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Translating otherness: images of a Chinese city

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This article investigates the way Western configurations of Eastern identities are formed. It focusses on how Western encounters in the East are represented in the West and what role translation plays in this process. It probes the representation of those cultural practices and encounters that are particularly prominent in the literary genre of travel writing. Here, three Dutch accounts of travels to Guangzhou (China) from the late nineteenth century will be compared, and their methods of translation will be analyzed. The examples show that a different style of translation can result in a different image of the city and that the travel accounts under investigation possess varying degrees of Orientalizing and appropriative style, even though the three writers follow more or less the same itinerary. It appears that they are not merely providing a representation of the Other, but, in fact, are merging the Other with the Self. Ultimately, the degree of merging the Other with the Self depends on the style of translation and each of these styles is defining for the configuration of identity, which, from a Western view, makes the East appear inferior, superior or universally equal.

Keywords:: East and West; cultural translation; travel writing

1. Introduction

This study probes the way that Western configurations of Eastern identities are formed by looking at the representation of foreign cultural practices and encounters. These are particularly prominent in the literary genre of travel writing in which authors describe their impressions of a foreign culture. The process of observing the foreign and writing about it in another language requires varying degrees of interpretation and translation. These will generate different images of a city as this article will show. Here, I compare three Dutch accounts of travels to Guangzhou, formerly known as Canton, from the late nineteenth century, and analyze the authors' methods of translation in depicting the city of Guangzhou. The examples show how different interpretations can result in different images of the city. The reasons for this are that the translator may have (1) a different perception, which varies from taking things at face value to searching for ulterior motives; (2) display (a lack of) knowledge, which results in derision without understanding or admiration beyond belief; and (3) is able to interpret or go beyond ordinary things.

In their accounts, travel writers interpret and write about their observations and perceptions. As Douglas Kerr and Julia Kuehn write:

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> Travel accounts often adopt an extreme method of translation by either, in an imperialist gesture, domesticating and thus reducing the foreign to fit into a framework that reproduces that of the self, or, in an opposite anti-imperialist gesture, exoticizing the Other so as to make it distant and simply alien from the observing self. (2007, 7)

I take the term "translation" here, not as interlingual translation in the traditional sense: a rendering from language A into language B; rather, it is "cultural translation" as done by the ethnographer who reports about a foreign country, its culture and the people after going on a (field)trip and therefore there is not necessarily a (printed) source text involved. As Kate Sturge explains, "like the literary 'cultural translator', the ethnographer has to reconcile respect for the specificity of the 'native point of view' with the desire to create a text comprehensible to the target readership" (2009, 67). And she quotes Vincent Crapanzano: "the ethnographer like the translator must render the foreign familiar and preserve its very foreignness at one and the same time" (Ibid.). In this study, I will show how the three authors give their impressions of the city of Guangzhou, how they render its foreignness and to what degree they consider their target readers in this process. They translate in a domesticating or exoticizing way, according to Kerr and Kuehn, or, as Sturge puts it, in an "Orientalizing" translation style associated with hierarchical representations of other cultures as primitive or inferior to normative "western" civilization, and, on the other side, an "appropriative" style that downplays the distinctiveness of other world views and claims universal validity for what may, in fact, be domestic categories of thought (Ibid., 67–68). Indeed, the travel accounts under investigation show a varying degree of understanding the source culture on the one hand, to appropriating the target culture on the other. Each individual perception and personal style are defining for the configuration of identity, which, from a Western view, makes the East inferior, superior or universally equal. But, as Kerr and Kuehn point out, the act of translation in travel accounts is "never value-neutral or innocent," because it always entails both losses and gains (2007, 7).

2. Images of Guangzhou

Even though, in a practical and historical sense, there are similarities in the accounts, the impressions of Guangzhou that the reader gets from these three essays are very different. All three authors are visiting Guangzhou in the period 1889–1894. They all travel by boat and are staying in Shamian, or Shameen in the old spelling. Shamian, literally meaning "sandy surface," is a sandbank island connected to the city of Guangzhou by bridge. It used to be an important port for foreign trade and the location of foreign concessions in the nineteenth century. The impression of the city depends on the perception and description of the city by each author, which varies from sober and universal, overwhelming and fearsome, to beautiful and mysterious. Before going into the details of the depiction, it is essential to first examine the background of each author. The English translations of Dutch language material are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

The first account is by Dutch engineer Pieter Gerard van Schermbeek (1848–1901), who travelled to China early in 1889 and wrote a travel diary. Van Schermbeek was a member of the delegation sent to meet politician and diplomat Li Hongzhang (1823–1901). The delegation's goal was to come to an arrangement to work together with the Chinese to prevent the Yellow River from flooding. Li, who was known for his diplomatic skills, was often involved in the negotiation of settlements with foreign countries. Unfortunately, on this occasion, the Dutch proposal for cooperation was rejected by the Chinese government. The Dutch consul J. J. B. Heemskerk (?–1896) in Shanghai was

blamed for the failure of the mission, not least because he allegedly said that a joint venture was guaranteed (Ramaer 1924, 1226). In other words, the Dutch expectations had been too high. During the trip to China, the delegation was accompanied by the interpreter W. Collingridge Bing, who was originally from Singapore but had spent some years in the Netherlands. Bing spoke Dutch, English and "reasonable" (*tamelijk*) Chinese, according to Van Schermbeek in his article about this trip, "To the Yellow River" (*Naar de Gele Rivier*), which was published in the Dutch literary magazine *The Guide* (*de Gids*) in 1899 (Van Schermbeek 1899, 299). *The Guide* was first published in 1837 and is still being published today. The delegation made trips to other cities in China, including Guangzhou. Van Schermbeek's account of his trip to Guangzhou was an excerpt from his travel diary, which appeared in two parts on 27 and 28 September 1894 in the newspaper *The Telegraph* (*de Telegraaf*). Van Schermbeek had previously been involved in an engineering project to fortify dykes in Japan in 1883. There are no further details available about the project there, but apparently Van Schermbeek's work was satisfactory, because he was subsequently invited to take part in the Yellow River project in China. Characteristic of his account of the trip is his attempt to understand China based on his knowledge and experience of travelling in Japan, and also his pragmatic approach as an engineer.

The second account is by Marcellus Emants (1848–1923), a renowned Dutch author, who was living off his inheritance at the time he travelled to China. He is praised for being a key figure in the development of travel writing, which in that era changed from mere personal accounts into a literary genre (Blokker 2011, 400). Emants visited Guangzhou in 1893 and his account was published in *The Guide* in 1894. The impression that Emants gives is that he did not have much prior knowledge about China and he made no effort to understand Chinese culture, even though he had travelled extensively, including to Japan as his essay on "Japanese Wrestlers" (*Japansche worstelaars*) in *The Guide* in 1893 shows. His account of Guangzhou is a very straightforward and honest view of a Dutch writer, conveying exactly his experiences and emotions while in China. Emants is overwhelmed by the city, and this is reflected in his account, but readers with plans to visit China will be put off by the negative descriptions in his account of Guangzhou.

By contrast, we are given an idealized image of Guangzhou by the third author, Henri Jean François Borel (1869–1933), who went on a trip to the city during Chinese New Year in 1894. Borel had studied Hokkien Chinese for four years at the University of Leiden, from 1888 till 1892. He went to Xiamen, Fujian province, to further his studies and in preparation for his appointment as Chinese interpreter in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). The majority of Chinese immigrants in the Dutch East Indies spoke Hokkien. Borel's essay on Guangzhou was published in 1896, also in *The Guide*. Although he writes in a footnote to the essay that his writings were not intended as a furtive attack on Emants, the positive contents of the essay are in marked contrast to Emants' negative impression of the city. Moreover, the fact that Borel's essay appeared 2 years after his trip is also suspicious. Indeed, in a letter of 29 February 1896 to his friend and writer Frederik van Eeden (1860–1932), he writes:

> I am now writing an essay on Canton, which I will send to [Lodewijk] van Deyssel [pseudonym for Karel Joan Lodewijk Alberdingk Thijm (1864–1952)]. Emants will be amazed! He wrote in *The Guide* about how ugly he found everything in Canton. (Borel 1896a)

This suggests that his essay is indeed a reaction to Emants and it is most likely that it is (partly) based on his notes in his diary, where he mentions the trip to Guangzhou in an entry on 6–7 March 1894. Thus, the piece by Emants must have stimulated Borel to write

about his own experience, if only to undo the injustice, in his eyes, that Emants did to China. By the time the essay was published, Borel had been working as a Chinese interpreter in the Dutch East Indies for about two years: he was appointed to Riau in October 1894. Hence, it is possible that his experiences in the Dutch East Indies influenced his writing about China. Indeed, he longed to return to China, which he tended to idealize as "that lovely wonderland," while he disliked and criticized expatriate life and society in the Dutch East Indies.

It is clear from the above that each of the three writers has a different background, each has a different purpose for visiting China and each has a different approach to writing the account. This is projected in the way they depict the city, how they translate this into Dutch, and how they form configurations of Chinese identities.

3. Style of writing

Each writer has a different style in writing about China, varying from taking things at face value to searching for ulterior motives. This has to do with what Kerr and Kuehn write:

> all travel writers about China, in recording an impression of the country, have also portrayed themselves, whether as the briefest sketch or in a full-blown self-portrait for which China is simply the background. We can only become aware of ourselves in relation to others beyond ourselves, and for these writers this is the other meaning of China's ulteriority. (2007, 5)

Van Schermbeek clearly shows that he is an engineer who takes a pragmatic approach, shown, for instance, in his observations of the rice fields and the growing of bananas and lychees, but also in his descriptions of surroundings, such as "higher up the river is the alluvial terrain" (1894a, paragraph 2). When he gets off the boat, he is surprised by the life on the water and describes it as being "like ants in an ant nest," while complaining about the cacophony of talking and yelling (Ibid., paragraph 5, 8). He also tries to understand China based on his knowledge and experience of Japan. Van Schermbeek had been to Japan, as shown by earlier publications, such as his essay "Sketches from Japan" (Schetsen uit Japan) in 1884 and the translation of *Shita-kiri Suzume* (The Sparrow with the Slit Tongue) into Dutch *de musch met de geknipte tong* in 1886. This Japan experience can be detected, for example, in his description of a visit to "a large Buddha temple," and comments such as "I knew the Buddhist religious ceremony from Japan" (paragraph 14). Thus, it was not new to him and it struck him that China was very similar to what he had seen in Japan. Van Schermbeek's impression is factual and sober: China may be different, but it is not unique. He certainly does not give the reader an impression that he does not understand or is appalled by what he sees.

This is in contrast to Emants, who is overwhelmed by the dirt and noise of the city, which he specifically writes about. Upon arrival, he is relieved to be "rescued" by a sedan chair and carried away to Shamian. Emants' description of Guangzhou leaves no doubt about how shocked he is by what he sees. For example, he writes about the disgusting streets that release rotten odors, while the foul smell of urine and faeces "hangs in the air like a heavy atmosphere full of poison and pestilence" (1894, 534). His descriptions are oppressive and extreme.

Borel admits that the city is dirty, but he sees it as "a city like all the others in China that I have seen, not prettier not uglier." Moreover:

> There is a very beautiful soul in those dull dark Chinese cities full of dirt and stank. They lie there sad and gloomy, like the semi-perished accumulation of doomed people, and it looks like it is all mud, darkness and wickedness. But I know that hidden beyond all the hideousness there are gems of beauty, and a soul of radiance and brilliant colours is alive. (1896b, 184)

This shows that Borel is not an average tourist, just looking at what the eye can see. Instead, he is looking beyond the surface and telling the reader that he has knowledge that there is beauty underneath. Elsewhere, I have argued that Borel has a poetic vision of China that is rooted in European Romanticism (Heijns 2015, 62–63). It is beyond doubt that Borel was influenced by Romantic poets, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), who writes in *A Defence of Poetry*:

> Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed […]. All things exist as they are perceived, at least in relation to the percipient (1904, 81–82).

Borel claims he is a poet and therefore his perception of China is that of a poet's. In this capacity, Borel suggests that he has the intuition and spiritual insight to understand China. Therefore, the way he writes about China is like a poet and he sees beauty in everything. For example, he expresses admiration for the Chinese shopkeeper of an antique store, who tries to convince Borel that a vase dates from the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) while it looks brand new to Borel. In spite of the fact that Borel suspects the shopkeeper of deceiving him, he writes:

> Oh, what a wonderful gift [that the Chinese have] to be able to sense and gesture the truth by imagining things, it must be such a blissful life, such immense happiness must it give the Chinese! […]. The fantasy, the capability of representation, the rich mimicry in this country, in which every person is an accomplished, excellent actor, a country of superior artists! Is China perhaps one huge theatre? (1896b, 185)

Instead of complaining about the deceit, Borel praises the Chinese for their ingenuity. Again, Borel acknowledges that the reality is bad, but turns it into something positive by looking at the culture of the Chinese people.

Yet, all three authors remain conscious of being Western. This is the awareness of ourselves in relation to others that Kerr and Kuehn write about, as quoted above. In this context, it appears that even authors who make an effort to understand China harbour feelings of fear and enmity. For example, all three find it too dangerous to walk through the city. They all sit in sedan chairs to move around and have a Chinese guide to take them to mostly the same sights, including the 500 arhats temple, and the flower boats with courtesans. All three mention the feeling of anti-foreign sentiment among the Chinese, while at the same time one can detect a feeling of superiority on the side of the Dutch authors. Van Schermbeek notes the heavy security in Shamian, which he blames on the violence and looting in 1888. I have been unable to find the cause of this incident, but it seems to refer to an attack by Chinese people on foreigners in Shamian. In light of this, Van Schermbeek stresses:

> [I]n Canton it is clear that foreigners are not welcome and not tolerated, given the hostile glances and insults that I just mentioned. This occurs repeatedly and in a bloody manner (1894a, paragraph 7).

This description of Chinese hostility towards foreigners is clear. It is not only in their facial expressions and their curses, but their physical attacks are also evidence of this. Van Schermbeek is clearly worried about his safety. Similarly, Emants perceives hatred on a visit to a gambling place:

> It is here [in the gambling house] more than anywhere else that the Chinese harbours his contemptuous hatred for the European. (Emants 1894, 540)

He notes that although they are allowed to enter, it would be too dangerous to play and win. The great emphasis here is on the contrast between Chinese and European, and how white men are merely tolerated as onlookers. The fact that Emants stresses that the gambling house is the worst place for anti-foreign behaviour, means that it also occurs elsewhere or in other circumstances (although perhaps less severely or less prominently).

Borel senses enmity in the eyes of a courtesan during his visit to the flower boats: "She stared at me as if I was a strange black monster wearing a European jacket" (1896b, 193). The notion of "strange, black monster" and "European" reveals Borel's feeling of being out of place: he is guessing what the girl is thinking and it is not positive. Positioning himself in her thoughts and imagining that she thinks he is a monster shows a wall between the Chinese and the Dutch. Of course, this only exists in his mind and imagination, because neither can know what the other is thinking. Moreover, Borel admits that he is unable to speak Cantonese so he would not be able to understand what they were saying if they were talking. But by writing like this, it shows that Borel is greatly aware of the differences, the distance between him and the Chinese and he wants his reader to know about this dichotomy. He, too, juxtaposes Chinese versus European. Thus, the fact that he has (a basic) understanding of Chinese culture does not prevent him from making comparisons.

4. Displaying (a lack of) knowledge

Each writer also displays (a lack of) knowledge, which results either in derision without understanding or admiration beyond belief and gives a different perception and impression of Guangzhou. It boils down to whether an effort is made to understand Chinese culture, whether or not differences are accepted, and how these differences are interpreted and translated. This is, I would argue, where translators differ – what Sturge calls "an Orientalizing translation style" vs "an appropriative style" that downplays differences (2009, 67–68).

An example is the music that is played on the flower boats. Emants and Borel both give a description of their experiences. Emants describes in detail what he sees and hears:

> The men take out musical instruments that look like violins with two and three strings, and one starts pulling the strings while the other plucks at them. Two women put small wooden drums covered with pigskin and what look like inverted bowls on bamboo tripods. Now the third starts wailing painful nasal sounds without a melody, accompanied by violins that yell shrilly while the drumsticks jump up and down making a rattling sound. For European ears it is an awful charivari; what the Chinese think or feel doesn't show. (Emants 1894, 539)

Again, Emants puts the Chinese squarely opposite the Europeans. His description is quite detailed and shows that he notices many characteristics that are typically Chinese. Words such as "painful," "shrilly" and "awful" show that Emants is appalled: he thinks the music is terrible for a European person like him. Eventually, he cannot stand it any longer and

decides to leave in the middle of the performance. Borel's description is more nuanced insofar as he only remarks that the sound is different from what "we" are used to:

> Our host called for the musical instruments, and the little creature next to me started plucking what looked like a small guitar with her small fingers of red porcelain. Strange but very melodious songs and a strange voice sang very high notes in previously unheard of fausettes. (1896b, 193)

Borel's description shows that the music is still music and melodious in its own way: it is strange but not awful. So he is more subtle than Emants. Borel is trying to downplay the differences in an attempt to appreciate Chinese music. But note how Borel describes the woman beside him, belittling and dehumanizing "the little creature." The way he writes about Chinese women reveals his paternalistic, colonial views. It is his portrayal of China as he created it. As Edward Said writes: "knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world" (Said 1979, 40). In sum, it is clear that the image presented by Emants is more precise than that of Borel, and it is vivid, the reader can almost hear the noise. Emants is also more accurate in describing the two-stringed musical instrument, an *erhu*, as a "violin" rather than a "guitar." The way Borel puts it, it is as if he is desperate to make the point that being different need not be awful, but rather it can be interesting.

Another example is the authors' descriptions of their visit to the temple of five hundred Lohans (or arhats), that is, Buddhists who had attained nirvana. This is probably the temple that is now known as the Nanhua Temple. A great difference can be detected in the description of the statues of the Lohans by all three authors.

Van Schermbeek is quite neutral in his description:

> Of the sites that we visited in Guangzhou, I would like to mention the trip to the temple of five hundred deities or gods, whose statues stand proudly in long rows. Among them is also the renowned Venetian traveller Marco Polo in his capacity as a disciple of Buddha, who visited China six centuries ago and who is still commemorated and highly revered. His appearance in the statue looks completely Chinese, but for his shoes, which are distinctly Western. (1894a, paragraph 13)

Overall, the description is positive: words such as "proudly," "renowned," "highly revered" help form an image. Apparently, Van Schermbeek finds the mention of Marco Polo very important and emphasizes Chinese respect for him. It appears that Van Schermbeek is often looking for something European or Western that he can relate to, or which he can use to attract the readers' attention.

Emants also mentions Marco Polo in the description of the temple, but focuses more on his own perception of the statues:

> […] among them were such clownish, jolly, grave, shifty, roaring, pondering, smirking, screaming, menacing, gesticulating figures, that Europeans would be inclined to imagine themselves among a set of mouldings of patients from the lunatic asylum rather than portrayals of disciples of the great, gentle thinker. (1894, 535)

It is clear that Emants is quite shocked by what he sees. He is very direct in his description of his impression: it sounds sacrilegious to compare religious figures with the mentally ill. There is no doubt that Emants' disrespect must be the result of a lack of understanding, even though he does describe "Buddha" as "the great, gentle thinker." In his description of

the facial expressions of the statues, Emants takes the view of "Europeans." This is different from Borel's account of the visit to the temple:

> Five hundred faces expressing high wisdom, devotedly praying in perfect peace, or dreaming away in intense meditation, far away from world matters, or some terrible storming, in furious hatred against arch-enemies, the passionate expressions with horribly distorted features. […] Oh, those endless calm, golden sages, how reverently they were seated, in an atmosphere of strange salvation and how passionless was many a face, how miraculous the red golden glim, lighting up in the high, cold quietness! (1896b, 187)

There is respect and reverence in this description, also in the emotions that the facial expressions depict. It ends in these passions being a kind of salvation, and a cold silence descended upon them. Thus, Borel does not resort to the statue of Marco Polo like Van Schermbeek did, possibly in order to evade explaining Buddhism. Borel also does not ridicule the statues as Emants did. Instead, he is trying to evoke an appreciation of the statues and he translates this in a very exalted way.

In a review by Willem Vissering (1851–1931) of Borel's *Guanyin: Book of the Gods and the Hell* (*Kwan Yin: boek van de goden en de hel*), in which Borel's essay on Guangzhou was reprinted, Vissering discusses the differences between Borel's and Emants' accounts of Guangzhou and argues as follows:

> As a rule, authors who record their impression of their trips to the Far East are struck by the bizarre, the gross and the gruesome that they encounter, and as a result they are upset and describe the things they see as ridiculous or insignificant. Their impressions are therefore incorrect, their descriptions are highly subjective, since they have arrived and have observed uninitiated; therefore their writing about travel in the Far East falls short of expectations. (1897, paragraph 7)

Vissering blames Emants for a lack of knowledge and understanding that leads to "incorrect impressions." Yet, his comments about the subjectivity of descriptions should apply equally to Borel's writing, for each gave their personal impressions. Thus, there is no one "correct" impression of Guangzhou, or indeed of China. This is what Kerr and Kuehn call "never value-neutral or innocent." Rather, as we see here, it is personal and subjective, but not wrong or right. Or perhaps one can say that Borel is wrong for depicting something that is not there. He gives the readers a more positive view of the Lohans by going beyond the surface and using Buddhist notions of wisdom, prayers, peace and meditation to give a more religious effect.

5. Understanding beyond the surface

Another aspect of the accounts is the ability to interpret or go beyond ordinary things. This touches upon what Kerr and Kuehn call "the truthfulness" that is expected of travel writing, where the lines between fact and fiction are constantly being negotiated (2007, 7). We can detect this tendency in particular in Borel, who adds his knowledge of Chinese culture to sound more credible. As I argued above, Borel is trying to give readers a positive view of the Lohans, and he reinforces this image by adding information about Chinese Buddhism. This comes in the form of quotations, but also additional explorations that the accounts of the other two authors lack. An example is the citation that Borel translated from a Sutra in order to make his account more profound, and create a religious atmosphere.

> Thus I have heard, at one time Buddha dwelt at Sravasti in the Jeta grove in the garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the solitary together with a gathering of great Bhiksus. 1300 in all, all great Lohans such as Sâriputra, Mahamandgelyama, Mahakasyapa, Mahakpphina, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Râhula, Bharadyâga and Arismuddha. (1896b, 187)

The addition of these Buddhist terms shows that Borel, in a manner of speaking, went beyond the faces of the statues. This extra information enhances the reader's understanding, but it is also professional knowledge that seems to make Borel's essay more convincing, or at least that is the message he tries to convey to the reader. Borel goes on to recount how he went inside the temple to look at the reclining Buddha. This part of his essay can be read as a metaphor for his exploration of China, his idea of going beyond the outer veil. Borel records how he not only pulled back the curtains to take a better look at the Buddha, but how he also removed the quilt on top of the Buddha. Rather than ridiculing the Buddhist statues and expressions, Borel tries to understand and explain more about Buddhism. Of course, his act of trespassing is, in fact, offensive and reveals his feeling of being superior to both the Chinese and the other (in his view ignorant) authors. Afterwards, as he explains, he pulls the quilt back over the body of the Buddha and closes the curtains.

What Borel did is what I would call off-track exploring, i.e. to do more than the average tourist or traveller would do. This is different from Emants, who does not venture beyond the surface. Emants is someone who is not at ease in China. It is telling that after returning to Shamian from the flower boats, he ends with the line:

> Back in the European decorated house in the quiet Shamian we listen to the strange sounds for a while that buzz from the incredible city reminding us of Pidgeon's words: "it was like entering heaven after leaving pandemonium." (Emants 1894, 540)

This paragraph shows that the city is too much for Emants and he craves western comfort. There is a great contrast between the incredible city, which to him is "pandemonium," versus the European and quiet Shamian, which is "heaven." The quote, "it was like entering heaven after leaving pandemonium," is from *An Engineers Holiday or Notes of a Round Trip from Long 0 to 0* by Daniel Pidgeon. In chapter XI on Hong Kong–Canton, where Pidgeon covers 28–30 November 1880, there is the following description of the street scene:

> The narrow alleys are paved with granite slabs, foul with slime, and choked with a flood of unclean men, through whom the chair-carriers make their way unceremoniously enough. All idea of locality is soon lost in these labyrinths, closely walled in as they are by high and somber houses, and the ear is distracted by the strange raucous cries of street-sellers, which strike discordantly through the general drone of sound that rises from the crowd.
>
> Returning from this scene to Shamian, across a bridge guarded by an iron gate, was like entering heaven after leaving pandemonium. On one side of the canal were the wide quays, leafy avenues, and well-appointed houses of the concession, the last already lighted for the decorous dinner; while, on the other, rolled a turbid stream of Chinamen, whose cold, unfriendly eyes we were glad to escape, and whose sinister murmur sounded like a perpetual "beware!" addressed to the confident and careless ears of the settlement. (Pidgeon 1883, 327)

Actually, Emants' description is not unlike that of Pidgeon, the dislike of "the foul with slime" and the "discordant" sounds and the preference for the "well-appointed" and the "decorous." The fact that Emants cites Pidgeon indicates that the former had read about China before his trip, and was thus not totally unprepared. It is possible that Emants

realizes that Pidgeon's views were accurate and therefore he decides to stick close to Pidgeon's depiction of China.

In addition to the quote from a Buddhist Sutra, Borel also adds his knowledge about the female deity He Xiangu. She was one of the group of "Eight Immortals" popular in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Borel adds this name in his description of the women on the flower boats, who are like "real Chinese fairies from old tales and legends," (Borel 1896b, 194). This not only gives a more literary flavour, but also strengthens his idea of the mysterious and unreal Chinese women. There is no such addition from the other two authors, who mainly convey what they see and possibly what the guide tells them. Therefore, Borel may sound more professional or expert-like, whereas there can sometimes be doubt about the accuracy of information supplied by the other two or the reliability of the source of information. Indeed, the part where Van Schermbeek describes the situation on the steamer is questionable:

> In the second class compartment, right under our saloon, we heard the resonant sound of a Confucian missionary during the entire morning. He was hired by a Chinese consortium at 45 Dutch guilders per month, and served as an antidote to the Christian missionaries who made themselves heard around Hong Kong. (1894a, paragraph 3)

It seems strange that there was "a Confucian missionary" who makes a resonant sound. It is more likely that such sounds were the chanting of Buddhist sutras, but Van Schermbeek gives no further details and remains vague. We can surmise that Van Schermbeek had heard this information from people on the ship, without further trying to understand what the actual situation was. There must have been disturbances, and the Chinese found it necessary to react against Western missionaries.

It is clear from the examples that Borel tries to delve deeper into the meaning of Guangzhou, by giving literary quotes and curious details that only a student of Chinese would know or learn about. Hence, we can deduce from the way he writes that he wanted to show that there is more than meets the eye. This is different from Emants and Van Schermbeek, whose descriptions are mainly direct observations of the visible and palpable. This may, in part, be related to intention or readership. Van Schermbeek seems to be communicating with his readers, in the sense that he gives answers to the questions that his readers have. These questions are not directly related to sightseeing in Guangzhou, but more generally about Chinese culture. In response to the question about the consumption of dog meat, Van Schermbeek writes that he spoke about it with a Mr. Gray, who had lived in Guangzhou for many years. According to Mr. Gray, dog meat is indeed available at half a dozen restaurants across Guangzhou, and it is an expensive dish on the menu (1894a, paragraph 10–11). Another question was about tea drinking. Van Schermbeek specifically describes the differences between the Chinese and the Dutch way of brewing and drinking. Whereas the Chinese pour hot water on tea leaves in the cup, the Dutch have a teapot in which they make tea. The Chinese drink the tea with a lid on the cup to prevent the leaves coming out and they do not add any milk or sugar (1894b, paragraph 5). This shows that Van Schermbeek is very much concerned with the target reader. Emants' writing is more a direct reflection or projection of his impression of Guangzhou, and does not seem to be writing with his readers in mind. None of the three writers is able to translate an objective image of Guangzhou. In other words, there is personality inside each of the essays. While we read about Guangzhou, we are also able to learn more about the writers at the same time. There is a merging of the Other and the Self.

6. Conclusion

In terms of translation, I would argue that there is a degree of merging of the Other (Chinese) with the Self (Dutch) that depends on different styles: an Orientalizing translation style that represents the other culture as inferior; an Orientalizing translation style that represents the other culture as superior; and an appropriative style that downplays distinctiveness. The first is seen in Emants' account, which has a negative foreignizing style. Emants is someone who is in shock and is not trying to make it easier for the reader to understand, probably because he himself does not (want to) understand either. Emants reminds the reader that China is strange and, as such, his configuration of the Chinese identity is quite negative. Emants' views are also racist. That said, we should bear in mind that Emants is someone who suffered from depression and who said "You are calling me a pessimist and I accept that." (Anonymous n.d.) For him, life was a great string of disappointments: it was meaningless. The second style can be seen in Borel's account, which is Orientalizing in a positive way. In his translation, Borel tends to be foreignizing, in the sense that he tries to idealize and mystify China: he looks beyond the ugly surface to find beauty. This is a very subjective configuration of the Chinese identity. Borel adds literary references and literary translation to assert his authority and to convince the reader of his truthfulness. He is portraying a China that many others are unable to see. Finally, there is the third, more domesticating and universalizing version by Van Schermbeek. From his writing, it appears that he is trying to understand and appropriate Chinese culture. Yet, although he downplays some of the differences, he is also showing a cultural awareness by comparing the Chinese way with that of the Dutch. In conclusion, I would say that all three authors have their own subjective view of China and individual style of translating China. Ultimately, each style is defining for the configuration of identity, which from a Western view makes the East inferior, superior or more universally equal.

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