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The Image of China in Milan Jovanović's *Tamo amo po istoku**

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Serbian traveler Milan Jovanović arrived in China in the 19th century, and after his return, his travelogue *Tamo amo po istoku* (Here and There in the East) was published. This article aims to reveal Jovanović's perception of China in his writings, in order to analyze the image of China and more importantly, his dilemmas of self-positioning while facing the East and the West. By applying comparative literary imagery theory and cross-cultural methods, this paper interprets the literal value of Jovanović's work, and discusses the interactions between the East and the West, as well as the "self" and the "others." This article argues that Jovanović's self-affirmation is faced with two "others": the heterogenous "other" of Eurocentrism, and the homogenous "other" of Eastern utopia. His image of China is constructed in the tension between the two.

KEYWORDS: travelogue; image of China; Milan Jovanović; Serbian literature

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Introduction

As early as the time of Marco Polo, the “gaze” of foreigners has become an important clue to investigate China and the cultural exchanges between China and Europe. In Europe, the mechanism of “gazing” has always been regarded as a reliable way to acquire knowledge. The eyes have always been the most reliable receptor, and vision is the most important way to get to know the world. The image of China has always been the mirror of the “other” of Western civilization. Studying the methods of the Europeans’ understanding of China and the construction of the image will not only help us understand the European view of the Chinese civilization, but also help us comprehend the self-understanding of the Europeans.

However, what we need to pay attention to is that the image is not static, it will change according to the specific historical context, the position and mentality of the constructor. Over centuries, the image of China in Europe has undergone important historical evolutions. From the beautiful and mysterious utopia to the land of ignorance and backwardness, the meaning of Chinese images is constantly being “interpreted” and “misinterpreted,” and its “color” is constantly changing with the eyes of the viewer. British scholar Raymond Dawson used the metaphor of the “chameleon” (Dawson, 1967, 1) to describe the ever-changing image of China in the diachronic dimension while Polish scholar Tomasz Ewertowski used the term “mosaic” (Ewertowski, 2020, 359) to describe the complex Chinese image in the synchronic dimension. Whether it is “chameleon” or “mosaic,” they all expound the different understanding of Chinese society by foreign missionaries, envoys, travelers, historians, etc. from their own perspectives, to help us better understand the essence of Chinese civilization.

Serbia and China are far apart, and it was not until the 18th century that the two peoples came into direct contact with the arrival of Serbian Sava Vladislavić as a Russian envoy. In the second half of the 19th century, Milan Jovanović arrived in China and became the second Serb to come to China that was documented in written materials. As a highly educated traveler, he recorded his trip to China with detailed texts, and his remarks about China and the Chinese

can be found in his works *Tamo amo po istoku* (Here and There in the East). The image of China constructed by Jovanović in this work is the main object of this paper. This study attempts to find a place for Jovanović's image of China within the "chameleon" and "mosaic" metaphors.

Milan Jovanović as a travel writer

Milan Jovanović's identities are diverse. He was a travel writer, playwright, novelist, a professional medical doctor and professor. Jovanović was born in 1834 in Jarkovac, Vojvodina, northern Serbia (the region was then ruled by the Austro-Hungarian Empire). As a teenager, he studied in various places. In 1862, Jovanović enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Vienna, and after obtaining his degree in 1865, he returned to his hometown and taught medicine at the higher schools in Belgrade. Between 1876 and 1878 he came to the royal family of Montenegro as the personal physician of Prince Nikola. From 1878 to 1882, he served as an accompanying doctor for the Austrian Lloyd Steamship Company, and followed merchant ships to the Middle East, India, and the Far East many times, until he finally reached the South China Sea and arrived in Hong Kong.

Jovanović was a highly recognized writer, his most important literary works were travelogues which were subsequently published in various Serbian newspapers and magazines, such as *Srpska zora* (Serbian Dawn), *Srpske ilustrirane novine* (Serbian Illustrated Newspaper) and *Otadžbina* (Fatherland). In 1882, he ended his sailing career and returned to Belgrade. While practicing medicine, he continued to devote himself to literary work. In 1890, he was elected a corresponding member of the Serbian Royal Academy, Department of the Academy of Arts. Two years later, he was elected as Academician. Jovanović was one of the founders of the Serbian Literary Association, which was established in 1892 and which published four collections of his short stories and travelogues: *S mora i sa suva* (From the Sea and the Mainland, 1892), *Tamo amo po istoku* (Here and there in the East, two books, 1894–1895), and *Gore dole po Napulju* (Up and down in Naples, 1898).

Jovanović was known as an outstanding travel writer of his time. He brought to undeveloped Serbia not only his impressions of the Far East but also of the history, religion, literature, and the real life of the people who, in Europe, were still veiled in mystery (Djordjević, 2020, 105). The knowledge of China and other oriental regions contained in his travelogues greatly increased Europe's interest in oriental traditional culture (Gvozden, 2011, 87).

Jovanović's perception of Hong Kong

In the history of cultural exchanges between China and the world, Hong Kong is an important "contact zone." Mary Louis Pratt writes: "The contact zone refers to the space of imperial encounters, where geographically and historically divided people encounter each other and interact with each other. A space for uninterrupted relationships, often involving situations of coercive politics, racial inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt, 2008, 10). Hong Kong is a place with such characteristics. Because of its potential to become a good port, Britain began controlling it from 1842 after the First Opium War. Hong Kong gradually developed from a small fishing village with many barren land and mountains and a lack of water sources, into an entrepot and became a hub for European countries to trade commodities to China. It has played an important role in cultural exchanges between China and the West as well. While absorbing the edification and influence of foreign cultures, it has always retained the Chinese culture that nurtured it. When Jovanović arrived in Hong Kong, it was the period of intense European colonial expansion.

The port was the heart of Hong Kong. The endless "heartbeat" kept the whole city awake. The harbor was busy around the clock loading and unloading ships. When Jovanović arrived in Hong Kong by ship, the first thing that caught his eye was, of course, the hustle and bustle of the port: it was a Chinese harbor, but named after the Queen of England—Victoria Harbor (Jovanović, 1895, 160). He was fascinated by the busy scene there, noticed that tea was China's main export, while opium was in exchange. It is worth noting that opium was a part of the goods that his ship carried from Europe (Jovanović, 1895, 161).

The city of Hong Kong gradually extended from the seaside to the interior of the land, Jovanović's observation and exploration also followed this route. One day, he took a rickshaw and set out for the depths of the city. According to Jovanović's impression, the macadam was smoother and firmer than any other macadam in the world, which allowed the barefoot rickshaw puller suffer less (Jovanović, 1895, 171).

After the opening of Hong Kong as a port in the early 19th century, many foreigners came to Hong Kong for various reasons. After these immigrants came to Hong Kong, the population of foreign residents reached a certain scale, and the immigrants would choose to live with immigrants of the same ethnic group, thus forming their own living areas and environments geographically. The foreigners in Hong Kong lived relatively concentratedly, mainly in the Central (the early Victoria town) of Hong Kong Island and the Tsim Sha Tsui area in the northern part of the Kowloon Peninsula. In this way, Hong Kong was divided into two parts: the European area and the Chinese area. Jovanović was fascinated by both areas, but found the shops most interesting:

If the European area of the town is interesting for its beauty and delicious gardens, the Chinese area, which is full of houses and shops, is no less interesting for its originality and taste. The market streets are colorful from afar with many signs and colorful lanterns hanging in front of the shops. Almost every store has its own loft where the goods are stacked and many have their own galleries, which can now be seen in European warehouses. Above the lower loft, there is a wide curved stretch, so the upper loft cannot be seen from the street (Jovanović, 1895, 174).¹

And when the night fell, the shops kept open and turned on their colorful lights, making the scene even more charming. Besides the shops, the teahouses were busy too, the rice was always being cooked from dawn to dark every day, it was because Chinese people were always working from dawn to dusk (Jovanović, 1895, 174).

1 Passages quoted in this article are translated from Serbian to English by the author.

Jovanović's description is vivid and beautiful. Through delicate writing, the author not only presents a colorful and vibrant landscape that evokes the readers' imagination, but also expresses his admiration. Hong Kong was a place where Chinese and Western cultures blended, and everything in it exuded different allure. Till today, Hong Kong has not only been a window for modern Chinese to observe Western society, but also a window for Westerners to observe Chinese society. In this sense, the account written by Jovanović was a witness of encounter between the East and the West.

Jovanović's perception of the Chinese people

To a large extent, the image of China is the image of the Chinese people. There is a difference between the image of the Chinese obtained through observation and one obtained through interpersonal contact. The former is mainly manifested in external aspects such as appearance, clothing, hair, living habits, etiquette, and customs, while the latter is more emotional and more real because of the actual contact. In *Tamo amo po istoku*, Jovanović made a lot of effort in writing about the Chinese people. Before arriving in Hong Kong, he had already been living with the Chinese while traveling to the South China Sea. His perception of the Chinese people came from both observation and interpersonal contact.

Lifestyle

The Chinese people in Jovanović's writings have a calm character and always seek tranquility. They are peaceful and quiet, they don't like arguing or aggressive behaviour, which he thinks is worthy for the Westerners to learn from (Jovanović, 1895, 144). As a professional doctor, Jovanović thinks that, besides being peaceful, the Chinese do follow the principle of health in terms of clothing and food. They dress comfortably, have light food and drink tea. There isn't any strong alcoholic drink, so there aren't heavy drinkers. What's more, he believes that their lives are carefully organized, and the correctness of this way of life could be proven by science (Jovanović, 1895, 146). From observing Chinese

people and their culture, Jovanović comes to an important realization which is:

... many of our physical and moral problems may stem from our food that is too rich and too spicy. I don't know if Confucius, like our sages, taught his people to restrain, but if he did, I can freely say that the Chinese listened to their teacher better than we do (Jovanović, 1895, 105).

Jovanović respects the Chinese people's lifestyle while writing positively of them. He praises the restraint and moderation, which he sees as advantages over Western culture. When it comes to faith and belief, Jovanović sees loyalty. He notices that no matter where people live, in their living space there is always a corner for worship with incense, flowers, and icons. Jovanović thinks that faith might be the foundation of their thinking, allowing the Chinese to preserve their identity and not be mixed with other ethnic groups. This is where Jovanović finds the link to the Chinese people's adaptability: regardless of where they are, they live independently by themselves (Jovanović, 1895, 162).

Some more examples of the Chinese people's lifestyle are given in *Tamo amo po istoku*. Jovanović uses comparisons so his readers can better understand his intentions. While referring to family, he compares the Chinese with the Greeks, showing that they have close family ties and take care of each other when in difficulties. However, more comparisons are drawn to show the difference. The Chinese are different from the Arabs because they are quiet (Jovanović, 1895, 144). The Chinese of various faiths are different from the Muslims because they go to the temples only when they need comfort or encouragement. Jovanović admits that the way of worship of the Chinese is more similar to the Byzantines and Romans, because it is destined to act more on the senses than on the soul (Jovanović, 1895, 147). When the Chinese celebrate their New Year, it is like the carnival in Italy (Jovanović, 1895, 192). In general, comparisons are made to present the image of the Chinese. Ewertowski reveals that these comparisons essentially express a judgment (Ewertowski, 2015, 194). The tendency to present the Chinese as a positive alternative to Europeans seems obvious.

Craftsmanship and hardworking spirit

While writing about the Chinese people, Jovanović describes their hardworking and tenacious spirit. Looking at a silk scarf and a pair of slippers, he appreciates the durability and beauty of Chinese handicrafts, and believes that these two characteristics could not coexist in European handicrafts (Jovanović, 1895, 183). The Great Wall of China presents a symbol of the continuity of hard work. As Ewertowski mentions in his book, even though Jovanović didn't see it with his own eyes, he uses it as an example of China's greatness (Ewertowski, 2020, 179). He believes that the high level of Chinese craftsmanship is attributable to the Chinese people's diligence, perseverance, and self-discipline:

Chinese people persevere in their work. They never ask how long it takes to finish something, but just do it. If it can't be done today, he will continue to do it tomorrow, he will keep doing it for years. Until one day he dies, and someone else picks it up and continues. Such continuity in every piece of work can be found especially in economy or literature, providing them with a broad foundation of existence (Jovanović, 1895, 179).

As mentioned above, the teahouses and shops in Hong Kong never close at night because the hard-working people never rest. They don't have Sundays off or holidays, they value time as money (Jovanović, 1895, 191). When writing about the hardworking rickshaw pullers and porters at the docks, Jovanović shows a certain sympathy for them. The resilience of the Chinese is also reflected in the tolerance for bullying. When being beaten and scolded by the British, the Chinese remain silent and insist on continuing their hard work (Jovanović, 1895, 157). While some Westerners see the diligence and tenacity as troublesome features of the so-called "Yellow Peril"², instead of using expressions such as "sensory numbness" and "no perception of pain" which were familiar with the

2 The "Yellow Peril" was an ultra-nationalist theory formed in the 19th century which saw the Asian ('yellow') race as a threat to white people. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the "Yellow Peril" was rampant in China, Japan, and other countries.

Westerners at that time, Jovanović interprets them as virtues. Having lived among the Chinese, he has a deeper understanding and greater regard for them, and writes from a humanist perspective. On the other hand, it is obvious that Jovanović is skeptical and vigilant of the colonial discourse.

Chinese women

In Jovanović's eyes, Chinese people exhibit flexibility and persistence in labor, and these two qualities are vividly reflected in women. Chinese women constitute an important focal point of observation and writing in *Tamo amo po istoku*. The author is so deeply impressed by Chinese women's dresses and immeasurable ability in physical labor that he devotes a lot of space to write about them. In his point of view, even the Chinese women who live on boats with their families are meticulous in terms of hygiene and cleanliness, and they keep the living space on board in an orderly manner. While they are working with their hands, they are carrying their children on their backs, which doesn't make them weaker than men in the slightest way. What impresses him the most is that these women are as skilled at rowing and steering the boats as men (Jovanović, 1895, 162). The Chinese women the author refers to belonged to the ethnic group called "Tankas" (or Dan people, 登家人) who lived on boats and pursued their traditional livelihood of fishing. Since they were boat people who lived by the sea, they were sometimes referred to as "sea gypsies," "on-water people" (水上人), "people of the southern sea" (南海人) or "boat dwellers" (艇家).

From the detailed remarks that Jovanović makes, we can feel the respect and admiration he has towards the Chinese Tanka women. This is evident in the chapter where he describes the way they are combing their hair: "In China every woman is a hairdresser" (Jovanović, 1895, 145). Since the women live in modest conditions and hardly have any fancy clothes or ornaments, each of them pays a lot of attention to their hair. Every woman's hair is carefully groomed and some of them engage in joint rituals when they comb each other's hair (Jovanović, 1895, 145). On the other hand, the women living on water seem to have a special kind of natural beauty. Their clothes are neat and tidy. Since they do hard labor,

Tanka women don't bind their feet or wrap their breasts as most Chinese women did at that time. Working outdoors gives them dark, healthy skin and strong, solid bodies. Their physical strength enables them to participate more in work and play a more important role in social activities.

Nevertheless, Jovanović finds women's social status to be generally low: "this was consistent with the whole of the East" (Jovanović, 1895, 172). Women did labor in order to maintain their families, however, they were treated like household items which could be sold for money. To make matters worse, some Chinese women outside of the Tanka group even had to undergo the ordeal of foot binding. Foot binding is a phenomenon that is frequently mentioned in travel writings about China by Westerners from the late 19th century. The deformed feet not only restricted the movement of women, but also caused serious harm to women's physical and mental health. Western missionaries and travelers often criticized it as a "cruel and terrifying torture" (Ross, 2016, 182). In the late 19th century, foot binding, together with opium, infanticide, gambling, and taking concubines, became an image of the decay of Chinese culture. Serbian travel writer Milutin Velimirović proposed three reasons for the existence of foot binding in his book *Kroz Kina* (Across China). Firstly, the Chinese men see special beauty in small feet, they call them "three-inch golden lotus" (Velimirović, 1930, 135). Secondly, small feet are beneficial to ensure women's loyalty because their right to move freely is deprived. The third reason is what he heard from the French: the deformed feet will stimulate male desire (Velimirović, 1930, 135). Jovanović himself met Chinese women with bound feet. He admits that he understands that bound feet will guarantee better social status for women, but he is still deeply suspicious of this custom (Jovanović, 1895, 104).

In addition to the extraordinary diligence, perseverance, resilience, adaptability and flexibility, the duality and ambiguity of the Chinese characters in Jovanović's writing are also remarkable. However, Jovanović believes that the opposing factors are well balanced, and that the spiritual "inner" and the physical "outer" of the Chinese people can be separated. For example, the Chinese are proud of their own people, but also admire the advantages of foreigners; they have a deep historical tradition, but also focus on the present and the future; they find

a balance between resignation and fatalism, and see this as a good antidote against suicide and other sinful thoughts in difficult situations; the Chinese people are prone to indulging in emotions, but they have strong self-control; they may be engaged in mundane tasks, but their ambitions have no limit. These psychological characteristics are particularly interesting to a travel writer.

Jovanović's image of China

The transformation of China's image in the 19th century

Chinese scholar Zhou Ning distinguishes two phases in the way the Western people developed their image of China: the Pre-Enlightenment (1250–1750) and the Post-Enlightenment (1750–late 20th century) (Zhou, 2011, 25). Beginning in 1250, the late medieval period of Western culture, the Pre-Enlightenment phase encompasses the entire Renaissance period up to the climax of the Enlightenment, i.e. 1750, which gives a span of 500 years. Throughout this phase, Western descriptions of China are positive and affirmative, and in a chronological order three types of images can be broadly categorized, namely, “Khan's Land”³, the “Greater Chinese Empire”⁴ and “Confucian Utopia.”⁵

3 The image of “Khan's Land” corresponds to a time period roughly from 1250 to 1450 when China was united and powerful during Yuan Dynasty and Ming Dynasty. Meanwhile Western society was in the late medieval era and at the dawn of Renaissance, a time of material scarcity, poverty when society was in turmoil and war.

4 The image of “Greater Chinese Empire” corresponds with the period from 1450 to 1650, which is the so-called “Age of Discovery.” It has an obvious characteristic: the significance of institutional civilization becomes prominent.

5 The time period corresponding with the image of “Confucian Utopia” is roughly from 1650 to 1750. During this time, the Renaissance was over, the age of the great geographical discoveries was coming to an end, and the Enlightenment movement began in an all-round way. This stage emphasizes a Chinese image with profound Enlightenment significance. In the Western modernity imagination, the meaning of Confucian Utopia has changed from a social utopia of investment, intervention, and reality to an aesthetic utopia of detachment and escapism (Zhou, 2011, 36).

From the middle to the late 18th century, with the beginning of the industrial revolution in Britain and other Western countries, the modern capitalist economy emerged and was in urgent need of foreign expansion. At the same time, all the ancient Eastern empires, including China, declined. Western countries broke the old world order with their strong military and economic power. On the other hand, Western social concepts also changed, and values such as democracy, progress and freedom became the core concepts of Western culture, as well as the basic criteria for judging whether a country was modern or not. In the eyes of Westerners, the image of China changed from the civilization and perfection of the 17th and 18th centuries to an authoritarian, evil, dark, closed and degenerate “Opium Empire.” The two Opium Wars in the 19th century and the fall of the Qing Dynasty in the early 20th century reinforced the negative image of China. At this stage, China was also perceived as the “stagnant,” “despotic” and “barbaric empire.”

From the point of view of the Western colonizers, China’s tyranny, stagnation, backwardness, barbarism, ignorance, and similar negative associations became a mirror for the West to prove its superiority; it needed to construct China as an authoritarian, stagnant and barbaric “other” to establish its self-awareness, to highlight and prove its own advantages. Therefore, in the “grand narrative” of Western modernity, the three image types as the dominant values of modernity: progress, freedom and civilization found the opposite in the image of China—the “stagnant empire” versus the progressive order; the “despotic empire” versus the liberal order; the “barbaric empire” versus the civilized order (Zhou, 2011, 89). More importantly, the negative image of China provided justice and justification for its colonial aggression, as well as the rhetoric that “such a nation can only be saved by Western Christian civilization and scientific democracy, otherwise the existence of the Chinese nation has no meaning and will only continue to degenerate and sink” (Zhou, 2011, 313).

This was the cultural background when the Serbian traveler Milan Jovanović came to China between 1878 and 1882. As we could see from his narratives, his perception of China tends to be positive, which does not seem to be in line with the mainstream Western image of China at the time when European colonization was approaching its peak in Asia. Jovanović’s image of China represents subversion.

Anticolonial stance

Jovanović came to China as a merchant ship doctor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and part of the cargo on his ship happened to be opium. However, as can be seen from his travelogues, he was clearly different from most of the Western travelers of the same period: he did not consider himself a colonizer, nor did he feel superior because of his identity as a foreigner. He consciously rejected the zeitgeist of his era, trying to use universal humanity and fraternity to observe the plight of the local people, and gave sympathy, thereby reflecting on the endless harm to human nature caused by European colonial expansion. His accusations of European colonialism can be found in his writing, for example:

The so-called European civilization seems to be another form of the primordial barbarism of Africa: the native sultans no longer sell slaves in America, but now they and their subjects are slaves to European farmers, and they are only so relieved to be slaves in their native home (Jovanović, 1895, 113).

Obviously, Jovanović disagrees with the so-called “European Civilization Mission” and “Eurocentric Consciousness.” As a doctor, he saw firsthand the terrible consequences of these colonialisms. When writing about the appearance of Europeans in China, he says bluntly: “Opium is the best illustration of European greed.” He also adds:

For such huge profits, the British did not hesitate to wage two wars to force the Chinese to authorize the import of this poison. This poison destroys the health and morals of the Chinese nation. To put it bluntly, this (the huge profit) is the real meaning of the so-called “European Civilization Mission” that is being carried out on Asian soil. (Jovanović, 1895, 135)

Jovanović is a fierce critic of the expansion of European colonial powers in the East, which he sees as a greedy, violent, and unjust act. He sees Europeans as a more barbaric presence than the Chinese; in his work, the Chinese are portrayed as victims of the European colonial aggression.

Jovanović came from a country different from the West—Serbia where the people had just broken free from five hundred years of Ottoman Turkish rule. Before setting foot in China as a doctor and intellectual, he had participated in the Serbian national patriotic revolution. He had a very deep and personal understanding of the harm caused by foreign aggression. In his self-identification, there was no sense of racial superiority or colonial arrogance, therefore he preferred to identify with the Chinese who suffered from colonial aggression. Instead of reproducing the prejudice that regarded the Chinese as a “yellow peril” or “yellow threat” to Western civilization, he appreciated Chinese culture and linked it with the liberal and humanitarian ideas so as to promote them as weapons against European civilization dominated by greed and violence.

At the end of the 19th century, what Jovanović saw through his personal contact with China, was not depravity or failure, but an alternative way of development for ideals and humanism. It can be said that *Tamo amo po istoku* reflects Jovanović’s humanitarian warmth and unique aesthetic pursuit. By adding a perceptual element to the Chinese “other,” the image of China that Jovanović constructed is in great contrast with his historical background at the time, which makes the travelogue more precious.

Two “others”

Daniel-Henri Pageaux pointed out that every image originated from the self-consciousness of the relationship between the “self” and the “other,” the “local” and the “exotic” (Meng, 2001, 155). This is why the foreign image in literature cannot be regarded as a simple description of foreign reality, but must be placed in the relationship and interaction between the “other” and the “self.” The construction of China’s image is a process of complex development and interaction. Travel writers construct the image of China against a certain historical background and environment of discourse, and the image of China, as the “other,” also participates in the construction of their “self” (Zhou, 2011, 4).

In the example of *Tamo amo po istoku*, the concept order of “East–West” can be easily detected. When confirming the “self,” Jovanović clearly put himself in the position of the West because that was actually where he

came from. However, in his consciousness, the ideological opposition between the East and the West is not simply established. His West is not a simple or absolute value concept, but a duality full of contradictions. He acknowledged the superiority brought by the industrial revolution, technological revolution, and civilized reform for opposing feudal rule and church privileges, and for the development of European society, and recognized that Western values and moral ethics advocating rationality, science, equality, and democracy were progressive, but he did not agree with the way Europe used capitalism and colonial expansion to destroy and dominate other continents and regions. Eurocentrism is what Jovanović tries to reject. In this sense, instead of the East, the heterogenous "other" is presented by Eurocentrism.

On the other hand, Jovanović's East is complicated too. Jovanović develops an imaginary connection to the image of China, and uses it as the "other" to complete his self-identification or self-affirmation. Represented by China at the time, the East was indeed backward and underdeveloped, but it did not have the Orientalist manifestations of the East in the cultural map of the Western imagination, such as mystery, debauchery, brutality, depravity, despotism, corruption, antiquity, stagnation, chaos, evil, etc. (Zhou, 2011, 335). The East represented in Jovanović's image of China seems to have escaped or even surpassed the imaginative geography of "Orientalism" where the East was to be controlled, reconstructed, and dominated by the West (Said, 2019, 4). For most of the 19th century, the Western world was interested in using Western culture to "save" the East. In their eyes, the West represented rationality and progress, while China was the opposite, an ignorant and backward Eastern empire that contrasted with the advancement of Western culture. This is reasonable when one is fully confident to affirm the West identity. However, for Jovanović this is not the case. He seeks to express a sense of cultural relativism, skepticism, and criticism towards the Western civilization by constructing a positive image of the East. While doing so, he adopts a positive, idealized, and utopian discourse. In this sense, China, or the East, can be understood as Jovanović's homogeneous "other."

Jovanović's self-affirmation process is faced with two "others": the heterogenous "other" of Eurocentrism, and the homogenous "other" of

Eastern utopia. His perception of China is constructed in the tension between the two “others.” By shaping the heterogenous “other,” he rejects Eurocentrism and suggests that the spiritual values which modern Europe lost could be found in China; by shaping the homogenous “other,” he consciously idealizes China, shows admiration and respect for its civilization. This construction can be regarded as an attempt to promote Chinese tradition in the world order dominated by the West, an attempt to prove that Chinese culture is not inferior to the Western one.

Conclusion

Milan Jovanović’s travelogue *Tamo amo po istoku* is regarded as one of the most important texts about China by Serbian writers. His writing is vivid and beautiful, full of emotion and humanitarian warmth. More importantly, while constructing the image of China, he consciously adopts a positive, idealized, and utopian vision so as to reject Eurocentrism and promote Chinese spiritual value in the world dominated by the West. It does not seem to be in line with the mainstream Western image of China at the time when European colonization was at its peak in Asia. This may be the reason that makes the travelogue more precious.

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