cultures and a digital site of cultural representation.

CHAPTER TWO: CHINA IN WESTERN EYES, A BRIEF HISTORY

China in Western Travelogues:

A Brief History, Prominent Themes, and Rhetorical Strategies

Before conducting a close scrutiny of the online discourse about contemporary China produced by American expatriates, a review of previous Western accounts about the country, its people and culture produced in different historical moments would be helpful to put the current investigation into a historical context. In this effort emphasis has been given to identifying major themes and rhetoric conventions in those historical narratives. The expectation here is to trace the historical continuity between the travel narratives of the past and today's online anecdotes about China.

In a wider definition, historical Western travel writing about China came in many forms, “as diplomatic reports, or as poems, as stage plays or as letters home, as philosophical tracts or novels” (Spence, 1998, p. xii). Despite the different literary forms, these writings were part of a tradition of unveiling the legendary cultures of the Far East to the Western world. It is a time-cherished tradition that could be dated back to the year of 1253 when French man William of Rubruck was dispatched by French Louise IX to Mongol. Although William of Rubruck never made it to China he still noted down whatever information he obtained from the Chinese living there. Today, those notes are believed by historian such as Spence (1998) as the earliest Western manuscript about China.

The most famous and one of the earliest thorough records of Westerners' excursion into China was the admiring writings of Kublai Khan's empire by Italian merchant Marco Polo in

the thirteenth century. The text was also the first such work by a Westerner to claim to look at China from the inside. The general tone of Marco Polo's account was a sense of awestruck wonder at the enchanting strangeness of Chinese civilization. In this famous book *Description of the World*, Marco Polo went into details describing the wealthy and the splendor of the Chinese imperial court and the many marvels and curiosities he encountered in the middle kingdom. Although in recent years historians and scholars have cast doubts on whether Marco Polo actually reached China, his accounts did spark Western interests in China and did lead to closer contacts between Europe and the Far East. Historian Stockwell (2003) would point out that it was a copy of *Description of the World* that accompanied Christopher Columbus in his historical transatlantic sail in search of the mysterious Cathay.¹⁰

Marco Polo was followed by French Jesuits who came to China in around sixteenth century on missions to spread Catholicism. One of their leaders Matteo Ricci visited Beijing in 1598. Three years later he succeeded in setting up a Jesuit base in the capital city despite the previous restriction imposed by the Ming imperial court. Similar to Marco Polo, French Jesuits were impressed by the advanced Chinese civilization. Their favorable writings about the country cultivated China admirers among the most distinguished French intellectuals such as philosopher Voltaire who never had any contact with China or the Chinese (Stockwell, 2003).

As the seventeenth century waned diplomats and soldiers from the Netherlands and Great Britain followed the steps of the French Jesuit to explore China. Unlike the Jesuits this new group of Westerners viewed China with hostility as they were forced by imperial Chinese court

¹⁰ Cathay is a more poetic alternative name for China. It was used in Marco Polo's *Travels in the Land of Kublai Khan*.

to observe ritualized subservience in front of the Chinese emperor. (Spence, 1998) Those unfavorable attitudes were reflected in the writings of John Bell (1965) and George Anson (Walter, 2001).

The American attitudes toward China were more or less influenced by European attitudes. According to historian Harold Isaacs (1980) who did an extensive study examining American images of China through interviewing prominent American intellectuals and political figures, the eighteenth century was an age of respect in terms of how Americans perceived China. Isaacs believed that Americans held Chinese civilization in high regards before 1840. He also observed that the years after 1840 were marked by the American contempt of the country. Other pioneer historians such as Kenneth Latourette and Tyler Dennett supported Isaacs's argument that China inspired Americans something of awe, even of envy before 1840 for three major reasons. First of all, early American traders and missionaries to China were free of racial prejudices unlike their British counterparts. Second, a common fear of British colonial ambition drew Americans closer to the Chinese. Third, Americans saw Chinese social system has a Jeffersonian flavor therefore similar to American social system (Miller, 1998)

Stuart Miller (1998) held a different view though. After reviewing fifty American traders' accounts of China and the Chinese between 1785 and 1840 he discerned that Americans were interested in but also very critical of the Chinese peculiarities, technological backwardness, dishonesty, moral debasement, and idolatry. Based on these observations, Miller argued that the American fondness of Chinese culture was hardly more than a fascination with the exotic unknown. He further argued that all the evidence pointed not to the early American expatriates'

respect of China but a wide-spread contempt of the country. Therefore, the popular assumption of the American benevolence toward China prior to 1840 was misleading if not entirely groundless.

Even if the pre-1840 American travelers held Chinese civilization in high regards, their followers would look at the country through other lenses. By all accounts the year of 1840 was a turning point in Chinese history as well as in the Western assessment of the country and its culture. In that year, China was defeated by the West in the First Opium War. The defeat effectively reversed the relation between China and the West. From that point on China gradually succumbed to various spheres of influence from Western colonial powers. Then, the ratification of Tianjin Treaty after China's another defeat in the Second Opium War in 1860 allowed westerners to roam freely in China's interior beyond a handful of treaty ports along China's east coast. However, it was not until 1870 that Western travel inside China really picked up its pace. Under the British pressure to ensure foreign travelers' safety, Chinese imperial administration ordered local government to provide official protection and escort to British, French, or American travelers. It is worth pointing out that there were quite a few American women among these travelers of the late nineteenth century. From Eliza Bridgman at the beginning to Jane Elkins in the middle, and to Sarah Conger and Eva Price at the end of the century these American women brought gender perspectives to the Western narratives of China. Of course, their writings presented China with enormous charm. Yet, it was obviously tinged with an imminent danger as the Qing dynasty was about to collapse and the Chinese society was at the brink of long social unrest and a devastating civil war (Spence, 1998).

In the first half of the twentieth century another new perspective to look at China was proposed by left-leaning American journalists who sympathized with the cause of the Chinese Communist revolution. The unforgettable writings Edgar Snow (1973), Graham Peck (1940), and Agnes Smedley (1975) became the first source in the Western world about Chinese Communist Party. Their writings not only introduced the Chinese Communist Party to the West in the most positive and idealistic manner, they also portrayed the charismatic Mao Zedong as an emblem of a new and more progressive China.

After the reestablishment of the Chinese central power under the Communists Party in 1949 and especially after the Korean War, Western travel to China practically came to a halt. Since then anti-Communism sentiment started meshing with a dark vision of Communist totalitarianism and dominated the popular Western imagination of China. It was only after the re-normalization of the Sino-U.S. relation in 1972 that Western travelers once again started pouring into China. Between 1980s and the early twenty-first century many travel books focusing on China have been published. Most of them provided vivid descriptions of the beauty of Chinese landscape and the exotic customs of the Chinese society. Few travelers could write about China like Peter Hessler (2006) and Rob Gifford (2008) did. Both authors spent years living in China and learning Chinese language and the culture. Their perspectives were panoramic trying to encompass all aspects of Chinese society. And their narratives were nothing about simple generalizations. Instead, their writings provide opportunities for China to reveal itself, for the first time, through ambiguity, contradictions, nuances, and rich layers of meaning. Anyone reads their books would sense a new and unconventional approach to reporting China. And their influence on the Western imagination of China remains to be

evaluated.

The abovementioned travel writings of the Western travelers to China provided a sketch of the West's encounter with China. The travelers/writers played important roles in shaping that experience in the West. The value of their writings to current study, however, lies in the fact that those writings could serve, in the most subtle and implicit way, as the templates upon which our American bloggers construct their own narratives about contemporary China. Not only do our bloggers inherit the same vantage point to observe China from their predecessors, they also incorporate many of the rhetoric and discursive strategies from the previous Western accounts of the country and its culture. One noticeable difference between the two groups is that early Western explorers to China enjoyed a much greater privilege than their counterparts in a digital age. The colonial privilege endowed those early travelers freedom to observe China from a distinct superior vantage point, from which China was transformed into an aesthetic object for appreciation and evaluation. Its sublime scenery, exotic ethnic minorities, peculiar customs, and even poverty came to life in the travel writings of Archibold John Little (1898), Isabella Bird Bishop (1899), Constance Gordon-Cumming, (1900), Alexander Williamson (1870), Archibald Glover (1908), and so on.

A cursory survey of their narratives reveals four major themes that shaped the mainstream Western thinking about China. The first dominant concern of early travelers was territorial because that it was closely related to the colonial expansion. Second, natural science loomed large in the minds of those travelers. Special attentions had been given to topics related to botany, geology, anthropology, and ethnographic study of Chinese ethnic minorities. Third,

romantic appreciation and depiction of Chinese landscape epitomized the pleasure of colonialism. Finally there was a strong religious motivation present in most of the writings when those early travelers were missionaries dedicated to evangelizing China (Wang, 2004).

If there is one more persistent theme emerging from those colonial narratives, an emphasis on the Otherness of China in relation to the West could be easily identified. American travelers from as early as the late eighteenth century kept reminding their compatriots that Chinese culture and people were peculiar. Sometimes, such peculiarity was framed in favorable light to invoke a sense of exoticism. More than often the backwardness of the country, culture, and the Chinese life style were highlighted in a stark contrast to Western scientific progress and civil ways of organizing society and domestic life. To those travelers, China conjured up an image not of glory but of waste and unchanging hopelessness. They perceived the land as “corrupt, superstitious, and burdened by a conservatism so rigid it might be taken for stupidity” (Clifford, 2001b, p. 128). They also saw those incomprehensible and intolerable Chinese peculiarities being manifested in what they described as the exploiting Chinese political and social systems. In the end, they readily drew a conclusion that China didn’t have history anymore but a distant past. The achievements in the Chinese civilization were easily scoffed by them as something that had been long vanished into an eternal past. And Chinese history became irrelevant when it was subject to the evaluation using Western standards, which defined history as a “progressive force, ever moving forward, making its logic evident in the experience of Europe and North America” (p. 131).

Many Western travelers felt it was their white man’s burden and moral obligation to bring

progress to ill-fated China. Hence, the denial and even deprivation of Chinese history became a burden of progressivism-minded Americans. Most of them felt it was their task to guide China out of its static condition and to re-connect China with the progressive historical force. Such a sense of mission was exemplified in their criticism of almost every facet of Chinese life ranging from political system to the most mundane details such as domestic hygiene. Under their pens, China was a land of hopelessness crippled by government corruption. The barbaric practice of foot-binding, polygamy practiced by Chinese upper class, idolatry, filthy Chinese inns, and dusty Chinese streets were common points of attention in those travel tales. For instance, Elsie Maude Sites, a female missionary to China once wrote of the “heathenism” and the “low, dark, houses in the “filthy streets” of China and assured her readers at the same time that she was removed from what she witnessed because she rode in a sedan chair carried upon the shoulders of chair-bearers, or coolies (Cramer, 2003, p. 215).

Around the same time, another American missionary woman Hatties Yates Cady also shared a similar attitude toward China. In a letter to her sister in the summer of 1895, Cady playfully joked about how she could pass as a Chinese wife in traditional Chinese clothe. In her amusing but nonetheless comfortably superior tone, she emphasized the difference between America and China. In Carol Chin’s (2003) eyes, such an act revealed the power relation between American missionaries and Chinese women, and it was an indicator of what she calls American “beneficent imperialism”, which is “predicated on the notion of race and culture” (p. 332).

Another American traveler Arthur Smith wrote a book *Chinese Characteristics* based on

his experience in China in 1894. He arranged the 27 chapters on Chinese sensibilities through lens of Christian humanism. And he made ethnographic attempts to understand China as a primitive society and Europe as the center of privileged humanity and a higher form of life. Wang (2004) once commented that such a bold generalization of the Chinese as of without character and conscience reflects the irreconcilable conflict between the colonizer and that of the colonized, in which control and dominance constitute the dominant proof of understanding.

These anecdotes shared by British and American travelers between the late nineteenth and twentieth century mirrored a strong belief in the so called civilizing mission of the West, which was to guide the Chinese through Western democracy, science, education, and Evangelism. Today students of colonial discourse will recognize those languages of civilizing mission in which North European and American imperialists produced the Chinese people as, to use Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) words, "natives, reductive, incomplete beings suffering from the inability to have become what Europeans already are, or to have made themselves into what Europeans intend them to be" (p. 152). Pratt also harshly criticized those travelogues for reflecting the way "the capitalist vanguard read themselves into the future of those they sought to exploit, as a kind of moral and historical inevitability" (p. 153).

Like Pratt, David Spurr (1993) recognized this particular colonial discourse in his reading of Western travel and journalistic writings about other non-Western cultures. He pointed out that the way Western writers approach other cultures is not necessarily limited to ideological positioning. In other word, no matter what different ideologies Western producers of the discourse may espouse they rely upon the same set of colonial rhetorical principles in

representing cultures other than their own. Applying Spurr's theoretical framework to the examination of travelogues produced by legendary early-twentieth-century Americans who were anti-imperial, who empathized with the Chinese about their predicament, and who saw China's hope in Chinese communist revolutionaries, Clifford (2001a) found Edgar Snow, Agnes Smedley and Graham Peck accomplices of nineteenth century imperialists whom they despised so much. Those self-proclaimed broad-minded American liberal travelers/writers infused in their writings the familiar colonial rhetoric. Their portraits of China switched back and forth from a nostalgic admiring of what their Western minds fantasized as the ancient and authentic Chinese wisdom to unflattering stereotypes of China's backwardness and degeneration. And they relied heavily on signifiers such as dirt, disorder, dingy smell, grave, and dire poverty to convey the message. The persistence of the seemingly opposing themes of fascination and repulsion in the China travelogues of American men and women of the left in the early twentieth led Clifford argue that the undeniable "Orientalist cast of mind formed part of the intellectual genealogy" (p. 131) of Americans who dealt with China, and "who in their representations of that land and its people might easily fall into ways of speaking that participated in the larger Orientalist binaries: Eastern passivity and Western activism, Eastern illogic and Western rationality, Eastern despotism and western freedom" (p. 131).

Orientalism, Travel Writing and the Difficulties of Representation

Nowadays, the texts produced by Western travelers of late nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been the target of an on-going postcolonial critique project that aims at problematizing the seemingly innocence of the travel writing and at exposing its complacency

with colonial expansion and exploitation.

The interrogation of Euro-American travel writings through the lens of post-colonialism or neo-colonialism is largely indebted to Edward Said's ground-breaking theoretical formulation of what is known as orientalism. The publication of the book *Orientalism* in 1978 created a new paradigm and model primarily for the critical examination and assessment of a corpus of Western intellectual productions, Euro-American travel writings included, that are associated with the representation, construction, and invention of the Orient as both an imaginary geographic and cultural entity peripheral to the Euro-American center. Three domains of orientalism are worth spelling out here. First, it is concerned with the cultural and political relationship between Europe and Middle East and Asia; second, it is a Euro-American scientific discipline that originated in the early nineteenth century with a specialization in the study of Oriental cultures and traditions; third, it refers to ideological suppositions about Asian cultures in general, and Islamic culture in particular. Edward Said's theorization has much to do with the second and the third aspects of the orientalism. In the book, he meticulously analyzed the texts produced by orientalist to illustrate the epistemology that produces "representation of societies in terms of essentialized cultural characteristics" (Dirlik, 1996, p. 97). In short, Said's orientalism stands for a complex institutional othering practice of Western cultures vis-à-vis Oriental cultures. It is "a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and the 'Occident' " (Said, 1978, p. 2). By naming, describing, and representing the Orient in certain ways Western cultures dominate and exercise authority over the Orient. They even gain "strength and identity by setting itself off the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (p. 3).

Orientalism as a unified and systemic practice encompasses all Western political, military, and ideological realms. In Said's (1978) own words, it is not a mere intellectual instrument of Euro-American imperialism but intellectual imperialism exercised unto non-Western peoples, and is "a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts"(p. 12).

The goal of orientalism-informed cultural critique is not so much about discovering the "true" essence of the Oriental societies than exploring the expressions of the Euro-American cultural conscious. (Dirlik, 1996) It raises the questions like "How does Euro-American culture (re)present the other?", "Through what processes are these representations articulated?", and "By doing so how does the West deny the rights of Oriental cultures to (re)present for themselves?". Answers to those questions are of great significance to the critical interrogation of the Eurocentric epistemology that has given rise to the ordering of the world in accordance with Western criteria of historicism and development.

Although Said's conceptualization of orientalism primarily dealt with British/French culturalists' conceptions of Middle East and India, the relevance of this theoretical framework to the study of Euro-American discursive representation and construction of China is indisputable. In the introduction to *Orientalism* Said (1978) pointed out that America has its own share of orientalism while ascending to the world power. He suggested that the Americans' sense of the Orient is much more likely to be associated with the Far East including China and Japan. It is also Said's contention that during the nineteenth century the United States was "concerned with the Orient in ways that prepared for its later, overtly imperial

concern” (p. 293). In the book, he illustrated the U.S. connection to orientalism by quoting a speech from John Pickering, the first president of American Oriental Society in 1843. In the speech Pickering encouraged Americans to take the advantages of an easy access to Asian cultures such as China to expand its own Oriental studies and to facilitate the U.S. empire-building in Asian-Pacific region. It is also worth mentioning that although the U.S. involvement in China didn’t entail “direct colonial rules in the form of territorial acquisition and political governance” (Yoshihara, 2003, p. 7), an informal American sphere of influence was established and was active in Asian Pacific countries such as China, Japan, Vietnam, and Philippines. In the late nineteenth century, the United States started an aggressive commercial and cultural expansion in China after signing series of unequal treaties with the country.

Since its inception Edward Said’s orientalism has inspired the critique of Euro-American colonial discourse. Mary Louise Pratt (1992), Gayatri Spivak (1995), Homi Bhabha (1997) and others have followed suit and made their unique contributions to the critical engagement with various forms of colonial discourse. Among their works, the examination of colonial travel writings by Western sojourners in Oriental cultures revealed colonial psyche in a more immediate manner because travel writing is believed to be unequivocal in its meaning.

In pervious chapter I pointed out that the China blogs are a digital extension of the genre of travel writing. By framing the China blogs in such a way, I want to call the attention to the dilemma that these two face when it comes to the matter of representing cultural Others from a distinct Euro-American point of view. Those dilemmas or difficulties arise from the highly ideological and complex nature of travel, the dubious connection between travel writing and

colonial project, travelers' own positionality, and the intrinsic problem of relying on sight to gain knowledge.

As a literary genre travel writing is a complex hybrid connected to autobiographies and eye-witness accounts. According to Peter Bishop (1989) it is "a sub-species of memoir, a form of romance..., [an] art of collage [of] newspaper clippings, public notices, letters, official documents, diary extracts, essays on current affairs...[and] it is not concerned only with the discovery of places but also with their creation" (p. 3) because "no matter how much effort is devoted to being as true as possible to the empirical material, frequently the travel account masks a totally fictional and imagined journey"(p.4).

From a postcolonial standpoint, Western travel writings have never been innocent. Being the most practiced and widely read literary genre among those who have exercised commercial or political power over others it "has been involved in one way or another with the history of colonialism" (Philip, 1993, p. 242,). Clark (1999) was even more explicitly critical of the genre being an implicit manifestation of colonial desire and being the instances of the promotion and confirmation of imperial power. In his views, travel conducted by Euro-American sojourners during the era of colonial expansion was a one-way street, in which Westerners "mapped the world rather than the world mapping them" (p.3). He even went on saying that not only was travel associated with exploitation, Western travelers were also figures to be feared and shunned precisely because they belonged to a more developed culture and had greater access to transportation technology.

The postcolonial critique of Euro-American travel writings sees its main objective at exposing the implicit power relationship between Euro-American travelers and the Oriental

destinations they visited and eventually sort to represent. A Euro-American subject's ability to move freely in Oriental cultures is no different in essence from his or her sense of mission to report and represent the Other. On one end, it is the prestige to travel; and on the other end, it is the power to produce knowledge about the Other. But an understanding and assessment of the intricacies of that power relationship also requires critics of the colonial travel discourse to grapple with the fact that those Euro-American travelers usually move about under cultural, political, and economic compulsions. As Clifford (1992) pointed out that those "different circumstances are crucial determinations of the travel at issue," and they include "movements in specific colonial, neo-colonial, and postcolonial circuits, different diasporas, borderlands, exiles, detours and returns" (p.108). Thus, travel in a post-colonial context is a highly complex phenomenon. It means a wide range of spatial and material practices that produce images, music, hearsay, stories, memories, and knowledge about the Other.

The difficulties facing Euro-American travelers in reporting oriental cultures do not only have epistemological and ethical dimensions. The dominance of vision over other senses as a means to gain knowledge also presents challenges to the travelers who rely almost exclusively upon their abilities to see/witness the Other. Although it is true that the supremacy of vision in human cognition has only been a relative modern development, Foucault (1973) would convince us, through his ground-breaking theorization in the *Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, that it is a very important epistemological development in Western thoughts. Indeed, this notion that seeing equals knowing and knowledge laid down the philosophical groundwork for the advances in modern Western science and technologies such as microbiology, medicine, X-rays, the telescope, and so on. Thumbing through stories of

Western travelers visiting other parts of the world we will find the same assumption permeating their entire travel discourse. Therefore, travel has long been associated with sightseeing. Descriptions of beautiful or exotic scenery have always been a major component of travel literature. When critiquing colonial travel writings, both Spurr (1993) and Pratt (1992) identified the travelers' gaze upon the exotic scenery as a major rhetorical device. In the economy of gazing, colonial travelers became the "monarch of all I survey", (Pratt, 1992, p. 201), or the "knowing connoisseurs" (Siegel & Wulff, 2002, p. 113) whose authority and subjectivity were confirmed by the ability to see and observe the Other.

Yet, even though sight is the most important sense, we still can't come to the conclusion that seeing an image would automatically lead knowing everything about the object. Again Siegel and Wulff (2002) were right to point out that what travelers see is not universally equivalent or even shared within a culture. In other words, travelers see and understand the visited cultures not in natives' terms because their visions are always mediated and filtered. Hence, it is highly questionable how much "reality" of the other culture is perceived even if it "appears seductively accessible via vision" (p. 110). As readers of travel writings, online or offline, we need to exercise caution because we now know that the views of travelers are intrinsically partial and biased. After all, "the vast number of unconsciously learned and assimilated beliefs, values, and norms that make up cultural patterns, the 'mental programming' of any culture, remain veiled" (p. 110).

One relevant point to the current study is a connection drawn between the Internet and travel. Siegel and Wulff (2002) argued that the Internet has been associated with metaphors of travel, speed, and space since its inception. Just as the initial perception of travel is partial at

best, “cyber travel”, with the short amount of time we invest in it and the fragments of information we collect along the way, does not provide much knowledge either. In the context of blogging about other cultures, we ought to raise the question that how much “reality” about China that we, readers of the China blogs, could possibly grasp from reading the fragmented impressions.

Rhetorical Conventions in Euro-American Travel Writings

There are two basic approaches in the critique of colonial travel writing. One approach deals largely with historical narratives in those texts, and the other strand of scrutiny is largely rhetorical. Among them, David Spurr’s (1993) detailed analyses of Euro-American discourse in journalism, travel writing, and imperial administration offered a useful and thorough framework to the current study of the digital accounts of contemporary China by American expatriates. Informed by orientalism, Spurr identified twelve rhetoric modes in writing about non-Western cultures and peoples. According to him, these twelve modes constitute “a kind of repertoire for colonial discourse, a range of tropes, conceptual categories, and logical operations available for purpose of [colonial] representation” (p. 3). These twelve overlapping rhetoric modes are surveillance, appropriation, aestheticization, classification, debasement, negation, idealization, insubstantialization, naturalization, eroticization and resistance. Having saturated colonial discourse and enabled it to frame the “reality” of the non-Western cultures in certain ways, these rhetorical conventions are epistemological lenses through which the West produces the knowledge of, and subsequently establishes a claim over the non-West. Such symbolic dominance served the colonial enterprise in the past and it is still far from being

extinct today. In what follows, I will discuss the discursive and rhetorical conventions that are relevant to the present study.

The first relevant rhetorical convention is surveillance, or visual observation of the Oriental landscape and bodies. The word “surveillance” indicates looking. It also bears a strong connection to Foucault’s *panopticon*, a metaphor of the encompassing eye of power. The examination of the sweeping Oriental landscape and the staring-down of Oriental peoples by Western journalists and travelers reveal the colonial desire to establish knowledge of and authority over the cultural Other.

The second relevant rhetoric convention, aestheticization, is associated with “sensory stimulation” (Spurr, 1993, p. 45). This convention was prominent mostly in the pictorial portrays of the Orient by Western news media and travel accounts. The photos and images supplied by these Western writers served as the evidence of an Oriental culture, which is exotic, bizarre, and primitive. Often times, those images made the people of the Orient “appear unprotected by the restraining constructs of advanced civilization” (p. 46). Subjects that are frequently-captured by the Western gaze include tribal atrocity, natural disaster, poverty, and human suffering. To Spurr, the West is fascinated with these images precisely because they offer a channel to the secret expression of the subdued Western elemental passion.

The third and fourth rhetorical conventions are naturalization and idealization, respectively. Naturalization “identifies ... primitive people as part of the natural world” (p. 157). The representation of the native people and Oriental cultures is so intertwined with the concept of nature that those people and cultures are relegated to a more inferior primitive and

underdeveloped state in contrast to the superior and civilized Western cultures. Idealization is an “unconscious act of [Western] self-reflection” (Spurr, 1993, p. 125). The discourse of idealization admires the virtues of the cultural Other. However, those virtues are less the qualities of the Other than an embodiment of the Western aspiration for the idealized virtues. In the end, they tell about the colonizing subjects and their values more than anything else.

If the Orient in the Western fantasy is emblematic of an unconstrained force of nature, such force is also gendered. Spurr’s (1993) examination of the Western discourses listed eroticization as a fifth reoccurring motif in colonial discourse about the other cultures. It deals with the Western fantasy of the non-Western cultures as a female figure and reveals the gendered relationship between the colonizing masculine West and the colonized feminine Orient.

Believing the colonial condition was burdening to both the colonizer and the colonized as they were equally entrapped within the structure of power, Spurr (1993) looked out for rhetorical possibilities contained within the colonial discourse that has a subversive potential to challenge the colonial authority and logic, and to counter the discursive violence caused by colonial representational principles. In the final chapter of his book, He argued that colonial discourse still contains within itself seeds of resistance, or four possible ways to resist the “imposition of value inherent in any colonizing discourse” (p. 189).

What Spurr (1993) identified as the resistance can be characterized as “a set of critical and interpretive problems” facing the colonial writings of non-Western cultures. First of all, here is the question of language. The localized re-appropriation of words that are familiar to Western

context challenges the language's "authority as the name for a specific phenomenon and is instead revealed as an instrument of rhetorical and political strategy" (p. 190). The second issue deals with the conditions of observation. To challenge the colonial legacy is to reveal the colonizers' "imprisonment within the perceptual framework of colonial rule" (p. 191). In a word, the reflection and critique of the colonial observer's positionality allows the exposure of the highly problematic and skewed colonial views of the colonized cultures, and of the world at large. In raising the question of interest as one of the conditions of observation, Spurr contended that any reportage about other cultures is necessarily rooted in interest. There will be no disinterested interpretation, understanding, and knowledge. Hence, Spurr applauded writers' efforts to be critically self-conscious about their own invested interest in writing about the other cultures. The last question deals with the issue of voice. Spurr proposed to create discursive space where voices and testimonies of the other can be heard so that the singular colonialist conception of the other can be challenged.

Informed both by Said's (1978) theorization of orientalism and the abovementioned five rhetorical modes that Spurr (1993) expounded upon in his critical examination of the Western travel and journalistic texts from colonial and postcolonial periods, my examination of the China blogs of Americans expatriates is cultural and critical. The main objective is to unravel the complex discursive processes through which American bloggers mobilize textual, visual, video, and hyper-textual means to articulate a coherent discourse about contemporary China. Such an examination of this particular online discourse will illuminate our understanding in the historical continuity and the metamorphosis of the American orientalism as well as its latest manifestation in digital age. In addition, it offers an opportunity to estimate the magnitude of

the ongoing ideologically-charged construction of cultural other that is prevalent on the Internet, a place used to be considered as a democratic and prejudice-free site. In the next chapter, I will discuss the specific steps I will take to conduct the investigation.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL DILLEMAS

Multimodality in the China Blogs

Chapter one introduces the interpretive frameworks that I employed in the analyses of the China blogs of American expatriates. At the center of the critical investigation are examinations of the discourse about Chinese cultural Otherness and the production processes of such a discourse both in the micro context of blog space and in the macro context of globalization in which the Sino-U.S. relationship is undergoing tremendous changes. For the study I proposed five research questions whose answers are predicated on the understanding of the complex interplays between political, cultural, and technological factors that contribute to the formation and dissemination of this particular American discourse about contemporary China. Factors that have shaped the online discourse include the ways in which previous Western travelogues talked about China, and the epistemological as well as ethical constraints facing the genre of travel writing and the China blogs when it comes to representing cultural Other. Other issues can't be overlooked. For example, the production of the American digital discourse about contemporary China has been complicated by the unique interactive and dialogical nature of the blogging technology that makes the dialogue between burgeoning Chinese nationalism and the American bloggers technically possible. Of no less importance is Chinese government's active exercise of Internet censorship because it resonates with the production of the discourse as one of the major concerns of the American diarists.

Departing from a discussion of the research focus, research questions, historical context, and the theoretical framing in previous two chapters, current chapter is devoted to an explication of empirical approaches I took to investigate the China blogs. Critical multimodal

discourse analysis was used as the main research method. My discussion addresses its appropriateness to the China blogs. Then I lay out specific research plans including detailed data selection procedure and categories of analysis. In the other part of the chapter I talk about ethical choices I make whiling analyzing the blogs and writing the research report. Given the unique characteristics of Internet communication in general, and blogs in particular, I feel this discussion is much needed and of great value to future researchers who might find themselves facing similar ethical dilemmas as I have encountered researching the China blogs.

Guided by the theoretical assumption about the discursive nature of the China blogs in chapter one, I took a multimodal approach to the empirical analysis of the selected blogs. The terminology, *multimodality*, was first coined by sociolinguists to refer to the presence or use of multiple linguistic and semiotic resources to invoke meaning during human social interaction. (O' Halloran, 2004) In the eyes of early conversational analysts who studied face-to-face communication, multimodality narrowly means that verbal and nonverbal behaviors are equally important in contributing to "an overall social ecology of mutual influence among interactional participants" (Erickson, 2004, p. 198). In a communication situation where no direct human face-to-face communication is present, multimodality could be interpreted as a combination of textual and other semiotic modes that are organized to represent and communicate. Those modes may include text/written language, visual images, sound, and structural configurations of these elements (Jewtt, 2004).

Obviously computer-mediated communication is inherently multimodal. The multimedia technologies offer great selections of representational resources ranging from texts, graphics, audio, video, to hypertexts. As the latest genre of Internet communication, blogging enjoys the

same representational and communicative flexibility and versatility. In the same vein, the China blogs are not just plain texts. Quite to the contrary, they are digital showcases of the sights and sound of contemporary China observed from very personal viewpoints of American expatriates. In order to convey to their audience the same feeling they have experienced living in China, our bloggers employed multiple discursive means enabled by blogging technology. These modes included written language, color, photos, short videos, embedded audio, icon, hyper-textual links, to name just a few. As the result, when compared to traditional print travelogues, the China blogs are far more vivid, spontaneous, rich in multiple perspectives, and discursively convincing. The key to making sense of such a discourse is trying not to narrowly focus on single representational mode but to emphasize the interdependent nature and the accordance of all discursive elements in terms of orchestrating a coherent meaning. Furthermore, those modes are ought to be interpreted as both the texts and the contexts of the discourse. Only by this approach can we properly address the reality that the advent of computer technology has already modified and broadened our conceptualization of what accounts as discourse in cyberspace.

I followed three steps incorporating the multimodal approach into the discursive analysis of the China blogs. First, I identified each single discursive mode from the whole discourse. These modes then were classified and distinguished from each other based on their physical properties such as text, still image, video, audio, icon, color, typography, and hyper-textual link. Then I investigated the rhetorical/discursive functions of these modes. Given the fact that an ideal exhaustive discourse analysis is technically impossible because of infinite analytical possibilities, extremely intense labor involved, and practical needs to conduct the research

within certain time frame, I chose to concentrate only on the most obvious semiotic and rhetorical functions of these representational modes. Grammatical, linguistic, and structural characteristics of these modes were not taken into account if they don't pertain evidently to the production of the American bloggers' knowledge about China. Here, I use the term "knowledge" in a sense suggested by Jäger (2001) who believed knowledge is all kinds of content that makes up meanings used by a person, or a group of persons to interpret and shape surrounding realities. The last step involved making connections, comparing, drawing parallels, and looking for similar meaning-making patterns among all the representational modes. This step was important as it emphasized the situatedness and the embeddedness of the each single representational mode within the macro picture of the discourse under investigation.

Research Design & Data Selection

The critical multimodal discourse analyses of the select China blogs were carried out over a time period of one year. At the first phase of the study, I conducted cursory reading of all the blogs registered to the China blog list. The purpose of this round of primary reading was to help me to get familiar with the varieties of the blogs in terms of subject matter and form. In addition, I also developed a very general idea about the demographic of the bloggers during this rough reading. I felt this community is international with its members coming from many countries. But it is only international to a certain degree because majority of the bloggers are from economically developed Western countries such as the United States, Great Britain, Canada, or Australia. Therefore, it was questionable that what these bloggers feel about China reflects what the world feels about the country in general. The sheer number of the blogs presents a

daunting challenge for me to conduct in-depth analyses of all the blogs. For example, by the time I started collecting data in June 2006, there were 272 blogs registered to this list. The feasibility of such a comprehensive research was impossible if we take into consideration that it is common for a well-maintained blog of no more than six month old to have at least 100 posts and hundreds of guest comments. Hence, the research focus had to be narrowed down to blogs written by American expatriates, which made the whole project manageable.

The next phase involved singling out the blogs that are created by American expatriates. Once again I read through all the 272 blogs and singled out the bloggers' nationalities through simply looking at their personal profiles. Personal profile is a common feature of most blogs, and most bloggers are not shy from talking about their backgrounds including nationality. This procedure helped to exclude blogs that are obviously not created by American expatriates. In order to determine the rest of the blogs after the initial sifting, I had to read the rest of the blogs more closely. By picking up direct or indirect clues within the texts, I was able to come down to a handful of blogs that are written by American expatriates.

The next step involved getting rid of the blogs that are written around a single subject matter. This procedure further limited the size of the blog pools from which I selected individual China blogs for in-depth analyses. However, this was not the sole reason behind. The real concern was that the select China blogs should have wider and more inclusive coverage of the diarists' China experience. Bearing this in mind, I chose to focus on the ones that have clear narrative structures and demonstrate an obvious mission of making cultural observations.

The question "Who makes the cultural observation?" matters in this study as it was

directly linked to my selection of the blogs for analysis. If we open some of the major newspapers in the U.S. looking for the news about China or glance through China related travel books in libraries or bookstores, we will have no shortage of information about the country. Not surprisingly the most likely people to keep the American public informed of anything about China are elite China hands—professional journalists covering China, Chinese study scholars, or diplomats who are equipped with sophisticated knowledge about the country, its history and culture. It is not a stretch to say that the views of these people have largely shaped, and, to some extent, dominated American mainstream media and public discourse about China. Such an influence has been extended to the digital space of the China blog as well. For example, the blog *Glimpse of the World* is a household name in the China blogs community and it is run by a long-time *New York Time* columnist Howard French who specializes in China fairs. Although there are a couple of similar blogs of that nature in this space, I chose to exclude them from my analyses because what I am really interested in examining is the cultural observation made by ordinary American expatriates, not the ones with too strong professional and political ties to China. To me, the point of studying blog discourse is that such a semi- private and public digital space gives voices to common people who otherwise won't be heard in mainstream media. If I want to study elite China hands' observations of China I could simply read their accounts already circulating in the public.

Besides of selecting blogs for analyses based on the criteria of subject matter, narrative structure, theme, and political and professional affiliations of the bloggers, I had to deal with the constraints that the blogging and the Internet technology place on my data selection. It is true that in comparison to the research in face-to-face context Internet research is relatively

convenient in terms of fast data access and easy data storage. (Mann & Stewart, 2000) Most of the time, the blogs I want to look at are just clicks away. And I can save the blog screens to my computer and retrieve the saved data whenever and wherever I like. Yet, there is a downside of the Internet technology that creates difficulties. Network failures, disabled server, busy traffic, and errors in HTML coding all contribute to inaccessible pages, missing links, and even to total disappearance of blogs that are supposed to exist. On top of these constraints, some bloggers are not very committed to keeping their blogs updated. Often times the initial freshness and enthusiasm of blogging attenuate so fast that some blogs become completely dormant after only one or two months of sporadic postings. Out of these technical and practical concerns, I decided to study blogs that have been active for more than six months by the time I started collecting data in June 2006, that have stable web presence, and that enjoy good reputation among the community, and receive regular audience.¹¹

The abovementioned sets of criteria were used in the screening process to locate blogs that could be used for in-depth multimodal discourse analyses. In the end, they helped to funnel the 272 blogs down to four individual blogs. They are: *Sinosplice*, *The Other End of China*, *Speaking of China*, and *Talk Talk China*.

Categories of Analysis

Once the blogs were selected for finer scrutiny, I did close readings of each one of them. At this stage, I created archives for each blog, in which I collected blog entries that are clearly devoted to observations of and comments on China-related issues. For future finer analyses, I

¹¹ Good reputation is indicated by how frequently a blog cited in other blogs' blog ring and how often it is voted as a top blog in a blogging community.

especially marked and highlighted passages that are thematically significant. In the meantime, I kept notes of other structural features of the select China blogs. The main objective of conducting the preliminary close readings of the China blogs was to synthesize the content of the blogs, and more importantly, to establish following analytical procedures:

1. Provide general characterization of each select China blog.
2. Establish data archives and formulate corresponding processing categories.
3. Conduct macro-level structural analyses of each individual China blog.
4. Conduct finer and micro analyses of the China blogs with a particular emphasis on textual blog entries and other representational modes that are salient and significant in conveying certain messages about contemporary China.
5. Examine the overall discursive statements of a China blog.
6. Conduct additional comparative studies of the discursive strategies and statements of the select China blogs.
7. Summarize the interpretations of the entire discourse about China with references to the processed materials from the select China blogs.

The aforementioned analytical guidelines were only a very general pathway to follow during the actual research. According to Jäger (2001), at the heart of any discourse analysis is data processing. The key to an organized, systemic, and effective data processing is an identification of categories of analysis. It is a roadmap that helps a researcher/analyst to navigate through a labyrinth of symbols and meaning. It is also an essential tool to distill the essence of a discourse. For this study, I put forward five major categories of analysis based on the preliminary reading of the blogs and on a revised analytical framework proposed by Jäger.

Here below I discuss each of the categories in details.

The first category of analysis is “local context”. It pertains to factual information about a blog. The information includes justification of the selection of individual China blogs as particular sites for investigation; relevant diarists’ profile; history and purpose of the blogs; number of posts and number of China-related entries; frequency of posting, and structural configurations of the blogs.

The second category “text surface” deals with the examinations of:

1. Graphic and structural layouts of the China blogs including title, headline, use of icon, visual design of the blog template, banner, typography, and so on.
2. Use of photos, video segments and imbedded sound in the China blogs.
3. Themes of the blogs entries including observations of and comments on Chinese history, culture, landscape and living condition, Chinese characteristics, customs, politics, education, interesting cultural artifacts, and language.
4. Any salient absence of relevant topics or themes.
5. Hyperlinks as a particular reference to cultural knowledge.

The third category “rhetorical means” is employed in the finer analyses of highlighted passages and the marked significant visual expressions. Discussions of lexical choices are the centerpiece of this category. And the discussions are carried out in a way to locate and emphasize what Jager (2001) conceptualized as the “*collective symbolism*” (p. 55), for instance, the use of metaphors in textual and graphic texts.

The passages or blog entries that make apparent value judgments are put in the fourth category of “ideological statement and evaluation”. This category helped to illuminate what

specific understandings about contemporary China are promoted by the China bloggers.

It is noted that some of these categories overlap with each other. Yet it is not considered as a problem because, for example, a statement can be rhetorically expressed and ideologically charged at the same time. In addition, in the light of likely omissions of important issues, I create a fifth category “striking issues”, into which I note down issues that are not addressed in those China blogs.

It is worthwhile to point out that putting discursive fragments into different categories doesn't suggest that these elements are discreet. On the contrary, a nuanced analysis should be able to treat them as interdependent of each other. Moreover, it is of an equal importance to cross-examine the select blogs after detailed individual analyses, to pay attention to the thematic and discursive disparities between them, and to seek connections among them in representing China in certain fashions.

Researching the China Blogs: Ethical Challenges

As my approach to the China blogs has both textual/rhetorical and ethnographical dimensions, the issues of how to conduct ethical investigations presented a particular challenge to me. On one hand, I agree with most computer-mediated communication scholars and researchers (Jones, 1999; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Paccannella, 1997; Porr & Ployhart, 2004) that it is necessary to take measures to ensure the safety, privacy, copy rights, and integrity of the individuals who are involved with or without proper knowledge of the purposes and procedures of the research. Due to the fact that the Internet is a fairly new and ever-changing development in our society, there is no real consensus within Internet research community

about what the exact ethical research procedures are to follow.

Generally speaking, the association for Internet researchers recommends that the ethical rules generated out of offline research context are applicable to online research as well. Hence many Internet researchers go through the same informed consent and human subject review process as their offline counterparts do. However adhering to offline ethical guidelines in online research setting is far more complicated than simply transferring the prevailing rules to the new environment. Obviously, online research is a different concept and practice from offline research in many ways. An online environment means a lot more opportunities that are not readily available to most researchers in face-to-face context. For example, the Internet makes it easier for researchers to access abundant data at a few clicks away without the constraints of geographic distance. They can gather and store materials for future reference in short amount of time. More so than ever, researchers can take the advantages of Internet anonymity to observe and document online activities without informing the individuals who unknowingly participate in the study, which might decrease the risk that the presence of a researcher will hamper the natural flow of the environment. As the result, it is not unusual that online data are gathered, studied, and presented without informing individuals who supply and own them (Denzin, 1999).

To make the situation more ambiguous, even the concept of digital data ownership has been questioned by researchers like Kitchin (1998) who pointed out that there is no easy way to classified online messages as private or public because messages, except private emails, are often transmitted to unknown public through cross posting or linking. This is the case for messages posted in public forums, BBS, or newsgroups. But we should acknowledge the fact

that those advantages don't render the ethical questions desolate. We should still ask (Sevningsson, 2004) what happens to the privacy and integrity of online research subjects. Or, is it ethical to observe Web actions and discourses without informing the individuals who produce them? Therefore, as a typical Internet investigation the examinations of the China blogs can't evade from addressing those important ethical questions.

Waskul and Douglas (1996) provided a guideline that informs much Internet research. First they advised Internet researchers to distinguish data selected from private or semi-private sources such as email or "closed" online chat rooms. Then they suggested that future researchers should obtain informed consent when they collect data from private sources. If gaining informed consent from research participants is not a viable option, they recommended researchers to use pseudonyms to refer to the groups or individuals under examination unless these groups or individuals grant permissions to the use of their real names in the original online text. This proposed guideline to conduct ethical Internet research has been customarily followed by researchers based on the specificities of their research circumstances. For example, excessive protection of participants' privacy can conflict with a need to give credits to the individuals or groups who produce the online content. To illustrate this point Paccagnella (1997) presented a hypothetical but also highly possible situation in which the posting of messages on the Internet is for public consumption.

Those discussions of the rules and concerns surrounding doing ethical Internet research that both protects and pays respect to participants' privacy and copy rights are relevant to my study because they very well represent a dilemma inherent in weblogs research. Such a dilemma comes from the ambiguous nature of the medium itself for being both public and

private at the same time. On one hand, many texts uploaded by online diarists or bloggers are very personal. A cursory survey of existing weblogs would reveal that except for weblogs that deal with news linking and commentaries most weblogs are intimate in nature. They are kept for the purpose of recording one's life, and providing individual opinions. Also, there is too much personal information shared in weblogs including the photos, real names, age, gender, family upbringing, profession of bloggers. They even reveal the locations from which they blog. This is so because popular blogging tools usually ask for the information in the first place when people create weblogs using existing templates. Of course, bloggers have the options to conceal their real identities by providing pseudonyms. Many of them do exercise caution in presenting information related to their offline lives. But many more of them choose to reveal their identities irregardless of the possible harms. And they may do so deliberately because the nature of the diary genre demands certain degree of truthfulness. No matter how bloggers feel about this issue, as Internet researchers we need to admit that exposing personal information of bloggers in our research report without taking extra caution could put the bloggers under potential risks. It is our duty to take measures to reduce the risks. In that case, use of pseudonyms is an option.

On the other hand, anyone who writes a personal weblog is aware of the fact that parts of his or her life presented in the online diary are going to be, sooner or later, consumed, "peeked", and judged by an unknown public beyond the immediate circle of friends and family. For the same reason there is truth in Serfaty's (2004) statement that "there is no such a thing as private content on the Internet; the pretence of privacy is *de factor* shattered to pieces, since anyone can gain access to any site the world over, yet the diarists feel protected by the very size of the

Internet” (p.13). In other words, being personal doesn’t necessarily mean being private.

Another dimension to the issue of protecting online individuals’ privacy is the concern of copyright. Just like I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, some bloggers provide real names because by doing so they seek publicity and name recognition as authors. Many times the naming of their blogs is indicative of the purposes and themes of the blogs. In that respect, using pseudonyms will not do justice to these authors, and making alterations to URLs or blog titles will contribute nothing to the interpretation of the whole blogging experience. If we regard online environment as public places, we may thus conclude that it is justifiable to study them without obtaining informed consent from the originators of the online texts. Therefore, in the case of multiple modal discourse analyses of the China blogs, they can be viewed as self-published literary works whose study demands compliance with copyright rules. Therefore, protection of the bloggers’ privacy is not the primary focus of this study. Rather the emphasis is more on the discourse itself, its production process, and the symbolic and cultural implications associated with it.

To sum up the ethical choices I made in the study, first of all, I approached the China blogs as a typical lurker who is not visible to the bloggers but nevertheless watches and observes what happens in the blogosphere. My point of observation is text/discourse orientated. In other words, I was more interested in studying what the bloggers produce rather than the bloggers. Second, the URLs of the select blogs and the links to the quotations are provided to enable verifications and to give credits to the bloggers/authors. Third, bowing to the possible reluctance of some bloggers being subject to academic inquiry I only used the first names of the bloggers in the text. And I didn’t disclose any other information about the bloggers that does

not relate to the study, which includes the names of their friends and families, their email addresses, their American or Chinese addresses, sexual orientations, their employers, and so on. I made efforts to protect, within my limited power as a researcher, the privacy of the bloggers so they will not be subject to public exposure or any harm. Yet, I can't prevent readers of this study from following the links provided in the study and digging out the real identities of the bloggers. All I hope is that the measures I took will make such a discovery much harder.

CHAPTER FOUR: THREE BLOGS, THREE CHINAS

Generalization Not Intended

Given the fact that there are hundreds of blogs listed under the China blog list, it is only natural that current analysis can only be applied to a select few. Admittedly, when it comes to deciding which blog ought to be closely analyzed my personal judgments played a major role. Hence, the selection process was neither scientifically random nor objective. However, I didn't choose the blogs out of pure personal preferences. Vigorous surveys and extensive readings of all relevant blogs had informed the following criteria against which three blogs were finally elected for finer analysis: first, the scope of the blogs' coverage of China must be broad enough to reflect the diarists' observations of multiple facets of Chinese life; second the diarist has to demonstrate strong a commitment to blogging about China; In other words, he or she should at least have a regular web presence in terms of posting and responding to readers' feedback in a timely and consistent fashion; third the blog should reflect the diarists' unique points of view when it comes to observing China.

Coming up with these standards seemed relatively easy comparing to the task of applying them to all China blogs in an effort to narrow down the list so that the in-depth study was practically feasible. The process, however, was rewarding in a sense that it exposed me to a large number of China blogs. Given historian Jonathan Spence's (1998) assertion that China, as a great nation, has the capacity to attract and retain the attention of others the large number of China blogs produced by American expatriates testifies to the fact that the American fascination with the country and the culture has not been dulled by the increasing contact between the two countries and their people. Hence, the select reading of a few blogs should not

be considered as representative of all the China blogs. In fact, it is unproductive to lump all the China blogs together as an undifferentiating whole and let the select a few speak for them when in reality they offer much more diverse viewpoints about contemporary China despite shared subject matters, presentational modes, and discursive strategies. Hence, my readings of a few blogs should only be understood as the first installment of a series of critical investigations of many more wonderfully-written blogs with similar themes and purposes.

Three Blogs: A Sketch

Guided by the above criterion I originally selected four blogs for analysis with each of them approaching the common subject of China from unique thematic and discursive angles. Later I had to drop one blog from the study list for an unforeseen circumstance that I will explain after the analysis. Therefore only three China blogs by American expatriates made to my final list. These three blogs exemplify three different ways that contemporary American expatriates in China reporting China. Among them, *SinosplICE* focuses on the daily occurrences of Chinese life that the diarist finds funny. It is characterized by laid-back tone and witty language. On the other end of the spectrum, the blogger of *The Opposite End of China* is more interested in showcasing his travel adventures in China's Northwest frontier as well as making comments about the historical and political aspects relevant to that particular region. The third blog, *Speaking of China* gives us a glimpse into the Chinese life from an American female perspective. It is the most personal blog among the three, and the narrative mainly centers on the diarist's fascination with Chinese culture and her romantic relationships with Chinese men.

At this point it behooves me to say a few words about the diarists whose social and

cultural backgrounds have bearings on the online discourse they produce. I will refer to them by their first names in a probably futile effort to ensure them some degree of confidentiality since there is no such a thing as complete privacy or confidentiality in an age of information excessiveness when personal information can be easily searched and revealed to anyone on the net. To me, citing the diarists' first names is the best solution at hand that at least addresses the complicated reality of online research that calls for respecting the authorship of online content providers and at the same recognizing their wishes to be anonymous.

Current study has investigated three particular blogs written by three bloggers. They are John of www.sinosplice.com, Michael of www.china.notspecial.org; and Jocelyn of www.speakingofchina.com. John, in his mid or late twenties, is from Florida and blogs from Shanghai. He has an undergraduate degree in Japanese study and is currently employed, as an English teacher, by a private web-based Chinese educational organization. His passion is Chinese language. And he is quite fluent in both spoken and written Chinese.

Michael of www.china.notspecial.org is from New Jersey. Coming from an upper-middle class family he has traveled extensively inside and outside of the United States. With a major in political science and journalism Michael once interned in NBC's Nightly News under the supervision of the famous Tom Brokaw. In early 2005, his life took a sudden turn when he decided to move to the city of Korla in the remote desert region of Western China. One year after writing the blog about his life in China, Michael caught the attention of *Fordo Travel* and landed a contract to write travelogues for the publishing company. In the mean time, he also made himself a partner in a Korla-based international trade company that specializes in making and exporting sun-dried tomatoes from Xinjiang to the U.S.

Jocelyn of www.speakingofchina.com is the only female blogger in this group. She came to China after graduating from a major university in America's Appalachian region. In the five years of her stay in China she lived in and blogged from many parts of the country. By the time I started collecting data she had already returned to the United States. I received the updates of her recent lives from a Chinese ethnic newspaper serving a Midwestern metropolitan area in which she was featured for her active role in setting up an organization to promote American understandings of Chinese culture. Apparently her involvement with China has continued even after her departure from the country.

All of these bloggers are white middle class Americans in their mid or late twenties. Each one of them has spent at least one year in China either by choice or by circumstance. By the time the data collecting process was under way they all developed meaningful personal relationships with the country and its people either through friendship or marriage. They are a new generation of American expatriates who take the advantage of the Internet and blogging technologies to showcase their China experiences. Of course, they do so from various thematic angles and employ different discursive means. In the end, their blogs have become cultural windows through others could take a peek at the sides of China that are not necessarily like each other. Despite the differences, they all contribute to the formation and dissemination of a particular discourse that informs the world about contemporary Chinese society with some of them refreshing the western memories about China and others unfortunately reinforcing the very outdated images of the country that they set out to challenge and replace. In what follows, I will present the three China blogs in a hope that they will shed light on the processes of the making of the discourse as well as the nature and possible implications of that process.

Tying the Sino-U.S. knot --- Sinosplice

Introduction

In my opinion, all the three blogs that I am going to discuss are of equal significance in revealing aspects of Chinese life seen through American eyes. So it doesn't matter in which order the individual blog should be presented. Having said that, I want to start with www.sinosplice.com (see Figure 6) because the man behind the blog— John---is also the builder of the www.chinaboglist.org, a web directory through which I gained access to hundreds of China blogs of foreigners inside or outside China. In a sense, my research would be possible if I were not inspired by John's work.

Figure 6: Sinosplice Homepage

Partly due to his role as the keeper of the china blog list, John has good reputation in the community, and his own journal www.sinosplice.com is one of the most popular online diaries in the China blog circle. The success of www.sinosplice.com also has to do with John's superb language talent. Once a major in Japanese studies he only took less than seven years to become

fluent both in written and spoken Chinese. John's knowledge and skills in Chinese language provide him a vantage point from which he could easily observe and make sense of the Chinese city life that is interesting, strange, or even contradicting to his American eyes. John understands the power of language. For him language is crucial to cultural understanding and can be translated into all his cultural insights. He made that point clearly in his blog: "One can simply never get the clearest view of a house looking through the dirty window or observing what comes out of the house. You have to go *in*. Language is the key." (Pasden, 2002a, About section, para. 2)

But knowing the Chinese language is not the only way. John believes that another key to solving the mystery of China is to go native. In other words, it is of equal importance to get a real job, to become the neighbors of common Chinese people, to eat Chinese food on daily basis, to make Chinese friends, or even find a Chinese spouse, etc. These changes to one's mundane life habits are essential milestones marking one's journey of voluntary enculturation, which is always painful and involves constant self reflection, negotiation and transformation of one's identity. Not many expatriates are committed to such a process, and that is the case even for those who choose to come to China to experience the culture. For example, the perceived "normal" length of stay in China is usually less than two or three years. After that most Americans go home to continue what their families or friends consider as a "real" life (Pasden, June 23, 2004, To stay).

John, on the other hand, feels China has a lot to offer: passion in life, excitement, and the possibility of a promising career. He likes to stay in China for a long haul, a decision that raises lots of eyebrows in the community with some admiring his courage and more casting doubts.

Nevertheless, John takes great pride in his passion about China and uses his blog www.sinosplice.com as a venue to share his observations of Chinese life with interested audience on the Internet.

In what follows, I will first discuss the structural features of www.sinosplice.com. Then I will present the major themes of the blog. Significant discursive expressions and statements from select entries of this blog will also be pointed out in the third part of this analysis. The underlying goal is to paint a faithful picture of *Sinosplice* and to reveal the discursive processes through which certain images of China have been created and disseminated on the Internet.

Local Context & Mission

According to John (2002a, About section), *Sinosplice* has had two versions so far. It was first launched on April 30, 2002 as a public diary for friends and family to replace the mass emails he had been sending home. It wasn't long before John realized that he was a part of a fledgling expatriate China blog community. Then he revised the old *Sinosplice* and launched a new version which was to become the later Sinosplice network, John's effort to support the foreign China blogging community by sharing some of his server space.

Although the official launch date of *Sinosplice* was April 30, 2002, the oldest entry can be dated back to April 2, 2002, and John must have it copied from his handwritten diary. From the date of the oldest entry to the time I started collecting data, which was the end of 2005 *Sinosplice* had a total of 638 entries. The number of entries posted on the site had shown a steady annual increase during the 3-year period. In the year 2002 there were 71 entries. It increased to 137 entries in 2003. In the year 2004, John posted 168 entries and 2005, 262

entries. That increase may reflect John's growing enthusiasm about blogging. John updates his blog frequently. Sometimes he even posts two to three entries in one day. Figure 7 shows the annual increase of the number of *SinosplICE* blog entries.

Figure 7: Annual Increase of *SinosplICE* Blog Entries

Out of the 638 entries 186 entries directly pertain to John's observation of and comments about China. The rest has no significant relevance to China since they largely deal with site news such as server change, personal updates such as John's travel outside China, or discussions of personal hobbies. On average, the China-related entries take less than thirty percent of the total posts. It was thirty-eight percent in 2002, twenty-nine percent in 2003, a sharp drop to twenty-four percent in 2004, and a rebound to thirty percent in 2005. The decrease of the number of China-related entries from 2003 to 2004 might be attributed to the fact that John was undergoing changes in his life including a job change, relocation, and traveling outside China. Figure 8 illustrates the proportion of China-related entries to the total posts on a yearly basis.

Figure 8: Number of China-related Entries in *Sinosplice*

At the first sight *Sinosplice* looks more like a personal homepage with following features: blog title, highlights of each subsection, blogger's profile and contact link, links to external sites, advertisements, and search engine. The only feature common in other blogs but absent from *Sinosplice* is a blog entry calendar with latest entries highlighted and arranged in reverse chronological order. Unlike the majority of blogs out there that use the free space of commercial blog service providers such as www.blogger.com, or www.livejournal.com, *Sinosplice* has a permanent URL, or web address, which means John pays a commercial server to host his blog. Serious bloggers usually do that because it makes their blogs more stable and reliable. In John's case, having his own web space gives him more freedom to play with his site. For example, he provides five customized background templates of five different colors to his visitors to choose.

The first and the most visible feature on the homepage of *Sinosplice* is the title banner as shown in Figure 9. Against the default deep green background stands out a bold, stylistic: "Sinosplice". Beneath the word, John states the purpose of keeping the blog is to "try to understand China. Learn Chinese" (Pasden, 2002a, About section). The statement is set against

a bold white waving brush stroke that accentuates the words in the foreground and introduces another two vaguely visible Chinese characters “华结” behind the word “SinosplICE”. Literally, “华” means China and “结” means knot. A meaning is created by combining the two characters, and it corresponds to the invented word “sinosplICE”. “华结” has a connotation of tying a cultural knot or making connections. John acknowledges that “华结” is the Chinese translation of the self-invented word “sinosplICE” and it means a specific union between China and the U.S.(Pasden, Dec 7, 2002, Sinoamerica)

Figure 9: Title Banner of *SinosplICE*

Like many other English blogs with a focus on China, *SinosplICE* started out as a private journal read by family and friends only. Gradually it has developed a greater sense of mission and taken on more responsibility, which is to educate the general public about a new China and to change the largely negative images of the country held in the Western world. John tries to live up to such a mission by sharing his knowledge of Chinese language with and telling light-hearted anecdotes of his life in China to readers worldwide in his blog. Such a mission to promote fusion of cultures and peaceful cultural coexistence is most vividly exemplified in the graphic symbols of the blog such as the “China knot”. Another example (Figure 10) would be a

Sinosplice flag that combines visual elements of both Chinese and American national flags (Pasden, Dec 7, 2002, Sinoamerica).

Figure 10: Flag of *Sinosplice*

Content-wise the whole blog is organized with such a goal in mind. Each of the five subsections introduces one or multiple aspects of the blogger's China experience. John once noted (2002a) in the blog that his passion for language and linguistics is the driving force behind his decision to move to and live in China. Hence it is only natural that he has an entire subsection devoted to Chinese language. The Language Section is a mini library containing references and tools that are useful to the learning of Chinese. Moreover, John has employed flash, video, audio, and graphics to vividly explain and illustrate the pronunciation and tones of mandarin, and the sound of Shanghainese dialect. In addition, the Language Section contains reviews of Chinese study books, discussions of John's own experience of learning Chinese and short lists of Chinese vocabularies with refreshing topics like alcohol, Chinese onomatopoeia, and cartoon character names. There is even mp3 and video of a popular Chinese love song with translations of its lyrics. (Pasden, 2002a)

While the Language Section is most useful to those who come to China "with little more

than an adventurous spirit” (Pasden, 2002c, Language section, TEFL teaching resources, para.1) and are expected to teach English at Chinese school the rest four sections are for general audience. China Section provides light-hearted features about life in China and Chinese culture. They are put into four categories shown in Figure 11. China Humor contains pictorial and practical guides to daily life in China. In this section, icons copied from the U.S. homeland security webpage are used in a satirical way to comment on Chinese living environment, which supplements and reinforces many observations John makes in the Life Section. Junk Food Review Series show funny pictures made by John and his friends to grade Chinese snacks. Here, life in China shows its lighter side. China suddenly looks like a juvenile paradise with strange and fun treats to the young and the adventurous.

Figure 11: China Section of *Sinosplice*

There is also a section dedicated to John's favorite Chinese pop singer Jolin and her songs.

Transcripts of an interview of a Chinese photo blogger Ziboy are also presented in this section. Another page provides complete transcripts of John's interview of a Chinese photo-blogger Ziboy. Both features give John's audience a chance to catch a glimpse of contemporary Chinese popular culture and to know the work and life of a young Chinese artist. Some parts from the Language section are repeated here such as Chinese fonts and translations of the lyrics of a popular Chinese love song (Pasden, 2002c, Language).

At the heart of the blog is the Life section (Figure 10). It is mainly textual with all the blog entries listed under it. A click on the tag will lead the readers to the most recent updates of John's observations of life in China. Like any typical blog the entries are arranged in a reverse chronological order so visitors always read the latest entries first. However, it doesn't have a calendar. Therefore one has to go to the Archive section to retrieve the old posts either by following the archive tag or by clicking on specific year and month. In addition to the Archive Section, there is a link to classic entries that John picked so visitors can sample the best of his blog without reading the entire entries. For those who can read Chinese, there is another link to the Chinese blog that John keeps in order to practice his written Chinese.

Figure 12: Life Section of *SinosplICE*

If there is one section in *SinosplICE* that is able to match the Life Section section in terms of its importance and power to grab the attention of the visitors it must be the Photo Section. Images in this section are arranged in four categories: Life in China, ZUCC, Travel in China, and Propaganda in China (see Figure 13). Those photos show beautiful Chinese sceneries, John's Chinese students, foreign expatriates' parties, neighborhood food markets, apartments John once lived in, Chinese school campuses and street scenes. Looking at these photos we, as visitors, feel being invited into the private world of the diarist. We walk with him and accompany him as he negotiates his life in China's streets amidst Chinese crowds. Indeed, these photos act as a means of verification testifying to John's credibility as a China insider. In the mean time, we feel we can still get to know about China without actually traveling to the place. Therefore, the photos are an essential part of the blog and they frame John's China experience in certain ways in conjunction with the texts in the Life section.

Figure 13: Photo Section of *SinosplICE*

The title of the blog suggests that this is a site dedicated to facilitating learning and

experiencing the Chinese culture. John hopes that visitors of *Sinosplice* would develop a more open and tolerant cross-cultural perspective as well as goodwill toward China. Certainly he takes great pride in what he is doing in the blog and believes his blog challenges a set of outdated stereotypes of China that have long been “smeared by fear-mongering, political agenda or political goals” of western media (Pasden, 2002a, Philosophy, Network section, para.1). It is in the same spirit of providing an alternative view of China to the world that John creates the Network Section to introduce the viewers to a legion of China blogs written by foreign expatriates. He even volunteered to share his server space with these bloggers in a hope that a pro-China foreign expatriate community will emerge and eventually becomes a powerful voice speaking for China.

John envisions that the China depicted in his blog must be different from the China used to be featured in mainstream Western media. If Western audience tends to associate China with the red Communist regime exercising air-tight control on its faceless mass, then it is *Sinosplice*’s job to give China a more humane face. Controversial issues of ideology do not concern him. Rather, *Sinosplice* is purposefully apolitical and it is interested in sharing John’s experience with China at the country’s most intense moment of transformation. How is that experience translated in the blog as far as China is concerned is of interest in this particular study. Before proceeding to the close reading of the blog, however, I feel it is necessary to point out that although armchair travelers around the world are able to glean the sights and sounds of Chinese daily life through John’s eyes they should be aware of the fact that what they see are *only* fragments of an unattainable Chinese “reality” seen through an American eye as much as imagined by an American mind. Maybe what is left out of the picture is of similar significance

to what are included. It is with such a caution and a critical lens that I offer the following interpretations of *Sinosplice*'s depiction of China.

Theme I: Landscape and Living Conditions

David Spurr (1993) once pointed out that reporting being with looking. This observation succinctly summarizes how John approaches China and reports about it in his blog. Like any sojourner who first set foot on a foreign soil so vastly different from his own, John was eager to see the country. Whenever he had time, he was on the road exploring China and taking photos along the way. As the result, *Sinosplice* has gradually built a virtual gallery that contains fourteen web albums of travel photos. When looking at this collage of Chinese landscapes in the Photo Section we feel we are traveling with John and gazing at the landscape over his shoulders.

Unlike conventional travelogues in which a few pictures are always subordinate to a flood of descriptive adjectives, photos in *Sinosplice* play a major role. They are displayed without much explanation. Nevertheless they "signpost" John's journey and attest to the authenticity of his China experience. Such a sense of immediacy and realism comes from the social conventions that tend to privilege camera with "a form of objective observation" (Spurr, 1993, p. 26). Everyday travel pictures taken by amateur photographers are perceived to be more objective and real because we tend to believe that picture taking involves little manipulation. After all we all have had the experience of taking pictures on impulse. We, however, overlook the fact that as a socially regulated and highly conventional activity, everyday photo taking still

involves ontological choices about what is worthy to be photographed, what is shown, and what is admired. Even the casual pictures like the ones we see in *SinosplICE* happen in some context and not others. If we look hard enough we will see that only some topics, events and people are evident. A careful examination of the travel photos in *SinosplICE* seemed to suggest that the majority of them have either shown natural sceneries with as little human trace as possible or man-made spaces that are distinctively Chinese such as rural towns, ancient architectures, and lively streets and markets crowded with Chinese people.

Not surprisingly such focuses are not without antecedents in the long history of American fascination with China as many Americans throughout centuries have come to China basically on two purposes. They either come to explore and admire China's unique landscape or they come to satisfy their curiosities toward Chinese culture as one of a few old but continuing civilizations in the world. Prompted by these two motivations, the China described by those travelers including our blogger John tends to oscillate between one being characteristic of gorgeous and untamed nature and the other being synonymous with a culture that is ancient and reminiscent of "willow-patterned plates" (Lee, 2004, p. 58). Given that, it is understandable to see images of China from *SinosplICE* travel photos that confirm the mental images that many of us have about China: peasants tolling in emerald rice fields, lush green mountains shrouded in drifting clouds, peaceful riverside villages and towns, impressive ancient city walls, majestic imperial palaces, Buddhist temples with tiled, up curved roofs, historical relics inscribed with unrecognizable Chinese calligraphy, local crafts, and of course, picturesque and exotic outfits of Chinese ethnic minorities.... (see Figure 14)

Figure 14: Images from Sinosplice's Photo Section

If the Photo Section showcases Chinese natural sceneries and cultural artifacts that are somewhat detached from living experience and are better for admiration only, the Life Section turns to Chinese urban landscape where ancient culture is shattered by modernization and green land is lost to a rising jungle of concrete. John uses few images to show such landscape but he does write passages after passages in the blog about the less-than-appealing changes that industrialization has brought to Chinese cities. Contrary to the serene wilderness and the slow-paced small town life, Chinese cities such as Shanghai are portrayed as exciting and energetic places full of opportunities. To young American John, Shanghai is exciting and

energetic place where he can find better paying jobs and greater access to Western amenities. But beyond the glittering high-rises and convenient Western franchises John also sees an uninviting sign of excessive development: pollution. According to John, there is no escape from the pollution as it has already invaded every corner of Chinese city space permeating the air, the water, and becoming a part of human existence. Dust is the first evidence of pollution. And “life in China comes with more than the recommended daily dosage of dust” (Pasden, Jan 19, 2005, Dust, para. 2). “It is no longer distant, mysterious substance that accumulates in remote places after several weeks. You become very familiar with dust” (Pasden, June 20, 2003, Fighting Pollution, para.1) and it chokes you and makes daily sweeping almost essential because dust accumulates *fast*. At one point, John felt the ubiquity of the dust and commented that fresh air means fresh dust (Pasden, June 20, 2003, Fighting pollution).

The heavily polluted air in Chinese mega cities such as Shanghai and Hangzhou, John suggests, is the direct product of overly industrialization. The repeated mentioning of raging flames atop smokestacks leave a powerful mental image on the minds of the blog readers. They are indicative of John’s distaste of China’s overly industrialization that seems to turn the country into a super construction site on which giant machineries roam and thick black smoke spreads. According to John, the dumping ground of industrial waste is rivers and canals. One time when traveling in Suzhou he reported seeing the canals absolutely reeked with bustling garbage with the “green murky water bubbling” (Pasden, Apr 24, 2005, Suzhou, Any Good?, para. 11). The descriptions about the polluting Chinese cities resonate with numerous Western travelers’ narratives about the country. After reviewing those narratives Nicholas Clifford (2001b) noted that almost symmetrical to the Western admiration of the Chinese nature and

culture is a deep-seated disdain of filth and dirt that were considered one of the defining aspects of Chinese habitation. It is not hard, however, to find that similar pattern in *SinosplICE*. The only noticeable difference, however, is that the word “filthy” and “dirt” have been replaced by “pollution”.

Besides polluted air and deplorable water quality, the Chinese living condition is characterized by words such as “horrible”, “shoddy”, “primitive”, and “cheap”. Reading a paragraph about the interior of a Chinese college dormitory, we feel John’s eyes pan over the room like a keen and precise camera and capture the following scenes of a typical Chinese living environment that is marked by noting but deprivation:

[N]o full mattresses, no hot running water in the room, one room, not super spacious...clothes are being hand washed...the ‘bed pad’ is probably a woven mat... six students live in this room...note the pipes coming out of the walls. The light hung from a wire in the ceiling. The newspapers are pasted to the walls because the white paint is so cheap that it will rub off on you (Pasden, Mar 26, 2005, Chinese college dorms, para. 2).

The hidden message behind is that if a Chinese college dorm is in such a dismal condition, then the living standards of less-privileged Chinese must be far worse. The disarraying interior spaces are in sharp contrast to the new and modern constructions found everywhere in the twenty-first century Chinese metropolis. But John is less interested in the skyscrapers than what he considers the norm of Chinese living environment such as the poorly furnished college dorm. To him, skyscrapers are just another success story of copying the development formula of the West while old residence structures, albeit shabby and lacking in basic infrastructure, are part of the traditional and authentic China that will be regrettably lost to the ferocious force of

the modernization. As development brings about pollution and destroys old ways of living, John wishes China can still be “*very Chinese*”, which translates to “cheap taxi, lots of people biking” and “friendly people and old people walk[ing] the streets at all hours of the day” (Pasden, Aug 1, 2004, Ruminations on Tianjin).

Theme II: Cultural Practices

John’s yearning for the mystic essence of Chineseness has always steered his attention away from things that are perceived to be reminiscent of American or Western urban life styles. Besides visiting temples, mountains, and ancient buildings John also enjoys conducting his own ethnography by discovering those “totally China moments” (Pasden, Mar 31, 2003, Outfit streaks) when some Chinese behaviors and daily practices become bazaar and strangely funny in his American eyes: the street peddlers selling caged cricket are refreshing to watch; a group of Chinese are insane because they fight and even bet on the fights on a cricket; ear cleaning in public is such a China spectacle that no foreigner should ever miss; Chinese people do not change clothe as often as we Americans; and of course some Chinese are so superstitious that they burn clothes for the dead and drink tiger penis soup to boost male potency....(Pasden, Spet 2, 2002, Haircut episode; Pasden, Feb 28, 2003, China the real facts; Pasden, Mar 31, 2003, Outfit streaks & Pasden, Oct 13, 2004, Hospital acupuncture)

John writes about these moments with great amusement. As long as he is an observer these practices only appear exotic and harmless. But when John finds his life being affected by those practices he rejects it with a strong opinion. Once one of his Chinese colleagues offered him an advice, which says drinking cold water in hot weather is not good for his health. John is

not impressed by it and doesn't hesitate to joke about it with his American friend:

John: I hate that [nonsense]!!!... fever AND diarrhea from a cold soft drink...that stuff is poison in a can... just chill to activate the poison.

Friend: why do Chinese people feel the need to make up bs explanations for their so-called health advice.

[in reference to a scenario in which the patient recovers from the diarrhea believed to be caused by cold drinks after taking medicine]

John: wow, way to treat that damn cold soda

Friend: did they warm up the saline?

John: hehe... they poured it from a thermos. (Pasden, Nov 26, 2005c, Cold as poison)

Obviously John and his friends are skeptical about the commonly-held Chinese belief. What is interesting in this excerpt is the use of joke. In the world of personal blogs, joke serves multiple purposes. It can lighten the mood and demonstrate the quick wit of the blogger. Also joke can exaggerate the hilariousness of a described situation and play down the seriousness of the discussed matter at the same time. When we hear a joke and fall down laughing about it we tend to overlook the message behind it. In that sense, jokes are a more culturally sanctioned and tolerated way of expressing opinions that might otherwise offend people if voiced directly. The conversation above is full of mean-spirited jokes that are targeted at a particular healthy advice offered by a Chinese person. However it leaves an impression that it is a typical Chinese belief and it is unscientific and ridiculous. Under the cover of humor, the jokes make John and his friend seem less judgmental and less serious,

and therefore less offensive. Moreover, sharing those jokes with one's own kind emphasizes the cultural difference and reaffirms one's own cultural identity.

If it is easy for John to shrug off and laugh at the advice, it is not so when he tried acupuncture out of curiosity. According to his blog this time he had to go through a painful treatment to be convinced that such a Chinese medical practice “goes too far” against his personal experience and against the “Western scientific/medical knowledge” (Pasden, Oct 13, 2004, Hospital acupuncture). The following paragraph presents the scenario seen through John's viewpoint:

The acupuncture doc was a thin, oldish Chinese man. He seemed very confident.... [He] proceeded to insert five disposable acupuncture needles into each of my legs behind the knee....Then he stuck one into the nerve. I felt like a powerful electric shock was surging through my lower leg, from the knee down. My leg jerked wildly, but I managed to restrain the rest of my body.

‘Ah, you're sensitive,’ the doc observed.

Then, to my horror, the doc brought out some clunky electrical device and started hooking it up to the needles....It was even more powerful than the insertion of the needle, and my leg went into involuntary spasms....It was *very* uncomfortable. It kind of felt like I had had too much caffeine and was all jittery, but I couldn't move around and work off the energy. Plus I was very conscious of the feeling that there was an *electrical current* running through each of my legs. *Twitch, twitch, twitch* went my legs.

I asked the doc how long he needed to leave the power on. I figured I could handle five minutes of it. “Half an hour,” he said cheerfully as he left the room ... [and] put on some

classical music, but it just seemed to taunt me. (Pasden, Oct 13, 2004, Hospital acupuncture)

The narrative depends on contrast and hyperbole to invoke humor. Throughout the acupuncture treatment John is very nervous about needles, electrical current and the involuntary spasm of his body. The “thin” and “oldish” Chinese doctor, however, doesn’t respond to John’s concern. Instead, he makes insensitive comments about John’s reaction. And he seems inappropriately cheerful when he tries to calm his patient down by turning on classic music. At the end of the story we get an impression that the whole acupuncture experience is painful and absurd. And the doctor looks more like a quack than a serious medical professional. As for John’s opinion on the whole experience, he later comments as a ‘reasonable man of sanity’ that Chinese acupuncture “can’t be measured up against the Western scientific and medical standards” (Pasden, Oct 13, 2004, Hospital acupuncture).

Theme III: Chinese Characters & Society

John’s fascination with the “real” china didn’t evaporate into the thin air after the “haunting” close encounter with the Chinese acupuncture. For him, an “authentic” China experience is not limited to appreciating the beautiful Chinese landscape and ancient architecture, evaluating current Chinese living conditions, or even being exposed to Chinese cultural practices that either amuses or repulses him. His China credential wouldn’t be complete without first-hand knowledge about the Chinese society and people. Hence, the observation of and comments on the characteristics of both emerge as another major theme of

SinosplICE.

John certainly has interesting observations to share in regards to the peculiarities of the Chinese society and people. But he is neither the only nor the first one trying to unmask the secrets of the both. Many Western travelers before him already produced their versions of Chinese society and people in numerous travel writings and correspondence. Unfortunately their Chinese characters have always been dwelled on differences and hinged upon a limited repertoire of contradictory images. For example, in the travel writings of Scidmore and John Stuart (Clifford, 2001b), Chinese people demonstrated a “suffocating uniformity” (p.57). They were believed to be cast in an “unvarying physical and mental mold” (p.57) with the same yellow skin, hard features, mechanical voice, and a submissive herd mentality. Too often these travelers commented on Chinese people’s lack of imagination, innovation, and creativity as if it was an inevitable side effect of the absence of individual conscious. On top of these observations, former travelers also were inclined to describe Chinese people with labels such as cruel, reserved, cold, incomprehensible, selfish, conservative, conceit, backward, indifferent to fallen estate, and blind in their worship of the precedent and antiquity.

Of course, it would be one-sided to say that previous Western discourse about Chinese characteristics was completely negative. In fact, it did say a few good things. In those rare cases, Chinese people became the idealized symbols of a China that only existed in the Western fantasy. To Bertrand Russell, such a China could be found on those Chinese servants who carried him a steep pass on a hot day. They were praised by Russell because they smiled at him as if “they had not a care in the world”. Gerald Yorke probably shared with Russell the same admiration of the noble Chinese in poverty. In a barge being drawn slowly down to Hangzhou,

he lay back and watched the lovely high-arched stone bridge passing by and had nothing but praise for his boatmen who were content to work fifteen hours at a stretch for him. The same sentiment was also echoed in Harold Speakman's writing when he described the way his coolies hummed a theme from *Madame Butterfly*. The people and the scene, he recollected with nostalgia, had brought a "sense of the nearness of ancient, forgotten things." (Clifford, 2001b, p. 97)

The way in which former Western travelers perceived Chinese society was parallel to the way in which they lumped Chinese people into either "good" or "bad" category regardless of their individual differences. An examination of the narratives produced by Euro-American travelers to China from nineteenth century onward reveals two generic conceptual frameworks within which Chinese society has been interpreted. Either Chinese society is projected as a model for the West for its advanced and efficient ordering of the societal elements around the unique Confucius moral principles, or it is the epitome of poverty, backwardness and a state of decadence. Occasionally, the backwardness of the Chinese society was exoticized and even appropriated by some Western travelers for its picturesque quality.

For the most part, the observation of the contemporary Chinese society and people in *SinosplICE* follows the same path: while the Chinese society oscillates between good and bad society, the Chinese by and large are one-dimensional characters with recognizable flaws. The bad Chinese society was marked by persisting social problems. Among them, lack of public sanitation and low level of personal hygiene of the Chinese made John very uncomfortable. He vividly described the dirt and dust in Chinese streets and called provincial Chinese cities "filthy shitholes" (Pasden, Feb 28, 2003, China the real facts) in which Chinese people littering and

spitting everywhere. It is not a surprise to see John's emphasis on Chinese people's lack of personal hygiene as it has been a recurring theme in Western travelogues about China. The high value placed on public and domestic tidiness reflects the Euro-American tradition of relating cleanliness to evidence of civilization, godliness, progress, and moral purity (Clifford, 2001b). In that sense, the dirt in the Chinese streets and the Chinese's persistent lack of personal hygiene exemplified in *SinosplICE* become emblematic of the fact that the Chinese are racially and culturally alien, or their society hasn't changed to its core.

If John only felt uncomfortable about the littered Chinese streets he grew impatient with, and became angry at some cultural attributes of the Chinese after having a few clashes with the local people. According to him, Chinese people do not have manners. Pushing and shoveling in line are very common in public. It is very annoying that Chinese people would cream "hello" and snigger at him, and then run away. He believes that Chinese people have the habit of getting loud and are vocal about their opinions in public. They also have no concept of privacy and often stand behind him. But those are only nuisances when compared to an incident in which two Chinese men hop into the taxi supposed to be taken by John and his friend. After the incident, John lashed out.

It was all a ridiculous incident....Underlying it all is an anger, not just at one guy in one particular incident, but at a whole society. I've never been in a country like this, where people are so "me first!" *crazy*. There are no lines for buses, just a pushing hoard. The other day in McDonalds, after I had already stood patiently in line for about 5 minutes, some woman suddenly pushed her way in from the side and placed her order right in front of me! I just stood there and let her. What am I going to do, change a society? It's the same

in banks and at ticket counters. I've been living with this every day for two years now....I really believe that in the USA, there are few people who would quickly hop into the taxi instead of doing the civil thing and saying, "you were here first, you take it." I think that in all the other countries I've been to — Japan, Mexico, Korea, Thailand — most people would do the same. What is it about this place that makes people so divinely self-centered?

(Pasden, Oct 1, 2002, Taxi incident)

If the lack of personal sanitation, public display of rude uncivil behaviors and self-centeredness can be improved through education and economic development, the perceived absence of creativity and individuality from Chinese characters seems to suggest deeper and more serious cultural backwardness. Upon hearing that a little girl was punished in school and scolded at home for standing up and confronting her teacher for the teacher's partial treatment of other students John lamented that he felt so foreign in a society like this. The incidence was used in *SinosplICE* as an example to show the extent to which Chinese society stifles creativity and individual thought. In order to substantiate his judgment without appearing too subjective in regards to this matter, John referred to his fellow American blogger who made a blank generalization that "the least creative kids [in the world] were Chinese... [because] they live under a system of rigid conformity-one of communism....it must be true that 5000 years of history affects the way things are done" (Pasden, Apr 28, 2005, Micah on creativity). Another American agreed that number one value of the Chinese as a whole is stability. Stability doesn't require a lot of creativity, but more conformity.

The discussion on the rigid conformity and the lack of creativity of Chinese people and

society is familiar as it echoes a century-old Western complaint about China's suffocating uniformity. Either time hasn't changed, or China has been locked up in an eternity of its backwardness. The only difference between now and then may lie at the fact that while former Western travelers blamed the long Chinese history and culture for making Chinese people passive, docile, and unimaginative, the American bloggers in the twenty-first century simply add communism as another major cause of such a China-specific problem on top of history, Chinese tradition, and Confucianism.

Throughout *SinosplICE* John tried to paint a faithful picture of Chinese characters and society. Yet his effort fell short for at least two reasons. First, he frequently made blank generalizations about the society and people from only a couple of encounters he had with a few Chinese people. It is ironic to read his statement that "the Chinese seem to be fond of lumping unfamiliar concepts together and then applying generalizations" (Pasden, Oct 13, 2002, Daily life Q & A) when he made the same mistake. Second, the perspective with which John viewed China is still very much constrained by a narrow and cliché point of view that were held by most former Western travelers to China to look purposefully for any Chinese deficiency. Moreover the long standing Western discourse about China has exerted such a powerful influence on John that it forces him to understand the culture and people in a certain way and supplies him with a very limited vocabulary to describe what he observes. In *SinosplICE*, the use of "annoying", "crazy pushing horde" echoes the deep-seated Western fear of the unknown but nevertheless uncontrollable power of the huge Chinese population. A perception that the Chinese can be aggressive and stubborn like a kid (Pasden, Oct 1, 2002, Taxi incident) indicates the psychological immaturity of Chinese characters and the arrested

development of the Chinese society. In the meantime, such an analogy between Chinese people and a child has long been Western discursive strategy to diminish and patronize the cultural and racial others who are thought to be not on par with the West in every aspect.

Theme IV: Politics and the Government

In the mission statement John described *SinosplICE* as an apolitical blog preferably devoted to a faithful representation and promotion of Chinese culture. Hence serious political commentaries are largely absent from the blog. But *SinosplICE* is not a politics-free blog either. As the matter of fact, despite the initial intention John still occasionally commented on Chinese politics and the government. Most of his opinions were criticism of the Chinese government, albeit very mild and controlled. And the criticism was primarily targeted at the Chinese propaganda and the government control of the Internet.

Ever since the Communist China was founded in 1949 the West has fascinated with the Chinese propaganda. Although as a political concept propaganda can be neutral, popular Western view of Chinese propaganda tends to be overwhelmingly negative. In the Western eyes, Chinese propaganda is the epitome of the power of the Communist apparatus. The propaganda posters from the Cultural Revolution are of special interest to Western collectors and researchers as they are perceived as an ultimate symbol of the regime's control of mind and ideology (Cushing & Tomkins, 2007). Contemporary Chinese propaganda has undergone changes in its content, which is more geared toward raising public awareness and promoting civic-mindedness. John is very much interested in the new Chinese propaganda that arrives at his door, appears in the street or on TV screen. Therefore, he used *SinosplICE* as a platform to

showcase Chinese government-distributed pamphlets, street slogans, and Chinese state TV programming.

Instead of targeting at the political ramifications of the new Chinese propaganda, John poked fun at its inadequate and ineffectual delivery. In his opinion most state-produced propaganda is useless and embarrassingly incorrect. Empty slogans, outdated cartoon illustrations, and grammatically incorrect English translation were used to show the incompetence of Chinese bureaucracy. Chinese TV programming was especially mocked in *SinosplICE* as a “tool of the state patriotic entities”. In John’s opinion Chinese TV shows are characteristic of “gleaming host, bubbly super-standard mandarin, smiles that make your eyes ache, and mind-numbing awful stuff” that never fails to reach “a new depth of raw bore-power” (Pasden, Oct 19, 2003, Craptacular). John even invented a new word “craptacular” to refer to Chinese TV show and stage performances. But unlike many of his fellow Americans who in the guest comment section openly accused the Chinese government of using propaganda to brainwash its people John was careful not to comment on the political nature of the Chinese propaganda. Overall, John’s approach on Chinese propaganda was light-hearted only making fun of the silliness of the message and form of the propaganda. Still, the mockery is a form of disapproval. In the end, when John drew the conclusion that “*China loves the Craptacular*” he sent out the message that propaganda is unique to China where “there are some things we foreigners just don’t understand” (Pasden, Oct 19, 2003, Craptacular).

In addition to Chinese propaganda, John is also seriously concerned about the Chinese government’s control of the Internet given the importance of the Internet to bloggers like him. Every time when John noticed any Internet irregularity he didn’t hesitate to attribute it to the

Chinese government's censorship of the Internet information and the freedom of speech. John believes the great firewall of China is very real and it affects his life and freedom to communicate on the Internet (Pasden, 2002a, About Section). For example, in September and November of 2002, John reported in his blog that China blocked and unblocked access to the search engine *Google*. He talked about how the Internet was acting weirdly when he tried to conduct a search for picture of a famous Chinese leader. He noticed that things were fine at first and then the links to the pictures stopped working. Finally the search engine became inaccessible. He quickly jumped to the conclusion that such irregular activities of the Internet were caused by China's sophisticated technologies of the Internet censorship. Out of the fear of being censored John didn't criticize the Chinese government explicitly. Instead he relied on wordplay to explain to his readers the politics in China:

There have been only three main leaders of Communist China: Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and you-know-who. Tomorrow it is widely believed that you-know-who will step down, and a new guy will take his place. (Pasden, Nov 7, 2002, Selective search blocking)

In the first year of blogging John avoided topics concerning Chinese politics and government. However, his attitude changed slightly from reserved humor to mild anger and finally to direct criticism. In a January 2003 entry, he ranted "China had done it again....The links on my China blogs ...have been massacred". What upset him most is that "most of these blogs are by foreigners living in China, dedicated to changing the way outsiders think of China. We're out here building bridges, creating windows. And they're getting torn down and

smashed by the government of the very country we're trying to benefit....Stupid, stupid” (Pasden, Jan 12, 2003, Information terrorism). In a February entry of the same year, John (Pasden, Feb 10, 2003, I am being watched) reported again that while surfing the Internet in a public Internet café in a provincial capital he was watched by guards in uniform who patrolled the space. He quickly concluded that this was another form of thought control. It was the first time that the Chinese government's exercise of control and censorship was reported in an offline context although the blogger didn't have any proof other than a strong suspicion.

In July, August, and October of 2004, similar complaints about Chinese censorship were posted. Bold fonts were used to emphasize the frustration that John felt being a censorship casualty. When it came to the year of 2005 the number of posts that relate to Chinese censorship had almost tripled. On March 9, John shared one of his fellow American bloggers' blog entries on his site, in which his American expatriate friend told the community that he had to shut his China blog because he was afraid of being punished by Chinese government. In a near paranoid tone the descriptions highlighted the severity of the government Internet censorship and surveillance. For example, he feels there are moles everywhere in China who would put him under constant watch, observation, and close scrutiny. He also fears that his Internet activities will put his wife, job, and legal residence in China at risk. He further complained that “China is a lonely country for foreigners.... isolation and scrutiny by the masses isn't an easy thing to come grip with” (Pasden, Mar 9, 2005, End of the monologues). This post triggered heated discussions among members of the China blog community. Many of them came to testify to the truth of the story and outpoured their disgust toward the government. The prevailing belief in this community is that as long as there is an oppression of mind, China

won't be able to get on the road to democracy, let alone to be a world power even though it has produced an economic miracle over the past twenty years.

Amidst the heat of the accusation and expressed disdain of the Chinese government, John chose to express his disappointment with the Chinese government in a more subtle way by lamenting “mystical Orient, what a cruel mistress you are” (Pasden, Apr 7, 2005, New blog name). At the same time, he seemed to self-censor his own blog content whenever he brought up what he perceived as sensitive topics either by pronouncing publicly that he had no anti-government agenda, or purposefully omitting key words so that his posts could dodge possible surveillance.

It is not the purpose of this study to prove whether the Chinese government is capable of using sophisticated Internet technologies to detect and censor online foreign dissidents. However, it is important to point out that while believing in such a control is one thing, believing such a control is placed on blogs run by foreigners 24 hours a day and 7 days a week is another matter. In fact the described scenarios are merely assumptions rather than hard evidence because none of them actually happened to the China bloggers. Despite this, many China bloggers unfortunately seem more ready to criticize the Chinese government for the sake of being critical without recognizing and understanding the political and economical complexities and imperatives of the country. They tended to use rhetoric that brings back the memories and fear of red Communism, totalitarianism, and secrecy. Such a discourse has contributed nothing but to reinforce and fan the conventional Western imagination of a China that is hopelessly undemocratic and oppressive. Provided, the main goal of the www.sinosplICE.com is to dispel unfavorable myths about China created by the Western media, it is hard to say it has achieved

its purpose.

Off the Beaten Path ---The Opposite End of China

Introduction

Among the three China blogs that I analyzed, *The Opposite End of China* (see Figure 15) is my favorite blog. It is one of the few China blogs that report from China's border region. Given most American expatriates in China live in big coastal cities, it is reasonable to believe that Michael, the blogger of *The Opposite End of China* has something special to say about a unique place. In fact, the title of the blog already suggested its uniqueness, and it was the first thing that drew my attention.

Figure 15: The Opposite End of China Homepage

Almost every weblog on the Internet has a title because it is as important and meaningful as a name is to a person. Title is always the first thing that a blogger needs to deal with when he or she starts creating a weblog because popular blog creating templates always ask bloggers to

name their blogs. Blog title speaks something about the nature of the blog. The title of *The Opposite End of China* indicates that the blog is China-related, and it is devoted to a special part of China, Xinjiang, literally “new frontier” of China.

Also known as China’s Uyghur Autonomous Region, Xinjiang, the northwestern part of Chinese territory, borders Mongolia to the east, Russia to the north, as well as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and the disputed area of Kashmir to the west. It is China’s largest political subdivision and a home to several Muslim Turkic ethnic groups such as Uyghur and Kazakhs (“Uyghur”, 2006). Geographically, this northwestern border area of China is far-off from other well-known coastal regions and big cities like Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, or Hong Kong. The scenery is also opposite to what most Western travelers in China are familiar with. Unlike the lush green river valleys in the south, this northwestern backcountry is somber and barren. The staple geo landscape of the region is a combination of huge mountains and vast Gobi desert intercepted by few cities, small towns, and patches of oasis. Speaking of its population, it is again the opposite of most places in China. Majority of the residents here are ethnic Uyghurs. Hans who belong to the dominant majority group in other parts of China are minority here. In every aspect, Xinjiang is the opposite end of China.

By choosing to travel to and live in this “farthest flung, most middle-of-nowhere region of China” (Manning, 2005, Bio Section), Michael projected himself as a hardcore traveler who goes off the beaten path, explores China’s interior that is beyond the reach and understanding of most Westerners travelers, puts up with hazardous, comfortless conditions, and endures a kind of alienation and panic in foreign world for the after-taste of having sampled new scenes (Theroux, 1985).

But acquiring the pride of a real traveler was not the only reason that made Michael move to this remote border region of China. In the biography section of his blog Michael (2005) stated that he hopes this journey could be a life-changing and therapeutic experience. A young college graduate from an upper-middle class family, Michael was born in San Francisco and raised in New Jersey. He came to the city of Korla, Xinjiang as an English language teacher after the tragedy of September 11 that had changed his life. Before coming to China, Michael majored in journalism in college, which led directly to an internship with NBC Nightly News. He worked under the supervision of the famous anchor and correspondent Tom Brokaw. Judging from the biography posted on the blog, it is obvious that Michael didn't come to China for low-paying English teaching jobs. What mattered to him was that such a journey could enrich his global trekking experience and provide an escaping opportunity for him to keep a distance from painful and incomprehensible realities back home. It is not an overstatement that the wilderness of Xinjiang was expected to purify and re-invigorate Michael's spirit and help him to see things more clearly from a different perspective. Maybe the unspoiled wilderness had the answers that Michael has been eagerly seeking. From the title and the biography provided by Michael, readers of *The Opposite End of China* get a sense of adventure both physically and spiritually. But why he chose Xinjiang other than other parts of the world remains a question unanswered, which offers an interesting entry point for this study.

Local Context and Textual Surface

Before applying a discursive analysis to *The Opposite End of China*, I would like to describe how the weblog looks by examining the structural features of it. Besides a title, other

things that a visitor will notice right away about a weblog are how it looks and how it differs from other blogs visually. The appearance of *The Opposite End of China* blog is very appealing. Like John of *Sinosplice*, Michael is serious about blogging so he created the blog without using a customized template offered in commercial blogging sites such as www.blogger.com , www.livejournal.com , or www.xanga.com. In other words, Michael also paid to have his own weblog space and distinct URL at <http://china.otspecial.org>

In terms of structural organization, *The Opposite End of China* is not unlike many other blogs out there on the Internet. It has a title, an archive of blog entries arranged in reverse chronological order, a monthly calendar marking the days that contain blog entries, a photo gallery; profile and contact information of the blogger, a list of blog rings that refer readers to other blogs of the owner's interest, and some commercial advertisements. In addition, Michael also highlighted his favorite blog entries. The Recent Entries section is a little bit redundant because it repeats the information under the News section. Another important feature of *The Opposite End of China* is Guest Comment section listed at the bottom of every single blog entry. Readers can leave comments in this section.

The first entry of *The Opposite End of China* was posted on January 9, 2005. By the time I started collecting data for the current study Michael had his entry dated on November 4, 2005. In between, Michael posted a total of 66 entries and received 302 guest comments. On October 27, 2005, the number of visitors to his blog reached 10,000. It was an impressive achievement given that Michael he had only blogged about ten months. Among the 66 blog entries that I examined, 32 entries are closely related to China.

In their 2005 study of weblog as a new Internet communication genre, Torill Mortenson

reflected that “weblogs straddle the boundaries between publication and process, between writing towards others and writing for oneself...[and] between what’s private and what’s public, and often we see that they often disappear deep into the private sphere”. Given this nature of weblogs being both public and private at the same time, it is common for Michael to devote most of his blog content to personal communication between family and friends.

Theme I: Into the History

Putting aside the irrelevant blog entries, what images of China will the visitors of *The Opposite End of China* develop? The first theme that I noticed from reading the blog is the sights and sounds of China that came directly from Michael’s extensive travel in the Northern and Western part of the country. Although most of his time was taken up by teaching, Michael did manage to visit some interesting places in China. From the blog texts and numerous photos, I could feel Michael’s impulse to search an authentic China that is necessarily traditional, exotic, and is characterized by nature.

The capital Beijing was the first Chinese city that Michael visited. After arriving in the city he chose to stay in an “old fashioned” Chinese hotel converted from a Manchurian nobleman’s courtyard. According to him, “General Zen Ge Lin Qin, who would later crush the Taiping rebellion, built the hotel in the 1830s.” (Manning, Feb 2, 2005, Beijing, para. 3) Michael was equally amazed by the fact that the hotel is located in Hutong, the “narrow alleyways of yesteryear” (para.3) and it was decorated with things very Chinese such as red lanterns and traditional Chinese furniture with delicate carvings. The following days Michael

got to see for himself famous scenic spots. His photo album shows billowing golden roofs of Forbidden City, bronze door ornament in the shape of a lion's head, imperial gardens full of paintings and sculptures, Buddha statues, and the signature of China travel--the Great Wall. Of course he also went to see the spectacles of Beijing Opera and Chinese acrobatics. Such research for an old and familiar China continues in Xian, China's ancient capital of both Han and Tang dynasties where Michael snapped pictures of the beautiful ancient bell tower lit up by red lanterns, typical Chinese carvings of dragon half-covered by snow, and the unintelligible old school Chinese calligraphy. Figure 16 shows some of the photos from the Image and Gallery section.

Figure 16: Images from The Opposite End of China

Those images, very typical in photos taken by Western travelers to China, became visual ratifications of a Western traveler's prior ideas about China. And in David Spurr's opinion (1993), they represent a rhetorical strategy of anaesthetizing and idealization of what is foreign. However, they are not the only signifiers of a real authentic Chinese experience because there must be another China that has nothing to do with the charm and mysterious culture of an old

civilization. Counter-balancing the China of too much history and civilization, there is another China of disorder, undesirable lack of hygiene, and people's general disregard of others. Such tropes of negation and debasement usually run parallel with the nostalgic admiration of the ancient Chinese high culture.

Before he set his foot on Chinese soil, Michael already had his lesson of something uninviting about Chinese culture. It was mid-air on his long strenuous flight to Beijing. He noticed that “[w]hereas Americans tend to act like they're in a library once the plane gets up to cruising altitude, the Chinese talk and talk and talk...and talk some more. It was impossible to get any sleep.” (Manning, Feb 2, 2005, Beijing, para.2) The repeated use of the single word “talk” creates a sense of tension and uneasiness that only got heightened later when Michael came to Beijing West Rail Way Station to purchase a railway ticket to Xian. The moment he arrived at the station Michael saw faces of Chinese that were “frenzied” and “unfriendly” (Manning, Feb 2, 2005, Beijing, para. 5). The scene, full of unrecognizable Chinese accentuates Michael's loneliness and frustration in a foreign land. At the same time, it conveys this deep-felt anxiety when one faces a nameless mass that can't be comprehended nor controlled. The frenzy of Chinese reality even reaches a hilariously dangerous point when Michael went on a bus trip to visit Turpan:

[A]fter an hour of waiting in the dark, we finally got on our way. Oddly enough, we soon found out that there's pretty much no road at all for the first 15 or 20 kilometers between the train station and Turpan. And when I say no road, I don't mean a dirt road...I mean *NO* road! Occasionally, while weaving back and forth along the rutted tracks of previous vehicles, we would catch sad glimpses of where the road used to be. Then it would

mysteriously dissolve into nothingness or head off the edge of some small cliff. About 40 minutes after our bumpy journey began, the road reappeared in the desert like some sort of transportation mirage in reality. (Manning, Mar 28, 2005, Turpan trip, para. 4)

The surreal situation described by Michael testifies to the utterly lack of rules and the rampant chaos in Xinjiang, the “Wild West” of China. In a strangely fitting way it perfectly contrasts with the serene ancient architectures in the Chinese cities of history that Michael once visited. When it comes to portraying China, David Spurr (1993) and Nicholas Clifford (2001b) would like to remind us that the binary opposition between the civilized and the wild, progress and backwardness, culture and nature would appear quite frequently in many Western travel narratives about the cultural Other. And in Michael’s blog such a contrast seemed to find its expression.

A similar contrast exists between the bustling and colorful scenes of Chinese markets/bazaars and the dingy, dusty, and dirty Chinese living environment. Since the colonial travel time, the filth of Chinese roadside inns and streets has long been the focal point in the accounts of Western travelers. In a metaphorical way, the dirt comes to associate with the degeneration of a society’s morality. Although such an association is hardly suggested in *The Opposited End of China* and the intolerance of the dirty environment is much more muted due to the improvements on the Chinese part, descriptions and photos of muddy cottages and badly-polluted air with an awful rancid smell still constitute a good part of the blog narrative. Sometimes even a picture of a toilet made it in the gallery simply because one of Michael’s readers, actually his mother, asked for a visual verification of the Chinese toilet, which so many

previous travelers had complained about. (Manning, Mar 9, 2005, Details, living conditions)

Theme II: Into the Red China

If the sharp contrast between the graceful ancient civilization and not so beautiful reality is not enough to define China, a red Communist tag must be attached to the country. As a representational trope, red China with its variations of red army and the statue of Mao Zedong has made stronger appearances in American travelogues about China since the Chinese Communist party became a real threat to the Western ideology. Although Edgar Snow had employed red star as a trope of hope to appraise the Communist regime, the connotation of red star became increasingly ironic with the world entering the Cold War. In the imaginations of many Americans, China is essentially linked to Soviet style buildings, rigid PLA soldiers, the statue of Chairman Mao, propaganda posters with big characters, and the synchronized dance or morning exercise of big crowd. They are just indicative of how Chinese Communist regime tightly controls the minds of its people. The ridicule continues in *The Opposite End of China* as well. For example, the bright red color of the blog template resembles Chinese national flag in an obvious way. The color of red seems to authenticate Michael's Chinese experience. Further, on his motorcycle expedition across Taklamakan desert to south Xinjiang, Michael noticed a "massive statue of Mao Zedong shaking an old Uyghur man's hand... I'd seen a similar statue in Keriya (Yutian), but this one was far bigger. This fact also brought into focus the fact that, at least in southern Xinjiang, the farther you get from Beijing the bigger the tributes to Mao get" (Manning, May 9, 2005, Motorcycle madness, or the fantastic voyage, para. 25) In line with the ridicule is a series of criticism of Chinese government. Articles which are critical of Beijing's

censorship on the Internet, the flawed Chinese legal system, and the unfair treatment of ethnic people in Xinjiang are linked in the weblog side by side with Michael's observation of the country.

The Guest Voices

If *The Opposite End of China* is kept on a paper and sent home as a letter, the images of China would be one-sided and full of old representational clichés. The technology of weblog changed it by providing a platform where a dialogue about Michael's representation of China is possible. In the entry on April 16, Michael reported about (Manning, 2005, Rumblings, social and geological) Kolar taxi drivers' strike against government's charge of operation fee. A Chinese reader (Sun, Apr, 2005, Guest comment) replied to that post providing information suggestive of the fact that it is not all the government's fault. Again, in response to Michael's somewhat bitter complaints about an insensitive Chinese who greeted him by commenting on his weight, the same Chinese reader asked for more tolerance when misunderstanding happens in cross-cultural communication (Sun, June 12, 2005, Guest comment). Another French reader seemed even more critical of Michael's hidden prejudice in reporting China's ethnic oppression in Xinjiang. He commented "Unfortunately VERY typical of foreign journalism about China... I have read and see MUCH MUCH worse, for example in the French media. Perhaps the Chinese government is too benevolent letting foreign journalists roam freely and "report" their propaganda?" (Frenchlover1999, Nov 6, 2005, Guest Comment)

Although there were different voices in the guest comment, they didn't receive much attention either from Michael or from other guests. Hence a real dialogue between cultures was

not really happening. In the end, what we get from Michael's blog are reinforced stereotypes of China and images of the country linked to ancient civilization, defined by underdevelopment, and controlled by the red Communist government. When all these images become a background, we only see a brave American who searched for the traces of the old civilization, who braced himself for the uninviting wildness of the China's West border, and who survived the red Communist state and came out a stronger man.

A Romance with China – Speaking of China

Introduction

On May 18, 2003, *the Charleston Gazette*, West Virginia's leading newspaper, published a short story about three Yeager scholars from Marshall University whose choice of less traditional career paths had led them to unusual accomplishments that are not defined by material success but by more creative and less structured existence. In other words those three people were praised for their bravery in taking the advantages of the scholarships to travel to foreign cultures and eventually embraced a more culturally diverse and challenging life, which seemed to bring a fresh breeze to the culturally and ethnically monolithic Appalachian region.

Jocelyn was among the three scholars. By the time the news report came out, she had already spent four years in China first as English teacher and then print and copy writer for a company in Shanghai. Although grew up in Northeast Ohio and went to college in West Virginia, Jocelyn has been passionate about China as if it is in her blood. She is a self described devotee of Taoism, a connoisseur of Chinese food and tea, and believes in the healing power of Chinese medicine. In her own words, she fell completely in love with China. (Jocelyn, 2001, About me section)

The love affair began in 1999 when Jocelyn first came to China's heartland, Henan province to teach college English. It has grown stronger in the subsequent 6 years of her stay in the country, and it is still going on even after she and her Chinese husband left for the U.S. at the end of 2005 because she promised in her blog, *Speaking of China*, that she would come back. The online journal, of course, is one of hundreds of American expatriates attempts to capture and reveal the essence of today's China in relation to their own experience to whoever is interested in hearing those tales as well as to themselves. What separates this particular blog from other China blogs with similar purposes, however, is a heightened sensitivity rarely found in the China blogs, most of which have been written by male diarists. As a female blogger, Jocelyn approached China from an extremely personal and intimate angle. Reading through her journal one can't help noticing two paralleling stories that keep diverging from but more often converging into each other: her passion about China is interwoven with the bitter-sweet love affairs between her and a couple of Chinese men.

Such an interesting juxtaposition of the two romances makes it compelling to include *Speaking of China* in the current studies of China blogs. Another reason that makes me prefer studying *Speaking of China* over the other China blogs is the gender of the blogger. Given the fact that the online community of China blogs is dominated by white male bloggers, a female voice from that community deserves serious attention. Hence, even there are many China blogs that have greater reputation and attract more people to visit and comment, I still chose *Speak of China* to conduct the analysis.

Local Context and Textual Surface

In what follows I first drew a sketch of *Speaking of China* by discussing the general features of the blog including the diarist's habit of posting and the number of blog entries. Then I examined the structural components and the relevant visual elements of the blog. The main focus of the analysis, however, is the identification of the thematic themes of the blog and the examination of the salient discursive strategies that Jocelyn employed in her writings about China.

As I mentioned before, Jocelyn has a relative longer relationship with China compared to many other American expatriates who blog about the country. She first came to China in 1999. After a year of teaching English she returned to the U.S. only to come back a year later to work as a volunteer in a renewable energy organization in Hangzhou, a city in China's East coast. Ever since then she has kept a China blog *Speaking of China*. (see Figure 17)

Figure 17: Speaking of China Homepage

The first blog entry of *Speaking of China* was posted on August 14, 2001. In the four years

and four months before Jocelyn again left China for the U.S. in December 2005, *Speaking of China* had been active on monthly basis. Those years also had witnessed major changes in Jocelyn's life. She changed her job three times; moved from one apartment to another, relocated from Hangzhou to Shanghai; and finally married a Chinese citizen. Despite the ups and downs, Jocelyn kept documenting her life in China. Whenever there was an emotional need, Jocelyn turned to her blog as if it was her best friend. The blog has also been a platform where she shared her passion about China and Chinese culture.

By the end of 2005, a total of 133 blog entries had been posted. Those entries were extraordinarily longer and more reflective. Therefore, *Speaking of China* is different from most blogs out there whose entries are typically shorter and involves less personal reflection. In the four years between 2001 and 2005 Jocelyn contributed to her blog regularly. Yet, the year of 2003 was an exception. Only one entry was posted in that year, and Jocelyn didn't provide any explanation. Although it was certainly unusual for a frequent blogger like Jocelyn to skip an entire year it is not uncommon in the blog world. Another interesting fact about Jocelyn's blogging habit is that the longer she stayed in China the less frequent she updated her blog. For example, she posted 61 entries in the last four months of 2001. However, there were 34 entries in the entire 2002. From 2004 to 2005, Jocelyn posted an average of two posts each month, which brings the total number of the blog entries in these two years to 37.

Again, the irregularity of the posting frequency is common in blogging community in general. At times bloggers post multiple entries in a few days or weeks. At other times blogs just become dormant for a long period of time. In the case of *Speaking of China*, the first two years of extended stay in China might give Jocelyn initial cultural shock. Under a pressure to

adapt to a new physical and cultural environment she might write and post more often in her blog, a virtual emotional outlet. Overall, except for the unproductive 2003, *Speaking of China* stayed current and relatively active in the years I examined.

Unlike *SinosplICE* and *The Other End of China*, *Speaking of China* is a low maintenance blog. For example, the blog requires its visitors to register to Typekey to be able to comment so that spam comments could be effectively eliminated. Screening visitors didn't encourage guest comments. Therefore there is almost no interaction going on between Jocelyn and her blog visitors. In addition, Jocelyn took a minimalist approach when it comes to designing her blog. Given that there are millions of blogs out there filled with animated icons, colorful background, eye-catching graphics, and multimedia add-ons, *Speaking of China* is not visually fancy at all. It only has a light gray background and a couple of red banners with violet logos on them. No video or audio components were spotted in the entire blog site. *Speaking of China* is a simple blog. The center piece of it is Jocelyn's journals, or blog entries. As I mentioned before, those entries were long, and a large proportion of them were personal reflections. Only a few posts were accompanied by photographs, which indicated that Jocelyn preferred the textual over the visual.

The simplicity of the graphic design of the blog, however, doesn't mean that Jocelyn didn't care about her blog. Quite to the contrary, she purchased a domain to host her blog instead of using free weblog service; she also had many friends involved with the site construction. And she did make thoughtful choices regarding the use of certain visual elements. For example, her frequent use of the color red gave the blog a distinct Chinese flavor because red is a prominent and popular color in Chinese culture and traditionally symbolizes happiness

and fortune. Another typical feature design of *Speaking of China* is the recurring use of various icons that are emblematic of Chinese traditional culture. Characters from traditional Chinese painting, images of dragon boat, exquisite floral patterns that are distinctively oriental, and decoration motifs clearly inspired by Chinese calligraphy were used to invoke a Chinese theme. Figure 18 shows a variety of icons clearly associated with Chinese culture and civilization were frequently used in *Speaking of China*.

Figure 18: Typical Icons Used in Speaking of China

In addition to the low-key but nonetheless carefully designed visual layout, the content of *Speaking of China* is structured in a simple way. Under the blog title there are only five subsections including My China Journal, China links, About Me, Get in Touch, and What's New. Containing 133 blog entries My China Journal section is the soul of the blog. About Me section introduces Jocelyn to the visitors of her blog. This section presents general information about Jocelyn in a way that emphasizes her passion for and connection with China. By scanning this section we will learn Jocelyn's name, her Chinese name in Pinyin, her Chinese Zodiac sign, and personal hobbies. Most of the information is devoted to illustrating her connection with China. The purpose of the blog is to share her passion for China with the rest of the world. In answering the "Why China?" question, Jocelyn recalls how she became

“extremely curios about this mysterious giant across the ocean” (Jocelyn, 2001, About Me section) and how her secret passion for China motivated her to study Chinese language and absorb anything that she perceives as being part of the Chinese culture. She also mentioned several milestones of her Chinese adventure such as moving from Hang Zhou to Shanghai by a leap of faith and her marriage to a Chinese man in the summer of 2004. There is also a space for future plans: she wants to open a psychological business in China if destiny allows.... Anyone who reads Jocelyn’s personal profile couldn’t ignore her passion about Chinese culture nor her honesty in revealing so much about herself. Such openness is not very common among her fellow American bloggers. To a certain extent, it provides proof to Jocelyn’s advanced knowledge of China. More important, it reinforces her credibility in sharing her observations of the country with the rest of the world and adds a layer of female sensitivity to the blog narratives in the mean time (Jocelyn, 2001, About Me section).

Like many China blogs, *Speaking of China* contains a list of China-relevant web links. It is an important feature because one of the primary missions of most China bloggers is to spread the influence of Chinese culture and to report to the world what China really is. It is assumed that knowledge instills understanding. Hence, Jocelyn would love to point to people places where they can learn something about the country and the culture. First, she recommended relevant links to websites that are devoted to Chinese history and promotion of Chinese culture. These links are followed by links to websites that contain useful and practical guidance to people who will work, travel, and live in China. Personal preferences certainly influence Jocelyn’s choice of linkable websites. According to my observation, the majority of websites on Chinese history and culture that are linked to *Speaking of China* are based in the U.S., and

they tend to feature traditional Chinese cultural practices such as medicine, tai chi, Chinese tea culture, and so on. (Jocelyn, 2001, Chinese Culture and History Links section)

There are another two interesting observations that I made of the Link section. First, Jocelyn doesn't provide links to any website that is devoted to the discussions of political aspects of China. The absence of such web resources accentuates the intended theme of *Speaking of China*, which is purely personal, cultural and apolitical. Second, there is no single reference to any China blog in the entire Link section. In the world of blogging, cross-reference not only increases the amount of information in a single blog but also promotes the site. That is to say the more interlinked to other blogs and bloggers, the higher popularity a blog tends to enjoy. Moreover, cross-reference provides the infrastructure to the formation of virtual community, which might be later developed into offline relationships. Given the fact that cross-reference is one of the staple features of mainstream blogs, the absence of it in *Speaking of China* becomes extremely unusual. It seems to suggest that even though *Speaking of China* is one of the few early blogs devoted to China it hasn't been very popular in the circle of the China blogs. Or it might also be indicative of the fact that Jocelyn didn't associate herself closely to other foreigners in China and she was not a high-profile member of the China blog community.

Her blog entries confirm these speculations. In the blog Jocelyn often expressed her frustrations with the foreign co-workers of her who didn't share with her the same desire to be acculturated in Chinese culture. Although Jocelyn was fully aware of her fellow Americans blogging about China she didn't have favorable views of those blogs. She even lamented that many [China] blogs simply "failed to capture the spirit of living in China through a unique

voice and electric stories” (Jocelyn, 2001, About Me section). On the other hand, Jocelyn feels confident that she can offer an alternative perspective instead of repeating what others have been saying about China. Therefore, she invites people to come with her to explore China and promises that together they will enjoy the surprises and wonders.

Such a confidence in the uniqueness of her stories about China comes from nowhere other than her attempt at blending in with the local population and keeping a distance from the American expatriate circle in China. Yet, in regards to writing and sharing the China moments with others Jocelyn isn’t radically different from her fellow American bloggers. After all, she believes in her ability to discover and capture the essence of China like anybody else in the China blog community do. The truth about China, she might believe, is carefully tucked in hidden places and away from arrogant souls. And it can only be revealed by people like her who is so passionate about the country and the culture that she chose to go native. Jocelyn’s strong desire to become a Chinese cultural insider influenced her point of view when it comes to observing China. She rejected to be a distant observer of China and preferred immersing herself in and feeling about the culture of her passion. Therefore, the blog is not about a particular aspect of China but a cluster of impressions about China.

Theme I: China, Land of Ancient Culture

Despite the fact that the China presented in *Speaking of China* is only a fragmented impression, a unifying emotional tone runs through the whole blog. Generally speaking, Jocelyn has an extremely favorable impression of China. She had been passionate about the

country and culture even before started contemplating the possibility of moving to China. In the About Me section, Jocelyn (2001) confessed that she was born with an unconditional love for China as if it was in her blood. Without explaining why such a love for China comes so natural to her Jocelyn makes her connection with the country seem mysterious and fateful.

Yet, the China to which Jocelyn has been irresistibly attracted has little to do with the more urban and modern side of the country. What really fascinates Jocelyn is everything traditionally Chinese. As being indicated in the About Me and Link sections Jocelyn's knowledge of Chinese culture largely concerns artifacts and cultural rituals that are perceived by the Western world as the essential symbols of Chinese civilization. Therefore, Chinese zodiac signs, Taichi, Kungfu, acupuncture, FengShui, classic poems, tea drinking, and other things of similar nature have frequently appeared in the blog entries of *Speaking of China*. At the same time it is a great pleasure for Jocelyn to discover those signs of authentic China in the "nooks, crannies, and odd corners" of Chinese streets. We found her actively searching for the "PERFECT wooden Buddha" in handicrafts market that is literally a museum of Chinese treasures such as "Ming and Qing dynasty states and decorations, wooden furniture, traditional Chinese paintings, pottery", every conceivable goods to turn an American home into the "ultimate Chinese palace" (Jocelyn, Dec 24, 2002, A one-woman bargaining machine, Journal section).

Casual bike rides through the Chinese neighborhood became journeys of discovery of the local flavor. (Jocelyn, Sept 17, 2001, Finding the peace again, Journal setion) Turning away from the fast-paced city life and "the 24-hour construction, incessant horns blaring from the traffic, or noisome crooning from the Karaoke bars" (Jocelyn, Aug 24, 2001, Welcome to Hang

Zhou, Journal section) Jocelyn liked meandering through the gently winding pathways and visiting a traditional lush garden to see people fishing, painting, simply having a stroll, or living a life whose pace is decidedly unhurried and is extraordinarily quiet. Those trips were full of pleasant surprises. Sometimes Jocelyn stumbled across “a lovely little isolated enclave of Chinese homes that was picturesque nestled among some ponds and wetlands in front of the majestic hills” (Jocelyn, Aug, 26, 2001, Unexpected company, Journal section). Other times, she wandered about the alleyways of old towns and “was captivated by the lovely old buildings with the austere, carved wooden doors and tiled roofs of the style of 100-some years ago” (Jocelyn, Feb 14, 2002, Divination and degradation, Journal section). The sight of the Great Wall with its “glorious views of the country side beyond” fired up Jocelyn’s imagination and she started picturing in her mind the “fierce guards that once stood watch at the vast fortress, warding off foreign invaders” (Jocelyn, Oct 3, 2002, Conference companionship, crowded Beijing, Journal section). The blog is filled with words such as “charming”, lovely”, “picturesque”, “captivated”, “isolated enclaves”, “gently meandering stream”, “pleasant solitude”, “old town”, and “old buildings of 100-some years”. Together they have invoked a dreamy as well as a placid feeling as if what Jocelyn saw is something surreal and really appear much like the China we [Westerners] all fantasize about, as though it were stolen from one of those Chinese scrolls: the mountains that seem to stand so tall one can hardly see the summit and the base within the very same glance, all covered in trees and curving down to a meandering stream. (Jocelyn, Sept 1, 2001, Leisure-time, Journal section)

Jocelyn’s pursuit of a traditional China and its classic beauty didn’t stop at searching for

landscapes and architectures. She chose to live the Chinese way of life as a means to connect with the spirit of traditional China. And there is no place to look for the outwardly expression of that spirit other than Chinese medicine. From Jocelyn's point of view, not only is Chinese medicine informed by Chinese wisdom, it is also a vehicle of that wisdom. It is interesting to note that the way in which Jocelyn described her experience with Chinese acupuncture is vastly different from John's approach to the same topic. In *SinosplICE* acupuncture has generally been ridiculed as the evidence of the incompetence and backwardness of Chinese medicine vis-à-vis the more advanced and scientific Western medicine. Opposite to John's view, Jocelyn praised Chinese acupuncture and medical massage whole-heartedly. She believed that Chinese medicine has the power to restore the harmony between the body and the soul, and is able to bring anchor and stability to her life. Hence, in her blog having a medical massage was equal to an indulgence that could bring a new found lightness and a renewed charge of energy to one's body (Jocelyn, Dec 2, 2001, An acupuncture-esque existence, Journal section). Traditional Chinese medicine was compared to the "[Chinese] answer to Prozac – minus the nasty side effects." (Jocelyn, Aug 25, 2005, The ebb and flow of the Autumn tiger, Journal section).

Jocelyn's first acupuncture experience was more dramatic: the medical building was described as an elegant mansion that only exists in *Gone with the Wind*; the moment Jocelyn met the "well trained and skillful" Chinese doctor she felt incredibly safe and confident for being under the care of someone who shall consider her entire being; later, Jocelyn felt she can easily surrender to the treatment because the doctor has become more than a doctor to her (Jocelyn, Nov 26, 2001, A tumultuous "dance", Journal section). Overall, unlike the incompetent and buffoon-like quack portrayed in John's blog, the Chinese doctors in Jocelyn's blog are

professional, trustworthy, and “cultivated healer[s] of Chinese medicine”. The Chinese acupuncture treatment has equally been described in positive tone. She explains to her readers that the “intensive program of acupuncture, electric therapy and Chinese medicine...like any long-term relationship... [that] requires time and patience” (Jocelyn, July 18, 2004, The Chinese medicine miracle-worker next door, Journal section). After the treatment session she found herself “breathing freely...and there is also the renewal of [the] body’s equilibrium, and the discovery of underlying strength.” In short, the miracle of the Chinese acupuncture helps to “restore[s] a fantastic balance in [her] system that [she] can deeply sense” (Jocelyn, Dec 2, 2001, An acupuncture-esque experience, Journal section).

It is obvious that Jocelyn believes in and is fascinated by the healing power of Chinese medicine. Her perception of Chinese medicine resembles that of the popular Western admiration of Yoga as an ancient oriental practice that has a secret power to heal body and soul. In her blog, Chinese medicine is not merely a medical practice. Instead, it has a long and intricate relationship to the traditional Chinese wisdom and oriental philosophy of universal harmony, inner peace and spiritual tranquility. Hence, by praising Chinese medicine Jocelyn promotes the Chinese culture in its purest classic spirit.

Theme II: China, The Good Old Earth

“When you live in a city like Shanghai, it’s easy to forget that there’s a world behind this raucous, smoggy, bustling cosmopolitan place full of tired, yearning masses and crafty businessmen. That there are places where people still plow the field with their trusty ox. Where a mountain climb yields wild bamboo and fiddleheads for dinnertime, and firewood to stock

the oven. Where neighbors stop by casually for the afternoon and linger over a hot cup of green tea. Where fresh air, green hillsides and fields that stretch as far as the eye can see...Where true Chinese hospitality is the rule – not the exception.”

The above excerpt comes from a blog entry posted in *Speaking of China* on May 8, 2005 (Getting back to the good earth, Journal section), in which Jocelyn wrote with fondness about the mountains, river, and people in her husband’s hometown, Zhongshan. This small rural mountainside town appeared many times in the blog. Often it was associated with poverty and underdevelopment. Jocelyn observed that in Zhongshan “just about everyone lives in a simple one or two-story home made of concrete or brick with no insulation...and quite often no formal toilet/showering facilities. Opening the door is probably the closet...to AC” (Jocelyn, Aug 15, 2004, The dizzy days of August, Journal section). The outside walls are unostentatiously white. Neither heating nor air conditionings are found inside. The interior of a home is “ascetic, dusty, and barely furnished”. And the cement ground was “coated with dust, and walls were best avoided, lest you wanted to dirty your fine clothes”. Overall the lack of basic infrastructure makes a typical Zhongshan home resemble 1900s ear home in the U.S., and it is even miles away from any modern one seen in the U.S. (Jocelyn, Feb 7, 2003, Chinese New Year healing and meeting the parents, Journal section)

Yet despite the poor living condition Jocelyn still fell in love Zhongshan. In fact, she considered the life there a desirable alternative to the modern and fast-paced life style in big Chinese cities for the beauty of the nature. Whenever Jocelyn visited Zhongshan she enjoyed “a panoramic view of the basin with only lofty pines”. The miles and miles of nothing but lush

emerald hills in Zhongshan stunned her, and the sighting of a wren's nest and incredible flock of egrets was a great pleasure to her. She felt a real connection with the nature when wandering about the rice terraces, catching frogs, feeding chickens, showering in fresh spring water, and enjoying delectable meals made with home-grown produce and home-made tofu. The ambrosia flavor of the local honey pears enticed her. And the sound of the patient winds outside her window was enough for her to "sit and bask in it all while willingly withdrawing from the world." Life in the green mountains of Zhongshan was, according to Jocelyn, "a gateway from the getaway" where one can find solace and true healing. (Jocelyn, Aug 15, 2004, The dizzy days of August, Journal section)

In addition to the largely unspoiled landscape, the simple village life with an intimate connection to the land equally fascinates Jocelyn. Absence of modern amenities or distractions: television, email, the telephone, the Internet, and cinema only gave Jocelyn peace and content. She saw farmers toiling in the rice paddies, raising domesticated animals, and keeping gardens in or near the confines of their own homes. The villagers provided warm welcome to Jocelyn and treated her as their own. She was invited to participate in Chinese traditions of the holidays such as visiting relatives' graves, setting off fireworks, and being given hongbao, red envelopes filled with a little money. She also took much delight in hanging out with her husband's families and described them as decent and kind Chinese farmers who are in complete harmony with the natural surroundings. It was with amusement for Jocelyn to watch her husband's slightly deaf uncle wear a cocked straw hat, walk with his faithful ox, and calmly tend the fields. The father-in-law impressed her with a sense of humor, an outgoing character, and goofy nature. Jocelyn respected him as the provider and head of the family and praised his fine

manners, a “well-rooted sense of justice”, and a passion for Chinese calligraphy and paintings. The mother-in-law was depicted shy and a little bit mysterious. She fit the traditional role of Chinese housewife who is reticent, hardworking, dedicated to the family, and rarely complains (Jocelyn, May 8, 2005, Getting back to the good earth, Journal section).

There is a clear trace of idealism in Jocelyn’s characterizations of the villagers of Zhongshan. Not only were they invariably good-natured, hard-working, and virtuous, their lives were also pastoral, pure, and not corrupted by modernity despite the struggle with life’s hardships. By presenting Zhongshan and its people in such a way Jocelyn conveyed the message that in order to find the real and traditional China one simply needs to travel to place like Zhongshan and meet the people there (Jocelyn, Dec 11, 2005, Where is the real China? Journal section). Hence, it is not accidental that Zhongshan appeared in *Speaking of China* so many times. It occupies such a place of significance for Jocelyn because it is the quintessential China that she has long envisioned and searched for. In a sense, with the attachment to the land and a respect for moral principles and family values intact Zhongshan is a modern mirror image of Pearl Buck’s “Good Earth”: a symbolic and idyllic China firmly attached to a rural past.

Theme III: China, the Feminine Land of Romance

So far Jocelyn in *Speaking of China* has presented to us an image of China that is still very much a traditional and classic scenario. Such an idealistic representation of China occurred in a set of discursive instances – the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, East and West, nature and culture. But these rather cliché binaries are not the only lenses through which Jocelyn looked at China. Having Chinese friends and been romantically involved with some of

them gave Jocelyn a vantage point to view China in a more intuitive and personal way. And such experience informed her to present China as a land of femininity with possibilities for romance.

In the blog Jocelyn described her feeling toward China as if the country were a person of gentle character. According to her, China appeals to her indirect and sensitive personalities while the culture of the U.S. is too strict and unforgiving. Therefore, she happily escaped to China and found many Chinese soul mates whose sensibilities and undying devotions to friends and families speak to her gentle side (Jocelyn, Oct 16, 2005, Herbert's curse, Journey section). Jocelyn understood that it was easy for her to make friends with Chinese men and women because many of them are eager to have contact with and honestly desire a closer relationship with a foreigner. Such Chinese enthusiasm was illustrated in one blog entry in which Jocelyn recalled that dozens of her Chinese colleagues were thrilled to have her at their table during lunch time (Jocelyn, Jan 10, 2002, Happiness in work, Journal section). Another time, her employment with a Chinese company was even considered by a potential customer as an honor, an indicator of the success of the business (Jocelyn, Mar 18, 2002, A colorful existence, Journal section).

Outside the work place, Jocelyn was equally impressed by the hospitality of ordinary Chinese such as neighbors, restaurant and shop owners. But it is young Chinese that she could easily relate to. There were many occasions in which she ran into young college students and soldiers in the street and soon they started having meaningful conversations. Not only did Jocelyn enjoy those friendly encounters with the young and independent-spirited Chinese she

also felt flattered that the Chinese were “overflowing with excitement” to speak with her and were enlightened by her thoughts. In her eyes, young Chinese women are “VERY sweet”, “adorable and “invariably cute”. They all wanted the best for her and were accommodating in every possible way. When commenting on her male Chinese friends Jocelyn tends to use similar descriptors such as “charming”, “shy”, “sweet”, “extremely affable” “gentle”, “compassionate”, and “helpful”. One time she even marveled at the fact that her Chinese friend Peter loves to cook! She concluded such a quality makes the man only “exist in novels of courtly love” (Jocelyn, Oct 3, 2001, reuniting with old friends, Journal section). As if it is not enough to praise a craftsman she met during a trip to Southwest China, she even compared him to one of the “angles residing among mortals” (Jocelyn, June 19, 2004, Sould journey in Lijiang, Journal section).

Regardless of their gender, Jocelyn’s Chinese friends were nice, gentle, accommodating, and a little bit deferent. Conventionally those qualities are associated femininity. In fact, Jocelyn seemed to reckon such an association by providing the evidence that China is awakening her “Great Feminine side” since she was surrounded by those gentle Chinese people. (Jocelyn, Oct 30, 2001, Equilibriums, Journal section). The kindness and hospitality of the Chinese surely made Jocelyn’s stay in China enjoyable. Yet, Jocelyn was not self-reflective enough to acknowledge the fact that being an American in China predisposed her to a privileged position in relation to the local population. Such a position made her communicate with the Chinese with much ease and greater confidence that otherwise might not have been available if she were in the U.S. In other words, Jocelyn’s racial and cultural identity being a white woman from the United States does give her a sense of security living in China, a culture

that is yet to shake off a lingering inferiority complex against Western powers due to its history of semi-colonization by those powers in the early part of the twentieth century. Today, in the eyes of many Chinese, Americans traveling and living in China still enjoy implicit yet de facto privileges. This is the case for Jocelyn of *Speaking of China*. Often times she felt lucky to be able to criticize the unfairness of the Chinese society and challenge the inefficiency of Chinese bureaucracy because her Chinese colleagues don't enjoy the same amount of freedom (Jocelyn, Sept 23, 2001, *Wardrobe bargains and progress*, Journal section).

Comfortable and confident, Jocelyn found herself in a happy lot of China. At the same time, she felt somewhat deserving all the kindness bestowed on her (Jocelyn, Jan 16, 2002, *Enthusiasm and support*, Journal section). With a sense of entitlement Jocelyn viewed her life in China with certain purposes and missions. For example, when joined a Chinese organization she felt she is building up a promising Chinese company and better individuals within its workforce. After a casual meeting with a Chinese business man she started to ponder over the possibilities that her knowledge of both America and China could be an asset for negotiating business between the two countries. She even played with the idea of setting up her own business with an ultimate goal to bridge the communication gap between China and the whole Western world (Jocelyn, Mar 24, 2002, *A "colorful" existence*; Mar 18, 2002, *Romanced by true friendship*, Journal section). In her daily life Jocelyn took upon herself to offer guidance to and open the eyes of the less open, more conservative and even naïve Chinese young men and women. She was proud of herself for having extremely fresh and avant-garde ideas and thoughts that are not used to her Chinese friends. And she believed that the conversations she has with her Chinese friends are capable to make deep and profound impressions in their lives

and even move them to ponder and question their own existence. (Jocelyn, Oct 3, 2001, Reuniting with old friends, Journal section)

Besides making friends mostly with Chinese Jocelyn also sort out the companionship of Chinese men. According to the blog, before marrying a Chinese man in 2004 she was romantically involved with at least five Chinese men. Like many other American sojourners Jocelyn didn't come to China expecting to fall in love. Yet, very often romantic relationships with Chinese nationals develop and become an indispensable part of American sojourners' China experience. Due to the private and personal nature of the relationships, such experience hardly becomes the subject of most writings about China, and it is certainly not a popular topic in most China blogs I surveyed. Therefore, when Jocelyn openly talks about her relationships in *Speaking of China* she provides a rare but interesting opportunity for me to examine how Chinese masculinity is perceived by a young American woman. If we pay a closer attention, we may even discern the processes by which race and power are implicated in those perceptions as well as define the very relationships.

It is hard to tell what Jocelyn had in her mind about Chinese masculinity when she first arrived in China. One thing for certain is that she had quite impressive knowledge of the four canons of Chinese literature and some Chinese history (Jocelyn, Sept 17, 2005, Learning the four great Chinese classics, Journal section). Based on that fact it might not be a stretch to assume that her preconceptions of Chinese male were somewhat influenced by her understanding of the classic Chinese literature, from which an archetypical Chinese masculinity emerges in its most classic and traditional form. Basically, the image of a

traditional Chinese man is encapsulated in the figure of the young and vulnerable scholar who is characterized by gentle demeanor, effeminate look, and literary talents. Jocelyn seemed to find and appreciate the similar qualities in the Chinese men she dated. All of them were well-educated middle-class Chinese. They were engineer, young professional, or university graduate student. One man even surprised Jocelyn by his knowledge of English literature and various schools of semantics.

Like a thread running in and out her blog moments of those romantic relationships become one of the most obvious themes of Jocelyn's China story. On one level those memories reinforce the gentle and "feminine" side of Chinese male as Jocelyn was always attracted to the men who were "incredibly endearing", "charming", "sensitive", "thoughtful", "gentle", who had "ubiquitous grin" and "rhythmic, nearly musical manner of speech", or who flattered her with poetic descriptions of [her] elegant stride and long flowing dress. The language used to describe those romantic partners reveals the passion of the relationships as well as the palpable and visceral excitement that Jocelyn experienced. However, satisfaction and happiness were not the only emotional states that Jocelyn found herself in. Sometimes she expressed frustration and anxiety over the "indecipherable heart" (Jocelyn, Feb 15, 2002, Tears and reminders of the past, Journal section) of her Chinese lovers when they were ambiguous about making commitment to the relationships. There were personal reasons to the unwillingness on the part of the Chinese men to commit. Yet, in trying to reduce her disappointment Jocelyn turned to the Chinese classic literature for a rather generalized explanation:

Something that has occupied my mind recently is the complexity of Chinese men.

Moreand more I see that sometimes their behavior is directed by unseen motives....I will say that Chinese men are more apt to develop a deep burning desire for someone that remains buried within themselves over a long period of time. You know, there are quite a few traditional stories in China of tragic love or courtly love, where the desire is buried for a lifetime, only every glimpsing the object of one's desire and never consummating any of the passion. (Jocelyn, March 10, 2002, More complex Chinese men, Journal section)

On another occasion, Jocelyn used comments from a Chinese friend to support her judgment on the Chinese men's inabilities to commit. According to her friend, although there are multitudes of Chinese men who would be incredibly proud to have a girl like her because it would even make a Chinese family proud knowing their son possesses a unique capability of understanding foreigners, the key obstacle the man often cannot overcome is his feeling of inferiority. Being an American girl and a citizen of one of the most powerful countries in the world makes her presence somewhat intimidating. The man who becomes fond of her could never believe that such a girl would become his one and only. Hence he would simply swallow in a certain inferiority complex. Such an answer came as a surprise to Jocelyn: "A Chinese man seeing himself as unworthy of me...it seems almost absurd and fantastical" (Jocelyn, Apr 10, 2002, Understanding men and unexpected guests, Journal section)! It was the first and the only occasion in which the issue of power was touched to illuminate the nature of Jocelyn's romantic relationships with the Chinese men. Unfortunately, in spite of surprises there is not much reflection going on in regards to her positionality as a white American in China. It is indeed a privileged, masculine, and centered position from which Jocelyn observed and presented to her blog readers a gendered Chinese society of submissive females and effeminate

males.

CHAPTER FIVE: CHINA REVEALED AND AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE ISSUES OF THE OTHER'S VOICE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Metaphors

Observations of the China of the twenty-first century are shared in the blogs of John, Michael, and Jocelyn. Certainly the three bloggers are neither the first nor the last ones to attempt to unravel the essence of the country and the culture for their audience. They are simply travelers writing down accounts of their journeys to various parts of China. In that capacity, they form part of a larger company of American men and women who have done the very exact thing for centuries.

One obvious difference between these bloggers and their predecessors lies in the means through which they publish their observations of the country. Former American travelers recorded their impressions of the country on paper. In that case, China as an entity takes its shape little by little in the cooperative construction by the writers' literary rendering as well as by the readers' imagination. Today, thanks to the Internet technologies, the American expatriates are able to blog about China more vividly with greater immediacy. Photos, audio files, and video clips in those blogs serve as a convincing multimedia proof of the credibility and authenticity of the bloggers' China experience, which effectively heightens the sense of truthfulness of their accounts.

Maybe the word "truthfulness" should be used with caution when it comes to evaluate the extent to which the American expatriates succeed in representing Chinese realities in their blogs. A close examination of the three blogs illuminates a fact that each of the bloggers has proved his or her own veracity in telling the stories about China, only to a certain degree. Three

young Americans in three different Chinese locations taken there by different motives try to observe, understand, and explain to us what the real China is. It is a matter of perspective. No blog ever speaks more truth than the other, and none is able to capture the elusive “true” spirit of a country, or a culture as vast and diverse as China. In the end, no matter how hard they try, our bloggers are able to put together no more than a few pieces of what remains the unsolvable puzzle of China. And we as the readers only get to recognize images of the country filtered through the young bloggers’ intellectual, cultural, racial, class, and gender lenses. To make the situation more complicated, even those images are tinted by a complexity of sentiment towards China felt across the American expatriate community to which the three bloggers belong. Feelings such as curiosity, excitement, admiration, love, disapproval, mockery, prejudice, and even disdain found their ways into the digital discourse of the three blogs we examined here. All these factors have influenced the bloggers’ attitudes towards China and shaped their individual experiences with the country to varying degrees. In the end, distinct metaphors emerge from those experiences and become the most vivid and defining China moments witnessed by three American bloggers.

For John at the *SinosplICE* there is no singular way to conceptualize about the new China of the twenty-first century. Instead, he has come up a set of inherently consistent metaphors to describe his China experience. One time he sees the country as a “Grand Central Terminal” where “the Chinese society is milling about” and “a lot of people [including Chinese natives and foreigners] are doing the chaos run” (Pasden, June 27, 2006, The chaos run). The other but more hidden metaphor comes from John’s experience riding the Chinese bus, which “is part of a well choreographed scheme to give all the passengers a thrill ride”. The bus often “slows

down only enough to miss other cars, cyclists, and pedestrians by scant inches.” And “there are always certain points at which someone — a man walking, a car, a woman with a baby on a bike — pops out in front of your vehicle[s]” (Pasden, July 16, 2002, Flashback: August 20, 2000). From John’s point of view, riding a bus in Chinese streets is absolutely a surreal experience whose equivalent can only be found in a crazy car chase scene in a movie or a video game.

Although John doesn’t explicitly make that connection, his metaphor of traffic surprisingly give us insight into some important aspects of the contemporary Chinese society. While the grand central terminal conjures up an image of a society that is powered by a bustling economic engine and is on a rapid move toward modernity, the car chase metaphor emphasizes the full speed with which Chinese society is heading toward its future. In the mean time, there is also a sense of confusion and chaos. To understand the ruthless manner in which the traffics fight for the lane and almost slam into each other from every direction is to understand the sheer and unstoppable force of the amazing economic growth that China has undergone in the past ten years; the hectic and noisy street scene seems to indicate the full energy and high spirit that define today’s China; discussing the possibility of running into serious accident at every turn is just another way to pint out potential dangers facing China on her way to prosperity; last and not the least, from the helpless bus passengers we see a mirror image of the disorientated ordinary Chinese who, instead of benefiting from the economic boom, eventually get lost in and carried away by the torrent of social transformation.

It is very likely though that John didn’t intend to create the metaphors for his readers to comprehend the Chinese reality as he sees and understands it. However, his descriptions

fittingly reflect the magnitude of the economic growth that China has been going through, and they truly convey to us what the social transformation means to John: a sense of energy, an anticipation of great adventure and opportunity, and a promise of unrestricted fun. Clearly John wants to participate in that process to make big profits like other foreigners who have already done so. In this regard, he takes a very pragmatic view toward China. And that may contribute to the fact that John's judgment of the country is much more muted, if not entirely gone, which is not typical of his predecessors.

The bus ride metaphor indicates John's awareness of the cost associated with the economic development. Therefore, we see him contemplate the destructive impact of pollution and imminent environmental disaster when marveling at the enormous economic power that has turned the entire city of Shanghai into a super construction site. When old buildings are being demolished in front of his eyes John laments the fate of the poor who are forced to relocate so that the ruins of their old buildings will make way for the high-rises of the rich. In that respect, John also interprets the Chinese reality as a dangerous game in which "innocent people get knocked down and bowled over. Others run themselves headfirst into walls". To be exact, the game is more like role playing games that are widely popular in the virtual world of computer and the Internet. In this game John imagines China as a mystic kingdom full of people believing in Qi, Fengshui, and legends. But in a sarcastic tone, John also pities that this kingdom is controlled by a powerful and malevolent force. Given his consistent suspicion of the Chinese government's control of the Internet, we have the reasons to believe that by a powerful and malevolent force he actually means the powerful Chinese Communist government. Even though he laments no heroes are to be found in this game or land, John

apparently believes he could be a lucky player in this game because as a foreigner he possesses special abilities such as English and foreign charm (Pasden, Jan 13, 2006, Living in China is like a RPG). In the end, what matters most to John is fun and thrill. And he reasons as long as China's power of seduction keeps him in a perpetual state of excitement he will stay in the country, an exciting game with lots of exotic sights and sounds and no less opportunities to offer.

In almost every aspect, *The Opposite End of China* is a different kind of blog from *SinosplICE*. In terms of subject matter, the former is heavy in news commentary, and the latter looks more like a notebook devoted to daily observation and personal thoughts. Speaking of the bloggers' intention, John wants his blog to be as apolitical as possible while Michael is not shy from discussing politically sensitive issues. Despite the differences, John and Michael do share the same enthusiasm about experiencing adventures in China. While John seeks adventure in China's changing cultural landscapes in urban centers such as Shanghai, Michael follows his dream of adventure to China's Western frontier of Xinjiang.

As being shown on the space maps in *The Opposite End of China*, the city of Korla is located in the center of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, which is at the far west corner of China. It has been the adopted home of Michael since 2005. When Michael first arrived in Beijing in the early 2005 he had to take a train to get there. It was a marathon journey of at least four days. As the train headed west, Michael had the first glimpse of China's northwest interior. With the roaring skyscrapers of the metropolis of Beijing vanishing into the distance, open farmlands and mountains began to dominate the landscape. Before long they were overtaken by the arid Yellow Plateau. But it was not the end of the journey. Soon "the absolute

nothingness of Gansu” became the norm, only to give away to the more exotic “mountain-desert nothingness of Xinjiang” (Manning, Feb 13, 2005, Snow in Kasghr).

The photogenic scenery of Xinjiang was stunning to Michael. He could think of nothing else to emulate the sublime beauty of the land but that of the American Wild Wild West. On many occasions in the blog Michael described Xinjiang, the west outpost of China, as if he was referring to his American Wild Wild West. And this metaphor is fitting in many ways. First, the geographic features of Xinjiang resemble those of the American West. Words like “jagged snow covered mountains” can be easily found in the passages depicting the Rocky Mountains. “The vast expanses of alternately sandy and rocky desert” (Manning, Feb 13, 2005, Snow in Kasghr) might as well describe the Nevada desert. If the dead and brown sandiness is the boring norm of Southern Xinjiang, then miles after miles of green pastures in Northern Xinjiang surely are a welcome change. Not only did they impress Michael but also helped to bring back his memories of Montana. According to him, even the “Big Sky Country” of Montana can’t compete with the “Bigger Sky Country” of Xinjiang (Manning, July 6, 2005, Kanas lakes & Hemu).

Of course, the similarity between the two landscapes alone doesn’t make Xinjiang the Wild Wild West of China. In fact, not only is the true Wild Wild West gone forever, Xinjiang is also a different story about different people and culture. Yet, Michael made the implicit comparison between the two because he perceived Xinjiang as an embodiment of the spirit of the Wild Wild West. As the term “Wild Wild West” refers to remote and unexplored virgin land, Xinjiang can be literally translated as the “new frontier”. While the Wild Wild West is associated with dangerous and unforgiving nature, Xinjiang, the new frontier, is equally filled

with barren and inhabitable terrains such as dry desert and steep mountains. While the Wild Wild West suggests open space, Xinjiang is a land of nothingness. While the Wild Wild West invites expansion and exploration, the unpeopled desert of Xinjiang is a field of action, voyage, and adventure. Riding a motorcycle and venturing deep into the ocean of the Taklamakan Desert alone, Michael certainly looked more like a lonely and fearless cowboy than a foreign language teacher. In that capacity, the journey was no longer a casual sightseeing but a conquest, a test of courage, and a process of self realization because, according to Michael, the real point of the journey was “to do and see things I’d never done and seen before” (Manning, May 5, 2005, Motorcycle madness).

In the blog, Michael described in details what it was like going on a journey “fraught with peril”. The whole region is dry and “generally hostile to living creatures”. In the endless dunes of the Taklamakan he suffered “two sand storms, three worrying mechanical breakdowns, and four run-ins with *jinchā* [Chinese police]”. But all the difficulties, understandably exaggerated, only made the journey more worthwhile and heroic. What really matters is that Michael prevailed and “came out a stronger man” with “a stoked ego”. With the pride of “the first foreigner to ever have driven across the Taklamakan”, Michael believed that “you [his readers] are bound to come to the conclusion that I’m either an utter fool or some kind of super-man” for completing a “very, very manly” journey “so immense in its scope, so mind-blowing, so beyond the limits of sensibility” (Manning, May 5, 2005, Motorcycle madness).

Michael’s story about his nature-defying journey into the Southern Xinjiang desert is impressive and inspirational. The ultimate goal of the trip was to explore, to conquer, and to prove one’s manliness. Hence it looked much like the activity in which extremely sports young

Americans will participate. With the same sense of personal mission Michael visited other parts of Xinjiang and the neighboring Kazakhstan. In the end, the mountains, grasslands, rivers, and desert he explored were transformed into a symbolic stage for an aggressive performance of an American masculine identity as much as what the Wild Wild West meant to the fearless pioneer and cowboys.

Unlike John and Michael who treated China either as a thrilling game to play or an exotic Chinese version of the Wild Wild West to explore, Jocelyn looked up to the country as if it was her home. Told in the blog the story of Jocelyn living in contemporary China as a young American woman is a story of coming home and finding one's spiritual root. But such a deep connection wasn't established overnight. Indeed, it took Jocelyn more than four years to realize what China means to her.

The connection started out as admiration afar. Jocelyn was fascinated with much of Chinese culture during high school years. At museum she was drawn to Chinese art and calligraphy. She also developed a palate for Chinese cuisine. Jocelyn felt her preferences for everything Chinese was mysteriously born into her blood. But it was a secret passion since she never thought of living in China. Then fate seemed to be at work when a teaching opportunity in China was presented to her shortly after her graduation from university. Jocelyn took the job and moved to China not knowing she was about to build a more meaningful relationship with the country of her passion.

The first year Jocelyn maintained a "comfortable distance from Chinese society". Yet, that experience still instilled in her "a childlike wonder of... [the] ancient and subtle language [of Chinese] and the people who were a part of it" (Jocelyn, Spet 5, 2004, Four years in China

looking back). Returning to China in 2001 with better Chinese language skills, Jocelyn dove right into Chinese culture and immersed herself in the “real China”. And the “real China” moments defined by Jocelyn were all about relationships. In fact, most of the blog posts concerns about the interaction between Jocelyn and her Chinese neighbors, students, coworkers, friends, romantic partners, and relatives of her extended family. Jocelyn made it very clear in the blog that it was much easier for her to find more soul mates and lead a far more social life in China than in the U.S. because most Chinese people treated her as one of their own kind (Four years in China looking back). Being showered with attention and hospitality, Jocelyn was warmed by such a gesture of inclusion. Therefore, China gradually became Jocelyn’s “borrowed homeland in the East” in a sense that home means relationships that give people a sense of connectedness and belonging (Jocelyn, May 10, 2002, War, but weary welcome back to Hangzhou).

Even when China became homier, Jocelyn couldn’t escape the reality that China challenged her. In the blog she admitted of her share of “I hate China” days, rants, and shameful moments” (Jocelyn, Apr 10, 2005, Relax, it’s just China). Like other foreigners in China, Jocelyn also used to spend a lot of energy reacting to the crowds in Chinese street, to apathy about Chinese rules and regulations, to pollution, to all of the near-death experiences on the road, and to the occasional disappointment of being singled out as a foreigner. But as time went by Jocelyn found an “uncanny pleasure living in [China], interacting with the people, and watching its culture unfold”. When “the exotic becomes ordinary, the impossible becomes reality, and the challenged becomes routine” Jocelyn realized that she was “no longer the drop of oil fighting in the glass of water”. She chose to accept the not so perfect sides of China, to

fully embrace the culture, and to penetrate what she called the “mythical boundary between China and the outside world”. Marrying a Chinese man gave her a real sense of belong to a Chinese family. Finally Jocelyn found a place for her heart in China and returned home (Jocelyn, Apr 10, 2005, Relax, it’s just China).

Whether it is a bus ride, a virtual game full of thrills and fun, a virgin land, an Oriental Wild Wild West, or a spiritual/relational/emotional homeland in the East, our three American expatriates have translated their China experiences into vivid images, which leave strong impressions in the minds of their readers. Despite the different points of view, they have joined each other on the same mission of making the fast-developing China better known and understood by the virtual public through diligently blogging about the different facades of the country and its culture. China reveals herself in these metaphors and the blogs.

In a sense, all the three bloggers’ efforts to provide independent and unbiased depictions of the country have succeeded. Their takes on the country and its culture are fresher than what we used to get from the Western mainstream media. The bloggers could manage to do so partly because they invariably tried to stay away from being out rightly judgmental of the Chinese politics and social realities even though they still remain mildly critical of the Chinese government in regards to issues such as the censorship of the Internet, inefficient bureaucracy, excessive urban development at the cost of the environment, and China’s ethnic policy.

Yet, the three bloggers failed, to different degrees, to document the fundamental changes and rapid developments that are taking place both in urban and rural China. In their blogs few insights were shared regarding the impact of such a transformation at economic, social, and cultural levels, which has been deeply felt by Chinese people. In addition to demonstrating an

obvious lack of interest in reporting the changes the Chinese society experiences, they still tend to view China as an eternal and mystical entity. By showing a subtle favoritism toward the aspects of Chinese society and culture that are exotic, traditional, and tied to an agricultural past, three blogs have once again testified to the eternal Chinese Otherness. From the three metaphors we could detect the trace of a same old Western myth about an alien and unchangeable China. And that alienness is something for the bloggers to entertain, to conquer, or to patronize.

Little has said about or reflected on the bloggers' sense of entitlement and white superiority that enables them to sample the Chinese alienness with much ease and comfort. More sensitive than their predecessors in the colonial times, out bloggers sometimes did acknowledge the fact that their status in relationship to the average Chinese is automatically better. With their American identity comes increased status, more money, less work, and easy access to almost everything in China. For that matter they will not and can not view China any other ways. As long as this deeply-entrenched white privilege is not reflected on and seriously challenged, I am afraid that much has been said about contemporary China will repeat the same discourse of orientalism.

Voices of Resistance

But what matters most in the current study is not entirely about whether China was portrayed most accurately in these blogs. Of particular interest here are whether there exists an alternative way in which a more balanced representation of China can happen in the online discursive space. Given the bloggers' intention to break with dominant Western discourse

about China and the potential egalitarian nature of the Internet and blogging technology, there are discursive and technological possibilities that the China blogs can be transformed into a space where the voices of the objects of the cultural representations can be heard, and therefore, challenge and resist the commanding discursive centrality of the cultural observers. According to Ananda Mitra and Eric Watts (2002), voice deals with the issues of agency, access, and the eloquence of representation. It is an useful construct in the discursive study of the representation of China in American expatriates' blogs for it helps raise the important questions of whose voice dominates the discourse about China and how the voice of the Chinese can be incorporated into the online discourse so that the cultural observers/American bloggers and the objects of their observations/the Chinese can have a real dialogue and negotiate their way toward a shared vision of contemporary China.

Despite the fact that the American bloggers occupied central places in their blogs in terms of creating a discourse concerning China, there are at least two ways through which the Chinese voices can find their places in the China blogs and resist the totalizing authority of the Western bloggers in portraying China. The first point of resistance lies in the willingness and openness on the part of the bloggers to bring in other perspectives. By providing perspectives of the Chinese without imposing one's own value judgments, the bloggers might open a discursive space where new meanings yet to be decided and the established meanings are challenged. Jocelyn has shown us the possibility of building up such a discursive space of openness by introducing Chinese voices into her blog. From the conversation with a Chinese friend Sofie, Jocelyn learned about the Chinese skepticism of the Western media. Although Sofie often listens to the Voice of America, she is disturbed by the fact that each time China is

discussed, invariably it is in regard to some sort of criticism. But Jocelyn didn't portray Sofie as a rigid one-dimensional anti-Western Chinese character. Instead, Sofie was presented as a thoughtful and serious woman who also questioned the objectivity of the Chinese media as it is always glowing with positive reports of China (Jocelyn, Oct 8, 2001, Dreaming of Henan) On another occasion Jocelyn met four Chinese soldiers who openly criticized America for being disrespectful of and ignorant about China. Instead of being defensive and intolerant, Jocelyn welcomed the conversations with these Chinese soldiers. She felt rather excited to participate in the dialogue because she believed this could be an opportunity for "the sort of healing that must take place between China and the U.S." (Jocelyn, Sept 11, 2001, From Shanghai to September 11).

John of *SinosplICE* and Michael of *The Opposite End of China* had another way to introduce the Chinese voices into their blogs. Instead of providing citations or quotations of Chinese people they encountered, they focused on the work of Chinese artists. John interviewed a Chinese photographer and published the interview transcript through a link to an internal webpage in his blog. He also employed embedded mp3 audio to introduce Chinese singers and their songs and lyrics. Michael took the same approach by incorporating audios and videos of the Uyghur dancing and singing in his blog. It is the technical ability afforded by the Internet and blogging technology that makes it possible for our bloggers to show a more dynamic and vivid side of China that might not have been readily available to global audience. Moreover, the fact that the images and music are presented to the virtual public offers the audience a chance to connect with lived experience of Chinese people, to see China as it is seen through a Chinese eye, and to develop an understanding of the unmediated Chinese

perspective.

In addition to the bloggers' conscious welcome and inclusion of the Chinese perspectives, the egalitarian potential of blogging technology also opens up more dialogic space for an exchange of perspectives. And it is possible to have such a space because most blogs on the Internet have the default guest comment section determined by blog creation software. Guest comment is a unique interactive feature of blog genre. It encourages readers' feedback on the blog entries by providing their own opinions. In a sense, guest comment is in itself a space for exchange and contestation of ideas. It doesn't matter how the bloggers feel about it. As long as the section is functioning readers will have the opportunity to support or challenge the discourse by adding new meaning to it.

Guest comments are very active in the blogs of *SinosplICE* and *The Opposite End of China*. Although it is too time-consuming to count the exact number of guest posts in the two blogs due to the unusual large amount of guest contribution, a rough estimation shows that the total number of guest comments in the two blogs easily surpasses one thousand. Most comments come from fellow foreign expatriates in China. But there are also Chinese voices that sometimes challenge the bloggers' observations of and comments about China. For example, in response to a blog entry that lists and ridicules what John perceived as the non-hygienic personal habits a Chinese guest commented:

I am a little upset to read this article. I never spit neither outdoor nor indoor...many foreigners like to say China this, Chinese that, but it's incorrect. Not all Chinese have these bad habits, and some Chinese even hate these bad habits. Like me. So the right way to say is that **some** Chinese have...or **some** Chinese do. (Guest, Dec 7, 2005, Guest comments on

spitting, peeing, snot rockets and me I)

In an entry about Chinese reaction to management abuse, John complained that his Chinese co-workers were too afraid to fight for their own rights. He went on saying that he seldom received the same bad treatment because he has special skills and knows how to fight for his rights. The self-congratulatory stance and the implicit prejudice against the Chinese are criticized by a Chinese guest. He pointed out to John that the better treatment had nothing to do with either the special skills or John's Western style. John's unique position, according to him, is a position of power that hinges on John's Western identity. The Chinese comments revealed the unspoken racial and cultural capitals that many American expatriates in China enjoy for granted. By doing so it opens up opportunities for John and other foreign bloggers to reflect on their own positionality and to be aware of their perceptions towards China that are skewed by such a positionality of power.

In the same vein, guest comment is used by another Chinese reader in *The Opposite End of China* to correct some of the biases of the American blogger Michael as well as to express his nationalistic sentiments. In an April entry Michael reported about a taxi driver strike in Korla and was generally critical of the local government. A Chinese reader Sun left a message in the comment section feeling Michael was incorrect with some of the information regarding the strike and the government's handling of it. Sun provided some facts and argued that the local Chinese government was not to blame as suggested by Michael (Sun, Apr 18, 2005, Guest comment). In another entry when Michael showed a subtle criticism of the conformity and the tightly controlled mind of Chinese people based on his observation of China's rising

nationalism and anti-Japanese sentiment Sun left two long comments in which he tried to teach Michael a history lesson about the Sino-Japanese war. He also used the forum to express his nationalistic pride by suggest that China is stronger so that no other countries including the U.S. would stop its cause to unite with Taiwan:

We want to let Taiwan home, but the Japanese says no. that is beyond its business. Maybe the USA has the same idea,...Then we will have a war. I don't know which side will win the war in the end. but the one thing is sure the war is not good to each side. You know that Sino-America had two wars in the history, one was in North Korea, we won, the other was in Vietnam, we also won. At that time China was a young country, and we had nothing. Now China is stronger. (Sun, Apr 22, 2005, The China syndrome)

And these are only a few examples of the ways in which Chinese readers of the China blogs utilized the guest comment to let their voices be heard. Although the Chinese “voice” was greatly outnumbered by the voices supporting the bloggers, its presence in the China blogs is enough to make the relevant discourse more open-ended. By exposing the positionality of the bloggers, correcting their biases and prejudices, providing facts, and offering different opinions, the Chinese readers challenged the totalizing authority of the American bloggers in framing the Chinese “reality”. Thanks to the inherent egalitarian potential of blogging technology the plurality of the voices in a discursive space like the China blogs is possible. Therefore the Chinese represented in these blogs are no longer the silent Other who in the old-time Western travelogues only had the right to be represented by the Western writers. Their perspectives are also an integral part of the blog narratives. In this respect, the China blogs

examined here cease to be the creation of a single author but the polyphony (Mitra & Watts 2002) of points of view.

When Mary Louise Pratt (1992) used *contact zone* to describe a particular type of colonial travelogues she would never imagine that later the term can be used in reference to the China blogs featured in the present study. To me, the three China blogs are very much a contact zone and a real social space where cultural meaning is created, shared, and even contested. As reconciliation might come out of struggles in a contact zone, an intercultural dialogue might also emerge from the Chinese challenging of the American representation of China with the facilitation of the interactive blogging technology in the form of guest comment,. Yet, before the real cultural dialogue could happen we need to address a few limitations of the China blogs that might create roadblocks to such an exchange.

Although the interactive blogging technology encourages blog readers to have dialogues with blog authors through actively contributing their ideas and opinions, the communicative exchange in blogs remains limited and asymmetric. Blog authors still retain the ownership and have ultimate controls of the blogs' content. They are the gate keeper who decides what topics are allowed in the blogs. Bloggers' personal preferences and knowledge also influence the filtering and selecting process through which a few out of hundreds and even thousands links to other web resources can be listed. In *The Opposite End of China* and *SinosplICE* the majority of the recommended blogs are those maintained by the bloggers' friends or other foreign expatriates in China who share with the bloggers similar attitudes toward China. In addition, bloggers' frame of reference often shapes the blog content. Take *The Opposite End of China* as an example. Being an avid reader of major Western news media, Michael chose his blog topics

based on the China-related news he read from those media outlets. Such a selective exposure only allows the blogger to isolate himself from anything that he doesn't choose to see and from issues that require knowledge and experience outside his own. Therefore, there is a real "loss of diverse experience and a flattening of perspective" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 107) associated with the bloggers' much control of the blogs.

Given the commanding influence of the blog authors on shaping the content of the China blogs, it is expected that they can exert equally important influence on the course of the guest discussion. Blog authors can be the neutral moderator of the guest comment, or they can be passionately involved in an often heated discussion. Overall, their responsiveness towards the different voices in the guest comment section determines how well the alternative views are received. In the guest comment of *The Opposite End of China*, the Chinese guest Eric's long message were never answered by the blogger. Michael had his own reasons for not responding. He could be unfamiliar with the issue, or he just didn't know what to say. But what matters is the discursive silence. Without the participation of the bloggers and other regular visitors, Eric's comment was ignored as if it were of no particular interest to anybody in the blog. Sadly, having an access to the discourse doesn't necessarily entail a more egalitarian dialogue. After all, the key to realize the dialogic potential of the China blog is not the interactivity of the technology but the bloggers' commitment to a truly egalitarian intercultural dialogue.

While screening China blogs for the present study, I came upon *Talk Talk China*, a China blog written by three American expatriates living in Beijing and Hong Kong. Some entries were written when one of them lived in Shanghai. It was a well known China blog in the foreign expatriate circle in China. *Talk Talk China* was a special blog mostly devoted to ranting

about China. In the blog the three authors detailed their frustration with life in China to hilarious effect. It was a poignant blog about Chinese attitudes, and about how foreigners behave and are perceived in China. Because of its bluntness and the purposefully mean-spirited and politically incorrect rhetoric about the Chinese society and people, *Talk Talk China* sparked a lot of controversy among its readers. Initially I wanted to include this blog in the analysis for its uniqueness and reputation in the China blog community. Eventually I wasn't able to conduct the analysis because the blog was suddenly shut down and taken out of the web by its authors as if it never existed. Although in their farewell message, the authors explained that they closed the blog because they are lazy, and more importantly, China has improved, many didn't accept those explanations. Given there was fierce criticism of the blog in the user comment by Chinese nationalists offended by the blog content, and the complete and immediate disappearance of the whole blog, many regular readers believe that the authors were under the Chinese pressure to shut down the blog. It is not the purpose of the study to find out the real reasons behind the closing of *Talk Talk China*. However, the case of *Talk Talk China* should at least raise some doubts about the blind technological optimism in blogs being a more open and egalitarian genre of Internet communication. The China blogs can be conducive to peacemaking and encouraging intercultural communication as they are to increasing hostility, given the platform they provide for extremist sentiment, stereotypes, and inflammatory rhetoric.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In summary, the three China blogs represent a unique digital space of cultural

representation and encounter. China is at the center of such an online representation by three American expatriates who looked and interpreted the country and the culture from different perspectives. For John, China means abundant opportunities in metropolitan cities. It is portrayed either as an exciting bus ride or a thrilling surreal game to play. For Michael, all his knowledge of China comes from exploring the wilderness of its western border, Xinjiang. What he experienced there gave an impression that China is a new Chinese version of the Wild Wild West where an American man can conquer the nature, test his courage and show his masculinity. For Jocelyn, China stands for a spiritual home in the East. In her eyes, China is a mother and female figure because of the gentleness of the Chinese people and its elegant ancient culture.

In the process of bringing in those images of contemporary China to their blog readers, our three blog authors utilized wide range of discursive means. Due to the multimodal characteristic of blogs, China comes to life in the words, photos, graphics, sound, and images that the bloggers provided in their sites. The hyperlinks in the blogs expand the picture by bringing in China's past, current fairs, and other people's views on the country and its culture into our focus. In that respect, blogs provide a revolutionary digital platform where a new form of cultural representation is possible. Without the mediation of media conglomerates, reporting culture has never been so fast and fresh. With the presence of an interactive feature in the form of guest comment, reporting culture could also mean diversity of perspectives, more open and egalitarian intercultural dialogue, and less prejudices and stereotypes.

Yet, the close examinations of the three China blogs also reveal some of the not so encouraging realities. Even though the three China bloggers intended to show us aspects of

China that are not like the cliché images of the country portrayed in mainstream Western media, they failed to do so to varying degrees. Thematic analyses show Chinese culture is still perceived by the bloggers as being traditional and ancient. The photo albums of the three blogs are full of what the bloggers' defined as the very images of China: ancient relics, traditional architectures, and dirty Chinese living spaces. Not only was the exotic side of China highlighted in the blogs, the wilderness of the country was also aestheticized as something symbolically pure and beautiful and as something to conquer. The agricultural life style of Chinese farmers was praised in those blogs to show how Chinese people are harmoniously connected to the mysterious force of nature. The other observation I made of the three blogs is an unfortunate absence of the topics concerning China's modernization. In spite of the fact that the three bloggers live in the China of the twenty-first century, a country is experiencing rapid economic development and massive urbanization, they either were not interested in paying attention to these changes that are largely beneficial to the Chinese society, or they tended to associate these changes to negative impacts such as environmental devastation and rampant pollution.

Criticism still dominates the blog entries devoted to the topics of the Chinese habits and characteristics. And it still repeats the same old prejudice that characterizes the century-old Western complaints of the Chinese. Even though politics were not the favorite topics of the three bloggers, the criticism of the Chinese communist government and its control of the Internet is present, and reveals the bloggers' deep-seated distrust of the Chinese political system. Yet, compared to their offline predecessors, the American bloggers were very careful about passing any direct judgment about China in a way that could have been almost

unthinkable in the past. Even if they were critical, the old air of judgmentalism was much more muted, if not entirely gone. The world had changed so much.

On the technology side, the multimodal blogging technology did contribute to more immediate and vivid representation of China. The interactive guest comment provided both the bloggers and the readers a chance to negotiate images of China in collaboration. Chinese voice had the access to the site but it is either ignored, or some Chinese extreme nationalistic sentiments damaged the chance to have a reasonable intercultural dialogue. There would be a real intercultural dialogue if there were more rational expressions of Chinese opinions and less bias on the part of the bloggers and their Western supporters. The research result confirmed the transforming potentials of blogging technology as well as its limited influence on shaping the discourse it helps to produce since how it is used is always decided by human factors.

In terms of the methodology of the present study, I'd like to share some of the lessons that I learned from the current study in a hope that they might be helpful for future researchers so that they won't repeat the same mistake like I did. The first lesson I learned studying blogs is that it is very important for a researcher of blogs to archive every blog entry and build a dated database of those entries. If possible, take screen shots of the blog entry and date them as frequently as possible. The ever-changing nature of blogs almost forces us to do so. New links and new guest comments are constantly added, which could create great confusion if no such an archive exists. If the confusion is something we can at least try to deal with, the lost of research data due to unexpected disappearance of blogs as it happened to me in the case of *Talk Talk China* could be devastating to any researcher. The second lesson I learned it in a hard way. Although my research is a relatively small study with three individual personal blogs involved,

I still had to deal with thousands of blog entries, hundreds of photos, and countless guest comments. To read, screen, select, categorize, and analyze all those information and data is very time-consuming, and sometimes the effort can be futile. Therefore some quantitative method can be employed to help the researcher to sort the data and conduct the study more efficiently.

To conclude, the current investigation has been conducted to answer the call of many researchers to incorporate rhetorical and discursive perspectives into the study of the Internet. It is informed by the theoretical advances of critical cultural scholars such as Edward Said, David Spurr, Mary Louise Pratt, Nicholas Clifford, Van Dijk, and Ananda Mitra. Their writings on orientalism, rhetorical conventions in colonial travel writing, discourse, and the construct of the voice in the Internet study have guided the inquiry of the select China blogs. Although it is a small-scale study, it is my first attempt to bring critical discursive study and the study of blogs together. So far, it has yielded interesting findings that can be inductive to future inquiries of similar nature. The question: “How a particular set of blogs is used to serve what kind of discursive purposes and to what results?” will always remain at the core of more critical studies of the latest Internet genre and its social impact. As for me, I have a firm belief in the great potential and future of the critical engagement with the Internet and blogs, and will continue to contribute to this field. Given the growing influence of blogs on people’s lives, such a lack in the vigor and depth of the research in blog-related activities needs to be recognized and corrected.

REFERENCES

- Baker, J. R., & Moore, S. M. (2008). Distressing, coping, and blogging: Comparing new Myspace users by their intention to blog. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 1(11), 81-85
- Bell, J. (1965). *A journey from St. Petersburg to Peking, 1719-22*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1997). The other question: The stereotype and colonial discourse. In K. M. Newton (Ed.), *Twentieth-century literary theory: A reader* (pp. 293-300). New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Bishop, I. B. (1900). *The Yangtze valley and beyond: An account of journeys in China, chiefly in the province of Sze-Chuan and among the Man-tze of the Somo territory*. London: John Murray.
- Bishop, P. (1989). *The myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, travel writing and the Western creation of a sacred landscape*. London: Athlone.
- Blanchard, A. L. (2004). Blogs as virtual communities: Identifying a sense of community in the Julie/Julia project. In L. J. Guark, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (Eds.), *Into the blogosphere: Rhetoric, community, and culture of weblogs*. Retrieved August 2006, from http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/blogs_as_virtual.html
- Blood, R. (2002). Weblogs: A history and perspective. In J. Rodzvilla (Ed.), *We've got blog: How weblogs are changing our culture* (pp. 7-17). Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.
- Bortree, D. S. (2005). Presentation of self on the web: An ethnographic study of teenage girls' weblogs. *Education, Communication & Information*, 5(1), 25-39.
- Burstein, D., & Keijzer, A. D. (1998). *Big dragon: China's future*. New York, NY: Simon &

Schuster.

Chin, C. C. (2003). Beneficent imperialists: American women missionaries in China at the turn of the twentieth century. *Diplomatic History*, 27(3), 327-351.

Clark, S. (1999). Introduction. In S. Clark (Ed.), *Travel writing and empire: Postcolonial theory in transit* (pp. 1-28). London: Zed Books.

Clifford, J. (1992). Traveling cultures. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. A. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural studies* (pp. 96-116). New York, NY: Routledge.

Clifford, N. R. (2001a). The long march of "Orientalism": Western travelers in modern China. *New England Review*, 22(2), 128-140.

Clifford, N. R. (2001b). *A truthful impression of the country: British and American travel writing in China, 1880-1949*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Cramer, J. M. (2003). White womanhood and religion: Colonial discourse in the U.S. women's missionary press, 1869-1904. *The Howard Journal of Communication*, 14, 209-224.

Cohen, W. I. (1990). *America's response to China: A history of Sino-American relations*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Cushing, L., & Tomkins, A. (2007). *Chinese posters: Art from the great proletarian cultural revolution*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Denzin, N. K. (1999). Cybertalk and the method of instances. In S. Jones (Ed.), *Doing Internet research: Critical issues and methods for examining the net* (pp. 107-126). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dirlik, A. (1996). Chinese history and the question of Orientalism. *History and Theory*, 35(4),

95-117.

Duncan, J., & Gregory, D. (1999). *Writes of paggage: Reading travel writing*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Erickson, F. (2004). Origins: A brief intellectual and technological history of the emergence of multimodal discourse analysis. In P. Levine & R. Scollon (Eds.), *Discourse and technology: Multimodal discourse analysis* (pp. 196-208). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995a). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1995b). *Media discourse*. London: E. Arnold.

Fairclough, N. (2000). Critical analysis of media discourse. In P. Marris & S. Thornham (Eds.), *Media studies: A reader (2nd, ed.)*, (pp. 308-333). New York: New York University Press.

Fairclough, N. (2001). Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, (pp. 121-138). London: Sage.

Foucault, M. (1973). *Birth of the clinic: An archaeology of medical perception*. (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

Fogel, J. (1996). *The literature of travel in the Japanese rediscovery of China: 1862-1945*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Frenchlover. (2005, Nov 6). Guest comment. *The Opposite End of China*. Retrieved Jan 20, 2006, from

http://china.otspecial.org/archives/2005/11/uyghurs_dont_da.html#comments

- Gajjala, R. (2001). Studying feminist e-spaces: Introducing transnational/post-colonial concerns. In S. R. Munt (Ed.). *Technospaces: Inside the new media*. (pp. 113-126). London: Continuum.
- Gifford, R. (2007). *A journey into the future of a rising power*. New York: Random House.
- Glover, A. E. (1908). *A thousand miles of miracle in China: A personal record of God's delivering power from the hands of the imperial boxers of Shan-Si*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Gordon-Cumming, C. (1900). *Wanderings in China*. London: W. Blackwood and Sons.
- Graham, P. (1940). *Through China's wall*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Gray, R. (1992). Travel. In M. Kowalewski (Ed.), *Temperamental journeys: Essays on the modern literature of travel* (pp. 33-52). Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Guest (2005, Dec 7). Guest comments. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Sept 27, 2006, from <http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2005/12/07/spitting-peeing-snotrockets-and-me-part-1>
- Hammersley, M. (2003). Conversation analysis and discourse analysis: Methods or paradigms. *Discourse and Society*, 14(6), 751-781.
- Herring, S. C., Kouper, L. , Scheidt, L. A., & Wright, E. L. (2004a). Women and children last: *The discursive construction of weblogs*. Retrieved March 20, 2005, from http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/women_and_children.html
- Herring, S. C. , Scheidt, L. A., Bonus, S., & Wright, E. (2004b). *Bridging the gap: A genre analysis of weblogs*. Retrieved March 20, 2005, from <http://www.ics.uci.edu/~jpd/classes/ics234cw04/herring.pdf>

Herring, S. C. , Kouper, I. , Paolillo, J. C. , Scheidt, L. , Tyworth, M., Welsch, P., et al. (2005).

Conversations in the blogosphere: An analysis “from the bottom up”. *Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences, USA, 1-11.*

Retrieved March 20, 2005, from <http://www.blogninja.com/hicss05.blogconv.pdf>

Hessler, P. (2006). *River town: Two years on the Yangtze*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Huffaker, D. (2005). The educated blogger: Using weblogs to promote literacy in the classroom. *AACE Journal* 13(2), 91-98. Retrieved May 2006, from

http://www.editlib.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Reader.ViewFullText&paper_id=5680

Isaacs, H. R. (1980). *Scratches on our minds: American views of China and India*. White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Jager, S. (2001). Discourse and knowledge: Theoretical and methodological aspects of a critical discourse and dispositive analysis. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, (pp. 32-62). London: Sage.

Jespersen, T. C. (1996). *American images of China, 1931-1949*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Jewtt, C. (2004). Multimodality and new communication technologies. In P. Levine & R. Scollon (Eds.), *Discourse and technology: Multimodal discourse analysis* (pp. 184-195). Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press.

Jocelyn. (2001a). About me section. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Feb 2, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/aboutme.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001b). Chinese culture and history links. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Feb 3,

2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/links.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Aug 24). Welcome to Hang Zhou. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved March 12,

2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Aug 26). Unexpected company. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved March 20,

2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Sept 1). Leisure-time. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved March 3, 2006, from

<http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Sept 11). From Shanghai to September 11. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr

27, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Sept 17). Finding the peace again. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved March 4,

2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Sept 23). Wardrobe bargains and progress. Retrieved Mar 28, 2006, from

<http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Oct 3). Reuniting with old friends. Retrieved Apr 2, 2006, from

<http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Oct 8). Dreaming of Henan. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved May 3, 2006, from

<http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Oct 30). Equilibriums. Retrieved Apr 2, 2006, from

<http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Nov 26). A tumultuous “dance”. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved March 8, 2006,

from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

Jocelyn. (2001, Dec 2). An acupuncture-esque existence. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved March

-
- 7, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, Jan 10). Happiness in work. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 10, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, Jan 16). Enthusiasm and support. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 5, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, Feb 14). Divination and degradation. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved March 20, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, Feb 15). Tears and reminders of the past. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 23, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, Mar 10). More complex Chinese men. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 22, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, Mar 18). Romanced by true friendship. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 15, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, Mar 24). A colorful existence. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 11, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, Apr 10). Understanding men and unexpected guests. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 23, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, May 10). War, but weary welcome back to Hangzhou. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 30, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, Oct 3). Conference companionship, crowded Beijing. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved March 22, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2002, Dec 24). A one-woman bargaining machine. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved

- March 11, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2003, Feb 7). Chinese New Year healing and meeting the parents. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 2, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2004, June 19). Soul journey in Lijiang. Retrieved Apr 25, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2004, July 18). The Chinese medicine miracle-worker next door. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved March 26, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2004, Aug 15). The dizzy days of August. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 2, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2004, Sept 5). Four years in China looking back. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 25, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2005, Apr 10). Relax, it's just China. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved May 3, 2006 from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2005, May 8). Getting back to the good earth. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 2, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2005, Aug 25). The ebb and flow of the Autumn tiger. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved March 17, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2005, Sept 17). Learning through the four great Chinese classics. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 20, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2005, Oct 16). Herbert's curse. *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 10, 2006, from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>
- Jocelyn. (2005, Dec 11). Where is the real China? *Speaking of China*. Retrieved Apr 8, 2006,

from <http://www.speakingofchina.com/journals.htm>

- Jones, S. (1999). Studying the net: Intricacies and issues. In S. Jones (Ed.), *Doing Internet research: Critical issues and methods for examining the net* (pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kahn, R. & Kellner, D. (2004). New media and Internet activism: From the battle of Seattle to blogging. *New Media & Society*, 6(1), 87-95.
- Kerbel, M., & Bloom, J. (2005). Blog for America and civic involvement. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10(4), 3-27.
- Kitchin, R. (1998). Towards geographies of cyberspace. *Progress in Human Geography*, 22(3), 385-406.
- Klein, C. (2003). Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the middlebrow imagination, 1945-1961. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kluver, A. R. (2001). New media and the end of nationalism: China and the US in a war of words. Retrieved June 7, 2006, from <http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MPI801ak.html>
- Kowalewski, M. (1992). Introduction: The modern literature of travel. In M. Kowalewski (Ed.), *Temperamental journeys: Essays on the modern literature of travel* (pp. 1-18). Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Lee, K. (2004). Into the heart of the middle kingdom. In S. O'Reilly, J. O'Reilly, & L. Habegger (Eds.), *Traveler's tales: China, true stories* (pp. 57-72). San Francisco: Travellers' Tales.
- Liss, A. (2003). Images of China in the American print media: A survey 2000 to 2002. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 12(35), 299-318.

- Little, A. J. (1898). *Through the Yang-tse gorges: Or, trade and travel in western China* (Rev & 3rd ed.). London: S. Low, Marston.
- MacDougall, R. (2005). Identity, electronic ethos, and blogs: A technologic symbolic exchange on the new news medium. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(4), 575-599.
- Macleod, C. (2005, November 18). A guide to success in China by Americans who live there. *USA Today*, p. 08A. Retrieved from Academic research Complete database.
- Mann, C., & Stewart, F. (2000). *Internet communication and qualitative research: A handbook for researching online*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Manning, M. (2005). Bio Section. *The Opposite End of China*. Retrieved Feb 10, 2006, from <http://china.otspecial.org/bio.html>
- Manning, M. (2005, Feb 2). Beijing. *The Opposite End of China*. Retrieved Jan 30, 2006, from <http://china.otspecial.org/archives/2005/02/index.html>
- Manning, M. (2005, Feb 13). Snow in Kasghr. *The Opposite End of China*. Retrieved Feb 2, 2006, from <http://china.otspecial.org/archives/2005/02/index.html>
- Manning, M. (2005, July 6). Kanas lakes & Hemu. *The Opposite End of China*. Retrieved Feb 5, 2006, from <http://china.otspecial.org/archives/2005/07/index.html>
- Manning, M. (2005, Mar 28). Turpan trip. *The Opposite End of China*. Retrieved Jan 11, 2006, from <http://china.otspecial.org/archives/2005/03/index.html>
- Manning, M. (2005, Mar 9). Details, living conditions. *The Opposite End of China*. Retrieved Jan 12, 2006, from <http://china.otspecial.org/archives/2005/03/index.html>
- Manning, M. (2005, May 9). Motorcycle madness, or the fantastic voyage. *The Opposite End of China*. Retrieved Jan 15, 2006, from

<http://china.otspecial.org/archives/2005/05/index.html>

- Matheson, D. (2004). Weblogs and the epistemology of the news: Some trends in online journalism. *New Media & Society*, 6(4), 443-468.
- Miller, S. C. (1998). The American trader's image of China: 1785-1840. In M. L. Krenn (Ed.), *Race and U.S. foreign policy from colonial times through the age of Jackson* (pp. 211-233). New York, NY: Garland Publication.
- Mitra, A., & Watts, E. (2002). Theorizing cyberspace: The idea of voice applied to the Internet discourse. *New Media & Society*, 4(4), 479-498.
- Mortensen, T. E. (2005) "Personal publication and public attention." *Into The Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community and Culture of Weblogs*. Retrieved October, 10, 2005, from [Http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/personal_publication.html](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/personal_publication.html)
- Munt, S. (2001). Technospaces: Inside the new media. In S. R. Munt (Ed.), *Technospaces: Inside the new media* (pp. 1-17). London: Continuum.
- Nardi, B. A., Schiano, D. J., Gumbrecht, M., & Swartz, L. (2004). Why we blog. *Communications of the ACM*, 47(12), 41-46.
- O' Halloran, K. L. (2004). Introduction. In K. L. O'Halloran (Ed.). *Multimodal discourse analysis: Systemic-functional perspectives* (pp. 1-10). London: Continuum.
- Paccagnella, L. (1997). Getting of your pants dirty: Strategies for ethnographic research on virtual communities. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3(1). Retrieved March 2006, from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue1/paccagnella.html>
- Pan, C. (2004). The "China threat" in American self-imagination: The discursive construction of other as power politics. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 29, 305-332.

Pasden, J. (2002a). About. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved June 24, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/about/>

Pasden, J. (2002b). Network. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved May, 3, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/network/>

Pasden, J. (2002c). Language. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved May 4, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/lang/>

Pasden, J. (2002, July 16). Flashback: August 20, 2000. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Sept 24, 2006,

from <http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2002/07/16/flashback-aug-20-2000>

Pasden, J. (2002, Sep 2). Haircut episodes. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 9, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2002/09/02/haircut-episodes>

Pasden, J. (2002, Oct 1). Taxi incident. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved July 7, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2002/10/01/taxi-incident>

Pasden, J. (2002, Oct 13). Daily life Q & A. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved July 12, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2002/10/13/daily-life-qa>

Pasden, J. (2002, Nov 7). Selective search blocking. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved July 20, 2006,

from <http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2002/11/07/selective-search-blocking>

Pasden, J. (2002, Dec 7). Sinoamerica. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved July 7, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2002/12/07/sinoamerica>

Pasden, J. (2003, Jan 12). Information terrorism. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved July 21, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2003/01/12/information-terrorism>

Pasden, J. (2003, Feb 10). I am being watched. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved July 21, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2003/02/10/im-being-watched>

Pasden, J. (2003, Feb 28). China, the real facts. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved July 2, 2006 from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2003/02/28/china-the-real-facts>

Pasden, J. (2003, Mar 31). Outfit streaks. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 8, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2003/03/31/outfit-streaks>

Pasden, J. (2003, June 20). Fighting pollution. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved June 28, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2003/06/20/fighting-pollution>

Pasden, J. (2003, Sept 7). Asian ear cleaning. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 9, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2003/09/07/asian-ear-cleaning>

Pasden, J. (2003, Oct 19). Craptacular. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 14, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2003/10/19/craptaculars>

Pasden, J. (2004, June 23). To stay. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved July 10, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2004/06/23/to-stay>

Pasden, J. (2004, July 14). Being a good citizen online. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 15, 2006,

from <http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2004/07/14/being-a-good-citizen-online>

Pasden, J. (2004, Aug 1). Ruminations in Tianjin. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 7, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2004/08/01/ruminations-on-tianjin>

Pasden, J. (2004, Aug, 24). A victim again. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 15, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2004/08/24/a-victim-again>

Pasden, J. (2004, Aug 30). More Internet irregularity. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 15, 2006,

from <http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2004/08/30/more-internet-irregularity>

Pasden, J. (2004, Oct 11). Blog death. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 15, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2004/10/11/blog-death>

Pasden, J. (2004, Oct 13). Hospital acupuncture. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 9, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2004/10/13/hospital-acupuncture>

Pasden, J. (2005, Mar 9). End of monologues. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 16, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2005/03/09/end-of-the-monologues>

Pasden, J. (2005, Mar 26). Chinese college dorms. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 3, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2005/03/26/chinese-college-dorms>

Pasden, J. (2005, Apr 7). New blog name. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 15, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2005/04/07/new-blog-name>

Pasden, J. (2005, Apr 24). Suzhou: Any good? *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 2, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2005/04/24/suzhou-any-good>

Pasden, J. (2005, Apr 28). Micah on creativity. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 20, 2006 from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2005/04/28/micah-on-creativity>

Pasden, J. (2005, Nov 26). Cold as poison. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 12, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2005/11/26/cold-as-poison>

Pasden, J. (2006, Jan 13). Living in China is like a RPG. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Aug 15, 2006,

from <http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2006/01/13/living-in-china-is-like-an-rpg>

Pasden, J. (2006, June 27). The Chaos run. *Sinosplice*. Retrieved Sept 23, 2006, from

<http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2006/06/27/the-chaos-run>

Philip, J. (1993). Reading travel writing. In J. White (Ed.), *Recasting the world: Writing after*

colonialism (pp. 241-256). Baltimore, NY: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Porr, W. B., & Ployhart, R. E. (2004). Organizational research over the Internet: Ethical

challenges and opportunities. In E. A. Buchanan (Ed.), *Readings in virtual research ethics:*

Issues and controversies (pp. 130-155). Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishers.

Pratt, M. L. (1992). *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*. New York, NY:

Routledge.

Ratcliff, C. (2004). Whose voices get heard? Gender politics in the blogosphere. Paper

presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, San Antonio,

Texas. Retrieved September 2006, from <http://culturecat.net/node/view/303>

Rheingold, H. (2000). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Cambridge, MA:

The MIT Press.

Riggins, S. H. (1997). The rhetoric of othering. In S. H. Riggins (Ed.), *The language and*

- politics of exclusion: Others in discourse* (pp. 1-31). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rosenbloom, A. (2004), The blogosphere. *Communication of the ACM*, 47(12), 31-33.
- Sade, G. (2005). Weblogs as open constructive learning environment. Retrieved May 2006, from http://incsub.org/blogtalk/?page_id=56
- Said, E. W. (1978) *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Serfaty, V. (2004). *The mirror and the veil: An overview of American online diaries and blogs*. Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi.
- Shapiro, A. L. (1999). *The control revolution: How the Internet is putting individuals in charge and changing the world we know*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Siegel, K., & Wulff, T. B. (2002). Travel as spectacle: The illusion of knowledge and sight. In K. Siegel (Ed.), *Issues in travel writing: Empire, spectacle, and displacement*. (pp. 109-123). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Smedley, A. (1975). *Battle hymn of China*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Smith, A. (1894). *The Chinese characteristics*. New York, NY: Young People's Missionary Movement.
- Snow, E. (1973). *Red star over China*. New York: Grove Press.
- Spence, J. D. (1998). *The Chan's great continent: China in Western minds*. New York: Norton.
- Spivak, G. (1995). Can the subaltern speak? In B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths & H. Tiffin (Eds.), *The post-colonial studies reader* (pp. 24-29). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Spurr, D. (1993). *The rhetoric of empire: Colonial discourse in journalism, travel writing,*

- and imperial administration*. Duke University Press, NC: Durham.
- Stockwell, F. (2003). *Westerners in China: A history of exploration and trade, ancient times through the present*. McFarland, NC: Jefferson.
- Sun. (2005, Apr 18). Guest comment. *The Opposite End of China*. Retrieved Jan 16, 2006, from http://china.otspecial.org/archives/2005/04/rumblings_socia.html#comments
- Sun. (2005, Apr 22). Guest comment. *The Opposite End of China*. Retrieved Jan 20, 2006, from http://china.otspecial.org/archives/2005/04/the_china_syndr.html#comments
- Svenningsson, M. (2004). Ethics in Internet ethnography. In E. A. Buchanan (Ed.), *Readings in virtual research ethics: Issues and controversies* (pp. 45-61). Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishers.
- Theroux, P. (1985). Stranger on a train: The pleasure of railways. In P. Theroux (Ed.), *Sunrise with seamonsters: Travel and discoveries, 1964-1984* (pp. 126-135). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Thubron, C. (1989). *Behind the wall: A journey through China*. New York: Perennial Library.
- Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Turnbull, G. (2002). The state of the blog. In J. Rodzvilla (Ed.), *We've got blog: How weblogs are changing our culture* (pp.78-98). Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.
- Uyghur. (2006). In *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved Sept 2, 2006, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uyghur>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1985). Discourse analysis in communication. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.),

- Handbook of discourse analysis* (Vol. 1, pp. 103-136). London: Academic Press.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (Ed.). (1997). *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* / London: Sage Publications.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1999). Editorial: On context. *Discourse & Society*, 10(3), 291-292.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse* (pp. 352-371). Malden, MA: Black Well Publishing.
- Wakeford, N. (2004). Pushing at the boundaries of new media studies. *New Media & Society*, 6(1), 130-136.
- Wall, M. (2005). Blogs of war: Weblogs as news journalism. *Journalism*, 6(2), 153-172.
- Walter, R. (2001). *Anson's voyage around the world: In the years 1740-1744*. London: The Narrative Press.
- Wang, X. (2004). China in the eyes of western travelers, 1860-1900. In A. A. Lew, L. Yu, J. Ap, & G. Zhang (Eds.), *Tourism in China* (pp. 35-51). New York, NY: Haworth Hospitality Press.
- Warnick, B. (2001). Rhetorical criticism in new media environment. *Rhetoric Review*. 20(1/2), 60-67.
- Waskul, D., & Douglas, M. (1996). Considering the electronic participant: Some polemical observations of the ethics of online research. *The Information Society*, 12(2), 129-139.
- Wellman, B. (2004). The three stages of Internet studies: Ten, five, and zero years ago. *New Media & Society*, 6(1), 123-129.
- Williamson, A. (1870). Journey in north China, Manchuria, and eastern Mongolia: With some

account of Corea. London: Smith Elder.

Yoshihara, M. (2003). *Embracing the East: White women and American Orientalism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.