



Re-orienting China

A Chinese Canadian Scholar's Book That Promotes
Cross-cultural Understanding

做跨文化交流的使者

LEILEI CHEN 陈蕾蕾 Photos Supplied by LEILEI CHEN and The Chinese Journal 供图: 陈蕾蕾 加拿大光华报

Dr. Leilei Chen teaches English literature and Writing Studies at the University of Alberta and MacEwan University, in Edmonton, Canada. She is the author of *Re-Orienting China: Travel Writing and Cross-Cultural Understanding* (published by the University of Regina Press, Canada, in 2016). The book represents an innovative way of studying travel literature, and it also helps Chinese readers see China's image in the eyes of the other. "The book marks the footprints of my life's journey and records the process of my learning and intellectual growth," she says.

在加拿大阿尔伯塔大学和麦克文大学，陈蕾蕾博士主要教授英语文学和写作研究课程。2016年11月，她的英文学术专著《重新感知中国——游记文学和跨文化理解》由里贾纳大学出版社出版。这本书不仅为学术工作者提供了新的研究视角和宝贵资料，也对有兴趣了解西方文化以及中国在西方人眼中形象的大众读者，提供了更好的阅读体验。

I arrived at the University of Alberta to do my Ph.D. in English in 2004. Prior to that, I was a professor of English at Jinan University, Guangzhou, China. The book was written based on the blueprint of my doctoral thesis, which focused on the travel literature written in English about China after 1949.

I was intrigued when reading Colin Thubron's *Behind the Wall* by the familiar but strange view of China through the eyes of a British writer. So, I decided to research the archive of travel books written in English about China after 1949.

My supervisor, Janice Williamson, among many of my colleagues and friends at the University of Alberta and beyond, envisioned a potential readership for my project, and she encouraged me to rewrite the thesis into a publishable book. I personally also felt a strong sense of responsibility to share my vision of China with the English readers.

As I was born in China and lived the first 34 years of my life in this country, I felt the need to share my vision of the place with the English readers who, for various reasons, saw China differently. Writing as an academic, I felt the need to join the scholarly conversation about travel literature studies and to contribute my perspective with both empirical knowledge about China and my professional training in the discipline of English studies in a Canadian university.

Travel literature studies about China and other non-Western countries often read the genre to be one that articulates the ideology of imperialism and consolidates the superiority of the West. I wish to say, "Not just that. Travel writing also opens up a dialogue between the traveler and the country visited, a space where the superiority of one culture is questioned and where a deeper, positive cross-cultural understanding is happening." Cross-cultural understanding is important to maintain global peace and the prosperity of human societies with diverse cultures.

I investigated six rarely studied travel writers' accounts of their experiences in China. Unlike those that largely represent the differences between home and abroad, the books examined in *Re-Orienting China* showcase the cultural connections despite the differences. The travelers are able to make sense of the foreign culture and bridge the gap — at least at the conceptual level — between China and their home countries.

The conceptual cultural bridge then leads to friendly exchanges and cooperation between China and Canada in Jock Tuzo Wilson's case. Wilson is the geophysicist from the University of Toronto who traveled to China in 1958. Wilson's visit to China allowed him to envision "a broader humanism" that transcended the boundaries between cultures, nations and peoples. With such a vision, he initiated an exhibit which introduced to Canadians China's contribution to science after he returned home. He also helped build science centers in various parts of China which have greatly facilitated cooperation and enhanced the cultural understanding between the two countries. This



type of travel story showcases the possibility of positive cross-cultural interaction conducive to a more productive and peaceful international relationship that is much needed in today's world.

I'm working with the University of Regina Press to find a Chinese publisher, who will purchase the translation copyright and make the book accessible to Chinese readers. I hope this book benefits not only English-speaking readers but also readers from China.

The book helps Chinese readers see China's image in the eyes of the other and to understand the complicated scenarios of cross-cultural communications. This vision and understanding are particularly important to those who need a global perspective to make decisions, and to those who need the knowledge to function in the Western countries — such as diplomats and government officials, business people doing international trade, students who study abroad and their parents, and so on.

At the academic level, *Re-Orienting China* represents an innovative way of studying travel literature, and it is a must read for scholars in the fields of not only Canadian, American, and comparative literary studies, but also anthropology, human geography, journalism and communications.

In addition, my translation of Steven Grosby's *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction* will be published by Yilin Press, in Nanjing, in East China's Jiangsu Province in May 2017.

In the future, I wish to work on new projects and to sustain the conversations made about travel and cross-cultural understanding.

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