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ROMANCE AND TEXTUAL POLITICS: AN ANALYSIS OF  
*THE TRAVELS OF SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE AND THE THREE  
TREASURE EUNUCH'S TRAVELS TO THE WESTERN OCEAN*

BY



DONGFENG XU

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Studies and Research in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND FILM STUDIES

Edmonton, Alberta

FALL 1993



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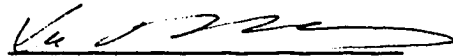
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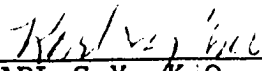
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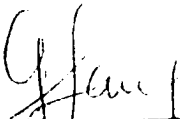
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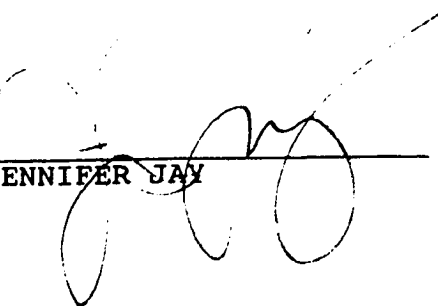
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Romance and Textual Politics: An Analysis of *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* and *The Three Treasure Eunuch's Travels to the Western Ocean*" submitted by Dongfeng Xu in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

  
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May 20, 1993

## DEDICATION

To the memory of Ye-ye, my maternal grandfather, who instilled in me the love of literature, to my grandmother who teaches me the essence of life is to be useful, to my parents from whose way of living I have learned that one should always maintain one's dignity and never give up faith.

## ABSTRACT

This comparative analysis examines two romances: *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* and *The Three Treasure Eunuch's Travels to the Western Ocean*. Both romances seek to subordinate other cultures, the former, a fourteen-century Western text, with medieval Christianity and the latter, a sixteen-century Chinese text, with Chinese imperial dynastic ideology. The thesis falls into four parts. Chapter One contains an extended survey of Fredric Jameson's theoretical stipulation which, developed from Northrop Frye's theory of romance, regards romance as "a socially symbolic act." The thesis then looks at the dialectical structure of both romances in Chapter Two and in Chapter Three the domestication of the Other. The dialectical structure becomes manifest through the hero's journey, which, launched to recover the Holy Land or some Imperial Seal, hierarchizes the Self and the Other, reducing the Other to a negative and inferior version of the Self. Allegorizing, reifying and enacting ideologies such as Christian superiority or the self-proclaimed Chinese dynastic hegemony, both texts attempt a rather simple solution to the opposition between the Self and the Other: to bring the Other into the Self's ideological system without ever validating differences of the Other. The domestication of the Other in the two texts is largely accomplished by focussing on four areas: geography, language, gender, and ethics. Represented as evil, alien and subordinate, the Other is not given a "voice" but is subjugated and made the same by the

Self. With the Other conquered and transformed, the two texts prove romance to be a powerful form for totalization and fulfilment of the libidinal wishes of the Self. The totalization in the two texts, however, becomes problematic in Chapter Four of this thesis when the textual logic of the two romances is put into question by a resisting reader. Despite all the domestication and subjugation, the Other, the resisting reader will find, still retains its discursive existence and otherness in unexpected ways. The conquest and the transformation, and even signs of textual production such as direct address, chapter titles and endings, though all are sure signs of the invincibility of the Self and the complete submission of the Other, at the same time often reveal that the signifiers in the texts do not always match the signified intention of the authors.



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Once again, I sincerely thank those whose names appear above and those whom I am unable to mention by name one after

another. Their help and encouragement really made much of the work on this thesis possible.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis proposes to compare two romance narratives: Luo Macdeng's 罗懋登 *The Three Treasure Eunuch Travels to the Western Ocean*, 三宝太监西洋记通俗演义 [1597]<sup>1</sup> from China and the anonymous, though traditionally eponymous, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* from England.<sup>2</sup> These two narratives, though originating from vastly different cultures, both display a romance structure which provides a framework for a comparative study. In this thesis, I shall examine how the two works represent the confrontation of domestic and foreign cultures and the implications of employing the romance form of narrative to achieve their ideological ends.

Luo and Mandeville use the romance form to overcome other cultures symbolically. What I intend to do in this thesis is to analyze the two texts by describing the romance structure of the texts and by investigating how the subordination of other cultures is brought about through the production of narrative. I will also consider the act of reading in relation of the two narratives because the texts attempt, in addition to subduing other cultures, to subdue the reader allegorically. In a literary text, the linguistic and ideological subjugation of other cultures will not be complete without the collaboration of the reader. And since the significance of the texts depends much on the ideological

position of the reader, he or she must be given a separate and adequate consideration for a better understanding of not only the production but also the consumption of the two works.

### Theoretical Background: the Politicization of Romance

Despite their many differences such as cultural context and some textual characteristics,<sup>3</sup> Mandeville's *Travels* and Luo's *Xiyangji* both combine the conventions of historical and fictional writing to represent the adventures of travellers in foreign lands.<sup>4</sup> In both texts, the various nations travelled through develop into an impressive catalogue of cultures, which present themselves compellingly for a comparative study. The cultural contact depicted in the Eastern and Western texts, as we will repeatedly see in the following pages, is by no means innocent. The apparently haphazard series of events take a specific narrative shape recognizable, in both the Eastern and Western traditions, as romance. This particular kind of narrative can be regarded as a "totalizing" text that in Fredric Jameson's words offers an "imaginary solution to [a] real contradiction"<sup>5</sup> in the encounter of cultures.

Critics usually refer to the two works as romance: the *Travels* is a "romance of travel"<sup>6</sup> whereas *Xiyangji* a "romance of quest."<sup>7</sup> This characterization seems useful for both works, since both the *Travels*, a pilgrimage, and *Xiyangji*, an

account of a military conquest, contain a protracted quest-journey usually manifest in a romance. The romance quest conventionally purports to recover a lost innocence or to retrieve a missing treasure--the Holy Land in the *Travels* and an Imperial Seal in *Xiyangji*. Since both lost objects are respectively symbols of religious deliverance and political hegemony, their absence threatens the identity of the respective cultural entities and characters involved and thus calls for a solution. It is with the symbolic recovery of the lost objects through spiritual and physical struggles in the journey that new social orders are established. Although the *Travels*, recounting the story of a single traveller, operates at the individual level and *Xiyangji* represents a state action carried out by a large fleet, the two works indeed exhibit the fundamental characteristic of romance, as defined by Northrop Frye: "the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality."<sup>8</sup> Frye, the leading authority of romance narrative, elaborates:

The complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main stages: the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero.<sup>9</sup>

These remarks have become the *locus classicus* in discussion of romance. Here they adequately describe the fundamental narrative structures of the *Travels*<sup>10</sup> and *Xiyangji*. Both works represent a wish-fulfilment procedure through cultural exchange and a transformation in such a way as to restore the conditions of some lost Eden.<sup>11</sup>

What has to be emphasized is that in both the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*, the perilous journey, crucial struggle, as well as the exaltation of the hero take place within a cross-cultural context. Indeed, the two works, unlike other traditional romances, such as Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* in English tradition or Luo Guanzhong's *The Romance of Three Kingdoms* of China, show a greater number of international conflicts. The travellers, in both works, rooted in an extended as well as unfamiliar locality, are not mere "footloose" adventurers. They are removed from their usually stable and cohesive social setting to face a highly unstable and hostile situation characterized by sharply different cultures. Through the journey the conflicts are not only fully developed but also successfully solved at the end. In our discussion of the *Travels* as a "wish-fulfilment dream,"<sup>12</sup> we will see that the struggle between different religions intensifies because Mandeville seeks to absorb, and thereby transform, the radical differences of foreign cultures. A work written in the age of European exploration, the *Travels* includes religious dedication only as a vehicle to lead the narrative to the

cultural confrontations and clashes experienced by the hero. *Xiyangji* unfolds within similar social conditions. Published toward the end of Ming Dynasty in China (1368-1644), a much-troubled period of the declining dynasty,<sup>13</sup> and incorporating into its narration some historical maritime ventures,<sup>14</sup> the work seeks to relive past glories of the empire by realizing its dream in a literary reconstruction. *Xiyangji* elaborates, in its discourse, a political ambition which imagines the supremacy of the Middle Kingdom over all other countries. The linguistic and literary realization of this political hegemony in *Xiyangji* is presented in a narration fraught with political and cultural clashes, with struggles between the Ming Empire and other countries.

It is in their emphasis on the presentation of cultural conflicts, that the two works cease to follow the traditional romance patterns. By expanding the conventions of romance, they both attempt a literary solution to the cultural contradiction of the time. In other words, it is through the medium of genre that the transformation of culture or the totalizing power of the two works is exercised. Their dependence on the framework of romance for a solution to problems posed by cultural confrontations provide a useful paradigm for cross-cultural comparison. In my interpretation of the two works, therefore, I will illustrate how the two aspects--the generic conventions and the ideological implications--interact with and reinforce each other. The



works should not be discussed as just romance narratives of travels, but must be considered as cultural and political discourse, or as what Fredric Jameson calls a "socially symbolic act."<sup>15</sup> In other words, the cultural conflicts depicted in the works are in fact the textualization of ideologies within a culture, a textualization which expects, through the comparison of different cultures or ideologies, to carry out a re-evaluation of the Other to the advantage of the Self.

Although in his discussion Frye observes that genre, mainly as literary category, has also social function,<sup>16</sup> it is in the works of other literary critics as Bakhtin, Said and Jameson that the embodiment of ideological implications in particular types of literary discourse receives intensive treatments. Due to "the great and essential destinies of literature and language, whose chief and foremost characters are the genres,"<sup>17</sup> Bakhtin points out "poetics should really begin with genre."<sup>18</sup> Since every significant genre is a complex system of means and methods for the conscious control and "finalization of reality,"<sup>19</sup> Bakhtin goes on to emphasize that "a genuine poetics of genre can only be a sociology of genre."<sup>20</sup> This privileged position of genre is as such because of the fact that, again in Bakhtin's words, "the utterance and its types, that is, the discursive genres, are the transmission belts between social history and linguistic history."<sup>21</sup> Sharing the Marxian and Foucauldian view of

literature and culture as sites of political and ideological struggle, Edward Said, after examining a large number of Western texts about the Near East since the Renaissance, concludes that these texts culminate in "Orientalism," a unique discourse which seeks, in conscious or unconscious collusion with political and economic imperialism, Western domination over the Orient.<sup>22</sup> Though both Bakhtin and Said are helpful, however, I have found Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconsciousness* and his "political interpretation of literary texts"<sup>23</sup> most relevant to my discussion of the two romance texts.

In the critical paradigms used by Jameson, he blends into his synthetic critical enterprise such seemingly incompatible viewpoints as Frye's archetypal criticism, psychoanalysis, structuralist poetics, Marxism and deconstruction. All these modes of criticism, Jameson contends, gain their "interpretive validity"<sup>24</sup> only when they retain their positive findings within a political interpretation of literary texts, because, as Jameson asserts,

we never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or--if the text is brand-new--through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited

interpretive traditions. This presupposition then dictates the use of a method according to which our object of study is less the text itself than the interpretation through which we attempt to confront and to appropriate it. Interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code.<sup>25</sup>

What I find most relevant to my discussion in this thesis is that Jameson negotiates Frye's Formalist treatment of romance with the Marxist socio-political context.

In Jameson's summary of Frye, romance is "a wish-fulfilment or Utopian fantasy which aims at the transfiguration of the world of everyday life in such a way as to restore the conditions of some lost Eden, or to anticipate a future realm from which the old mortality and imperfections will have been effaced."<sup>26</sup> Discussing and revising this stipulation of Frye's, Jameson concludes that romance in its original strong form should be understood as an imaginary solution to some real contradiction, and a symbolic answer to the perplexing question of how one's enemy can be thought of as being evil.<sup>27</sup> For romance, its ultimate condition of figuration depends on the basic principle of binary opposition, here the concept of good and evil which "is a positional one that coincides with categories of otherness."<sup>28</sup> As the Other simply characterizes whatever is

radically different from the self, and by virtue of the fact that difference seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to one's own existence, the essential point to be made about the Other "is not so much that he is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil *because* he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar."<sup>29</sup> In Jameson's discussion, the Other mainly refers to social classes other than one's own. But because the concept of the Other, throughout history, encompasses almost all groups from other tribes to other races, classes, and even another gender,<sup>30</sup> it seems that romance, if we extend Jameson's stipulation, should also be regarded as a mode that transgresses and crosses cultures. That is, romance as a genre can be regarded as a translinguistic discursive category, a category that can be of any language and at the same time exists above all languages. It is in this sense, romance not only allows, but also requires a formal analysis of the "twin diachronic perspective of the history of forms and the evolution of social life."<sup>31</sup>

It is from this diachronic and synchronic twin perspective, the perspective of genre criticism, that the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* will be examined. As examples of how discourse can be ideologically motivated to subsume the Other, the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* provide the space of separation and interaction where cultures not only link with, but also transform, each other. The incorporation of cultures of the Other in the two works, as we will see, is in fact

predetermined by a particular social contract. Throughout history, both Eastern and Western thoughts have always thematized the Other as a threat which must be reduced or assimilated, "as a potential same-to-be, a yet-not-same."<sup>32</sup> The paradigmatic conception in both romances is that of the quest in which the hero leaves the realm of his own culture to encounter certain forms of otherness. In both works, the quest is brought to an end only when the alien domain is brought within the hegemonic sway of the world of the hero's: the Other has been turned to the same. The quest is to show that the Other is amenable to being turned to the status of the same. For the heroes as well as some readers, it is ideologically inconceivable that there should exist an otherness of the same ontological status as the same, without an effort being immediately mounted for its appropriation. To describe in symbolic terms the appropriation, or what I will call domestication, the Other becomes the same as the Self through a metaphoric figuralization. In fact, Hayden White identifies metaphor as the fundamental trope of any narrative, historical or otherwise, that uses a romance structure.<sup>33</sup>

### The Reader as/and the Other

To have a good understanding of the making of romance, we must address the issue of reception, a matter of how a work's

presuppositions are put into perspective in the act of reading. Romance, like other types of literary works, presupposes a particular "social" contract between the writer and the reader. On one hand, the writer must include in the text certain network of conventions that assigns given content to the expressions employed so that a romance text becomes a determinate speech-act marked with culturally loaded signals. The reader, on the other hand, accepts first of all that romance as a genre is one of the literary institutions.<sup>34</sup> As a model reader,<sup>35</sup> he or she specifies the proper use of the particular cultural artifact, and deciphers a romance with reference to a set of related cultural texts. It is through this process of reading, the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* further complete their domestication of the Other. In other words, only when the signifiers of the works are transferred in the reading to the signifieds can some form of domestication be achieved. As Wolfgang Iser says, "a text can only come to life when it is read."<sup>36</sup> The Other will not become the "Same" without the involvement of the reader.

However, Iser's dictum should not be taken to mean that a work can come to only one life. In fact, there are as many ways a given work can be read and studied as there are readers. Literary works present themselves as relatively context free entities, not necessarily confined to temporal and geographical boundaries, but their reception, understanding and interpretation are largely bound to the

contexts of the reader, the time and the cultural background.<sup>37</sup> In the case of the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*, the issue of reception is far from an easy question not only because it is difficult to reconstruct their originally targeted readers but also because it may involve readers from other cultural backgrounds, from the cultures belittled in the texts, who would read the texts in very different ways. Unlike the model reader, a resisting reader or deconstructive reader probably will not assist the text's process of domestication. On the contrary, he or she will contradict, question and even resist the texts by finding out innate, self-subversive elements in the narrative structure and the linguistic construction of the text. It is with this resistance that reading comes to become what Paul de Man calls "an argument",<sup>38</sup> a contestation of the meaning of the texts intended by the author. Here a comparative study can negotiate not only the original production of the texts which is now very distant, but also the reception of the text which is not so much distant in time but distant in culture by looking closely at its reception. Only when we pay attention to the cultural clash between the reader as other and the Other as represented in the text, can we see better how the Other, otherwise silenced in and by the texts, can have his voice heard again.

To give voice to the Other in the text, the Utopian impulse usually seen in the romance must be rejected. It must

be made clear here that I, unlike Jameson, do not believe that the totalizing desire is the only motivation we have when we read. We have mentioned that the purpose of the two texts is to appropriate the Other, to fuse the Self and the Other, as culture, person, or religion into one, sometimes within the "body of the [totalizing] despot."<sup>39</sup> Like the Utopian form which Jameson perceives to be a means to achieve "ultimate identity by obliteration of difference through sheer force,"<sup>40</sup> the two romances intend to erase the difference between the Self and the Other by simplifying the opposition between the two sides, and reducing the Other to a mere negative mirror image of the Self. The two romances then, in a kind of Utopian impulse, achieve totalization by imposing a single pattern on the variety of experience. However, it is in the drive toward singleness, which both romance and Utopian writing use to end opposition that can itself undermine romance and Utopian writing. Reading demonstrates that the signifiers do not always lead to a singularity of the signified, or a single interpretation, designed and projected by the author. Through reading, what is subsumed and seemingly obliterated by the discourse at the level of meaning can reappear and retain its otherness in the texts through the signifiers which make that meaning possible. The Utopia is exposed as a fiction rather than something real, something existing in nature.



## Scholarly Reception

The production and reception I have talked about, as well as the significance of the quest and cultural confrontation in the two works have, however, to a large degree been overlooked. In the past, due to their historical and literary importance, the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* have been the topic of large volumes of scholarship. Hailed as the first known example of English prose to have influenced Chaucer and many other European authors such as Ariosto, Tasso, Cervantes, and Rabelais, the *Travels* has been a rich source for critics and scholars.<sup>41</sup> "[T]he first really popular book to portray travel as an adventure and a romance,"<sup>42</sup> the *Travels* today has approximately three hundred extant manuscripts.<sup>43</sup> The study of the *Travels* has proven as challenging a task to students of literature as it has been intriguing. *Xiyangji* has exerted similar appeal to Chinese authors and scholars. Even though not the best fictional narrative in China, *Xiyangji* is nevertheless an important work frequently perused and interpreted by literary critics, historians, scholars and ordinary readers.<sup>44</sup> With literary critics and scholars, *Xiyangji* often meets critical disfavour while to the average reader, the work provides a rare pleasure, giving a panoramic view of countries far away with all its strange peoples and fantastic customs. However, perhaps because both works borrow

heavily for their story materials from sources available at the time of their composition, some scholars have devoted their effort to source studies, tracing the origins of the stories, comparing various extant manuscripts or versions and identifying their authors.<sup>45</sup> Other scholars, assuming the works contain factual information, have tried to glean from the texts historical facts. Some have been concerned with whether Mandeville, the supposed author of the work, did venture to the Far East or simply to the nearest library.<sup>46</sup> J.J.L. Duyvendak, a prominent scholar of Ming history and literature, likewise has examined *Xiyangji* for what is factual in it.<sup>47</sup>

Needless to say, all these researchers deserve their due acknowledgement since they advance our understanding of both works. But it has to be noted that the number of critical inquiries concerning problems other than the degree of historical veracity in the works is small. To be fair, let me add that there has been attention paid to the works's semantic and literary significance. So far, however, the two works have rarely been examined as cultural discourses which represent cross-cultural conflict and the ideological motivations of these two canonical texts.<sup>48</sup>

There has not been, at least to my knowledge, an extended work that compares the *Travels* or *Xiyangji* with any other text of its kind to study their romance character and their ideological implications. This is the reason I have chosen

the two works to be the topic of my discussion. Comparison will not only throw light on each of the two works but also advance our understanding of how a discourse works to textualize, narrativize and even fantasize cultural, social as well as religious realities. In the examination of the two works, we will see how cultures look at themselves and imagine other cultures.

### A Prospectus

The pages that follow fall into three chapters, each designed to examine one specific aspect of the texts' production and reception. Chapter Two, "The Structure of Travel: The Politics of Romance," discusses the dialectical structure of the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* by focussing on two aspects: the differentiation of the hero from the villain and the violent domination of the villain by the hero through the quest. By following the dialectical structure of the journey, I will map out the hierarchical cosmology which, generated from the quest, can be referred to in the *Travels* as "the chain of being" and in *Xiyangji* as the Chinese worldview of the unity between the universe and man. Then I will attempt at some explanation of how the two narratives with their dialectical structure and hierarchical cosmology serve and enact specific ideological implications of cultures. The

theoretical frame of reference for my discussion will be Frye's and Jameson's genre theory of romance.

In the two works, the central narrative structure is the polarization of the hero and the villain, which is identified early in both texts. Due to the fact that the villain, the nonbelievers in the *Travels*, have occupied the Holy Land, and some Western Ocean country in *Xiyangji* has obtained the Imperial Seal, the fictional world in both texts is divided into two opposing sections: the one of the hero and the one of the Other. The loss of the treasure, symbolizing the loss of the hero's identity, motivates the hero to the quest. In the quest undertaken by the hero to recover the lost treasure, the two opposing worlds are made to look more and more "vertical" with the Self proven to be more and more superior and invincible and the Other more and more inferior and evil. The progress of the quest, following what Frye calls "ascent" and "descent" between worlds of different levels, elevates the hero and suppresses the Other.

As socially symbolic acts, the two narratives solve cultural confrontations between the Self and the Other by reducing the Other to a negative and inferior version of the Self and by placing the superior and dominant Self on the top, and the ugly and evil Other at the bottom. In the two texts, the hierarchizing allegorizes and reifies a collective thinking and collective fantasies of particular cultures when confronted with other cultures. Based on their own cultural

tradition, a Christian superiority in the *Travels*, and a self-proclaimed Chinese hegemony in *Xiyangji*, neither text attempts at a real understanding of the Other but a rather simple solution: to bring the Other into the Self's ideological system without ever inquiring about the true nature of the Other.

As Chapter Two discusses narrative and ideological structures of the two texts that suppress the Other, Chapter Three, "The Traveller as Host: Domesticating the Other," analyzes the ordering of the world and the domestication of the Other by focussing on four areas: geography, languages, gender, and ethics.

Due to the loss of the Holy Land and the Seal respectively and the dichotomy between the Self and the Other, the world in both works appears chaotic as either a fallen world of Leviathan in the *Travels* or an empire which is yet to recover from foreign domination in *Xiyangji*.<sup>49</sup> The hero's quest functions to restore the disturbed world order by sorting out the Other and find it an appropriate position. That is, to erase the trace of discursive existence of the Other by appropriating it and making it the same as the Self.

Both texts create an ideal discursive realm where the transformation of the Other can be carried out. The discourse serves not only as a sign of authority but also an actual means and process that lead the hero to his domination of the Other. In every encounter, the Other is depicted as alien,

foreign, and inconceivable. For instance, in the *Travels*, the alphabets of different countries are signs of not only the fallen world after the Tower of Babel but also of the otherness of the Other. In *Xiyangji*, the Other is very often presupposed as a subordinate of the Middle Kingdom, waiting to be subjugated by the Ming fleet.

Needless to say, different forces are anything but equal. The hero is always the one with authority. Even in other countries and meeting other peoples, the hero strikes us as the host instead of the guest, with all his knowledge and power. He assigns a name to the Other, as Zheng He does to the Country of Malacca 满刺加, or interprets and assesses the value of the Other, which is often the case of the *Travels*. The authority and the confidence of the hero that leads to the domestication of the Other can be summed up by the well-known message Julius Caesar sends home during his campaign with Pharnaces, King of Pontus: "*Veni, Vidi, Vici.*"

In Chapters Two and Three, my discussion of the production of the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* demonstrates that both romances achieve, to a significant extent, their coveted totalization, unifying the world and transforming the Other. Due to the dialectical structure and the detailed and systematic description in the texts, the Other is silenced and its unfamiliarity disappears. In the hierarchical world that the hero creates, the Other seems to have lost its otherness and have been completely appropriated by the hero, the Self.

The hero's domination and totalization, however, will be put into question when the reception of the two narratives is discussed in Chapter Four, "The Reader's Journey: Re-cognizing the Other." Under his scrutiny,<sup>50</sup> a resisting reader can find that the Other, after its domestication, subjugation and suppression, still retains traces of its discursive existence in unexpected ways. In my discussion, I will examine three types of otherness discovered in my reading: the villainous Other in the text, the otherness of the text, and the reader as the Other. When a resisting reader exercises an allegorical and deconstructive reading of the texts, the signifiers in the texts often cease matching their signifieds "intended" by the author but ironically attain a different and even contradictory meaning. Stories that should be sure signs of hero's victory and conquest may turn out to be self-contradictory and self-subversive. The tributes, the letters of surrender collected and the hero's knowledge and understanding of the Other demonstrated by describing the Other, for instance, are included in the texts to represent the hero's power, control and domination. In the reading, however, the tributes, letters, and barbaric customs of the Other work to assure the otherness of the Other. That is, due to the detailed description of the Other, the Other retains much of its otherness and stands out in the texts as the Other, different from the Self.

To the resisting reader, even signs of the textual

production such as direct address, chapter titles and chapter endings can undermine a unified textual meaning. The chapter titles, for example, represent authorial intrusion because they impose, from outside the story, on the reader what is to happen in the story. In other words, the titles are about the stories but not part of the stories. The chapter titles and endings, as well as direct address, are supposed to help control the meaning of the stories and guarantee the reader's "appropriate" naturalization. But these devices create, as the reading exposes, a foreignness of the texts because they generate "unnatural" closure of the texts and call the reader's attention to the production of meaning not the meaning itself.

Last but not least, the third Other I discover in my reading is myself. I am not an ideal reader due to my interest in a certain mode of interaction between the two texts, and in their structure which, as I have argued, is a form of otherness in the texts themselves. Most importantly, as a male Chinese reader, I am reading, on the one hand, an old Chinese text whose patriarchal ideologies I no longer share completely and, on the other hand, a Western text, whose representation of the Orient is so distorted as to be beyond recognition. I find myself ideologically Other to both texts.

In his or her reading and in the recognition of the Other, what the reader really finds is the presence of the Other and the absence of the Self. Furthermore, if the Holy



Land and the Imperial Seal are symbols of the hero's self, and if the purpose of the quest is to recover these lost treasures, the inability to retrieve them in the quest generates an irony. With the lost treasure not found, the totalization the texts work hard to accomplish is nothing.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The narrative has about sixteen editions by different publishers since 1597. Walter Goode lists twelve in his "On the *Sanbao taijian xia xiyang-ji* and Some of its Sources," diss. (Australian National U, 1976) 7-9; Roderich Ptak adds four in his "Hsi-Yang Chi--An Interpretation and Some Comparisons with *Hsi-Yu Chi*," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 7 (1985): 117. A very recent edition, prepared by Lu Shulun 陆树老 and Zhu Shaohua 竺少华, was published by Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社 in 1983. This edition to which I refer throughout my thesis is divided into two vols., 100 *hui* or chapters with a cover title *Sanbao taijian xiyangji tongsu yanyi* 三宝太监西洋记通俗演义. It will be referred to as *Xiyangji* hereafter.

<sup>2</sup>This work, hereafter abbreviated as the *Travels*, was supposedly first written in the year of 1366. It was, as long believed, written in Latin and then translated into French and out of French into English, but there is no extant Latin version today. The earliest French version in existence appeared in 1371. Cf. Malcolm Letts, *Sir John Mandeville: The Man and his Book* (London: The Batchworth Press, 1949) 13-22. The version used in this thesis is translated by C.W.R.D. Moseley and published by Penguin Books in 1983.

<sup>3</sup>In addition to religious dedication and belief of Christian domination, the *Travels* represents a curiosity for

other cultures. *Xiyangji* illustrates a Chinese world order established or re-established through military prowess. Furthermore, the two works differ from each other in size. *The Travels* is less than one tenth the length of *Xiyangji*.

<sup>4</sup>Brief summaries of the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* will appear at the beginning of the next chapter. An extended summary of plot of *Xiyangji* is included in the Appendix at the end of this thesis.

<sup>5</sup>Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 118. By "contradiction," Jameson refers mainly to the conflict of social classes, but romance narratives traditionally represent conflict between cultures and races as well. This point of mine will be further illustrated in the following discussion.

<sup>6</sup>Josephine Waters Bennett advocates this categorization. See her *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville* (New York: MLA of America, 1954) 1-86. See also Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975) 258; Christian K. Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage: The Literature of discovery in Fourteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) 131. Others, despite perceiving the work differently, admit the romance character in the *Travels*. See Donald R. Howard *Writers and Pilgrims: Narratives and Their Posterity* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980) 55. *The Travels* has also been referred to

as a "travel narrative." See Jenny Mezcims, "'Tis not to divert the Reader': Moral and Literary Determinants in some Early Travel Narratives," *Prose Studies* 5 (1982): 5.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted from Roderich Ptak, "*Hsi-Yang Chi--An Interpretation*," 119. *Xiyangji*, Ptak notices, retains other classifications as we'll. Y.W. Ma, for instance, discusses *Xiyangji* as a "historical novel" with "dynasty building theme;" or in an article by N.E. Borevskaia, it is regarded as a travel tale. See Ptak, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 193.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>10</sup>The death-struggle, the central theme of romance, is usually physical. That is, the enemy or the hero has to be killed. But it is also very frequent that the struggle or conflict between the hero and the villain is depicted psychological, religious, or spiritual. Examples of psychological struggle run through the tradition of romance in the West from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, a fundamental example of romance, Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Shakespeare's *Tempest*, to Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and even Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, to name a few.

<sup>11</sup>Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 110.

<sup>12</sup>See Frye, *Anatomy*, 193.

<sup>13</sup>As generally accepted among students of Chinese literature, the symptoms of political, economic as well as military weakness of the Ming Court--its inability in dealing with the Japanese pirates raiding on the Chinese coastal cities and its defeat by Japanese in Korea in the 1590's--have been the reason for Luo to write *Xiyangji*. See J.J.L. Duyvendak, "Desultory Notes on the *Hsi-yang chi* [*Xiyangji*]," *T'oung Pao*, vol. 42 (1953):3; Lu Xun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1964) 225. Liu Dajie, *Zhongguo wenxue fazhan shi* 中国文学发展史, (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1958) vol. 3, 221-22. For a discussion of the decline of Ming, see Ray Huang, *1587, a Year of No Significance: the Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981).

<sup>14</sup>*Xiyangji* combines into one seven historical trips Zheng He made to the so called "Western Ocean" countries, in fact countries of southeast Asia and Persian Gulf, between 1405 and 1433. More information concerning dates and other details of Zheng He's adventure is listed in Goode, "On the *Sanbao taijian*," 1.

<sup>15</sup>See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, throughout.

<sup>16</sup>In his theory of myth and archetype, Frye associates poetry and its social aspect. See his *Anatomy*, 95-128. See also Frye, *Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976) 6 et seq. In this work,

Frye refers to literature as "verbal culture." He discusses how genres express primary concerns of the society such as religion, laws, social structure, environment, history or cosmology.

<sup>17</sup>M.M. Bakhtin and P.N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1991) 127.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted from Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 81.

<sup>22</sup>In the introduction of his *Orientalism*, Said insists that Orientalism be examined as a discourse. He asserts that Orientalism should be regarded as "the [Western] corporate institution for dealing with the Orient--dealing with it by making statements about it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983) 3.

<sup>23</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 17. This view of political reading and interpretation saturates throughout Jameson's work.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>See *Ibid.* Again, I would like to emphasize that the term "Other" in Jameson works mostly denotes individual and psychological other of particular social classes. But in my discussion, "Other" mainly indicates a culturally different individual or group.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>32</sup>Michel de Certeau *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) xiii.

<sup>33</sup>See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1973) 281-82.

<sup>34</sup>See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 106.

<sup>35</sup>Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Exploration in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979) 7.

<sup>36</sup>Wolfgang Iser, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response to Fiction," *Aspects of Narrative*, ed. J. Hillis Miller (New York: Columbia UP, 1971) 2-3.

<sup>37</sup>Here, I am referring to Doležel's statement: "The reading public is not a constant but a historical [and cultural] variable, its attitudes toward literature are

subject to constant changes, conditioned by the changes of the 'context' in which the reception takes place." See Lubomír Doležal, "Semiotics of Literary Communication." *Strumenti Critici* 1.1 (1986): 36.

<sup>38</sup>For Paul de Man, true reading should not be a paraphrase but an argument. What it argues, in de Man's words, "is precisely the loss of an illusory coherence [in the reading]." See de Man, foreword, *The Dissimulating Harmony*, by Carol Jacobs (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) xii.

<sup>39</sup>For a favourable discussion of the "body of the despot," see Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 294-96.

<sup>40</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 51.

<sup>41</sup>There are tremendous efforts devoted to this digging. As a few instances, see Josephine Waters Bennett, "Chaucer and *MT*," *MLN* 68 (1953): 531-4; Bennett, *The Rediscovery*, 219-25; Carleton Brown, "Note on the Dependence of *Cleanness* on the *Book of Mandeville*," *PMLA* 19 (1904): 150-3; and Sir Israel Gollancz, ed. *Cleanness* (1921; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974) xxv-xxviii, 91-2, 96-8.

<sup>42</sup>Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, 258. For general discussion of the popularity of the *Travels*, see also C.W.R.D. Moseley, introduction to the *Travels*, 13; Christian K. Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage*, 130, 154; and Donald Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims*, 54-55.

<sup>43</sup>Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, 258. Donald Howard, however, counts about two hundred and fifty manuscripts. Among the



manuscripts, thirty-six are in English. See Donald Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims*, 54. For a comprehensive research of the manuscripts and the history of the work's prints, see Bennett *The Rediscovery*, 219-60. C.W.R.D. Moseley studies the various English versions of the work. See Moseley, "The Metamorphoses of Sir John Mandeville," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 4 (1947): 5-25.

<sup>44</sup>After its first and second printing in 1597 and 1642, the work underwent a period of negligence. Scholarly interest revived with its reprints in the late nineteenth century (in 1859 and 1881). Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907) was the first scholar who wrote about his reading of the work. In the twentieth century, literary historians such as Lu Xun and Liu Dajie treated *Xiyangji* in their works. Yu's essay about *Xiyangji* is reprinted as Appendix I in the Shanghai version of the book, 1289-90. For Lu Xun and Liu Dajie's discussion, see Note 13 above. In addition, see Lu Xun, "Zhongguo xiaoshuode lishide bianqian" 中国小说的历史的变迁 *Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 20 vols. (Beijing: Remin wenxue chubanshe, 1982) 9:329-30.

<sup>45</sup>Due to the paucity of information, little can be done to identify Luo Maodeng. But there have been efforts made to trace the sources of *Xiyangji*. Scholars demonstrate *Xiyangji* borrowed from *Yingya shenglan* (also *Yingzhou shenglan* 瀛洲胜览) 瀛涯胜览, *Xiyang fanguo zhi* 西洋番国志, *Xiyang chaogong* 西洋朝贡, *Xingcha shenglan* 星槎胜览 etc. See Xiang Da, "Lun Luo Maodeng zhu Sanbao taijian xiyangji tongsu

yanyi," (On Luo Maodeng's *Xiyangji*) 论罗懋登著三宝太监西洋记通俗演义, Zhao Jingshen "Sanbao taijian xiyangji," 三宝太监西洋记, and "Xiyangji yu Xiyang chaogong, (*Xiyangji* and *Xiyang chaogong*) 西洋记与西洋朝贡 all as supplements at the end of the Shanghai (1985) edition of *Xiyangji*. For comprehensive textual researches and studies of the sources of *Xiyangji*, see Xiang Da, "Guanyu Sanbao taijian xia xiyang de jizhong ziliao" 关于三宝太监下西洋的几种资料 ("Some Resources for Eunuch Sanbao's Journey to the Western Ocean"). *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报 (*The Story Monthly*) 20.1 (January, 1929): 47-67; Walter Goode, "On the Sanbao taijian"; Zhao Jingshen, "Sanbao taijian xiyangji" (*The Three Treasure Eunuch's Travels to the Western Ocean*) *Qingnian jie* (*The World of the Youth*) 9.1 (June, 1936): 121-44, reprinted in *Xiyangji*, vol. 2, 1298-326. For a partial list of the textual studies, see Ptak, "Hsi-Yang Chi--An Interpretation," 117-8. For quick information about what has been done concerning the *Travels*, see Bennett, *Rediscovery*; and C.W.R.D. Moseley's Introduction to the 1983 Penguin version of the *Travels*.

<sup>46</sup>See C.W.R.D. Moseley, Introduction to his translation of the *Travels*, 9-13. Now scholars generally agree that the *Travels* is a literary work rather than a historical travelogue. This historical argument has been summed up in the paper of Ralph Hanna III about the general denial of a real persona of the narrator. See Ralph Hanna III, "Mandeville," *Middle English Prose: A Critical Guide to Major*

*Authors and Genres*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1984) 121.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. J.J.L. Duyvendak, "Desultory Notes on the *Hsi-yang chi* [*Xiyangji*]." *T'oung Pao* 42 (1953): 1-35.

<sup>48</sup>Howard and Zacher may be exceptions, but their perspective is problematic. Howard, for instance, idealizes the *Travels* by insisting that Mandeville becomes more and more tolerant towards the cultures he sees during the journey. See Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims*, 53-76, and his "The World of Mandeville's *Travels*." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 1 (1971): 1-17. I will return to this later in my discussion.

<sup>49</sup>In Chapter One of *Xiyangji*, the story has the Buddha Tathagata pointing out that there is "some poisonous air hanging over the Southern Continent due to foreign rule." See *Xiyangji*, 7.

<sup>50</sup>I use this male pronoun here and later in Chapter Three for convenience of my discussion.

THE STRUCTURE OF TRAVEL: THE POLITICS  
OF ROMANCE

In every age the ruling social or intellectual class tends to project its ideals in some form of romance, where the virtuous hero and beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villain the threats to their ascendancy.

Northrop Frye  
*Anatomy of  
Criticism*

This chapter discusses the dialectical structure of the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* focussing on two aspects: first, the differentiation of the hero from the villain and, secondly, the violent domination of the villain by the hero through the narrative arrangement of events. I will map out the cosmological structures presented in the works and then attempt some explanation of how the two texts embody their particular ideological implications to serve as socially symbolic acts. The theoretical apparatus for my discussion will be the prescriptions of Frye and Jameson concerning romance.

As the most prominent critic of romance, Frye will help us understand the romance work's narrative arrangements, such as the opposition between the hero and the villain and the

adventures of the quest. The *Travels* and *Xiyangji*, as romances, both present a "libidinal" search evolving as a self-fulfilling experience in which the hero's anxieties are transformed into a series of victories and accomplishments. To articulate the transformation, a quest journey is launched in both texts in pursuit of some lost object--the Holy Land in the *Travels* and the Imperial Seal in *Xiyangji*.

Despite his emphasis on how romance "radiates a glow of subjective intensity," Frye adds that romance also possesses "a suggestion of allegory."<sup>1</sup> Frye points, therefore, to ideological analysis in the interpretation of romance because, as he states elsewhere, "all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery."<sup>2</sup> Frye's suggestion of allegorical analysis of romance is picked up and developed by Jameson. To Jameson, individual texts are always the allegorical textualization of history, cultural ideologies or "master narratives" that "have inscribed themselves in the texts as well as in our thinking of them."<sup>3</sup> After identifying the romance features of the two works, I will interpret the two texts by looking at them as socially, culturally and politically motivated discourses by which one culture subsumes other cultures. That is, I will demonstrate that the two romances contain what Jameson calls "'libidinal apparatus,' a machinery for ideological investment"<sup>4</sup>--the *Travels* as one of the rewritings of the Christian culture, the Bible, and *Xiyangji* an allegory

of Chinese world order and cosmogony.

The *Travels* tells of the journey of Sir John Mandeville, an English knight and a dedicated Christian. Divided into two parts, the work narrates in Part One the pilgrimage to Jerusalem undertaken by Mandeville as a contribution to the recovery of God's saving presence on earth. Part One, as a guidebook, comprises the various routes from England to the Holy Land. After different routes are mapped out along with stories of saints, relics and different people; Part Two recounts Mandeville's penetration into the Far East where he meets strange peoples, witnesses weird customs and even serves in some courts such as the Khan's court in China. At the end of the book, the traveller, his soul much elevated by his adventure, encourages his readers to follow suit.

Inspired by true historical events that took place during the Yongle 永乐 reign (1403-1424) in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and blending legends from various sources,<sup>5</sup> *Xiyangji* consists of 100 hui or chapters. It narrates a military mission to the so-called Western Ocean in search of a lost Imperial Jade Seal 传国玉玺. Led by Zheng He 郑和, also known as the Three Treasure Eunuch 三宝太监, and Wang Jinghong 王景弘, the two commanders, the quest aims at, more than the retrieval of the seal, for its real purpose is the re-establishment of the Dynastic order and the guarantee of the Ming's dominant position over all neighbouring countries. Assisted by supernatural beings, mainly Jin Bifeng 金碧峰,

a Buddhist monk who is a reincarnation of Buddha Dipamkara and Zhang Tianshi 張天師, a Taoist patriarch and magician, the mission proves victorious. In the end, though the seal cannot be found, all the countries that the fleet passes on the way are conquered. They all yield by submitting tributes and letters of surrender to the Ming emperor. In addition to regaining the lost objects, the quest is undertaken for another need: the need to complete the identity of the hero himself. At this level, the physical objects symbolize a lost psychological unity, whether it be at the individual level in the *Travels* or the social level in *Xiyangji*.<sup>6</sup> Along with the lost treasures, part of the hero is also lost. The hero needs to complete himself by recovering the lost object not only in the sense of repossessing it, but also by overcoming the "otherness" of his enemy who takes it. This need to complete oneself expresses itself as the ordering of the alien reality encountered on the journey, an order characterized by "the polarization of ideals and abhorrent worlds,"<sup>7</sup> the central structure, or what Frye calls "the character of romance"<sup>8</sup> much exploited in the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*.

Due to their dialectical representation of reality, neither the *Travels* nor *Xiyangji* dwell on "subtlety and complexity."<sup>9</sup> Quite the contrary, both works move quickly and directly to the polarization of two worlds, the confronting home of the Self and the threatening foreign land of the Other. The *Travels* dichotomizes the domestic hero and the

foreign villain in a straightforward manner. In its Prologue, for instance, after worshipping God and Jerusalem, the latter is referred to as the Holy Land by the Christians, the narrator claims *ex cathedra* that the Holy Land, "blessed and hallowed and consecrated by the precious blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ," is legitimate Christian heritage because in that land He [Christ] willed to die, and to be seised of it, to leave it to His children. Each good Christian man who is able, and has the means, should set himself to conquer our inheritance, this land, and chase out therefrom those who are misbelievers.<sup>10</sup>

With this claim of the Christian sovereignty of the land, the narrator prompts his reader (mostly Christians for whom his work was composed) to take note of the irony that this Holy Land--a gift from God to Christians--has fallen into the hand of the "misbelievers" or nonbelievers. Since the Holy Land first of all symbolizes the salvation of the Christians, the fact that it is inhabited by the nonbelievers means Christians suffer not only the loss of their heritage but also the denial of their deliverance.<sup>11</sup> With this double denial, the *Travels* from its very beginning is already charged with an uncompromising opposition which it refuses to mitigate or alleviate.

On the other hand, through this very passage, the narrator, in the manner of a verbal crusader, already



appropriates the Holy Land on behalf of the Christians. By narrating about it, and by restoring the name "Holy Land" that is only proper to Christians, he has already symbolically recovered the land as his and therefore Christian property.

In *Xiyangji*, awareness of the opposition between the Self and the Other is raised by a story told in Chapter Nine. On the day following the payment of tributes to the Ming Emperor by foreign envoys, Zhang Zhenren 張真人 (or Zhang Tianshi), a Taoist patriarch tells a story about an Imperial Seal: a jade seal known as the Imperial Seal not included in the tributes from foreign countries. The seal, made from a piece of invaluable legendary jade, was for centuries a token of legitimacy for emperors in China. Handed down through a long line of throne holders, the seal was, as the legend has it, carried by Yuan Emperor Shundi 元順帝 (1333-1341) at the end of Yuan dynasty (1206-1368) to the so-called Western countries, and it has disappeared from China ever since.<sup>12</sup> Recounting the history of the jade seal, this "embedded"<sup>13</sup> story contributes a great deal to the formation of the opposition between the hero and the villain. To appreciate the seriousness of the situation and the necessity for the quest, we have to examine the story in more detail.

Named after Bian He 卞和 (literally Bian the Harmonious), its discoverer, the jade by its very name, "He's Jade," means "Jade of Harmony" or "unity." If we consider how the name sounds in Chinese, Heshibi 和氏璧, homophones of "the

Jade that harmonizes (situations or things)," the jade even assumes an active and magic function that establishes order.<sup>14</sup> The name also takes on an allegorical function, signifying the text's harmonious aims. Indeed, the seemingly accidental resemblance with the eunuch-hero Zheng He silently establishes another allegorical dispensation from above. Nevertheless, as its history indicates, a possession of the jade can bring about security, harmony and honour. The jade first brought honour to Bian He. A well-known lapidary in the Warring States period (B.C.770-B.C.256), Bian He found the jade contained in a rock and presented it in turn to three emperors. Unable to see the jade because they did not bother to cut the rock open, each of the first two emperors had one of Bian's feet cut off as punishment for his dishonesty. Continuing his suicidal submission, Bian offered the rock to the third emperor who ordered the rock, instead of Bian's limbs, to be cut. Only when the invaluable and beautiful jade inside the rock was exposed, was Bian rewarded and his sound judgement respected (110-1).<sup>15</sup>

The jade becomes, according to Zhang's story, the token of state power when the First Emperor of China, Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, obtained it after he unified the country by ending wars among the states. Cutting the jade into three pieces for three seals, the First Emperor made one of them the Imperial Seal, a symbol of the legitimacy of the emperor. The emperor had eight words carved on the seal: "Ordained by Heaven; Long

lasting Prosperity and Longevity" 受命于天, 富寿永昌, (111) so that the seal stands as the emperor's legitimation to rule the "world." To enhance its image as a token of authority, the story relates, the emperor also made a handle of five-dragons. With the eight words and the five-dragon handle, which together speak for and symbolize the arbitrariness of the imperial power and its absolute authority, the seal shows its magic power by bringing about harmony and order from the very beginning: it calms a thunderstorm for the First Emperor during his trip (111). From the time of the First Emperor, the seal, which is supposed to guarantee the stability and harmony of the country, has been made a symbol of imperial legitimacy.

This embedded narrative of the First Emperor and his Seal is a master narrative which anticipates the entire structure of the Ming romance. A proleptic story<sup>16</sup> that legitimates in advance the Ming narrative, the story of the First Emperor is a crux in the text that shows how a totalizing text works. This metanarrative is a signal to the reader of the text's totalizing aims.

If possession of such a seal means authority and power, the seal's absence then certainly poses an immediate danger. Due to its legendary history, its rare beauty and, more crucially, its role as imperial token for emperors in history, the loss of the seal implies the emperor's loss of authority. Because the possession of the seal, according to Zhang's story, assures the legitimacy of the emperor and the

sovereignty of his empire, its absence, especially the possibility that it has fallen into some foreign possession, signals an immediate danger. The authority of the Emperor and the stability of the Ming empire are being challenged and threatened. Some crisis will sooner or later engulf the whole country. As soon as this potential crisis is raised to the attention of the Emperor, the superiority that the Ming has enjoyed over other countries, evidenced by foreign envoys and tributes paid to him not long ago, suffers a drastic reversal. The relation between Ming and other countries is no longer that between the master and vassals but between a master bereft of his sceptre and vassals who gain the capability to rebel.

The only way to end the animosity between the hero and the villain and the anxieties caused by the loss of the Holy Land and the Seal, and to determine again the identity of the hero and the villain, is to go on the quest. The journey, as perilous and as full of death-struggles as it is, proves to be a problem-solving process which has been well described by Frye. But there is much to say about the cult of the hero. Defeating the villainous Other, regaining, even symbolically, the lost objects, the hero completes his identity in the quest. In other words, the quest provides a locus where the hero can proceed with his adventure and further identify how evil the Other is and demonstrate how invincible and virtuous he himself is.

For the purpose of showing that the Other is evil and testing his own authority, the hero in both texts has to move through different worlds. In a romance, we learn from Frye, there usually appear four different layers of world, namely, the heaven, the Eden, our world and the demonic world.<sup>17</sup> These four worlds are often represented by different characters and invariable form a hierarchical structure in the romance. We often see the hero move through different worlds, from a divine world to human world or from higher human world to lower human world.<sup>18</sup> A hero may fall from a higher world into a lower one because he loses some treasure, as he does in the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*, or he makes certain mistakes. As he tries to recover what is lost and fights with every foe, the hero is trying to return to his home world. The transit has been viewed by Frye as a two-way narrative movements: ascent and descent. In ascent, "the chief conceptions are those of escape, remembrance, or discovery of one's real identity, growing freedom, and the breaking of enchantment."<sup>19</sup> As for descent, it usually falls into two groups: "those that suggest descent from the sky or, more precisely, one of the two higher worlds, heaven and Eden, and those that suggest descent to a subterranean or submarine world beneath this one."<sup>20</sup>

Frye's remarks regarding ascent and descent describe well the movement of the hero in the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* for in the two works the arrangement of events follows the descent or ascent pattern or combines both. Because of the loss of the

Holy Land or the Imperial Seal, the hero has to go to the lower world of the Other only to ascend back to his original and higher world. In this process, the hero not only identifies his enemy and defeats them but also, by so doing, regains his identity.

The hero begins to descend in the *Travels* as soon as he leaves home. On his way to the Holy Land, the hero finds himself in an estranged world, a world increasingly exotic. In this exotic world, he sees many people of different religions. To give a few examples, there are the Greeks who, though called Christians, practice Christianity in a different but conventionally unacceptable way (50-1); there are also the Samaritans who, though converted and baptized by the Apostles, do not keep to the Apostles' teachings (92); and Muhammad's false doctrine of rejecting wine (109). Peoples who are different are recounted all the way. Even when the hero is in the Holy Land, we hear of the Saracens who hold such ridiculous and ironic belief that in Paradise "every man shall have four score wives" (104).

By making clear that the villain is bad and evil, the narrative already confirms the good deeds and valuable creeds the hero upholds. In fact, the stories about the nonbelievers go side by side with the virtues of the Christians. As one critic points out, many things the hero sees he does in pairs<sup>21</sup> because stories are put in juxtaposition. Almost all descriptions of the Other are, explicitly or implicitly,

juxtaposed to stories or knowledge of the hero, the Self. Through paired tales or through exploitation of the concept of binary opposition, the narrative effectively depicts the difference between the hero and the villain and marks the hero's spiritual ascent toward a higher world with his physical descent into a lower world.

Since the hero in the *Travels* is going to the Holy Land, his ascent is represented temporarily as well. Disdaining all the follies of the pagans and admiring the holy atmosphere the shrines and relics generate, the hero ascends by moving back in time, first of all, because the farther he goes, the closer he is to the shrines and relics, the past of Christianity. The hero moves to the Holy Land backward in time<sup>22</sup> also because, in the pilgrimage from England, his earthly home, to the Holy Land, the birthplace of Christ, the hero is moving symbolically from the year 1322, the time he leaves home, to the year of zero, when Christ was born. With such movement, the hero symbolically moves toward his own deliverance and the recovery of the Holy Land.

What further enhances the hero's backward movement in time is the seemingly opposite progress of exoticism. As the hero moves on, the Other becomes more and more foreign, alien and thus more evil. The two sides of the pilgrimage--the Other and the Self (following God's scripture)--denote, respectively, the alienation, difference and decline of the Other (than I) and the piety, endurance and progress of the

Self as Christian. With this distinction, the Self and the Other are divided. It is with such ascent and descent, the ascent of the Self and descent of the Other, the hero moves to his goal. While the Other sinks deeper, the privileged Self rises higher, reconciling the opposition by differentiating and hierarchizing Self and Other to the detriment of the latter.

Similar to the hero's movement in the *Travels*, the hero in *Xiyangji* moves through different worlds in his quest. Like the hero in the *Travels*, the hero in *Xiyangji* moves from higher world to a lower one. The superiority of the Ming, or that of the hero, is first confirmed by the descent of Jin Bifeng, the incarnation of Buddha Dipamkara, from a Buddhist heaven to the Ming Empire, and then further determined by the Ming fleet's quest through the countries of the Western Ocean.

Buddha Dipamkara's descent from the Buddhist heaven is motivated by a prediction of Buddha Tathagata about the persecution the Buddhist monks will suffer in the Ming.<sup>23</sup> Once on earth, soon after the Buddha becomes a Buddhist monk with the name of Jin Bifeng, the persecution is initiated by the Taoist Zhang Tianshi's feud with Buddhism. Jin Bifeng successfully defeats Zhang Tianshi in a series of contests and is granted by the Emperor the title of "National Master." Then he accepts the Emperor's request and participates, together with Zhang, in the Ming quest for the Seal. To be sure, Jin's participation in the quest eventually serves well



the practical purpose of the quest. Though he never kills any enemy himself, Jin subdues the monsters and supernatural generals of the enemy whom nobody else can defeat. More importantly, as the incarnation of Buddha, Jin's presence in the Ming assures the superiority of the Ming Empire and represents the ascent of the country. With such a saintly being as citizen, the Ming emperor is already guaranteed his special position among the countries even before its fleet go to the quest. His presence in the Ming Empire and especially his participation as the actual commander and the major tactician in the Ming fleet's quest journey guarantees the victory of the journey, and legitimizes the Ming's supremacy among countries. Jin's descent to Ming China like a Buddhist "Messiah"<sup>24</sup> identifies the Ming Empire as a human paradise.<sup>25</sup>

Like the hero in the *Travels*, the Ming fleet find themselves in a lower world of the Other as soon as they leave China. In this world, there are monsters, and uncivilized people, for instance, people living in primitive houses and wearing shabby clothes. But most important of all in this lower and uncivilized world, there are evil villains who challenge the Ming power with force. To those who refuse to recognize quickly Ming's supremacy, their homelands are turned into killing fields.<sup>26</sup> The wars unfold in a set pattern. Upon their arrival in a country, Zheng He's men always demand a submission of a document of surrender from the king. If their demand is satisfied, the Ming empire gains a new

tributary state. If it is not met, war inevitably follows. Very often, the war is first fought between Zheng He's generals and the leaders of the hostile country. Then, as an enemy general with magic power joins, the fighting turns into a magic warfare and soon involves Zhang Tianshi and Jin Bifeng. No matter how the war develops or how stubborn and resilient the enemies may be, the outcome of the conflict is unalterable: others accept their fate and come into full compliance with the Ming.<sup>27</sup> Usually after the war in one country, the fleet would pass several other submissive countries without fighting.

Some critics have criticized the pattern as repetitive. But the pattern serves well the ascent and descent motives in the story. The fact that the victory of the Ming force frightens countries into submission symbolizes the Other's acceptance of the Ming authority and superiority. It means the Other descends further while Ming ascends higher. Here, a passage from Chapter Fifty about the Country of Malacca is typical. The Country of Malacca (马六甲) gives up without attempting resistance by force. When Ming troops enter the country, they are given a warm welcome:

The city gate was kept wide open, the whole city was decorated with festoons, and fresh flowers, ready to welcome [the Ming troops]. The two marshals, each in a sedan carried by eight persons, marched in first, escorted [by soldiers] as what is

the proper ceremony in China. There were also five hundred body guards, [marching] with arrows on their bows and choppers out of sheath.... Everyone of them looks outstandingly valiant and awe-inspiring. As for the civilians of Malacca who jammed the city, they were watching with their eyes wide open, and their tongues out of their mouths, exclaiming: "These must be holy soldiers and generals from the heaven. Where on earth could one find such men." (649; My translation)

The main import of the passage is that the Ming troops, as perceived by the ordinary people in the country of Malacca, are invincible. This peaceful solution in Malacca also relates, distributionally, itself to the war episodes. As a semantic component, peace comes as a consequence of previous wars. The peaceful settlement confirms that the lessons of previous wars have been learnt and therefore no resistance is being considered. From the example of Malacca, we see that war, while inflicting drastic changes to one country, changes also other countries which hear or learn about it. Fearing for similar destruction and frightened by the growing reputation of the ruthlessness of the Ming fleet, some countries choose to surrender with no hesitation. Therefore, as the people in the above example hail Ming soldiers as heroes from heaven, the paragraph does not speak for the onlookers' keen perspicacity but the lingering legacy of war

and Ming domination.

A war proves the dominant status of the Ming empire and a peaceful solution describes the effect of war, a situation or even mentality and attitude created as a result of war. A peaceful solution is like the sounding board of war. It merely signals a period of aftermath following the war. Extremely dynamic or somewhat static, both types of episodes eventually reflect on the pre-established relationship between the Ming and others. Wars, we have said, test and prove a state of mind. Peaceful solutions on the other hand serve as double repetitions that first echo the war and then go back, as a state of mind, to be an equivalent of the understanding of Ming domination over other countries.<sup>28</sup> In other words, we can just say the episodes of war and of peaceful solution are telling the same story from different angles.

As the journey develops, the opposition or the crucial struggle enhances in both works. With his country-to-country quest, the hero in both texts advances, as said above, from home to abroad, from the familiar to the exotic. In the *Travels*, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem is followed, from Chapter Seventeen on, by the adventure into the unknown countries beyond the Holy Land. This curious combination of two differently directed journeys, and the tolerance the narrative occasionally demonstrates, perplex critics. Examining the sometimes mocking tone of the *Travels*, some scholars even conclude that the work is an antipapal satire.<sup>29</sup> Others

would see it as a self-criticism of the follies and corruption of Christians following an understanding gained by meeting other cultures.<sup>30</sup>

While the *Travels* may incidentally strike a note of tolerance or awareness of the problems haunting Christians, that is by no means the main melody. The keynote is the dichotomizing of the Self and the Other, linguistically or physically.

Part Two, which narrates wanderings "through regions made marvellous by secular and non-Christian news,"<sup>31</sup> could be regarded as an effort by the narrator to further distinguish the Self and the Other. With the races encountered during the journey becoming more and more foreign, their religions, customs prove more and more bazaar. For instance, there is first the Tower of Babel where all languages are differentiated (116) until at last the Tibetans who practice a demonic religion (187). With the traveller's progress, the journey descends into a world of pagans or worshippers of false gods.

In this extended encounter with the foreign world, the narrator recounts the country of women where women kill men (117); people with such evil customs that among whom, father and son, husband and wife eat each other (136); fantastic beings such as one-eyed, headless, and flat-faced peoples (137); etc. Things are so foreign and grotesque in this strange world that they impress the reader as a pure reversal

of everything in the traveller's home world. Instead of believing in God, people practice so-called "natural religions," go around naked and exercise communal sex, communal ownership of lands and goods, polygamy, and even cannibalism. Some of these people look more like animals: dog-headed men; men with horses' hoofs or trunks; men who hiss like snakes or grunt like pigs (137).

In this world, not only men (with their heads growing beneath their shoulders) are strange, but animals are too. Besides giant snails, geese with two heads, griffins, there are plants and trees that bear venom. Wine, and wool are also beyond credulity. In short, the world has a "fallen nature, nature in decline from its primeval state--a world of grotesques, sports and freaks of nature."<sup>32</sup> If to go to the Holy Land occupied by nonbelievers is a painful experience that reminds the hero of the lost treasure and his threatened identity, going into the countries beyond the Holy Land is simply like, to borrow the words of a thirteen-century traveller to Asia, "stepping into another world."<sup>33</sup>

The most startling anticlimax, however, the pure reverse of Christianity, comes in the stories of the Isle of Rybothe (Tibet) in the last chapter of the *Travels*. The people there practise "a fantastic cannibal rite that is a nightmare version of Christian mass."<sup>34</sup> When a man dies, his son has the body decapitated and fed in pieces to birds. Nor is this all. The son at the feast then serves the flesh of his

father's head to special friends and makes of the skull a cup, and they drink from it "with great devotion in remembrance of the holy man" ( 186-7). This passage, which sounds like an acerbic parody of Christian beliefs and practices, is in fact the Other's, Tibetans's, mocking, in carnivalistic manner, of Christianity.

Carnival, simply explained, utilizes things in reverse. What a carnivalistic act purports to perform is, as Bakhtin observes, "a life drawn out of its usual rut, it is to some extent 'life turned inside out,' 'the reverse side of the world.'"<sup>35</sup> Reversing everything in Christian mass, the ritual that Tibetans practise seems to be a mini piece of Mennipean satire. Since this satire is the work of the Tibetans, to the Tibetans, it satirizes Christian mass. But to the hero and the reader, feeding one's father's body to birds and sharing it with friends only make the Tibetans the extreme Other whose Otherness and barbarity place the Tibetans far away from the Christian world and its values.

In *Xiyangji*, the last country passed in the journey also poses a reversed image analogous to the final episode in the *Travels*. It is the Fengdu guiguo 丰都鬼国, "the Ghost-Country" or, more exactly, "Country of the Dead."<sup>36</sup> A hell by character and positioned at the very end of the quest, this country and the expedition in it are important in two aspects. First, by locating one's enemy in hell, the narrative demonstrates the foreignness of the Other at the furthest

extreme. Who is more foreign than a dead person or ghost? Secondly, the conquest of hell caps the quest in the sense that Ming's absolute authority stands over both human and inhuman worlds.

In an extended space (1117-96), the expedition develops in hell, the lowest form of world in romance. The enemies have already been defeated by the Ming fleet before they attempt to challenge it again. Spirits of some of those killed by the Ming fleet accuse the Chinese of having unrighteously slaughtered them. They now want "justice" in hell from the Judge Cui! As the right hand person of Yama, King of the empire of the dead, Judge Cui knows the power of the Ming Empire. He justifies the killing by arguing that the spirits are responsible for their own fate. The spirits could have saved their own lives, Judge Cui reasons, if they had surrendered promptly without any resistance upon the arrival of Zheng He's fleet (1141-57).<sup>37</sup> In fact, Cui's reasoning is a simple one. The fleet represent Chinese who are superior in every respect, morally, mentally, or physically. The only thing the barbarians should do is to submit. When they refuse to do so, it is only logical to use force against them. In the end, Cui dismisses the cases and sends the ghosts back to those departments in the nether world appropriate for them.

Though Judge Cui silences the ghosts, the final solution of the matter, depends on the hero. Jin Bifeng is asked by Yama to exalt the souls of the dead on behalf of the fleet.<sup>38</sup>



It is only after Jin performs the ceremony and all the dead have been redeemed, that the fleet can turn home with total victory. Just as Hou Jian, when discussing the fleet's expedition to hell, makes the following comments: "Yet Fengdu guo yields another signification of its own. This has to do with Chinese cosmology. That is, the emperor is the well-deserved 'son of heaven.' His authority and his order governs not only heaven, but also earth and even underneath."<sup>39</sup> In short, the episode tells where the Other should go and stay, and it confirms that the Ming Empire is a true "Celestial Kingdom." The authority of the Ming Emperor not only dominates earth but extends to the country of hell. By journeying to hell and back, the hero proves the power of the emperor.

Here, a few more words must be said about the ending of the journey in both works. The end of the journey is the limit of the world. By reaching the last country, a hell or a hell-like place, the hero certainly has covered the whole world. In other words, the journey is to find the margin and the centre of the world. By depicting the Other living in hell or anywhere near hell, the narrative marginalizes the villain and puts the hero in the centre. The hierarchy dichotomizes the hero and the villain.

In the foregoing discussion, I have briefly highlighted the dialectical structure of the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*. The journey breaks cultural isolation and provides a chance for

the cultures encounter with what is different. The hero in both works, however, does not attempt a mutual understanding between the Self and the Other. The journey in its dialectical structure serves the hero as a process where the Self and the Other are dichotomized. That is, as Jameson points out,

[r]omance in its original strong form may then be understood as...a symbolic answer to the perplexing question of how my [the hero's] enemy can be thought of as being evil (that is, as other than myself and marked by some absolute difference), when what is responsible for his being so characterized is quite simply the *identity* of his own conduct with mine, the which--points of honour, challenges, tests of strength--he reflects as in a mirror image.<sup>40</sup>

In fact, the above discussion of ascent and descent illustrates clearly the mirror image, the opposition between good and evil. Following the dialectical structure of the narratives, the hero's movement also outlines a hierarchy where the Self and the Other are not only opposed to each other but also positioned in a manner appropriate to the identity of the two sides. The Self becomes the centre of the system while the Other, with all its inferiority, becomes the margin, the limit and the periphery which is only an opposite image of the Self.

Through the journey the hero acquires a more concrete image of Other's difference. The quest does not end the opposition but intensifies it because the journey offers an opportunity for the hero to emphasize and exaggerate the difference between himself and the villain. The question of the true nature of the Other is never asked. The texts deliberately assimilate the Other without discovering what the Other is. For the hero, what is important is that the Self and the Other must be reduced in the dialectical or oppositional structure to two juxtaposed categories or to binary opposition: the Christians and nonbelievers or the Chinese and the non-Chinese. The Other is a projection and a negative version of the Self. Through the reduction, the texts integrate the Other's ideological system into that of the Self. By making other countries appear barbaric, by making the Other look evil, the texts achieve their totalization.

The dialectical structure enacts the ideological implications of the cultures in which the texts are produced. The structure, the quest and the hierarchy can all be seen as the intention of one culture to subsume other cultures and fulfil its libidinal dream. The *Travels* is another ideological investment of Christianity in the form of romance within the biblical narrative tradition and *Xiyangji* is indeed a metanarrative of Chinese cosmogony. My mediation of these works and their ideological implication is conducted

the generic convention of the form of romance.

In the *Travels*, the first and most important purpose for the journey is to recover the Holy Land. The discursive presentation of the lost objects as well as the opposition in both works calls for a journey, because since the loss of Eden, "mankind has been wandering in time, engrossed by this world yet aware of the promise of heaven."<sup>41</sup> The pilgrimage, as it states in the Prologue, has its religious impetus as a deeply rooted Christian ideal: it is the only means for Christians to regain their holy heritage and win self-deliverance. As the opposition between Christians and the nonbelievers cannot be otherwise ended, Christians must make their pilgrimage in order to chase the infidels out of the Holy Land. In the *Travels*, the trip is thus charged with all the bitter emotion caused by the loss of the holy heritage of God and the hope of its recovery, both of which, in return, fully justify the necessity of the pilgrimage. This theme of necessity, as with many other medieval religious writings, fills the pages of the *Travels* and motivates the narrative and the journey as the prime cause. Everywhere in the work the narrator tells how the traveller is trying to live up to this challenge and fulfil the demand that his religion has put in his way.

But in addition to its purpose of freeing the Holy Land from the nonbelievers, the hero also treads a road leading to self-salvation, or as it was held by many Christians in the

middle ages, to "the perfection of the soul and the union with God."<sup>42</sup> This commitment to self-perfection, which parallels the self-fulfilment of romance, is equally important as the recovery of the Holy Land for the pilgrimage in the *Travels*. A committed Christian, the hero sees the journey as an act to purify himself of, in the words of the narrator, the "pride, envy and covetousness [that] have inflamed the hearts of lords of the world that they are more busy to disinherit their neighbours than to lay claim to or conquer their own rightful inheritance" (44). Moving from country to country, the hero is not simply set in opposition to the nonbelievers. By setting himself out on the pilgrimage, the hero is on the way to his own emancipation.

In *Xiyangji*, the ideological implications lie in Chinese cosmological mythology. In the opening pages of Chapter One, the narrative first outlines Chinese cosmogony by introducing the idea of the unity of man and universe (*Tianren heyi* 天人合一). In this brief review of the formation and function of the universe, it is emphasized that within the universe all beings and non-beings, from the revolution of the sun and the moon, the transition of day and night, to the relation between man and nature, and between men themselves, form a harmonious co-existence.<sup>43</sup> To be sure, this harmony eliminates the possibility of a divided world. However, the universal harmony should not be mistakenly deemed as autonomous, and much less equal. By singling out the three schools of

thoughts, i.e. Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and designating their practitioners three principal managing agents (*Sanda guanjia* 三大管家) (2), the narrative implies that the laws of heaven are reinforced by these most favoured agents of heaven. Based on this postulate and as it becomes obvious later in the work, countries receiving less heavenly favour must retain, or be made to retain, their subordinate status by obeying the agents. Since Confucianists, Buddhists, and Taoists are all influential in shaping the ideologies in China, they are naturally and collectively represented by the Ming Empire and its emperor. Therefore as the executive officer of the laws of heaven,<sup>44</sup> the Ming empire is responsible to restore the "pre-established harmony"<sup>45</sup> whenever it is interrupted. As for the other nations, their only option is to yield to order and surrender to the managing power of Ming. As heaven instills in the Ming Empire the sanctioned power, to obey the Emperor both means to trust oneself to the laws of heaven and to recognize the authority of Ming. The ideology identified above can be summed up by a phrase quoted by Ming generals in *Xiyangji*: "those who submit to the laws of heaven will prosper; those who resist them shall perish" (313).

Having discussed the static cosmology of hierarchy generated by the dialectical and ideological structure of the narratives, I will move to the next chapter to show the movement through this cosmology, by using narrative as the

vehicle of action. In other words, where my discussion in this chapter is concerned with a dialectical or synchronical structure, examining the formation of the hierarchy, the next chapter will be dealing with a diachronical aspect. I will discuss the hero's movement in his quest and his effort to domesticate the villainous Other.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Northrop Frye, *Anatomy*, 304.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>3</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 34.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>5</sup>For the historical sources of *Xiyangji*, see Note 45 in Introduction.

<sup>6</sup>In *Xiyangji*, the Ming fleet consist of a group of heroes. But in my thesis, the word "hero" will be used in singular form to mean either the fleet as a whole or one specific member of the fleet.

<sup>7</sup>Northrop Frye, *Secular Scriptura*, 79-80.

<sup>8</sup>Frye, *Anatomy*, 195.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>10</sup>*The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, trans. C.W.R.D. Moseley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) 45. All further references from the book are from this version and will be given in the text.

<sup>11</sup>Different scholars have conceived the theme of the *Travels* differently. Some believe that the *Travels* intends to promote a crusade. See, for instance, A.S. Atiya, *The Crusade of the Later Middle Age* (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1965) Chapter Eight. Others argue that the *Travels* simply offers entertainment to the reader. Josephine Waters Bennett, a prominent scholar of the *Travels*, upholds this view. See



Bennett, *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville* (London: Oxford UP, 1954) 69 et seq. Recently, Donald Howard and Christian K. Zacher argue that the open-mindedness and the curiosity that the author keeps while writing his work have added a whole new perspective to the *Travels* and made it unique in its kind. All the above, while demonstrating certain understanding of the work, are limited in their perspective. My point is that the *Travels* aims at a conquest of other cultures in the journey through meeting, describing and institutionalizing the Other through its discursive power.

<sup>12</sup>The whole story of the Seal appears in Chapter Nine, page 109 to 117. Further references to the work will be given in the text.

<sup>13</sup>"Embedded" narrative sequence or "the enclave," as Claude Bremond calls it, is a story set within another story. See Bremond, "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities," *New Literary History* 11 (1980): 389; and also Gerald Prince, ed. *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1987) 25. For a summary of Bremond's notions of narrative grammar, see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (New York: Methuen, 1983) 23. Sometimes, the term "embedded" is exchangeable with "metadiegesis," a term used by Gérard Genette in his *Narrative Discourse: An Essay of Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 231-4.

<sup>14</sup>Here, the homophones of the name Zheng He, Justice (or Straight) and Harmony, can be very significant too. To search

for the jade seal that harmonizes is to bring about "just harmony."

<sup>15</sup>The story of Bian He and his jade first appears in *Hanfeizi* 韓非子. It is originally told to warn authorities to avoid being deceived by appearance in their administrative duties. The story in *Xiyangji* attains an overtone of sarcasm on the emperor who, assuming to know everything, fails to be aware of the absence of the seal (109-10). In main, the story of the jade and the seal is, as we will see, told to emphasize the importance of the seal. For an English translation of Bian's story, see W.K. Liao, *The Complete Works of Han Fei Tzu* (London: Probsthain, 1939) vol. 1, 113-4.

<sup>16</sup>Prolepsis designates "any narrative manoeuvre that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later." See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 40.

<sup>17</sup>Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 95. It goes without saying that it is not necessary that all four must appear in one work.

<sup>18</sup>That is, the human world closer to Eden. See *ibid.*, 98.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>21</sup>Donald Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims*, 66.

<sup>22</sup>Donald Howard attempts an interpretation that the whole *Travels* is based on such a reverse of time, from the Middle Ages in Part One to "the expulsion from Paradise" in Part Two.

Howard says: "one saw relics of New and Old Testament times... the Age of Law (that is, the law of Moses)." See Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims*, 65.

<sup>23</sup>The story of Buddha Dipamkara's descent to the Ming Empire is told in Chapter One (6-11). There, after a brief description of the Chinese cosmogony, and an outline of the three major schools of thoughts (*Sanjiao*, 三教) in China-- Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, the narrative presents a divine world, largely in terms of Buddhist cosmology. It is in this "divine" world of Buddhism, where Buddhas and other divine beings gather on the day of the All-Souls-Festival, the Buddha Tathagata forecasts that Ming emperor of China, in reality an incarnation of the Dark Emperor (Xuandi 玄帝), will commit an error some fifty years later by issuing an order to persecute the Buddhists. Of this persecution, the Tathagata says:

In today's southern Continent, as a legacy of foreign rule, there lingers a bloody and poisonous atmosphere, even though the foreign rulers are long gone. Therefore, the Dark Emperor has once again to employ his measures in order to subdue the monsters and overcome the difficulties. Only one thing, Buddhist monks will suffer a calamity in fifty years' time, inexplicably. (7; My translation)

Upon hearing this prophecy, Buddha Dipamkara decides to

descend to the earth in order to save the Buddhists from their predicted disaster. His incarnate is a Buddhist monk with the name of Jin Bifeng.

<sup>24</sup>For Jin's role as a Messiah, see Hou Jin "Sanbao taijian xia xiyangji tongsu yanyi: yige fangfa de shiyan," *三宝太监下西洋通俗演义——一个方法的实验* Zhongguo gudian wenxue bijiao yanjiu *中国古典文学比较研究*, ed. Weilin Yip (Taipei: Liming wenhua, 1978) 314-15; Ptak *Hsi-Yang Chi--An Interpretation*, 126-8. In addition, Jin's identity coincides with the episode toward the end of the narrative which from another angel justifies the authority of Ming. Refuting the accusation of several kings and generals of Western countries beheaded during the quest by Ming fleet, Judge of Hell attributes the death to the responsibility to the kings and generals because they fail to comply with Ming's request. See *Xiyangji*, 1155-61.

<sup>25</sup>Ming superiority is proven even before the quest starts, a foreign envoy which comes to submit tributes to the Ming Emperor calls Ming "Celestial Kingdom" *天朝* (105).

<sup>26</sup>On their way, the fleet often find themselves in confrontation with hostile nations. Very often the fleet have to fight their way through. With nine out of all thirty-nine countries passed, the fleet have to wage major and devastating wars. Ptak notices this fact. The countries, as he lists them, are as follows:

1. Champa (Chapters 23-33)

2. Java (Chapters 34-45)
3. Nu'er guo 女儿国 (the "Country of Women," Chapters Forty-six to Fifty)
4. Sanfa guo 散发国 (Chapters 51-72)
5. Jinyan guo 金眼国 (Chapters 62-72)
6. Mogadishu (Chapters 72-78)
7. Yinyan guo 银眼国 (Chapters 79-83)
8. Aden (Chapters 84-86)
9. Gui guo 鬼国 ("Country of the Dead," Chapters 87-93)

Ptak sees the importance of the countries and believes that these nine major countries form individual segments. See Ptak, *"Hsi-Yang Chi--An Interpretation,"* 130.

<sup>27</sup>See Ptak, *"Hsi-Yang Chi--An Interpretation,"* 131. Hou Jian, who applies Northrop Frye's allegorical theory to *Xiyangji* in his "Sanbao taijian," advances such comments on the struggle between the Ming fleet and other powers thus:

Basically, there are two modes in which letters of surrender are obtained from enemy countries: by force or by strategy. Their actual acquisitions vary. As for the surrendering side, we can discern those who are contumacious and those who are soft, and the contumacious ones can be further divided into two categories, group in favour of negotiating and group in favour of fighting.... (306; My translation)

Hou Jian gives examples from almost each of the nine countries to illustrate his point: how the king of Champa intends to surrender but his third son thinks otherwise, and eventually war is waged; or how Java, having executed diplomats from Middle Kingdom, chooses war as its only alternative; or in Jinyan guo, how the civil officials prefer appeasement whereas military generals prefer fighting, etc. The entire opposition creates the tension in the narrative.

<sup>28</sup>Similar stories are numerous in *Xiyangji*. See Chapter Thirty-three for the response of the King of Luohu guo 罗斛国 upon learning the tactics of the Ming fleet (434); others receive the Ming fleet as they do to their parents (1088).

<sup>29</sup>This view has been regarded by some scholars as misleading and wrong. See Hanna III, "Mandeville," 126.

<sup>30</sup>See Donald Howard, "The World of Mandeville's Travels." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 1 (1971): 1-17; and his *Writers and Pilgrims*, 53-76.

<sup>31</sup>Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage*, 150.

<sup>32</sup>Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims*, 72.

<sup>33</sup>Quoted from Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimages*, 151, emphasis mine. The original phrase appears in *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, ed. Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed & Ward, 1955) 93.

<sup>34</sup>Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimages*, 151.

<sup>35</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. & trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 122, emphasis in the original.

<sup>36</sup>This expedition to hell has attracted some critical interest. Forty years ago, J.J.L. Duyvendak compared it with *Divine Comedy* in his "A Chinese 'Divina Commedia,'" *T'oung Pao* 41 (1952): 255-316. Both Hou Jian and Ptak give sufficient allowance in their discussion to this episode of hell in their essays. See Hou Jian "Sanbao taijian," 316-17; and Ptak, "Hsi-Yang Chi--An Interpretation," 135-39.

<sup>37</sup>Part of this court episode in hell has been translated into English. See Lu Xun, *A Brief History*, 226-8.

<sup>38</sup>Ptak argues that Jin's ceremony also redeems the Ming fleet from their "guilt of having committed thousands of murders." In consideration of the romance nature of *Xiyangji*, I find it hard to agree with Ptak. For Ptak's interpretation, see his "Hsi-Yang Chi--An Interpretation," 136.

<sup>39</sup>Hou Jian, "Sanbao taijian," 316, my translation.

<sup>40</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 118.

<sup>41</sup>Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage*, 3.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>43</sup>Joseph Needham has pointed out that the model of Chinese cosmogony is "an ordered harmony of wills without an ordainer." See Joseph Needham and Wang Ling, *Science and Civilization in China*, 6 vols. to date (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1954-) 2: 287. This idea seems to have been discerned by

many Western scholars. Carl Jung, for instance, noted in his Foreword to the German translation of *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*: "The ancient Chinese mind contemplates the cosmos in a way comparable to that of the modern physicist, who cannot deny that his model of the world is a decidedly psychophysical structure." Quoted from *I Ching*, English trans. Cary F. Baynes, Bollingen Series, vol. 19 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967) xxiv. Due to what follows in *Xiyangji*, it may seem to defile the above understanding of Chinese worldview.

"The position of Ming in this laws of universe is located from time to time in the relation between Ming and other countries. In fact, the whole narrative obvious dwells on the notion of Ming's superiority. This will become more clear in the next chapter.

<sup>45</sup>Christian Wolff's doctrine quoted from Michael Edwards, *East-West Passage: The Travel of Ideas, Arts and Inventions between Asia and the Western World* (London: Camelot Press Ltd., 1971) 104. A concept of the universe very close to that of the Chinese, the view of pre-established harmony insists in Leibnizian fashion that the greatest possible variety was held together by the greatest possible unity.



THE TRAVELLER AS HOST: DOMESTICATING  
THE OTHER

"Veni, Vidi, Vici."  
Julius Caesar

Following the dialectical structure mapped out in the previous chapter, I will turn to examine the process of subordination of the Other in the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*. To discuss them as totalizing romances, I shall try to show that the two texts seek domination over the Other in the following four areas: geography, language, gender, and ethics. The discussion will concentrate on these four elements to demonstrate how the hero transforms the chaotic Other into a reflection of the Self. However, the analysis will also show that the very representation of the Other as chaotic in relation to the Self and its norms is the first act of subordinating and domesticating the Other.

Both texts begin with the opposition between the hero and the villain. Since the Holy Land or the Imperial Seal has fallen into the hands of the villain, chaos permeates the texts.<sup>1</sup> The world is turned up-side-down and a conflict ensues when the hero attempts to end the chaos and put the world "right-side-up." In the *Travels*, for instance, the Holy Land is inhabited by nonbelievers. Even the Christians, the so-called true heirs of Christ, are corrupted by desire and

greed (44). In an extended sense, the whole work of the *Travels* represents a shattered world after the Fall of Man.<sup>2</sup> Because of the Fall, the world loses its centre; human races are dispersed, and things displaced. Worse still, even the Holy Land is lost and decentered due to the folly of some Christians.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the narrative of the Fall is the paradigm against which the Other is measured. The departure of the Other from Christian practices is not a sign of Christianity's limits but a confirmation of the chaotic failure of the Other to live up to Christian standards. The Other's practices are not seen as an equally valid culture outside Christianity, but rather a disorderly subculture within Christianity. In *Xiyangji*, the world is no less disorderly. With the absence of the Seal, not only the Ming Empire is endangered, but also the Ming Emperor, the son of heaven, makes the mistake of persecuting Buddhist monks in his country.<sup>4</sup> In short, in both texts, social or cultural order is disturbed and everyone, including the hero, is engulfed in "the whole fallen world" of Leviathan<sup>5</sup>--the Christian symbol of chaos or in a disturbed empire not yet freed from a poisonous atmosphere due to foreign rule.<sup>6</sup>

In both works, the way chosen to end the chaos is a quest through which the hero conquers the villain and recovers lost treasures. But chaos taints the pattern of the journey as well. In his journey, the hero appears to wander around the world, going through different countries and meeting different

peoples. What he sees, the scattered countries around the world, peoples with unintelligible language and utterly inexplicable customs, confirms the madness of the world. Even the narrative structure enhances the disorder. With events arranged in a country-to-country sequence, based more on geographical locations of the countries than on cause-effect logic,<sup>7</sup> the narrative strikes the reader as repetitive and episodic. In other words, it appears to be, in Frye's characterization of romance, "a discontinuous form of narrative."<sup>8</sup> However, part of the aesthetic appeal in romance is the unpredictability of its adventure. Even the seeming endlessness of the journey, which Frye suggests is typical of primitive romance, lends to the text another level of unpredictability.<sup>9</sup> This formal unpredictability will affect the content of the story, as will be shown later.

With the journey covering a vast space--numerous countries passed in both the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*--the world also appears endless, wild and disorderly. Nothing seems in order. The repetitions of the hero's action itself, however, signal the need to put the world in order. The hero must endlessly conquer and reconquer the Other to sustain the drive (will) to order the chaotic, villainous societies encountered on the quest.

The quest journey represents a totalizing process and creates order out of disorder. The journey traces the outline of the entire known world, though found in a chaotic and

dispersed condition. But as the hero moves from country to country, order gradually emerges and a hierarchical relation forms between the cultures and countries. Symbolically, the hero's going through different countries means that the hero is unifying the world into an environment where the hero's culture is the centre and other cultures are the periphery. The farther the hero travels, the more his authority becomes evident. In other countries and meeting other peoples, the hero impresses the reader as a domineering host rather than a fraternal guest. In the *Travels*, what Mandeville sees and knows he interprets and assesses establishing the value of the Other; he recounts each country passed and thus assumes the image of the name-giving Adam; in *Xiyangji*, the hero defeats the Other by military force and receives letters of submission from his prostrate foes as the envoy of the king of kings. When all the countries are visited, seen, and conquered, the world becomes united again. Only when the hero has exhausted all the known countries, the geographical limit, can the hero's society, and his story, attain order. The author, furthermore, marks the textual limit by representing the hero's journey to hell or a hell-like environment. Depicted as the extreme opposite of the hero's social system, the last country visited in the narrative stands as the "natural" conclusion, or the limit to the hero's progress.

In fact, we may say that the order of the conquest in the two texts implies the order of romance, the order the reader

discerns in his reading. In other words, *anagnorisis*, or the recognition of identity, that the hero gains at the end of his quest coincides with the *anagnorisis* of the reader. By following the narratives to their end, the reader finds the significance of the stories and the coherence of their structure.

For example, the unity and order, or the domestication of the Other is achieved in the story through the actual quest itself. But order is also achieved by the socially symbolic act of the discourse. The story, in other words, has only one voice, that of the hero, not that of the Other. The journey, the movement from one country to another, the meeting with various peoples and the recording of different cultures, customs and ethics of the Other, are all presented from the perspective of the traveller, the hero. Whatever is narrated is "focalized,"<sup>10</sup> or seen exclusively, through the eyes of the hero. The hero's stories of the Other are authoritative and authoritarian themselves, without need for acknowledgement by the Other. By narrating the stories of the Other and arranging them as he desires, the hero reduces the Other to a textual entity, deprived of its language and, in effect, its identity. On the few occasions when the Other does speak, it is excluded by the hero's imperializing discourse because his language is either unintelligible and therefore irrelevant, or domesticated because the language it uses is the same as the hero's. In both ways, the Other is transformed and

domesticated and the discourse, along with the journey, develops its totalizing gestures of both excluding and domesticating.

Perhaps a good example of what power discourse can generate is the final act of the hero that sets a limit to the order and chaos. That the limit is accomplished not only through heroic action but also through discourse is demonstrated by the conclusion of both texts. Through a speech-act<sup>11</sup> or act of language--the travels with a prayer to God and *Xiyangji* a list of tributes--totalization in the two texts reaches its end. Yet, while the conclusion of the two romances is the final totalizing act of the hero's, it is also the authors's discursive act of totalization. The reader may not accept the acts of closure performed by the story and the text, but the reader recognizes the closure and must respond to it. Part of the reader's response is to determine if he, or she, is included or excluded, self or other, in relation to the text.

### The Place of the Other

As a deeply rooted aspect of human behaviour, the ordering of space is highly arbitrary. Human discourse contributes to establishing differences between places and peoples by means of races and cultural practices. At the

beginning of his *Orientalism*, Said discusses the function of geographical distinction between the East and the West. He points out that man's ideas of each other do not develop without the distinction of locales, regions, geographical sectors. And thanks to these geographical, as well as cultural, demarcations, the Orient and the Occident become "an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given them reality and presence."<sup>12</sup>

Due to its plausibility, geographical arrangement of events is made the backbone of the narrative structure in the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*. In the country-to-country journey, the narrative moves into a more and more chaotic world as it implements its scheme of totalization. Such a conflicting use of geography, to depict a world of chaos and achieve an overall order, is obvious even before the journey starts. In the Prologue of the *Travels*, for instance, with the emphasis on the loss of the Holy Land and the opposition between the Christians and the nonbelievers, the text presents a world without order. Motivated to partake in the cause of recovering the Holy Land, the hero lays out, in the first person, an itinerary of his pilgrimage:

I, John Mandeville... passed the sea the year of Our Lord Jesu Christ 1332, on Michaelmas Day, and since have been a long time overseas, and have seen and gone through Turkye [Turkey], Ermony [Armenia] the Lesser and the Greater, Tartary, Perse

[Persia], Sirie [Syria], Araby [Arabia], Egipte [Egypt] the Upper and the Lower, Liby [Libya], Caldee [Chaldea], and a great part of Ethiope [Ethiopia], Amazon[ia], a great part of Inde the Lesser and the Greater, and through many other isles that are about India.... (44)

With many names of the countries crowded in a short passage, the itinerary points to the problem of a scattered world. Positioned after the extended elaboration of a world full of nonbelievers, corrupted Christian lords who fail "to lay claim to or conquer their own rightful inheritance," (44) in short, a world after man's Fall due to "the sin of our first father Adam" (43), the itinerary emphasizes with examples the fallen and divided world.

The list presents a latent order. Functioning the way a "catalogue" does in epics,<sup>13</sup> the list creates a circle, a space and a world. In the very act of listing the countries, we witness the initial effort of the hero to comprehend his world and put things in order. That is, the list follows a geographical order. Including only a few of the many countries the hero passes, the list nevertheless outlines the whole world known to the hero and arranges meticulously the countries according to their relative position to England. The countries are mapped out in an order geared to the eyes of the Europeans; they extend from Europe to the Near East, Middle East, Far East and, with a detour, Africa. Following



the routes the hero takes in his journey, the map by itself unites, orders and sorts countries, peoples and cultures.

Presenting the world from the perspective of the European hero, the list of countries reveals something not so innocent. By outlining the entire known world, and by delineating limits and boundaries of the world, the list also attempts an ideologically based hierarchical system.<sup>14</sup> The geographical distinctions that the list generates not only differentiates the Self and the Other but also places them in a new order, with the hero as the centre while the Other as the periphery or the margin. Going to a foreign land is, for the hero, a marginalizing experience because the traveller finds himself or herself an outsider in an unfamiliar environment. But since the hero creates a universe where he is the centre, wherever he goes, the culturally Other is marginalized and also "placed" in the heroes' ethnocentric order. In other words, the hero is the host because, to him, travelling to foreign lands does not diminish his authority, and may in fact increase his authority. With the whole world sorted out and ordered by him, the hero retains his status of host anywhere he goes. In principle, his listing the countries places him in such a dominant position that the world is linguistically conquered and the Other discursively domesticated even before the hero starts narrating his quest journey.

In addition to the violent hierarchy, the denominating purpose of the list of countries is also significant in

forming an unequal relation between the Self and the Other. By naming the countries, the hero calls the countries into his discourse, his journey in which the physical existence of these countries is given "typologically." That is, the list in the Prologue functions as a guideline of the work and is later reified by the narration of each country passed, just as the Old Testament is regarded as a course of anticipations of the events in the life of Christ in the New Testament.<sup>15</sup> The power associated with nomination is illustrated by the story of Adam naming the beasts in Genesis (Genesis, 12:16, 20). In the *Travels*, the hero is, typologically speaking, a post-figuration of Adam when he enunciates the countries one after another. Name-giving is identity-giving, and even life-giving, because, by attaining a name, a thing becomes a knowable essence, distinguishable from other things. A name also legitimates because it gives the nominator a measure of power over the thing named. However, since the nominee can be manipulated by the nominator, the name's instrumental function can limit, domesticate, or even destroy. Once denominated, the countries are incorporated into an enormous "verbal machinery," only to be marginalized by it at the end of the text. If the *Travels* is a totalizing text, its totalization starts with the list of countries. It is the list that initiates the hero's quest of recovering lost treasure--the domination of Christian culture.

In *Xiyangji*, country names are also given in a list to

highlight the danger the Ming Empire faces. As a reply to the Emperor's question of where one should go to retrieve the lost seal, Zhang Tianshi presents the following list of eighteen countries:

- (1) Champa 金莲宝象 , (2) Java 爪哇 , (3) Nu'er guo 女儿国 , (4) Achin 苏门答腊 , (5) Sanfa guo 散安国 , (6) Maldive Island 溜山 , (7) Quilon 木葛兰 , (8) Cochin 柯枝 , (9) Small Quilon 小葛兰 , (10) Guli 古里 , (11) Jinyan guo 金眼国 , (12) Bengal 孟加拉 , (13) Magadoxo 木骨都 , (14) Ormuz 忽鲁谟斯 , (15) Yinyan guo 银眼国 , (16) Aden 阿丹 , (17) Mekka 天方国 , (18) Fengdu guo 丰都国 (1269-80).<sup>16</sup>

The list presented to the emperor, and the reader, represents not only a divided world but also a threatening one. With these countries unsubordinated, not yet part of the territory under the Ming Emperor, his empire is not complete. In other words, the world in which the Ming Dynasty reinforces law on behalf of heaven remains scattered, not unified.

Compared with the itinerary in the *Travels*, the list in *Xiyangji* is placed in a more aggressive context of cross-cultural power-struggle. In addition to the actual journey, foreign countries visited are enunciated three times: first, as shown in the list above, by the Taoist monk Zhang Tianshi; the second time by the rival Buddhist monk Jin Bifeng in a structure with the Taoist Zhang; and the third, in a much extended form, comes at the end of the book as a report of the

journey to the emperor upon the fleet's triumphant return. All three occasions take place in front of the throne--the very symbol of power, the heart of the Central or Middle Kingdom and thus centre of the entire world--they collapse spatial allocations into social and cultural classifications.<sup>17</sup> Thanks to the power of discursive presentation, the countries listed, even without the journey, are already subjects of the Ming empire. With the first two presentations setting up a hierarchical ordering where the Other has been symbolically brought in to call on the Ming Emperor, the last report serves as a linguistic assurance with the hard evidence of tributes collected from the countries of the Western Ocean, and speaks once and for all for the acceptance of Ming authority by the Other. Differently put, through the three listings of countries, we already see the conquest accomplished.

Like the list in the *Travels*, the list in *Xiyangji* is also related to boundaries, distinguishing centre and periphery, only in reverse. In *Xiyangji*, the relation of centre and margin derives from the traditional Chinese concept according to which the Ming imperial palace is the very centre of the whole world, and the other countries only serve as the "corners," of a world conceived as square in shape (traditional Chinese cosmology represents "the sky as round and the earth as square"). Other countries are doubtlessly marginal and therefore inferior. To be sure, the centre and

corners are interdependent and they interact. But this centre-and-corner picture points to an ontological transition in which divine power enters the world and diffuses outwards through the emperor, the Son of Heaven.<sup>18</sup> The concept of centre and corners unites the world as much as it divides it, because the marginality of other countries depends on the centrality of China and vice versa. It is through the distinction of margin and centre that other countries and the Ming Empire sustain a relation, and a unity. The centrality, as the pivot brings together the four corners of the world. No matter how marginal, other countries do not at all lie outside the world but remain an integral part of it. But here, the relation represents a difference from the one created in the *Travels*.

In the *Travels*, the list highlights the difference of the countries. The countries, when identified, become individual entities and stay that way even after the hero domesticates them. In other words, though in the end he unites all the countries into a Christian totalization, the hero in the *Travels* allows the countries retain a certain amount of their difference. Mandeville, for instance, represents the alphabet and the culture of the Other with interest. In his process of domestication, the hero in the *Travels* emphasizes more the Otherness of the Other. In *Xiyangji*, on the contrary, no foreign country is ever allowed to be the Other. That is, every Other must become not only the Same but also part of the

totalizing Self. In *Xiyangji*, for example, the Western Ocean is believed to be a continent so faraway that it must be in the area described by traditional Chinese phrases as a place of "tianwai" 天外, "outside [the kingdom of] heaven," or more revealingly, "huawai" 化外, "beyond transformation."<sup>19</sup> But the words "outside" and "beyond" denote only the lack of civilization, the barbarity of the Western Ocean, not its individuality, much less its independence. In china, the imperial inclusiveness is called "shi wu wai" 示无外, to "show nothing left out" or "show no outer-separation"<sup>20</sup> or, more briefly, "no-otherness." From very ancient times, the Chinese started to cherish the idea of "wang zhe wu wai," 王者无外, that is, "the King leaves nothing and nobody outside his realm."<sup>21</sup> As a matter of fact, the Ming Empire is, to use Vadime Elisséeff's phrase, "an empire without neighbours."<sup>22</sup>

One example from *Xiyangji* suffices to illustrate the textualization of the Chinese "shi wu wai." The Ming Emperor, in Chapter Nine, claims his legitimation with the following hypothesis: "I am the son of father Heaven and mother Earth. All people under the sky are my sons; all fortune under the sky are my fortune; all treasure under the sky are my treasure" (163). In the view of the Ming Emperor, no national boundaries exist. All neighbours drop their otherness just to come under his domination. Such a belief of the emperor that his patrimonial rule, an extension of patriarchal control in

a family, extends to embrace the whole world has been well described by John K. Fairbank, who observes:

The Chinese tended to think of their foreign relations as giving expression externally to the same principles of social and political order that were manifested internally within the Chinese state and society. China's foreign relations were accordingly hierarchic and nonegalitarian, like Chinese society itself.<sup>23</sup>

The list in *Xiyangji* serves the purpose of naming, though different in nature from Adam's naming. The list not only gives "reality" to things but also assures domination of China over other nations. Because the evil countries in the Western Ocean unlawfully possess the Imperial Seal, they are in effect plotting to subvert the Ming Empire. They seek to reverse the relation between Ming and themselves and thus change their roles as master and subjects. Therefore, the journey to search for the seal or establish a new world order, can be regarded as an effort to protect the established names of nations, or to rectify whatever has been changed in the names. The importance of having an appropriate name for everything and everyone has been summed up by Confucius when he says "[w]hen names are not correct, what is said will not sound reasonable; when what is said does not sound reasonable, affairs will not culminate in success" (*The Analects* XIII, iii). But the significance of Confucius's sentence develops

to its fullest only in Xunzi's (Hsun Tzu) essay "Rectifying Names."<sup>24</sup> To Xunzi, the correct uses of language are a prime requisite for the realization of an ethico-political ideal of a well-ordered and harmonious society. But the proper use of name can only be regulated by authorities. As Xunzi insists, "When the king sets about regulating names, if the names and the realities to which they apply are made fixed and clear, so that he can carry out the Way and communicate his intentions to others, then he may guide the people with circumspection and unify them."<sup>25</sup> To rectify is to ratify and to institutionalize, to put things in order. Now if we return to the list in *Xiyangji*, it is to grant their own *de jure* status to the Western countries. The list performs some form of linguistic legislation that indicates firm control of the Other.

Geographical distinctions and boundaries, as the above discussion shows, are at once physical and metaphysical. They accompany cultural, social and ethnic distinction and boundaries.<sup>26</sup> The corresponding linguistic boundaries not only separate the "familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs,'"<sup>27</sup> but they also reduce cultures, countries or groups to a conceptual and domesticating order.



## In Other Words

Like the scattered countries, the many languages in the two texts are used as a sure sign of the divided world and dispersed human cultures. Toward language, the two texts demonstrate different attitudes of totalization. In the *Travels*, Christian theology accepts linguistic otherness as an act of God, whereas in *Xiyangji*, the Chinese advances the opposite hegemonic imposition of "shi wu wai," no-otherness.

In the *Travels*, the issue of language is dealt with from the Christian perspective of the story of the Tower of Babel. The Tower of Babel, according to Frye, "is really a cyclical symbol, an example of the rising and falling of great kingdoms."<sup>28</sup> This kingdom is man's kingdom. In other words, to build the tower so that man can reach God symbolizes man's ascendance and pride. However, the very construction of the Tower is viewed by God as the climactic evidence of the self-assertion of man, or man's intention "to take things into their own hands in their desire for greatness and power."<sup>29</sup> As a consequence of God's punitive intervention, the Tower cannot be built and man falls for the second time. After Babel, man is further dispersed because his language, man's faculty to comprehend and communicate, is fragmented into many different tongues. In other words, what Babel leads to is the separation, confusion, and displacement of language. Now humanity is farther separated from God. Man no longer

understands himself as a whole. Man's language, instead of being a means of communication, has become an obstacle, and a sign of difference. That is, the signifiers of one man, one culture, no longer signify what they do to every other. They come to signify the difference between individuals and cultures.

Obviously regarding language as the most essential cultural difference, the narrator-hero in the *Travels* demonstrates a substantial interest in the language of the Other. From time to time in his narration of a people, he would refer to their alphabets and have them actually printed in his text. The important role that alphabets and language play in the distinction of culture can be seen from the positions that the alphabets are given in the text. The alphabets almost always come at the end of the narration about a people.<sup>30</sup> That is, after all other stories about a particular people, the narrator further particularizes a people by adding a final comment about their language. For instance, at the end of the description about the difference between the orthodox Christians and the Greeks in Chapter Three of the *Travels*, we read the following: "if you would know what kinds of letters the Jews use, here you may see them set out with their names [pronunciations]" (93). After this sentence, the narrator represents letters in boldface and in much larger print than the rest of the text. In almost every instance, the alphabets are given in a form similar to that of

the Greeks.<sup>31</sup> Placed at the end of a section with their pronunciations, the alphabets work to enhance the feeling of cultural estrangement by a first-time traveller. The alphabets reiterate the cultural differences depicted by the preceding stories. To show how the alphabets help demonstrate the difference of a people, we will examine an episode to see what the narrator first says about that people.

In Chapter Three, for example, when the story of the hero's travel in Greece is narrated, the Greeks are compared with what are regarded as the orthodox or true Christians at the time. The message the narrator intends to get across is that the Greeks are not real Christians, at least not Christians who uphold the same beliefs as orthodox Christians. To illustrate this difference, the story of the Greeks starts thus:

And although the Greeks are Christian, nevertheless they vary from our faith. For they say that the Holy Ghost proceeds not from the Son, but only from the Father; and they are not in obedience to the Church of Rome, nor to the Pope.... The Greeks also make the sacrament at the altar of leavened bread.... And they say that we err in making the sacrament with unleavened bread.... And they say there is no Purgatory, and that souls shall have neither joy nor pain before the Day of Judgment. They say also that fornication is not a deadly sin,

but a natural one.... Their priests too are married. (50-51)

As the first sentence in the passage indicates, the narrator's purpose is to distinguish the Greeks as different by opposing their way of life and religious beliefs to those of orthodox Christians, with which the narrator-hero readily identifies himself. This opening sentence foreshadows for the reader what will follow, and raises his uncertainty about the identity of the Greeks, and then the narrator goes on to elaborate the difference. The differences, as the story tells, are many. The Greeks do not obey the church of Rome, they deny the existence of Purgatory and believe that "souls shall have neither joy nor pain before the "Day of Judgment." Finally, they do not denounce the deadly sin of fornication as it should be denounced properly. Because everything mentioned about the Greeks is carefully put in juxtaposition with that of true Christians, the Greeks, despite the fact that they are also designated as Christians, appear as heterogeneous as the unmasterable Greek letters printed in boldface.

Apparently feeling an insufficiency of the foregoing text in explaining cultural difference, the narrator quotes the Greek alphabet to remind the reading pilgrim of their own cultural limitations. Only an alphabet could produce this "graphic effect" in a travel book. Represented in large print, the letters add variety to the story about the Greeks by interrupting the narration. However, the significance of

the alphabets is not limited to the graphic effect that supplements the description of the Greek culture. The letters symbolize the wandering pilgrim's failure even to begin to understand the differences of the Greeks. The letters remain letters, separated from their membership in the verbal community of words and stories. The meaningless and fragmented condition reflect the letters's isolation. As a meta-textual comment the author relies on "perceptual strategies,"<sup>32</sup> the odd-looking letters, strategically placed at the end of the chapter, to summarize, reiterate and finalize the Otherness of the Greeks.

Apart from the Greek alphabet in Chapter Three, the narrative shows that of the Egyptian in Chapter Seven, the Hebrew in Twelve, the Arabic in Fifteen, the Persian in Sixteen, and, at last that of Chaldean in Seventeen.<sup>33</sup> In the *Travels*, the hero goes from Europe to the Far East, that is, from the familiar to the exotic. The alphabets dispersed in different chapters work to produce an effect of progress in the narrative. As the traveller moves on, the alphabets become, like the lands which use them, progressively more strange.<sup>34</sup> Since all these alphabets, except Chaldean, appear at the end of their respective chapters--perhaps for emphasis<sup>35</sup>--they help confirm difference and an emerging hierarchy of cultures. Ironically, however, despite helping the hero gain more knowledge of the peoples he meets, the alphabets, with all their oddness, help push the Other "to

utter difference and even silence."

Among all the alphabets in the text, the Chaldean alphabet, given in Chapter Seventeen, deserves special attention.<sup>36</sup> It is special not because it is part of an important language,<sup>37</sup> but because it occupies significant position in the story. The last of all the recorded alphabets and positioned in the middle of the chapter instead of the end, the Chaldean alphabet already speaks for its own peculiarity. The change of position not only interrupts the reader's expectation fostered by the previous narrative arrangement, but it also establishes a symmetrical balance of the text: the letters are in the middle of the chapter. What is more, since Chapter Seventeen is in the mid-point of the text which consists of thirty-four chapters plus the Prologue, the alphabet thus occupies, like the Tower of Babel, a central place in the whole work. With its positioning in the text, the Chaldean alphabet becomes the centre of the narrative in real and symbolic terms.

What makes this central place of Chaldean letters most significant is that Chaldea is the land where the Tower of Babel is built, or where, we are told by the hero, "the confusion of tongues was first made" (117). In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that as he travels toward the Holy Land, the hero believes he is moving spiritually upward but once he arrives he finds, ironically, that he has moved downward spiritually. Here, we can say that the hero, upon

reaching Chaldean, arrives on the top of the Tower of Babel or hits the bottom of human confusion resulting from pride and conceits. After Babel, that is, after Chaldean, things change completely. No more languages are recorded. Cultural and racial difference are intensified by implausibility. The world is divided into permanently different parts. As nothing can portray human difference more efficiently than language, the centrality of the Tower of Babel in the text determines the growing sense of disparity in the journey that follows.

The whole book of the *Travels* culminates in a linguistic Tower of Babel in which there are all kinds of human confusion and cultural difference. The linguistic and cultural differences recorded in both parts of the *Travels* can also be seen as a catalogue of confusion. Language, instead of being the tool of communication, becomes the obstacle of human exchange. It is now a marker of cultural difference. In this situation, no single true meaning can be found.

In the *Travels*, to use language is no longer to communicate but to differentiate the Self from the Other. And yet Mandeville still manages to conquer the Other by quoting their alphabets. In his mission to recover the Holy Land, the hero is searching for redemption but in fact finds only Fallen Humanity. Like the scattered relics, the alphabets scattered in the text are symbols of man's fall. Mankind is dispersed like language. The stories about the alphabets are stories about man's dispersion at the Tower of Babel. In Mandeville's

call to recover the Holy Land, he is calling for unity. Reality has to be changed. Human beings must learn to talk to one another before they can re-unite and be one with God.

To be sure, the hero is not on a "sightseeing tour." His self-appointed task is a quest-journey that purports to domesticate the Other but not to merely record the difference in the world. By listing the difference, and by knowing the world's problems, Mandeville is not only domesticating the Other but also reuniting the whole world. The world, as we have emphasized, is dispersed and the Holy Land displaced.

lost, the Holy Land is no longer one place, but like the relics, lies everywhere. In fact, the Holy Land itself in the work is presented as a relic of sorts.<sup>38</sup> To recover the Holy Land, therefore, requires the hero to go around the whole known world (that is, the whole text) to recover and in some way retrieve all the relics. It requires the hero to name, to see, to record and to know all the peoples, languages, cultures, and countries. Mandeville's work performs allegorically God's redemptive role. The day the world is together again would be the day the Holy Land is recovered and the day the Christians are granted their deliverance.

Description of other languages in *Xiyangji* is never as meticulous as that in the *Travels*. Presenting a military conquest, most stories in *Xiyangji* delineate the prowess of the Ming fleet. In this case, foreign languages are rarely mentioned in the text and exotic inscription never appears in



the text. Whenever the text refers to foreign languages, it is done with brevity. In Chapter Eight, when a foreign convoy comes to the Imperial Palace to submit tributes to the Ming Emperor, their language is described as "weird noise" (105). In Chapter Forty-six, there is a short mention of Zheng's knowledge of foreign languages and his using one with some foreign soldiers. Mid-way through Chapter Eight, when the narration turns to the Yongle Emperor, the new ruler of the Ming Empire, it is mentioned that foreign envoys have come to the imperial palace to honour the new emperor, whose great virtue and merits have not only benefited the Middle Kingdom but also the rest of the world. The passage reads:

They had just been shown into the imperial palace. What are these strange-looking beings? Merely looking like humans, they are not subjects living within the realm of our Middle Kingdom. Their heads are wrapped in a piece of white cloth, long and huge; what they put on their body are some kind of clothes; what they have on feet are cowskin boots; what they utter is a series of weird noises. (105; My translation)

The above is a caricature of the envoys. The description mocks almost everything about these foreigners from head to toe. Their primitive attire, and especially their unintelligible language betray their "barbarian" and "alien" nature. Since they are not subjects of the Middle Kingdom,

they are shunned once and for all by Ming civilization.

The passage is also very vague. Few details are given. The narrative does tell how the foreigners look, but that they are "*merely like humans*," not what they wear on feet but their lack of shoes. Their speech is described to be "*just a series of weird noises*." This is hardly surprising. In China, foreign languages, or "barbarian tongues," are generally referred to as the bird's talk<sup>39</sup> or, like the above, noises emphasizing their unintelligibility to human ear. Nevertheless, the ambiguity, the lack of patience to give detailed description of the foreign language do not blur but highlight, with sneers and, even, disdain, the juxtaposition between the civilized Self and the barbaric Other. Speaking of barbarians, who would bother to give more details? As a matter of fact, since they are so primitive and so barbarous, the foreigners mean nothing to the Ming Dynasty. The foreigners, with all their Otherness, do not deserve any attention and should be forgotten right away.

But what best illustrates the "*shi wu wai*" attitude is the fact that in the text the Other for most part uses Chinese, "the language of civilization." In the text, translation and interpretation are seldom mentioned.<sup>40</sup> The failure of mentioning interpreters cannot be simply explained as the negligence of the narrator: rather it is to be understood as his deliberate intention to domesticate the Other, making others "use" his own language. For instance,

from every conquered country, the fleet will demand a letter of surrender. Such a letter is always included in full in the text. Unexceptionally, every letter appears in the classical form of Chinese writing: rhythmical parallel prose, of which the following is an example from the King of Country of Zufar in Chapter Seventy-eight:

With respect, the King of Zufar presents this letter to the ensign of the Imperial Commissioner, Field-Marshal of the Mission to the West, Mr. Zheng He, from the Great Bright Empire:

Located negligibly in a small corner of the Ocean, this humble country of mine is as tiny and insignificant as an ant or a mole-cricket. Previously known as the Country of Daxia during the Tang Dynasty in your history or still earlier as Huoluo to your Han Dynasty. Though our humble country has been a subject to yours, we have never benefited from your military conquest. Now it is our good luck that you, Marshal, should have come all this way, through all the hardship, to grant us liberation. [Because of your arrival, we realize that] the sky is high, and earth is large; we learn the eternity of the universe. Out of the fact that the sun shines and the moon rises, we see the image of peace. As the fish [to be cooked] in the cooking pot, should we expect otherwise? As a

rabbit in a cave waiting to be caught, we know it is our fate. Writing this page I am overwhelmed by my utmost reverence and purest sincerity. (1009; My translation)

By no means an important country during the journey of the Ming fleet, the King of Zufar knows Chinese and uses it well. The king's rhetoric is so solicitous that he even includes the earlier names of the country, Daxia and Huoluo, previously known to the Tang and Han dynasties, for the new conqueror's convenience. Such total submission in language to the point of calling one's surrender a "liberation" suggests that political control by the Ming dynasty is absolute.

The no-otherness in *Xiyangji*, as shown above, depends not only on the fact that China is the centre and source of civilization, but also on the fact that other countries as margins realize that they can benefit from this unfailing source. They willingly maintain their relation with the empire by submitting tributes to "the celestial kingdom" 天朝. The Other always shows a willingness to be a vassal state of Ming China by being able to speak Chinese, coming to the imperial court with tributes, or like the letter from the King of Zufar, asking to be benefited from the Ming military conquest. To apply the Chinese concepts of "beyond Heaven," and "beyond transformation" again, all the above can be summed up in the much used phrase "laihua" 来化, "coming [to China] to be transformed."<sup>41</sup>

### Woman as Other

In the two texts, social norms are used to further differentiate, marginalize and subsume the Other. The society of the Other is seen as uncivilized, barbaric and incomplete. In both the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*, there are a large number of passages about the absurdity of the Other. To give a few instances, *Xiyangji* describes the lack of social order in Java where "there is no distinction of old and young, rich and poor, noble or humble" (443), and a character designates the country as "the most barbaric and cruel country of all, for in Java not a single day goes by without murders" (444); there is also Malacca which as a country does not even have a name but only later given the name Malacca by the fleet (648). In the *Travels*, we see "people of evil colour, green and yellow" (157); on the Isle of Lamary, the people go naked and practice free communal sex (137); or on the Isle of Milke men drink other men's blood (165). Both texts offer a long list of examples of barbarianism. But it is through the story about the Country of Women, or through the difference of gender, that the social absurdity of the Other is pushed further, and its Otherness is doubled. In both texts, we see the domestication of the country of women, that is, a country with women as the only residents.

Mandeville comes to the country of Amazons in Chapter Seventeen. An island surrounded by water, Amazon becomes the Land of Women after its king and most of his lords die in a war and the rest of the men in the country are slain by the women. From then on, the country is inhabited by women only. No men are allowed to live there more than seven days. For a man's company, or more plainly, for "bodily pleasure," women in Amazons cross the water to see their lovers in nearby countries. If a boy is born as the result of the love affairs, he will either be killed or sent back to his father, for no men, even male children, are allowed to live in the country. If the child is a girl, her right or left breast will be cut off so that she will be able to practice fine soldiery. In fact, the name *Amazon* means "breastless" showing that the feature of self-definition of the nation signifies a lack.<sup>42</sup> Worshipping warriors who are noble and wise, the women in Amazons will elect the "best fighter" their queen. All women are themselves "noble and wise warriors," and kings of neighbouring realms hire them for combat (116-17).

The story of the Country of Women in *Xiyangji* is much longer and more elaborate (591-641).<sup>43</sup> When the fleet approaches Nu'er guo, the Country of Women, they find a complete matriarchy with a hierarchical system of society from the queen, civil servants, and military personnel to ordinary people. At first, Zheng He, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ming fleet, decides to go himself to the country for a

negotiation with the Queen. Once there, Zheng meets with the Queen and tries to persuade her into military submission. The Queen agrees. But she secretly plans to marry Zheng and keep him and his whole fleet in her country. She successfully gets Zheng drunk and finally gets him to bed, only to discover Zheng is a eunuch. Furiously, she puts him in jail and wages war against the Ming fleet. During the war, several generals fall prisoner to generals of the Country of Women. Again, they become the sexual targets of their captors. Of course, the generals do not give in. They manage to escape. But one general, later on, indeed marries a woman from that country because she intends to help the fleet in their war against the Country of Women. At last, the queen surrenders and Zheng He regains his freedom. After collecting tributes and a letter of surrender, the fleet moves on with its journey of conquest (591-640).

In the two works, the image of woman attains a multiple Otherness. The woman is opposite to the hero as a foreigner and as a woman. But she is not only different from the hero as a foreign woman, she is also different from the submissive woman the hero knows at home--the woman already domesticated.

The women of Amazons are presented as wild and "undomesticated," possessed by some inexplicable madness. Driven by a constant desire for qualities traditionally not available to women, they are forever causing destruction. They kill men. They kill boys. They deform themselves. They

go to war. But the aggressive madness in the women of Amazon is more complicated and, as it is presented by the discourse, the aggression develops in a self-engulfing pattern.

The first sign of the women's aggression can be seen in the way in which the country as such comes into being. It is founded because "the women will not allow men to rule the kingdom" (116). In other words, the women would like to be their own masters. Motivated by this desire for feminine independence, they slaughter the men in the country. Then they establish a matriarchy. That the birth of the country should be the death of the man reveals the women's aggression and also their desire to become what they have not been before--the ruler and master of themselves. From here, we see the aggression backfires against the Amazons for the first time. To want to possess political power, a post traditionally designated for men, the women have rejected their traditional roles which may be viewed by some, as Jacques Lacan says, a rejection of "the essential part of her femininity.""

Once in control, the women in the country find that they are seized by the aggression. Now they have the country, they have to defend it from its enemy, but most of all from men. Accordingly, they set up rules preventing men from staying long in the country. They even kill boys as a means of protection. Here, we can see that their hierarchical desire for the Phallus, or "the signifier of the desire of the



Other"<sup>45</sup> enhances their unnatural madness. To be the rulers, to be their own protectors, the women have to reverse the traditional image of mother to that of killer, or even demon and monster. They have to kill children or get rid of them, instead of rearing them. If the necessity to kill the men who survive the battle reflects a political necessity to establish the matriarchy, the act of killing one's own children can only be seen as brutal. The women lose their womanhood and motherhood in exchange for political power. From the traditional point of view, they are beginning to turn into demons.

Once they have independence, the women realize their very independence brings about a need, the need for men. The lack of man comes on two different levels: lack of "bodily pleasure"; and the women's need to do more to defend herself. The solution to the former, occasionally fulfilled by the women's crossing the border to "see their lovers" (117), forces the women to be "bad" women, sacrificing traditional virtue for "bodily pleasure" (117). It is the latter need that, however, drives the women to even more aggression than ever. They have to destroy not only others, but themselves in order to protect their matriarchy--they have to deform themselves. As the narrator reports, "if they have a girl child, they cut off one of her breasts and cauterize it; in the case of woman of great estate, the left one, so that she can carry her shield better, and, in one of low degree, they

cut off the right, so that it will not hinder them shooting" (117).

The stories of the constant needs and their fulfilment show the torn identity of Amazonian women. Their effort to escape their culturally defined role does not set them free but simply produces an insane cultural logic, and keeps them looking for measures more and more drastic to bring about and maintain the matriarchal status that they assume will give them hegemony. In terms of romance ethos, the subversive quality and aggression of Amazonian women represent the chaos of a society which deviates from tradition. By killing men and children, they produce sterility. Their own matriarchal society, their subversive deeds against the patriarchal world, and even their seeming totalizing androgynous status of being women and good (aggressive) soldiers, only bog them down deeper and deeper in a paradox: The Amazon's aggression twists them into a traditionally male role, subverting the binary opposition of male and female.

Unable to transcend this paradox of forever hunting what will reverse the women's identity, the women fail to achieve their desired independence from patriarchal values. The Amazonian soldier becomes a soldier of fortune for hire fighting alongside neighbouring armies in a patriarchal war, for they are "noble and wise warriors; and therefore kings of neighbouring realms hire them to help them in their wars" (117).

Unlike the Amazon country which is founded by the "choice" of women, in *Xiyangji*, the Country of Women is created by a heavenly power, To explain why all her citizens are women, the Queen of Nu'er guo tells Zheng He: "Today, it is hard to trace how it started. But men of the Western Ocean and women in my country cannot ever touch each other. If they do, both will have malignant ulcers and die within three days. Therefore, we have only women here" (596; My translation). Without any violence or atrocities, the Nu'er guo is established. With a female monarchy in control, it seems a heavenly protected matriarchal society. However, this matriarchy is based on absence, not fulfilment. The unknown heavenly power dictates the mode of the Nu'er guo by depriving it of men. The existence of the country is therefore not a victory of women, but a punishment for them. In this country, the women in power, while ruling the country, are actually serving terms of endless imprisonment.

For such a country, the lack of marriage does not indicate sterility because women can always go to a "Body-shadow Bridge" to conceive children and "Mother-son River" to deliver the children. The lack of men in the country, or the absence of marriage, however, is a sign of incompleteness of the women's identity. They seem to need the form of marriage as self-definition for themselves. For a while it seems that the hope of liberation is raised among the women with the arrival of the Ming fleet. Because the fleet comes from the

Ming Empire, and because they are different from men of the Western Ocean, they and the women in the Nu'er guo, in the words of the Queen, "are perfect couples" (597).

Eager to marry, the women in the Nu'er guo display a desire to fulfil themselves and their desire takes a different shape from that in the story of the Amazonian women. Not pursuing a deliberately matriarchal character, like the Amazonian women, the women in Nu'er guo intend to complete their role as woman by domesticating the Ming fleet. This attempt to domesticate the Ming fleet starts with the Queen who, upon seeing Zheng He, plans to seduce him first and then marry him. Once in bed, the Queen reveals her plan to Zheng He: "You have many soldiers. You as the commander marry me, the Queen of the country; your officers will marry my officers and your soldiers will become husbands of the ordinary people in my country" (597). With such a statement, the Queen indicates clearly her intention of domestication. The Ming fleet will not conquer her and her country. In other words, the fleet will not find the Seal they search for; they will not even go home. They will be literally domesticated by the Country of Women.

The Queen's failure reflects the presupposition in *Xiyangji* that Ming authority covers all the other nations in the world. But this confirmation of Ming supremacy is revealed by the fact that the Queen is trying to seduce a eunuch. In the story, Zheng He's identity has more than one

signification. He is said to be "a supernatural toad" (207). Therefore, he is most at home when he is on the sea. In the episode of the Nu'er guo, Zheng's identity as a eunuch functions as in a symbol of Ming power in the sense that he, also the Ming Empire of course, is "invincible." Nu'er guo is in fact the first country Zheng He goes to in person before the battle begins.<sup>46</sup> In other episodes, Zheng He only receives the letter of surrender after the enemy country gives in and talks to the king of that country.

The Queen is unable to complete her plan of seduction. In order to domesticate the Ming fleet, she wages war. Her desperation represents, as in Mandeville, the irrationality of a matriarchal culture according to traditional roles prescribed for women. Zheng thinks, in patronizing sexist terms, of the benefit of the Queen and her country. As he says to the Queen:

In consideration of the fact that all your citizens are female and they, I am afraid, are not good at fighting, we have not deployed our generals and soldiers. And that is why I myself have come to ask you for a letter of surrender and your visa. That will be all. Nothing else. (595; My translation)

In the above passage there is a clear intention to belittle the Nu'er guo. By being considerate, Zheng represents that the Ming fleet do not think that the women in the Nu'er guo

should think of physical resistance at all. Men in the Western Ocean have been conquered one after another. A country of women poses no problem to the physical superiority of men.

Though the Queen is not wise enough to surrender in the first place, she eventually has to accept her defeat. When the Country of Women finally surrenders, what Zheng He says sums up well the story and his assumption of the Ming authority. Zheng says to the defeated Queen, now domesticated: "China rules from the centre [of the universe]. Foreign barbarians as margins obey and serve the centre. This has been true ever since the beginning and up till now. You, a bunch of women, how dare you so to try otherwise?" (640) Interpreted, what Zheng says is that you are the Other as woman and barbarian, effectively silencing their voice of sexual and political difference.

### The "Noble Savage"?

Up till now, my discussion has argued that these two texts, as totalizing discourses, relentlessly dominate and domesticate the Other. In his quest, the hero displays no real tolerance of the difference between the Self and the Other. All difference must be reduced and the Other must come

to compliance with the Self. If the texts strike a positive note of the Other, we should be cautious not to take it at face value. The intention to incorporate the Other and the effort to totalize the universe, we must remember all the time, remain relentless in the two texts. In the following discussion on the issue of ethics and the Other, I will contest that the myth of cultural tolerance that some scholars have found in the *Travels* and in *Xiyangji*<sup>47</sup> disguises another level of intolerance.

One of the popularly used examples to show Mandeville's tolerance is the criticism of Christians made by the Sultan in Chapter Fifteen.<sup>48</sup> The criticism is, according to C.W.R.D. Moseley who has translated the *Travels*, "a comprehensive and systematic attack on the gap between profession and practice of Christians."<sup>49</sup> The criticism is as severe as it is long. Here is a segment:

Christian men commonly deceive each other, and swear the most important oaths falsely. And they are, moreover, so swollen with pride and vainglory that they never know how to dress themselves.... Christians are so proud, so envious, such great gluttons, so lecherous, and moreover so full of covetousness, that for a little silver they will sell their daughters, their sisters, even their own wives.... And everyone takes another's wife, and no one keeps his faith to another and you so

wickedly and evilly despite and break the Law that Christ gave you. Certainly it is because of your sinfulness that you have lost all this [Holy] [L]and which we hold and keep. Because of your evil living and your sin and not because of our strength God has given it into our hands. And we well know that when you serve your God properly and well, and serve Him with good works, no man shall be able to stand against you. We know too by our prophecies that the Christians shall recover this land again in the time to come, when you serve your God well and devoutly. But as long as you live as you do in wickedness and sin, we have no fear of you; for your God will not help you. (107-08)

In the criticism, "all the sins are noted and the behaviour of the estate castigated."<sup>50</sup> Everything undesirable Christians do, from their religious activities and their personalities, to their daily life, is attacked. Because of their inability to maintain a decent life, the criticism asserts, that Christians have lost the Holy Land and lived in chaos. According to the Sultan, radical actions have to be taken to change the situation. Otherwise things will get harder for the Christians.

The severity of the Sultan's criticism seems also to have come from its apparent objectivity. Calling it "an objective appraisal from outside the Christian sensibility," Moseley



asserts, "[t]he force of this [criticism] is increased by having it in direct speech, and by making the speaker a Muslim who condemns Christians on Christian terms."<sup>51</sup> The criticism, we should admit, is in line with the intention of the hero, for one of his purposes to undertake "the holy voyage" is to rectify the wrong doings of Christians (44). By narrating the Sultan's comprehensive and harsh criticism of Christians, the hero warns his fellow Christian men.

To use this isolated episode, however, one of the very few in the Travels where the Other is allowed to speak, as unquestionable evidence that the hero becomes more and more tolerant to the Other in his journey,<sup>52</sup> or to conclude that, due to this kind of attack, "Eurocentric confidence in moral and religious superiority is challenged"<sup>53</sup> would be misreading and misinterpreting the passage. To illustrate my point, I will take Moseley's remarks quoted above as my point of departure.

Despite the fact that the chaos the journey of the Travels intends to end does include the corruption among Christians, there is a self-implicating irony in the Sultan's criticism. The same utterance of the Sultan can signify precisely the opposite of Mandeville's point. When he attacks Christians for their follies, the Sultan is at the same time demonstrating his respect for Christian superiority by expressing his belief that the Christians will recover the Holy Land. We need only to reflect on the purpose of the

journey of the *Travels* which the narrative has emphasized again and again from the beginning: to recover the Holy land. We need only remember that recovery of the Holy Land means deliverance, and thus Christian dominance over the world. Only in consideration of all these factors, can we see clearly how contradictory the criticism of the Sultan is.

But what is more damaging to the Sultan and his remarks is yet to come. Moseley regards the Sultan's criticism as "an objective appraisal." In Moseley's logic, the objectivity depends on the Sultan as a Muslim, an outsider. But right away he adds, "[t]he force of this [criticism] is increased by having it in direct speech, and by *making the speaker a Muslim who condemns Christians on Christian terms*" (my emphasis). Read together, Moseley's remarks reveal an interesting self-contradiction. Exactly due to the last part of the sentence I have highlighted, the attack the Sultan launches seems to be inverted in the making.

The meaning is inverted and subverted in the sense that to make the Sultan to speak--even to criticize--"on Christian terms" is to make him demonstrate his familiarity with, and even acceptance of (we remember his belief that Christians will recover the Holy Land) the values and doctrines of Christianity. Talking about the Christian problem in the same way as the hero talks about it, the Sultan is no longer an outsider, no longer a Muslim. The objectivity is gone with his lost status of outsider. His criticism of the Christians

is in fact a displacement of the Sultan's self-identity. No longer a sovereign of a Muslim nation, he is domesticated by Christianity, by Christian discourse.

In the case of the Sultan, as in the encounter between the Self and the Other we have discussed, the winner is again the hero, and the discourse that projects totalization. By the sheer power of discourse, the Sultan is domesticated and loses his sovereignty. Regarding the domestication of the Sultan, it is worth noting that, after retelling the Sultan's criticism of Christians, the hero mentions in passing "the Sultan spoke French wonderfully well" (108). We know that the Sultan suppresses his sovereignty and identity by knowing Christian doctrines and applying them in conversation. If all he has said about Christianity is said in French, a language not his own but that of a Christian culture, the Sultan's domestication is more thorough and complete.

To reiterate my point that we should not discern too readily nonexistent cultural tolerance out of the two texts, I will discuss a passage from Chapter Seventy-two of *Xiyangji*. Before the fleet arrives in the Country of Bengal (in India), a scout describes, to Zheng He and his generals, the marital relation between husband and wife in this country. He says:

People in this country are good. Husband and wife do not dine at the same table. If the husband dies, the wife will not marry again; the man will not remarry should his wife demise. The widowed

people, and people without relatives will be supported in turn by families in their village so that they do not have to beg for food elsewhere.

(923; My translation)

To comment on this passage, one needs to reverse the Jamesonian question in romance of "how my enemy can be thought of being evil" to "how my enemy can be thought of as being virtuous" because what is talked about in the passage is the most basic Confucianist values of family and social ethics as they are respected and practised conscientiously in the Country of Bengal. The purpose of the fleet's journey to the Western Ocean, as stated in the slogan on their ensign, is "to transform the barbarian and retrieve the treasure" (237). To this end, the fleet have been fighting throughout the journey. In the eyes of Zheng He, people in the Western Ocean are simply barbarians. Now they have found a country where similar virtues and ethics prevail. It is no wonder, then, that scout comments on the "good" people before he even starts his story. Life in the Country of Bengal is virtuous because it is the same as the life in China. The hero, by telling this story, finds that the country is already conquered before reaching it.

I would like however to pursue further the telling of the Bengal story from an intertextual perspective. The passage of Bengal is copied almost word for word from *Xingcha shenglan* 星槎勝覽, *The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*, a record of

the historical figure Zheng He's venture by Fei Xin, who, in history, accompanied Zheng He's expeditions.<sup>54</sup> In Fei's book, the related passage reads:

[in this country of Bengal,] husband and wife do not dine at the same table. If the husband dies, the wife will not marry again; the man will not remarry should his wife demises. The widowed people, and people without relatives will be supported in turn by families in their village, so that they do not have to beg for food elsewhere.<sup>55</sup>

Compared, we see what is missing in Fei's text but appears in *Xiyangji* is the comment "people here are good." The addition in *Xiyangji* is minute,<sup>56</sup> but the change in tone is fundamental. The comment shifts the paragraph from a relatively objective narration to a highly evaluative, romance narration or well-combined paragraph of both. The dialectical nature of romance polarizes ethical valuation more sharply than the Fei's travel text not only through explicit statement of affirmation, but also because the military context of the romance signifies an imperialistic motive demonstrated by repeated acts of conquest. The Others are savages. They can be noble too, but only when they are made the same as the Self in the discourse.

## Conclusion

In the two texts, the countries visited are countries discovered, analyzed, narrativized and thus countries known. The discourse culminates in knowledge which produces power, a certain authority, domination over the other nations. Through the process of textualization of the journey and countries, and through the performative speech act of the narrative, the countries visited become the "legitimate possession" of the hero.<sup>57</sup>

In the foregoing discussion, I have tried to demonstrate how the two romances are a kind of "verbal machinery" that rearranges geography, decodes the language of the Other, represents its social norms, evaluates its morals and at last manufactures a new but tamed Other. Both Eastern and Western men for ages rehearse encountering of the Other. The Other created by narrative discourse, and by the hero in the journey is the distillation of the specific anxieties the East or the West has for the Other.

In the two works, each episode, each country poses a new challenge and requires a new effort from the hero to assimilate this new country. At the completion of the adventure in one country other challenges will rise. Therefore, the victory in each country seems to be displaced, a desire that cannot be fulfilled. The hero seems to travel endlessly. The works arbitrarily end by the interruption of

external forces. *Xiyangji* ends through the interruption of Yama who asks the fleet to go back. In the *Travels*, Mandeville admits "there are many countries" he has not been seen.

The formal structure of the two works shapes an empirical "reality" in which the Other is subsumed. After all the effort to assimilate the Other and after the episodic structure of the work, at last the Self and the Other seem to become one because the Other is completely under control. Towards the end, the authors enhance the domestication of the Other through discourse. Both works make use of speech acts. In the *Travels*, the hero prays to God. In *Xiyangji*, the fleet present the Emperor with a detailed list of the countries conquered and tributes collected.

From the four aspects we have discussed, we have seen how the hero in both texts acts out the imperialist ideologies of his own culture. A crusader, in uniform or not, the hero is no less a colonialist, representing his own self-righteous culture, a culture that seeks to subsume other cultures.

The two works are romances, that is, they are literary reconstructions, discourse that accomplishes the two journeys. Whatever has been achieved by the hero is achieved by virtue of language. Textualized and discursivized, other cultures make their presence and image felt through language. The force of the discourse, however, that subdues the Other can, on the other hand, be haunted and violated by its own

violence. As the medium of expression, and the vehicle to think, cognate, and communicate, language can at the same time distort human vision and presentation, or form human *episteme*. What the discourses of the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* do is use the specific discourse of romance to form a totalizing textuality that shapes and destroys cultural structure, the way of life in different communities, and makes them as alien and wild as the narrator or hero would prefer. Outside the discourse, no real world is created. As Sapir observed in a classic statement that there is no such thing as an objective, unchanging "real world":

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct



worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached....<sup>58</sup>

The two romances and what they present, especially what is about the Other, are linguistic creations, or inventions of language or discourse. It is not relevant how much true information the two texts include, or how tolerant the discourse may from time to time appear, the very act of using the language of the Self in the hope of revealing the nature of the Other is itself an illusion, however necessary.

Discussing matters related to the presentation of other cultures, the word "invention" or its synonyms are often used. T.S. Eliot's cute sentence that Ezra Pound "is the inventor of Chinese poetry" is so well-known;<sup>59</sup> Pearl Buck, a "most China-identified" American in the Thirties and Forties,<sup>60</sup> is said to have created Chinese and their life in her book *The Good Earth* in a way that they can be appreciated by her American readers;<sup>61</sup> a more recent and good example is Derrida's questionable conception of the Chinese language.<sup>62</sup> The list is a long one.

Indeed, "the violence of language is a *domesticating* violence."<sup>63</sup> The language, the discourse in the two texts subsumes, transforms, and silences the Other. But the violence of the discourse goes further. It tends to domesticate the reader as well. Though, with the textual power discourse generates, the purpose of subsuming the reader is not difficult, it is not always achieved. As in the real

world imperialism does not always prevail in colonial countries, such culturally imperialistic texts as the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* can stimulate strong resistance in the reader, especially the reader whose countries are linguistically ravaged by the textual discourse. The resistance of the reader is the topic of the next chapter.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A chaotic situation is typical in romance. See Frye, *Anatomy*, 187, 189-190.

<sup>2</sup>Despite its sexist connotation, I retain the word "Man" just to be consistent with its original use in Christianity.

<sup>3</sup>Throughout his work, Mandeville iterates the need to restore the Holy Land as the centre of the world. See the *Travels*, 43, 105, 189, etc.

<sup>4</sup>See Note 23 in Chapter One.

<sup>5</sup>Frye, *Anatomy*, 190.

<sup>6</sup>In *Xiyangji*, the chaotic situation, a legacy of foreign rule, is described by the Buddha Tathagata as "a poisonous atmosphere." Foreign rule here refers to the Mongol (Yuan) Dynasty before the Ming. See *Xiyangji*, 7. In China, it is worth pointing out, the phrase "hundun", 混沌 is usually used to describes disorder or chaos. Cf. Yves Bonnefoy, comp. *Mythology*, trans. Wendy Doiger, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 1009-10.

<sup>7</sup>The consecutive connection of segments reduces to minimum, if not denying completely, consequent or causal-effect relation between the segments. In the journeys, what we see is country-to-country sequence arranged according to the geographical locations of the countries, which imply a co-

existence and grant all the countries equal importance.

<sup>8</sup>Northrop Frye, *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1983) 14.

<sup>9</sup>See *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>For summary of Gerald Genette's concept of "focalization," see Salomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 71.

<sup>11</sup>For a quick summary of speech-act theory in literary criticism, see M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1993) 277-80.

<sup>12</sup>Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

<sup>13</sup>See "Catalogue Verse." Alex Preminger, et al. eds. *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) 106. The list in the *Travels* can also be regarded as what Frye calls "the encyclopedic form." The word "encyclopedic," with its Greek root *enkyklios* meaning circular and general, denotes a circle or space and thus sets limits or boundaries. See Frye, *Anatomy*, 57-8.

<sup>14</sup>The concept of hierarchical relation, sometimes called relation of centre and periphery, is loaded with racial and cultural ideologies or prejudice. It may reveal Eurocentric bias about the Orient or vice versa, depending on where it originates. For discussion of hierarchical relation, see, as examples, Michael Rowlands et al, eds. *Centre and Periphery in*

*the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987); and John Fairbank, ed. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968).

<sup>15</sup>For a more detailed discussion of the typological characteristics of the Bible, see Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: the Bible & Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) 78-138.

<sup>16</sup>The actual journey covers sixty-four countries. In Chapter Ninety-nine, the report prepared for the emperor lists thirty-nine countries and their tributes. For a more comprehensive list of countries visited, see Ptak, "*Hsi-Yang Chi--An Interpretation*," 130.

<sup>17</sup>In imperial China, the Emperor is regarded as the Son of Heaven. The imperial residence is "the centre of the inhabited world, the source of all culture and civilization." See Wolfgang Franke, *China and the West*, trans. R.A. Wilson (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1967) 22.

<sup>18</sup>See Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1971) 434-6.

<sup>19</sup>Here, with all their irreverent connotation in the description of the world beyond, the word "hua" in "huawai" means cultivation and transformation, or the transforming power of a civilization, a life beyond the transformation is of course a life of the barbarian. "Tianwai" indicates the

Sinocentric view of Chinese. Tianwai is the opposite of "Tianxia," "all-under-heaven," which, as Fairbank points out, "presided over by T'ien-tzu, the 'son of Heaven,' sometimes was used to embrace the whole world including everything outside of China (Chung-kuo, the Central States, or the Middle Kingdom). See John K. Fairbank "A Preliminary Framework," *The Chinese World Order*, 2.

<sup>20</sup>Wang Gungwu, "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia: Background Essay," *The Chinese World Order*, 54.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted from *ibid.*, 26. This phrase "wang zhe wu wai" first appears in *Chunqiu gongyang zhuan* 春秋公羊传. See *Sibu beiyao* ed., 1:1b-2, 7-8; 5:3b; 12:3; 18:1b, 5b.

<sup>22</sup>Vadime Elisséeff, "The Middle Empire, a Distant Empire, an Empire without Neighbours." *Diogenes* 42 (Summer 1963): 60-4.

<sup>23</sup>John King Fairbank, "A Preliminary Framework," *The Chinese World Order*, 2.

<sup>24</sup>"Rectifying Names," in *Hsun Tzu: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia UP, 1963) 139-56. I am grateful to Professor Anthony C. Yu of University of Chicago for having drawn my attention to this important essay.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>26</sup>See Said, *Orientalism*, 54.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>Northrop Frye, *Words with Power: Being A Second Study of the Bible and Literature* (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 163.

<sup>29</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs: Perntice-Hall, Inc., 1975) 215.

<sup>30</sup>The Chaldean alphabet, however, does not appear at the end of a chapter but in the middle. I will return to this exception soon.

<sup>31</sup>The only exception is the alphabets of Persia of which only the sound are recorded but not the writing. As the narrative goes: "[i]f you would like to know what kind of letters they use [in the Empire of Persia], here you can hear them" (115).

<sup>32</sup>Stanley Fish uses this phrase to describe how the line boundary in a poem assists the reader in his reading. Cf. Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980) 165.

<sup>33</sup>The alphabets contain many mistakes. The Hebrew one, according to scholars, is "incomprehensible." See Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, 195.

<sup>34</sup>Donald Howard notices the use of alphabets to highlight the progress of the journey from the familiar to the exotic. See his "The World of Mandeville's Travels," 8.

<sup>35</sup>See William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc.) 32.

<sup>36</sup>Discussing how different alphabets illustrate the development of the journey in his "The World of Mandeville's Travels," Donald Howard, for reason unknown, does not mention at all the Chaldean alphabet, the most important of them all.

<sup>37</sup>After examining the alphabets that show their resemblance to the alphabets of other languages, Malcolm Letts points out the alphabet of Chaldean is "a 'ghost,' manufactured from the Saracen names and Cathayan forms." See Malcolm Letts, *Sir John Mandeville: The Man and his Book* (London: The Batchworth Press, 1949) 158.

<sup>38</sup>Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims*, 75.

<sup>39</sup>Qian Zhongshu discusses various ways of comparing foreign speech to birds's talk. See Qian, *Qizhuiji* (Shanghai: Guji, 1986) 121-22.

<sup>40</sup>In Chapter Forty-six, Zheng speaks a foreign language. In Chapter Ninety-three, Ma Huan, an interpreter of the fleet, appears. But in the entire work, we do not see activity of translation or interpretation.

<sup>41</sup>Franke, *China and the West*, 24.

<sup>42</sup>See Barbara G. Walker, ed. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myth and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 24-5.

<sup>43</sup>The story of the Country of Woman contains borrowed parts from *Xiyouji*, known in English translation as *The Journey to the West*. For identification of borrowing in *Xiyangji*, see Zhou Huabin, "Lun Xiyangji." *Mingqing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小说研究 5 (1987): 148.

<sup>44</sup>Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," in his *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton & Company, 1977) 290.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*



<sup>46</sup>Due to Zheng He's inactive role in the story, critics tend to think that the real commander of the fleet is Jin Bifeng. See Hou Jin "Sanbao taijian," 307; and Ptak, "Hsi-Yang Chi--An Interpretation," 127.

<sup>47</sup>Christopher Zacher criticizes such assumption. See his *Curiosity and Pilgrimage*, 148, 187.

<sup>48</sup>See Donald Howard "The World of Mandeville's Travels," 7; and C.W.R.D. Moseley, introduction, the *Travels*, 24-5.

<sup>49</sup>C.W.R.D. Moseley, introduction, the *Travels*, 24.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>Donald Howard, "The World of Mandeville's Travels," 16-17.

<sup>53</sup>Moseley, introduction, 25.

<sup>54</sup>For information in English of Fei Xin's (also transcribed as Fei Hsin) participation in the expedition and his work about it, see J.V.G. Mills, introduction, "Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan: The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores," by Ma Huan, trans. J.V.G. Mills (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970) 59-64. *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* is another work *Xiyangji* borrows heavily. For identification of *Xiyangji*'s borrowings from Ma Huan's work, see Zhao Jingshen, "Sanbao taijian xiyangji," Appendix III in *Xiyangji*, 1298-326.

<sup>55</sup>Quoted from Zhao Jingshen, "Sanbao taijian," 1316; my translation.

<sup>56</sup>Walter Gcode points out the borrowings from other sources usually remain within the meaning of the original except a few. But I would like to emphasize that the addition of the comment in this episode of Bengal is very important here. For Goode's discussion, see his "On the Sanbao taijian." 36-51.

<sup>57</sup>See Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982) 31.

<sup>58</sup>Edward Sapir, "The Status of Linguistics as a Science," *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. David G. Mandelbaum, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1951) 162.

<sup>59</sup>T.S. Eliot, introduction, *Selected Poems*, by Ezra Pound, (1928; London: Faber and Faber, 1967) 14.

<sup>60</sup>Harold R. Isaac, *Scratch on Our Mind: American Views of China and India* (1958; New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1980) 154.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>62</sup>Zhang Longxi, *Tao and Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (Durham: Duke UP, 1992) 22-33.

<sup>63</sup>Robert Scholes, *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 124.

THE READER'S JOURNEY: RE-COGNIZING  
THE OTHER

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master--that's all."

*Alice in Wonderland*

This chapter discusses the reading of romance. That is, it examines the dramatic power struggle between the text and the reader. Romance represents a form of totalizing narrative, of which the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* are two perfect examples. In the previous chapters, I have argued that the two romance narratives domesticate the Other in the text and attempt to make the Other drop all its unfamiliarity and become transparent, that is, become the same as the Self. To complete, or finalize, their victory over the Other, the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* need to claim one more victory. They need to win the support of the reader. Since the reader poses himself as an Other to the text, for the two romances, the domestication of the reader, the Other of the text, is as important as the domestication of the Other in the text.

However, it is in the reader that the totalization of the two texts meets true resistance and challenge for the first time. I say the first time because the resistance that the Other launches in the text does not amount to any significant counter-attack against the domination of the hero. The reader, unlike the Other in the text who is for the most part silenced, is an Other who is beyond the grasp of the text and who plays for textual mastery the "game of power."<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the reader "naturalizes" the text in the sense that Jonathan Culler uses the term.<sup>2</sup> The reader may, for example, identify with the romance hero's exploits and even find the text an adequate representation of his or her own desire to escape the anxiety of reality. But at the same time, the very same reader may also question the text's power and subvert the seeming totalization--the singularity of textual meaning. Simply speaking, the reader may be engaged in an argument with the text, an argument that transforms the text into a stage where the reader plays out the conflict within himself. Referring to the illusion of a "true reading," Paul de Man thus describes the reader's argument:

True reading, as opposed to paraphrase, is an argument, that is, it has the sequential coherence we associate with a demonstration or with a particularly compelling narrative. But what is here being argued (or compellingly told) is precisely the loss of an illusory coherence.<sup>3</sup>

Romance represents the play of desire, the desire to transform and totalize the Other and to impose the values of the Self on the Other. Reading as a kind of argument is a strategy that consciously goes against the text's claim of power. Instead of accepting the hero's domination in the text, the resisting reader devotes his energies to the subversion of any attempt at privileging the heroic voice, and the text's drive toward unity and wholeness. A resisting reader casts doubt on the possibility that the Other in the text can be really transformed and assimilated. The result of such a reading will be a displacement of the hero's significance, a displacement in which the Other in the text, otherwise silenced and subsumed, retains his difference and its voice can be heard.

To give voice to the Other, the resisting reader isolates those signs within the text that resist the text's explicit claims and goals. Rather than concentrating on the romance text's "intended" meaning, and the theme signified by the narrative, a resisting reader focuses on the signifiers that make the meaning possible. By focusing on the textual production of meaning rather than "the meaning" itself the reader problematizes the author and the hero's drive toward unity and meaning. Indeed, any analysis of character, plot or narrative structure and even seemingly trivial aspects like direct address, chapter divisions or titles, reveal the text's production as a material text as opposed to some

"transcendent" text with a unitary meaning. In other words, what is happening to the Other in the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* is happening allegorically to the reader. The reader in his reading is re-thinking, and recognizing the otherness of the Other. That is, the reader not only allows the Other to preserve its otherness, but also underlines the difference of the Other to displace the text's claim to power over the Other. The reading or the reader could "reverse" the hierarchical relation between the Self and the Other.<sup>4</sup> One consequence of this reversal is that the two romances lose their "illusory coherence," as well as the illusory totalization.

My reading of the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* exposes several obstacles that interrupt or defer the totalization in the texts. I will investigate in detail the structure of the quest, the narrative mode and the mixture of history and fiction.

The first obstacle of the totalization to be discussed is the arbitrary country-to-country structure in the two texts. Such arbitrary, or episodic, sequences are typical of romance structure. That this arbitrariness occurs at the level of story and text<sup>5</sup> is elucidated more than once by Frye whose discussion I have quoted or paraphrased earlier. Here, for the convenience of examination, I quote once more Frye's observation:

The most primitive type of romance is an endless

form, like contemporary comic strips, and while literal endlessness is not possible for frail human mortality, romances are often extended to enormous length if the sequential formula seems to be working satisfactorily.<sup>6</sup>

This "endlessness" materializes in the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* in the country-to-country quest at the level of the story's content, the exotic countries visited one after another, and its form, the many chapters which interrupt the reader's encounter with the text. In general, the unpredictable episodic structure of this exotic journey narrative works at the levels of content and form, story and text by creating suspense. For instance, Frye states, using a Chinese classic to illustrate his point, "In the vast eighteenth-century Chinese romance formerly called in English *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, and now known as *The Story of the Stone*, each chapter ends with the formula: 'if you want to know how this turned out, read the next chapter.'"<sup>7</sup> Romance generates interest by withholding information, creating a lack "to keep one listening or turning the pages of coming back for a further instalment."<sup>8</sup>

The Reader's search for answers to the questions raised in the text is represented as we will see, allegorically by the hero's quest. The quest in both narratives occupies tremendous textual space. It stretches in each work virtually from the beginning to the end. With the *Travels*, except for

its Prologue and about the last third of Chapter Thirty-four, the very last one in the book, the text is mainly devoted to recounting the hero's thirty-four years spent in wandering "through many kingdoms, lands, provinces and isles" (44). In *Xiyangji*, the situation is similar. Its story of the Ming fleet's quest-journey runs seventy-eight (out of one hundred) chapters long--from Chapter Twenty to Chapter Ninety-eight. Consisting of a great number of stories about the countries the hero goes through, the quest-journey, as Frye points out, seems to go on endlessly.

The seemingly endless structure of journey produces a mimetic effect in the texts. That is, the repetitive, endless structure follows a pattern of long quest that maps out the progress of the hero. During the journey, every country visited or conquered represents a victory of the hero that contributes directly to the final recognition and victory, or, in a word, totalization.<sup>9</sup> Only after journeying through all the countries in the text, the hero sees the fulfilment of his purpose, his *anagnorisis* or recognition. When the recognition is reached at last, the world is unified and the Other is domesticated. Having lost all his difference, the Other is now a mere signifier of God, the Ming Emperor, the Holy Land or the Imperial Seal. At least, this is what the recognition scene tells the hero in the end.

But the totalization turns out to be an illusion that will evaporate when we look more closely at the narrative



structure. On the one hand, if in every country the hero collects tributes or letters of surrender or gains knowledge of the people and their customs and religion, the experience in each country indeed represents a sign of conquest, victory and a partial contribution to the eventual totalization. On the other hand, each country is also an affirmation of the Other and, therefore, a failure that postpones the fulfilment of totalization. By describing a particular country, by narrating how it is different, uncivilized, barbaric, etc. and how it is conquered and known, the narrative affirms the difference of the Other instead of obliterating it. A good example of this deferred victory in the *Travels* would be the many alphabets included in the story. Given in large print, the very foreignness of the alphabets stand out in the text and call the reader's attention to the signifiers that to the reader are totally opaque. With the alphabets, the Other, instead of becoming transparent, retains all its alienation and remains opposed to the hero and the hero's familiar world.

In *Xiyangji*, conflicts between the conquest and the survival of the Other can be seen from the letters of surrender and the tributes submitted by the defeated countries. In the previous chapter, I have discussed the extremely humble letter from the country of Zufar that is composed to represent the "guixin" 归心 "submission of heart," or "xinfu" 心服, "'heart-felt' submission,"<sup>10</sup> or, complete submission, of the Other to the Ming conquest. It is

precisely this letter and defeat, however, that differentiate the Country of Zufar from Ming. A dependent country now, Zufar nevertheless remains a country outside the hero's homeland, and though it may be occupied, it preserves its distance and difference.

While all the letters of surrender speak about a willingness common with all countries to become subjects of the Ming Empire, the tributes indicate literally the difference of the Other. The tributes of one country, presented to the Ming fleet when that country yields to Ming authority, are always exotic and, what is more, different from those of another country. For instance, among the tributes from Malacca, there are Ling-aloes incense, flower tin, red monkey, fire chickens, jack-fruit, etc. (650);<sup>11</sup> from Achin, a neighbouring country of Malacca, there are in the list gold wheat, silver rice, ivory, foreign sheep, etc. (661). The tributes, functioning in a way similar to the alphabets in the *Travels*, represent varieties rather than totality. They reveal the foreignness of the country which submits them, while distinguishing the foreign countries from each other. In other words, each country is as opaque to the Ming Empire as it is to another country. Though the countries are now subjects of the Ming Emperor in name, in nature they still retain a radical difference and cannot be the "same."

In the quest, at the level of text, rather than story, we often read sentences that separate an episode in one country

from another. The sentences are a transition between episodes. The reader often reads a sentence or a paragraph that announces, for instance, in *Xiyangji*, "the fleet set out again and kept on sailing for a few days until they came to another country. And this country was a big one" (583), or "after two more days on the sea, the fleet arrived in another country" (776). In the *Travels*, similar transits are frequent as well. The hero is often made to leave one country and arrive in another by such sentences as "[f]rom Bethany men go through the desert to the River Jordan..." (88) and "[s]ailing thence [the isle of Iava or Java]... men come to another isle which some call Tahlamass..." (132). On the one hand, the transit sentences represent the endlessness of the journey, marking the hero's departure from one country and his arrival in another. Once a country becomes a new lackey of the hero, it is time for the hero to move to the next. The textual logic is that the farther the hero moves, the more countries he will conquer, the more powerful he will become. But the transition sentences can be read in a different way. Each country can be regarded as the limit of the hero's culture because it requires a re-institutionalization of the hero's power. In other words, going through the countries, the hero is at the same time imposing his power anew and yet he is showing the limitation of his power. He always needs to go on to the "next." In *Xiyangji*, one question Zheng He asks frequently is "which is the next country ahead?" The place of

the Other represents both presence and absence of the hero's power. In this case, the victory of the hero is, if not deferred, at least diminished a great deal. The endless quest of the hero, as de Man says about narrative, "endlessly tells the story of its own denominational aberration."<sup>12</sup> And according to the logic of romance, the hero has to keep moving on without knowing where and when he will see the next victory, and until he is told by some external, heavenly message that he has reached the end of the journey. The reader, likewise, will read chapter after chapter, until the author-god intervenes and silences the narrator.

It is through reading that the quest, rather than obliterating the difference between the Self and the Other, affirms it by calling attention to the quest as a textual production. The story shows that the hero has to have a margin, which is the Other. The hero cannot stay in his home country. Paradoxically he has to leave the centre to keep it a "centre." In their very effort of totalizing, the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* demonstrate their inability to truly dominate and transform the Other. If there were no difference, the hero would not leave home and assert his power. To unite the whole world under the banner of Christianity, Christianity must co-exist with the Other. In *Xiyangji*, the doctrine of "showing no outer-separation" or no-otherness merely assures the separation of the Self from the Other and to confirm that what is outside is really a necessary unavoidable contradiction at

the heart of the Self's totalizing desire. In textual terms, the contradiction lies at the level of language itself which, in the words of de Man, "simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode."<sup>13</sup>

The quest in both works goes on seemingly forever, until at last, with the intervention of the author or what can be called *deus ex machina*,<sup>14</sup> the hero is close to the end of his journey. Though the hero still has more places to go before he rests, due to the authorial intervention, his movement is no longer a horizontal, country-to-country movement, but a vertical cosmological one: he goes to or near an earthly heaven and then goes down to hell or a hell-like place. By changing the direction of quest the author prepares the reader for the ending, an ending whose arbitrariness is minimized by a representation within the story of an intervention consistent with the fictional heterocosm. For instance, the two "countries," utterly different in nature from each other, are also different from all the previous ones the hero has been to. In Chapter Thirty-three of the *Travels*, the hero comes close to "the Earthly Paradise" (183-84); "the highest land on earth" (184), "in which Adam and Eve were put" after the Fall (183). The hero does not actually reach this place because it is a "Paradise" "no living man can go" by land or by sea (187). Following "Paradise," the hero, in the next chapter, sees a cannibal rite in a parody of Christian communion and in Rybothe. Here, as we have discussed in some

detail in Chapter One, a son will cut the corpse of his dead father into pieces to feed birds and to serve to his friends (186-87). The arbitrariness of the ending however reveals itself in the final page of the narrative. There, the hero prays to God. He appeals to an external power and his prayer as a speech-act indicates the limit of the text. This appeal to God for textual closure reveals the inability of the hero and the text to totalize the Other without God as Other to help. The hero undertakes his journey to recover the Holy Land, but he comes home an old man without recovery of the Holy Land. If the Holy Land is the Self, the hero comes home without the Self, but with knowledge of the Other.

In *Xiyangji*, before they reach the hell, the Ming fleet conquers an earthly heaven called Tianfang guo 天方国, the Country of Heaven, or Mekka (1109-16). Mekka is different from previous countries because it is a prosperous and civilized country of humans. People there are strong and well dressed. But what makes the story of Mekka special is that it marks the beginning of the end of the quest because a pair of Red Silk Lanterns are manifest here. Long before the fleet arrive in Mekka, the King of Mekka sends an envoy to welcome the Ming fleet. As explained by the envoy to Zheng He, the king learns about the fleet from some divine message. First, for about a year, a couple of Red Silk Lanterns will come over the Temple of the Ancestors in the country every month and hang there for a few days. Second, in one of his dreams, the

king is told by his ancestor that the lanterns are set up by the Mother of Heaven 天妃娘娘 to guide the Ming fleet. Both the lanterns and the dream are authorial interventions. The author, from outside the text, intrudes into the text to force the fleet to go up to a country which has not often been visited by its neighbours.<sup>15</sup> The signification of the divine intervention doubles if we think that the Red Lanterns first come to guide the Ming fleet in Chapter Twenty-two, before the fleet arrive in Champa, the first country conquered in the whole quest.

After Mekka, the fleet move to the final stop of their quest, the Country of the Dead. It has been pointed out in Chapter Two that the trip to the Country of the Dead is a success in the story because it is there the villainous Other is finally silenced by Judge Cui out of his admiration of the Ming fleet. The *deus ex machina* of the story comes from Yama, the King of the Underworld. When some Ming generals attempt to conquer the Country of the Dead by force, as they have conventionally done so to many previous countries, they are stopped by Yama, the King of the Underworld. Yama not only asks the generals to go back to the fleet but also sends the National Master, Jin Bifeng, a pair of jade paper-weights (1172), which is later interpreted by Jin as the Yama's message to end the quest. Acknowledging the power of the Ming Empire and the military merits of the fleet, Yama serves both as a character in the story and as a *deus ex machina* the

author sends from outside the story to end the quest. With such an abrupt termination of the quest, the fleet turns to go back home. Like the hero in the *Travels*, the hero in *Xiyangji* goes home without the Seal but with the knowledge of the Other.

The arbitrary form of closure through the use of the *deus ex machina*, indicates that the text is not the signified but the signifier, not the meaning but the lack of meaning. Examined together with the lack of Seal and lack of the Holy Land, the inability of the hero to completely subsume the Other becomes more obvious. To go to hell/heaven represents an act of limiting, an act to set up a limit in the story itself. Only with such a limit, the story achieves totality. However, the totality is an ironical totality which acknowledges, even confirms implicitly or explicitly, the discursive existence of the Other rather than eliminates it.

In the texts, besides the villainous Other, the enemy of the hero, a reader sees another kind of otherness that comes from the level of narration<sup>16</sup>, signalled by such devices as the direct address, chapter titles, etc. This diegetic otherness in the narration interrupts the story by jumping from one narrative level to another. The *Travels* is a first-person narrative. In the text, the narrator often speaks directly to the reader. For instance, we can see sentences like "I, knight of England..." (44), "I will tell you" (105), "I have told you" (170) or "if you wish to know..." (52), "you



must understand..." (59) etc. Donald Howard points out that the author is "objective, authoritative and direct."<sup>17</sup> The authority of the narrative depends not only on the author's objectivity but also on the reader's willingness to accept the story's authority. In Howard's discussion, this narrative authority is obviously respected because he believes that the *Travels* is a "compendium or summa" or "an encyclopedia of knowledge."<sup>18</sup> But other readers, instead of letting themselves be daunted by the first person narrative and the apostrophic direct-address may recognize the foreignness or otherness of the direct addresses. The resisting reader also recognizes the ideological bias as well as the subjective nature of the narrator's authority.

By using "I" and "you," and thus talking directly to the reader, the narrative shifts narrative levels. The pronouns transfer the stories from one narrative level to another. In a narrative, there is a hierarchical structure out of which we can discern three basic narrative levels: the extradiegetic level including prefaces and note, the diegetic level or the storytelling process itself, and the hypodiegetic level contained within the diegetic level.<sup>19</sup> Narrating the experience of the hero who is identified with the hypodiegetic traveller, the hero in the story of the quest, the *Travels* proceeds on the diegetic level and the narrative, when other stories are related, moves down to the hypodiegetic level. Whenever "I" and "you" are used, the diegetic narrator

interrupts the text, he comes from inside the story to the outside to address or, if you like, to bring the reader into the story. This rhetorical device can be used to dominate the reader and demand his consent and acceptance of what is narrated. However, the "I" and "you" de-naturalize the narrative. Instead of allowing the reader to imagine the story's world, the use of "I" and "you" prevents him from creating the illusion of a *vraisemblance* in the text. For instance, many times, the narrator says that "I saw many other marvels in that land, which I shall not speak of now in order to make my book short" (139) or stories are "too many to relate" (137). The reference to his own "book" could be looked at as what de Man calls "rhetoric" which "puts an insurmountable obstacles in the way of any reading or understanding."<sup>20</sup> Fictional illusion drops when the narrator addresses the reader. The texts, by addressing the reader directly, puts an obstacle in the way of the reader's naturalizing the events of the texts.

For *Xiyangji*, part of the textual otherness is generated by the chapter titles. Sometime during the late Ming, it became customary for Chinese fictional narratives to use titles for their chapters. "Since the later Ming period," C.T. Hsia points out, "it has been the convention to prefix each chapter with an antithetical couplet, summarizing the content."<sup>21</sup> In the title, the first half of the couplet usually describes the first half of the story in the chapter,

and the second half describes the second half of story. Besides telling us the time when the use of titles becomes a convention in Chinese narrative, the function and position of chapter titles, Hsia's remarks already direct us to the otherness of the titles in the story. The titles are the prefixes, something affixed before the story. That is, a title is to tell, before the story begins, what is to happen in the story. For instance, before we read, in Chapter Thirty-one, the story of the surrender of Champa, the first country conquered in the quest, we are given a couplet summarizing the contents of the chapter: "The Country of Champa Submits with willingness; The King of Bintonglong Guo pays tributes." Or before Chapter Fifty-eight, the story about the Country of Sanfa and the Country of Xilan, we read: "The National Master subdues the Country of Sanfa; The Marshal's troops capture the King of Xilan." The titles in *Xiyangji*, like those in most traditional Chinese narratives, always come in the form of couplet, usually with the first sentence describing the first half of the story in the chapter and the second sentence the second half of the story.<sup>22</sup> But what is important here is that a chapter title is an attempt at mastery, a textual attempt to master the story in the chapter. Because it is outside the story, a title is not the beginning, but only marks the beginning. Therefore, a title is a failure to begin, or a false start. It marks the otherness of the text. It is the textual other to the story.

In other words, to impose on the reader what is to happen in the story, a chapter title represents an authorial intrusion in the text. It represents the metafiction or *mise en abyme*. A chapter title is by nature allegorical. Each chapter title is a mirror of the story and yet not the story itself. The title is an abbreviated allegory of the content from outside the story whereas the content is an extended allegory of the title from inside the story. However, the two do not complement but subvert each other. They are subversive because the author talks about the production of meaning, not the meaning itself. He talks about the signifiers themselves.

The chapter titles therefore are an example of "paratextuality"<sup>23</sup> that prevents the reader from naturalizing the texts. The titles indicate their otherness in the text; they oppose themselves to the stories. Thus the reader turns the Other away from the signified in the text by resisting the meaning of the text because it is unnatural. A resisting reader looks for the spot where the Other is allowed to speak.

With the direct addresses, and the chapter titles, the two texts show no natural totality nor natural enclosure. The structure of the quest and the pursuit of power are discontinuous. The structure, the metafiction or text in the narrative are extraneous devices employed in order to articulate and impose on the reader the intended meaning and the stories. But the power of the words on the page is a

textual Other which blocks the meaning. Here, the author seems to face a dilemma, he intends to control what he is telling. He wants the reader to naturalize "correctly" the signification of his text. He must call the reader's attention to the text rather than the meaning. But whenever he talks about the text itself, the author loses control of the meaning, creating a block for the meaning. In other words, the author's attempt at a closure that will include the meaning makes what he says self-referential because his narrative moves on to a higher narrative level. Texts enclose society through linguistic acts. Direct address, chapter titles and endings are all narrative techniques to convince the reader so that the reader will follow the direction the author designed for the work. What I have shown, however, is that in reading all the techniques become self-subversive and work against the author's intention. Instead of keeping the reader's attention on the wholeness and unity of the text, the devices destroy the wholeness of the text.

Now I would like to discuss the combination of history and fiction in the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*. In both East and West, writers of romance often yield to an inclination of blending history and fiction in their works. Such a mixture helps express the "persistent nostalgia" to which a romance narrative is usually devoted because a romance, as a whole and as a particular socially symbolic act, represents a "search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space."<sup>24</sup>

Considering the fixed historical pattern romance often follows, Frye even goes so far as to suggest that "most 'historical novels' are romances."<sup>25</sup>

In the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*, we have seen that the former imagines a return to the time before man's Fall, whereas the latter relives the glorious past of Ming Dynasty. In its illustration of the Christian faith to recover the Holy Land and to totalize the Other, the *Travels* has two outstanding rhetorical features. First, it adapts the form of autobiography. Second, it follows a medieval convention of reworking "olde feeldes" for "newe corne."<sup>26</sup> That is, the author borrows freely from historical or fictional sources and blends the borrowing with what is later proven to be his own imagination. Though *Xiyangji* does not claim to be a biography of Zheng He, nor a historical record of Zheng's ventures, it cuts rather freely across the lines of fiction and history.<sup>27</sup> This characteristic of *Xiyangji* has been discussed briefly by Y.W. Ma in an essay "The Chinese Historical Novel: an Outline of Themes and Contexts," where he points out: "As a novel, *Hsi-yang chi* [*Xiyangji*] gains its peculiar grandeur by combining, almost on separable planes, both a detailed particularity of facts and a drive toward free inventive fancy."<sup>28</sup> In *Xiyangji*, to represent the past glory of the Ming Empire, the stories are mixed with previous historical records of Zheng He's travels to the so-called Western Ocean. Zhao Jingshen, a modern Chinese scholar who compares *Xiyangji*

with a couple of its sources, uncovers many such borrowings. For instance, fifty-two literal borrowings are counted from Ma Huan's *Yingyai shenglan*, or *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* and twenty-three are counted from Fei Xin's *The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*.<sup>29</sup>

The combination of history and fiction generates a dubiety or uncertainty in the reading. Once aware of the fact that the text mixes fiction with history, the reader must start to question the ontological status of the text, trying to decide if it is a fiction or a historical record. What makes the reader question the credibility of the two works, furthermore, is that within the mixture of history and fiction there is the story of a journey, a feature that traditionally raises "the truth-lie dichotomy."<sup>30</sup> Since the *Travels* recounts an eye-witness experience of the hero, in the reading of it, the truth-lie dichotomy is constantly present. On the one hand, a reader may trust what is told in the story. Christopher Columbus is said to have consulted a copy of the *Travels* before setting out on his way in search for China.<sup>31</sup> Some scholars even now still insist on the authenticity of the *Travels*.<sup>32</sup> However, the general consensus among scholars today holds that Mandeville is at most "a lying traveller."<sup>33</sup> One scholar even advances the witty sentence that "Mandeville's longest journey was to the nearest library."<sup>34</sup> The *Travels*, as Ralph Hanna observes *ex cathedra*, "is now taken [as] nonhistorical, a pure literary fiction."<sup>35</sup> From

a broader cultural perspective, Edward Said even calls Mandeville the author "a fabulist" in his *Orientalism*.<sup>36</sup>

The situation with *Xiyangji* is a little different. Though J.J.L. Duyvendak, a well-known Western scholar of Ming history and *Xiyangji*, finds *Xiyangji* an unfailing source of historical material,<sup>37</sup> there has been no serious attempts by others to treat *Xiyangji* as true history but only as a "historical novel." Walter Goode in his recent discussion concludes that the historical value of the work is minimal.<sup>38</sup>

But calling the two works fiction does not eliminate the reader's uncertainty because it does not eliminate the historical elements included in the two narratives. In the reading, history will continue to catch the reader's attention. That is, the reader still has to ask and answer the truth-lie, or fact-fiction, question even if he consciously reads the two texts as fictional work.

The reader's persistent uncertainty has to be explained as his resistance to the Other in the texts. By the Other here, I mean the historical elements that is in conflict with the fictional elements in the texts. History and fiction can both take narrative forms, but they are different in nature. Fiction generally implies a form of closure. That is, in the reading of fiction, the reader retains a "willing suspension of disbelief,"<sup>39</sup> allowing the fiction a measure of self-referentiality and self-sufficiency. Fictional structures are to direct the reader's attention to itself. For fiction there



seems no outside. In history, however, the referent is traditionally reordered as external. It refers to something else or something outside the text, be it an event, a person, or a particular period of time. More committed to the law of verisimilitude and subject to a criteria of historical accuracy, history does not tolerate fancy or literary imagination. Because of their different nature, history and fiction, once blended, frequently deconstruct each other. If a work is read as history, what is regarded as fictional in it will not be "historical" and if it is "fictional," the work will cause confusion. Hayden White's work destabilizes this traditional dichotomy by revealing the fictional elements in historical representation. In the reading of the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*, it is through the reader's effort to distinguish fiction and history that the two texts lose their totalization. However, the "categories" are still valid today as conventions of reading even if historical referents have lost some of their "objectivity."

One way to represent the conflict between history and fiction is to expose the intertextuality between the texts and other texts and the use of history as a form of ideological authority. Mandeville, for example, relies on the reader's knowledge of the Bible and Bible history to shape his narrative. A scene of the Holy Land in Chapter Thirteen of the *Travels* is quite exemplary:

Thence men go through the plain of Galilee to

Nazareth, which was once a big city; but now there is only a little unwallled village. In Nazareth was Our Lady born, but she was conceived at Jerusalem. Our Lord took His surname from Nazareth. There Joseph wedded Our Lady, when she was fourteen years old. (94)

The Holy Land, when the traveller Mandeville sees it, appears virtually as a relic of sorts. Places and shrines there are disjunctive and unstructured because time has rewritten the city. All that is at present is described with reference to the distances between the present shabbiness and their glorious biblical past. In fact, almost every site in this chapter takes up its meaning from its part in the Old or New Testament, in the Christian story, knowing the familiarity of the reader with the Christian stories concerning the places. It is all this "common knowledge" that serves to ground the Holy Land as well as the legends attached to it in a historical and cultural reality in the reader's mind. In the reading process, the reader's naturalization is actually retrospection,<sup>40</sup> what he naturalizes or comprehends is series of inferences based on an initial knowledge of the Bible as master text.

The technique of calling on the reader's knowledge enhances the appeal of the works because the knowledge of the reader can help the naturalization of the texts. However, by calling the reader's attention to knowledge outside the texts,

the intertextuality directs the reader to the Other. When the reader naturalizes "historical" elements with reference to the previous texts, his reading is no longer a reading of the *Travels* or *Xiyangji*. Like scholars gleaning through the text for the historical borrowing from previous sources, the reader is reading two texts at the same time. For instance, Zheng He, as a fictional figure in *Xiyangji*, is related to the historical figure in history books. In *Xiyangji*, all the detail about the ships of the fleet, the tributes collected, and countries visited, refer to the historical Zheng He's adventures. Therefore, the reading of *Xiyangji* is a reading of Zheng He in quotation marks. In other words, the Zheng He in *Xiyangji* is the repetition, or quotation of the traditional--historical--record of the Ming Empire's golden age. *Xiyangji* represents a glorification of this heroic past.

In *Xiyangji*, totalization is a desire to make the signifier match the signified. In other words, totalization can only be accomplished when the author is assured mastery of his intended meaning and words. When the Zheng He in *Xiyangji*, however, is merely a mirrored image of the historical Zheng He, or when in the reading, the former simply allegorizes the latter, the narrative loses its totality, and destroys the illusion of being complete in itself. That is, it loses its mastery of meaning. In the reading, the text is ripped apart. The centre is lost.

What has been said about *Xiyangji* applies equally well to

the *Travels* because the historical elements in the latter also require an intertextual reading and also results in the loss of its totalizing claims. In the following, to conclude the discussion of history and fiction, I would like to consider the reading of an oriental reader in relation to the description about the Great Khan (Genghis Khan) in the *Travels*. In my reading, the episode about the Great Khan in the *Travels* represents an interesting irony because it shows not only that the Other cannot be totalized by the Self in the story but also cannot really be mastered by the reader either.

The irony first lies in the fact that, on the one hand, the Great Khan to Mandeville represents the Other to be totalized. On the other hand, the more Mandeville tries to domesticate the Great Khan, the more he affirms the otherness of the Khan. In his story of the Great Khan, Mandeville does not conceal his admiration for the power of the Khan. He enumerates the merits of the Great Khan: the divine message from God that sends him to his throne (146), his bravery as a soldier (144), and his great fortune (144). To emphasize the great merit of the Khan as a conqueror, Mandeville even admits that the land of Cathay conquered by the Great Khan is "a great country, beautiful, rich, fertile, full of good merchandise" (141). However, at the same time, Mandeville loses no time to christianize the Great Khan, pointing out that, though the Great Khan is not a Christian himself (144, 149), he is nevertheless obliged to "hear men speak of God and

allow Christians to live there" in the country (144). The Great Khan, as Mandeville says, "bows to the Cross" (155) and "trusts most to Christians" (159) A remote country, Cathay is a Christian frontier. With the encouragement of the Great Khan and some of his descendants, for instance, Kublai Khan who, according to Mandeville, is a Christian (149), God's doctrines are well observed and Christians are given the most trust. In the descriptions quoted above, we can see that when Mandeville emphasizes God's power over such great statesman and soldier as the Great Khan, he means to appropriate the latter to the Western culture. But the irony or paradox is that by describing the greatness of the Khan, Mandeville affirms the alien Other.

The irony of the Great Khan has another interesting side. The more Mandeville Christianizes the Great Khan, the more he creates in my reading the Other. As an Oriental reader familiar with Sinocentric values, I seek, in my reading of the *Travels*, to affirm Oriental ideologies and points of view. But in my reading from a Chinese perspective, the Great Khan represents the Other to me. He is the Other not only because Mandeville has occluded the Great Khan, but also because the Great Khan, to the Chinese, has always been the Other, the barbarian. To be sure, the Great Khan is more Oriental than he is Western. Even from a Sinocentric view "Mongol" in the *Travels* represents the limit of the Orient a limit marked by the Great Wall China built to keep out the barbarian Other

including the Mongols. And my reading represents the limit of my knowledge. From both Sinocentric and Eurocentric views which are meeting on this borderline of the Great Khan who is the Other to both, the Great Khan is the intertext, is the Other misrepresented and misunderstood by both. Therefore, the representation of the East is Other to me, and to Mandeville. The Great Khan is not only the limit of the two texts, but also the limit for both Eastern and Western cultures. He is an allegory or a metaphor of the limit of both Sinocentric and Eurocentric Self. The Great Khan is the situated limit for this cross-cultural comparison.

Produced to be totalizing romances, the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* intend to master their discourse by sending their heroes to recover the Holy Land and to retrieve the Imperial Seal. The recovery and the retrieval of the lost treasures is equal to control of the text's meaning. The inability of the heroes in their mission to recover the lost Eden is a symbol that the romances cannot even control their own signification. When we think of Humpty Dumpty's remarks that the meaning of words depends on the mastery, or the power of the speaker over those words, we should try to understand what Humpty Dumpty says in a different way. Humpty Dumpty does not really confirm that the master will have the meaning; what he is actually saying is that no one can be the master of language. A work of romance, however totalizing it intends to be and to whatever extent it achieves totalization, is nevertheless

dependent on the Other, the intertext, and the reader. In short, it deconstructs its own power.

The arbitrary form of ending, the otherness of the texts, the Other in the texts, and the lack of seal and Holy Land, all reveal that the texts are not the signifieds but the signifiers. The texts do not indicate the meaning but the lack of meaning. Without Seal or Holy Land, there is no totalization.

The Seal and the Holy Land are the identity of the Self. But they are not recovered at the end. This is an example of irony. Irony is also a form of allegory. The signifier and the signified do not connect. The Self and the Other do not connect.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>M.A. Abbas, "Reading Position: The Master's Game," *Tamkang Review* 14.1-4 (1983-4): 213, 216.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of naturalization or *vraisemblance*, as it is sometimes called, see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) 140-60.

<sup>3</sup>Paul de Man, foreword, *The Dissimulating Harmony*, by Carol Jacobs, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) xii.

<sup>4</sup>According to Jacques Derrida, the reversal of hierarchy is the fundamental purpose of deconstructive reading. See Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory of Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983) 85.

<sup>5</sup>Here I borrow the terminology of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. See her *Narrative Fiction*, 3-4. There is a third part of Rimmon-Kenan's--in fact, Gérard Genette's--distinction of narrative fiction, "narration." I will use this concept later in my discussion.

<sup>6</sup>Frye, *The Myth of Deliverance*, 14. The endless form of romance has been emphasized by Frye many times. See, for instance, Frye's *Anatomy*, 186.

<sup>7</sup>Frye, *The Myth of Deliverance*, 14.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>9</sup>Countries are connected to each other in accordance with their geographical locations rather than cause-effect logic.



In other words, the hero goes on from countries nearby to the ones faraway.

<sup>10</sup>In Chapter Thirty-two, Zhang Tianshi's story about seven arrests and seven releases of Jiang Jinding serves as a good example of the effort to win the heart of the barbarians (412-13). This story is copied from Luo Guanzhong's *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

<sup>11</sup>Here, I am using Walter Goode's translation. See his "On the Sanbao ta'jian " 45-46.

<sup>12</sup>De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 162.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>14</sup>See M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 44.

<sup>15</sup>A few pages before the episode of Mekka, the King of Adan tells Zheng He that Mekka is "so far" that he and his fellow country men have not been there (1107).

<sup>16</sup>See Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 91-94.

<sup>17</sup>Howard, "The World of Mandeville's Travels," 2.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 2, 17.

<sup>19</sup>Gérard Genette was the first to distinguish different narrative levels. See his *Narrative Discourse*, 227-34. For summary and brief discussion of Genette's theory, see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 91-92. Rimmon-Kenan adapts the term "hypodiegesis," a term used by Mieke Bal, as an alternation for Genette's "metadiegesis."

<sup>20</sup>De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 131.

<sup>21</sup>Since Ming Dynasty, according to C.T. Hsia, "it has been the convention to prefix each chapter with an antithetical couplet, summarizing the content." See C.T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968) 17.

<sup>22</sup>For discussion of the aesthetics of parallelism in the chapter titles and the design of stories, see Andrew Plaks, "Where the Lines Meet: Parallelism in Chinese and Western Literature," *Poetics Today* 11 (1990): 540-43.

<sup>23</sup>For "paratextuality," see Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989) 82-92.

<sup>24</sup>Frye, *Anatomy*, 186.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>26</sup>Quoted from C.W.R.D. Moseley, introduction, *the Travels*, 12.

<sup>27</sup>This characteristic of mixing history and fiction has been noticed by critics. Discussing the Chinese narrative, Cyril Birch points out, "the lines between historiography and fiction are hard to draw. In the earliest historical writings we find the structured dialogues that were later to constitute a staple resource for fiction." See Cyril Birch, foreword, *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Andrew Plaks, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977) xi.

Y.W. Ma, "The Chinese Historical Novel: An Outline of Themes and Contexts," *Journal of Asian Studies* 34.2 (1975):

280.

<sup>29</sup>See Zhao Jingshen, "Sanbao taijian xiyangji," *Xiyangji*, 1298-1316.

<sup>30</sup>For discussion of truth-lie dichotomy in travel narratives, see Percy Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1983) 81-102. Adams devotes a whole chapter to the issue of "the traveller's leave to lie" in this formidable book of his.

<sup>31</sup>See Christian K. Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage*, 154.

<sup>32</sup>For instance, C.W.R.D. Moseley is one of them. In his introduction, he emphasizes Mandeville's seriousness as a writer and the accuracy of the information in his work. See his introduction, *the Travels*, 14.

<sup>33</sup>Quoted from *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>34</sup>Quoted from *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>Ralph Hanna III, "Mandeville," 121.

<sup>36</sup>Said, *Orientalism*, 58.

<sup>37</sup>Duyvendak, "Desultory Notes," 1-35.

<sup>38</sup>See Walter Goode, summary, "On the *Sanbao taijian*," no page number.

<sup>39</sup>S.T. Coleridge's phrase in his *Biographia Literaria*. Quoted from M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971) 324.

<sup>40</sup>For a discussion of retrospection, see Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach", *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed.

Jane Tompkins, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 57.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion developed in the previous pages demonstrates the paradoxical situation of the *Travels* and *Xiyangji*, that is, the "warring forces of signification"<sup>1</sup> within the texts themselves.

Both texts employ a romance structure to solve cross-cultural conflicts. The romance structure generates in the two works a totalizing power with which the Self succeeds in subsuming, dominating and domesticating the Other. Through their discourse, both works establish a Utopia, an ideal state where the ideologies of the Self predominate and where the Other is appropriated.

No totalization, however, excludes resistance completely. The totalization tends to dissolve once the texts are read by a resisting reader. To a resisting reader, the *Travels* and *Xiyangji* become self-subversive. Examining the formal characteristics of the narratives, a resisting reader affirms the otherness of the Other; he affirms, for example in the *Travels*, the marginality of the Great Khan; he also affirms the lack of Self and the presence of the Other at the end of the texts. In short, the power that the two texts generate creates its own contradictions and finally undercuts the attempt to silence the Other.

The paradox, that is, the lack of unified meaning, of the

*Travels* and *Xiyangji* must also be understood as the paradox of language. "Language is not only a key," Edward Sapir observes poignantly, "it can also be a fetter."<sup>2</sup> In fact, the paradox or, the *aporia*, we have seen in the two texts goes further to embrace human *episteme* and representation, whose progress and whose perennial incompleteness may have been well described by T.S. Eliot in his "Little Gidding":

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

In this cyclical procedure of human *Episteme*, what can actually be known is the insuperable deadlock, double bind or incompatible and contradictory meanings. In other words, what is destroyed in such a cyclical procedure is the "claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another."<sup>3</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 5.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted from Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 39.

<sup>3</sup>Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference*, 5.

## APPENDIX

### SUMMARY OF XIYANGJI

An eminent figure in Chinese history, Sanbao Eunuch Zheng He (1371?-1435) of the Ming Dynasty is known for commanding the Ming fleet to the "Western Ocean" seven times between 1405-1433. The expeditions fraught with danger gradually gave rise to a host of legends over the years, culminating in a sixteenth century romance narrative (1597) known *The Three Treasure Eunuch's Travels to the Western Ocean* or, for short, *Xiyangji*. Consisting of one-hundred chapters and attributed to Luo Maodeng, *Xiyangji* combines Zheng He's all seven naval adventures into one and makes the search for a missing imperial seal its theme.

The narrative starts with Buddha Dipamkara's descent to the so-called Southern Continent, the Ming Empire. The descent purports to save the empire from its disaster, a consequence of foreign rule. On earth, the Buddha incarnates him Jin Bifeng and he becomes a Buddhist monk in the Ming Empire.

When the Yongle Emperor is enthroned, Zhang Tianshi, a Taoist magician, tells the Emperor that the Imperial Seal, a token of the imperial authority of China, has been lost to the Western Ocean. As a condition to lead a fleet to retrieve the Seal, Zhang asks that the Emperor order all the Buddhist monks in the country to resume secular life and that all Buddhist monasteries be destroyed. When the persecution devastates,



Jin Bifeng comes to the imperial palace to play his role of saviour. He and Zhang engage in a series of life and death contests. Defeating Zhang, Jin not only saves the Buddhists in the country, but also is given the title guoshi, "national master." Both Jin and Zhang are appointed to go with the quest fleet.

After some preparation, including training soldiers and building boats, the fleet set out with their commanders-in-chief Zheng He, the Three Treasure Eunuch, and Wang Jinghong, the Minister of Defence. By passing the "Soft Water Ocean" and "Magnetic Sea," the fleet cross the boundaries of the Ming Empire and their quest commences. During the journey, the fleet pass and conquer about thirty-nine major countries. All these countries submit their letters of surrender and tributes. If we include the countries circumnavigated, the total number of countries reaches more than sixty. In the end, however, the Seal is not found. After visiting Fengdu guo, the country of the dead, the fleet set out on the return journey.

Once home, Zheng He submits to the Emperor all the tributes collected by the fleet along with a report of the mission. The Emperor is pleased with the victory and decrees generous rewards for all involved.

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