

# Occidentalism, Undergraduate Literary Reading, and Critical Intercultural Pedagogy

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Received: July 31, 2022

Accepted: September 12, 2022

Online Published: September 23, 2022

doi:10.5539/hes.v12n4p45

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v12n4p45>

## Abstract

The purposes of this paper are to investigate Taiwanese undergraduate students' responses to a selected fictional text, and to propose a critical intercultural pedagogical approach of reading global literature in the EFL educational context based on the insights from the research findings. The authors first critically analysed Xiaolu Guo's third novel, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*, in terms of Occidentalism, in order to unpack the ideologies underlying her representation of the British and the Chinese. The analysis of the text was conducted through a qualitative approach of critical content analysis. After that, a semi-structured interview was adopted to scrutinise Taiwanese undergraduate students' perceptions of the ideologies underlying the fiction. The analysis of the text identified three themes of British-Chinese binary opposition together with the juxtaposition of ethnocentric Occidentalism and reverse Occidentalism. The findings obtained from interviews indicated that two of the three dichotomies, i.e. individualism versus collectivism and cosmopolitan versus rooted, underlying the fictional text were commonly perceived by the interviewed undergraduates while they had diverse views on the second dichotomy, sexual freedom versus sexual reticence. Furthermore, some students' responses to the fiction signified a subtle, implicit and delicate form of reverse Occidentalism. Based on the above research findings, the authors configured a critical intercultural pedagogy for raising students' capability of decoding and deconstructing Occidentalist ideologies underlying global literature.

**Keywords:** critical content analysis, critical intercultural pedagogy, literary reading, Occidentalism

## 1. Introduction: Intercultural Pedagogy and Global Literature

The first two decades of the 21st century saw a number of scholars who gave the utmost importance to the role of literature and intercultural reading in instructing English as a foreign language (EFL). They provided adequate grounds for the teaching of literature aimed at raising students' intercultural competence in different ways (Hanauer, 2001; Matos, 2005; Rodriguez & Fernando, 2013; Porto, 2014; Tikiz & Çubukçu, 2013). Literature provides simulated opportunities for interactions with individuals of different cultural backgrounds, worldviews, and a variety of values and behaviours (Byram, 2021). The term global literature refers to the literary text set in a global context outside the reader's own location (Short, 2016). It invites readers to immerse themselves into the culture and experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds, challenges readers' pre-knowledge and expectations and hence contributes to readers' intercultural understanding beyond superficial information (Alter, 2014; Short, 2016). In other words, reading literary texts can provide students space in which they can experiment with different cultural perspectives and compare their own cultures to the culture in the text (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001). On the other hand, texts are written from particular perspectives, deliver particular understandings of the world with particular narrative strategies and thereby position readers toward particular meanings (Short, 2017). A common distortion might be caused by the stereotypes and biases derived from binary opposition. Binary opposition can result in readers' simplistic and essentialist understandings of foreign cultures which are one of the most challenging barriers to communication across cultures. Hence, it is important to examine the representation in the form of binary oppositions underlying the literary texts and to raise EFL learners' awareness of the ideological components in EFL teaching contexts.

According to Rosenblatt's (1978) reader-response theory, meaning does not come from the text itself, but rather from the transaction between the reader and the text. When reading a text, readers make sense of and interpret the text by relating their values, knowledge, individual experiences and emotions with their ideological stances. From a pedagogical point of view, Rosenblatt's viewpoint reminds language teachers of the importance of encouraging undergraduate students to give personal responses to the text as a first teaching step, followed by critical reflection on their responses. By doing so, EFL learners are encouraged to explore their images of others and to reflect on their reactions to those images—a significant process for deconstructing stereotypes and developing intercultural awareness (Bredella, 1996). Therefore, the understanding of students' perceptions of, and responses to, the literary text can provide educators with fertile insights into EFL literature pedagogy for enhancing students' intercultural competence.

In terms of the selection of literary texts, a small body of research has focused on the utilization of global literature by Asians in the field of EFL pedagogical design for promoting students' intercultural understanding. Fictions written by Asians and featuring East-West contacts and conflicts within Western contexts are an important source for Asian undergraduate readers. Using these texts, they can learn to analyse these writers' perspectives or "gaze" (Urry & Larsen, 2011), and how they represent the Western Other. Students can reflect on the ideologies underpinning the texts, and their own responses to the texts, as an awareness-raising pedagogical strategy. Based on Chinese and British cultural backgrounds and knowledge of the three authors of the paper, Xiaolu Guo's (2007) fictionalised autobiography, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*, is selected as an example of where such opportunities exist. Guo grew up in China but moved to London in 2002. She decided to "make her isolation in Britain, and her struggle with the English language, an asset" (Guo, 2017, p.93) and wrote this novel just a couple of years after moving to Britain. Her detailed diary, filled with the new vocabulary she learned, became the basis for this novel. In her narrative, Zhuang Xiao Qiao (hereafter Z), a 23-year-old girl from provincial China, is sent to London by her parents to study English. The novel is laid out as a journal; each chapter recounts a month of the year she spends in London, and follows her love affair with an older British man. The language of the fiction replicates the style of a Chinese English learner and the cognitive development of the protagonist is accompanied by the change in her writing style (Kuhiwczak, 2014). The fiction has been translated into 26 languages.

There has been a substantial body of research analysing the representation of the East in literature from the viewpoint of Orientalism since the publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. However, the research on the Oriental representation of the West is relatively rare. Scholars who have previously pondered Guo's *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*, have focused on a variety of topics from different viewpoints, such as Dervin & Gao (2015), Doloughan (2009), Gilmour (2012), Hwang (2013), Kuhiwczak (2014), and Poon (2013). There is a lack of research on the representation of the British in terms of Occidentalism.

Based on the importance of raising Asian EFL learners' cultural reflection through reading global literature written by Asians and the above-mentioned gap in knowledge concerning Occidentalism, the purposes of this paper are to investigate Taiwanese undergraduate students' responses to a selected fictional text in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their ideological beliefs about the British from their reading of the novel, and to propose a critical pedagogical approach of reading global literature for enhancing undergraduate students' capability of analysing and reflecting on the ideologies underpinning the text and their responses to the text in the EFL educational context based on the insights from the researching findings. This study began with critically analysing Guo's novel, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*, in terms of Occidentalism, in order to unpack the ideologies underlying her representation of the British and the Chinese.

## 2. Occidentalism: A Critical Lens for Reading Global Literature

Occidentalism emerged from Orientalism and is strongly correlated with it (Makdisi, 2014). Amongst the wide variety of definitions of Occidentalism, some focus on the essentialist nature of Occidentalism while others regard Occidentalism as discursive practices and strategies. In terms of its essentialist nature, Occidentalism can be defined as an essentialist rendering of the West (Carrier, 1992, 1995). Occidentalism refers to "the belief in a coherent socio-cultural entity called "the West", which is thought to be distinctive and homogeneous enough to have its own culture, people, and society" (Jouhki & Pennanen, 2016, p.4-5). In terms of discursive practices and strategies, Occidentalism can be conceptualised as signifying practices and strategies that construct the discourses and images of the West within specific mechanisms, which are conditioned by the power relationship between the Oriental and the Occidental (e.g. Ahiska, 2003; X. Chen, 1992).

Based on Said's (1978) viewpoints in *Orientalism*, Carrier (1992) suggests that, like Orientalism, Occidentalism also feeds from binary opposition in which pairs of mutually-exclusive opposed categories are represented

without nuance or complexity. In terms of this research focusing on how the Chinese-origin author looks at the British, it is important to consider the presence of Occidentalism in contemporary China. Two forms of binary opposition between China and the West can be identified and seen as responses to the aggression and penetration made by Western powers in China.

The first is “ethnocentric Occidentalism” (coined by the authors of this article) referring to the binary opposition between inferior Britain and superior China. Since the British intrusion into Macao in 1808, the Chinese came to see the aggressive nature of the British, and tension between Britain and China was thus generated. The British were described negatively as arrogant, avaricious, deceitful, brutal, crafty, disrespectful and unpredictable by the Chinese ruling elite. This implies that the Chinese were contented, honest, humble, peaceful and sincere. During the first Opium War (1839), a dichotomy strategy commonly adopted by the Chinese writers was to produce a positive self-image through dehumanising or demonising the British by associating them with frightful animals (e.g. brutal tigers or wolves) or fearful ghosts (C.-H. Chen, 2007). Here the fundamental tone of Chinese Occidentalism was antagonistic toward the British, supporting nationalism and struggling against imperialism. The British are treated as other and a threat to the sovereignty of the Qing Empire and its superior national moral fibre.

The second form of Occidentalism is coined by Lary (2006) as “reverse Occidentalism”, referring to the process of a non-Occidental society adopting, or desiring to adopt, elements of Western modernisation. Following China’s opening from the late 1970s, due to Western influences, some Chinese considered the flourishing Western material and spiritual civilisation superior to Chinese culture. The West had been celebrated as a “model” to be followed (Ning, 1997). In terms of China-Britain intercultural exchanges, although the ruling elite described the British as other (inferior people) after the British invasion of Macao in 1808, some liberal-minded Chinese depicted positive images of the British in their writings. For example, in Xie Qinggao’s *Hailu* (Records of the Sea, 1820), he admiringly described Britain as powerful, rich, and with few social problems and depicted the British as brave, kind-hearted, law-abiding, and talented. British women were definitely far less restricted than their counterparts in China. It seems that he regarded the British as a respectable model for the Chinese to emulate. Commenting on the technical rather than the social, Ye Zhongjin’s *Yingjiliguoyi qing jilue* (A Note on the State of England, 1834) recognised the superiority of the British in medical and military sciences and welfare services (C.-H. Chen, 2007).

The selection of Occidentalism as the theoretical framework for this research was based on Guo’s Oriental origin (China), the detailed portrayal of the Occidental (the British) in the fiction under study, and the binary oppositions underlying the narrative of the fiction. Guo continually contrasted what the female protagonist, Z, encountered in Britain with what she had experienced and learned in China before arriving in Britain. In this paper, the term “Occidentalist ideologies” is adopted to denote the essentialist and biased perspective on the British and the Chinese in the form of binary opposition, ethnocentric Occidentalism and reverse Occidentalism. As a theoretical framework, Occidentalism allowed us to identify the explicit and implicit assumptions and ideologies in the selected fiction by answering the following four questions:

- (1) What binary opposites of national characteristics between the British and the Chinese were represented in the selected fiction?
- (2) Did Guo’s (2007) representation of the British and the Chinese reflect ethnocentric Occidentalism and/or reverse Occidentalism, and how?
- (3) To what extent and how did the Taiwanese undergraduate participants sense the identified binary opposites of national characteristics represented in the fiction under study?
- (4) How did the Taiwanese undergraduate participants evaluate the national characteristics represented in the form of binary opposites represented in the selected fiction?

### 3. Methodology

In order to achieve the research purposes, the study adopted two research methods. Firstly, critical content analysis was employed to conduct the analyses of the selected fiction for pinpointing the ideologies embedded in the text. Based on the result of analysing the text, semi-structured interviews were used to scrutinise Taiwanese undergraduate students’ perceptions of the ideologies underlying the fiction. The understanding of their perceptions constituted an important base for developing a critical intercultural pedagogy for decoding and deconstructing Occidentalist ideologies through reading global literature in EFL teaching context.

#### 3.1 Critical Content Analysis

In terms of literary research, content analysis is a research technique for examining what texts are about, that is,

considering the content from a particular perspective (Galda, Ash, & Cullinan, 2000). The focus of content analysis might be the presence and image of certain groups (e.g. Rocha & Dowd, 1993), the social and cultural values portrayed in texts (e.g. Edgington, Brabham, & Frost, 1999) or the portrayal of phenomena (e.g. Poling & Hupp, 2008). This research went beyond simple content analysis and adopted critical content analysis to reveal ideological patterns underlying cultural representation. Critical content analysis, as defined by Short (2017), “involves bringing a critical lens to an analysis of a text or group of texts in an effort to explore the possible underlying messages within those texts, particularly as related to issues of power” (p.6). It is a flexible method (Utt & Short, 2018) and “[w]hat makes a study „critical” is the theoretical framework used to think within, through, and beyond the text, and involves a particular critical theory” (Short, 2017, p.4).

Content analysis can be conducted by a quantitative or qualitative approach, or by merging both approaches (Groeben & Rustemeyer, 1994; Schreier, 2012). Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is suitable for dealing with meaning that is less standardised and obvious and requiring some degree of interpretation in the analysis of research material. This research adopted a qualitative approach to analyse Guo’s fiction because it required active interpretation by the researchers, and employed a flexible coding scheme based on both previous theoretical frameworks and developing patterns in order to reveal implicit themes and binary opposites underlying the text. By the same token, this research selected a combined inductive (data-driven) / deductive (concept-driven) approach to QCA as the most appropriate method for examining the portrayals of the British and the Chinese in the fiction in question.

The authors implemented the following process of analysing the selected fiction:

- (1) The analysis of the fiction began with the authors’ immersion in the story in order to get a holistic idea of the storyline.
- (2) A concept-driven approach was used to create broad categories by referring to Hidalgo’s (1993) three levels of culture—the concrete, the behavioural, and the symbolic. The concrete level contains the most visible and tangible products of culture. The behavioural level refers to the definitions of social roles, languages, rituals, and the form of nonverbal communication. The symbolic level includes values and beliefs and is fundamental to our interpretation of the world. The three levels constitute three broad categories of Guo’s representation of the British and the Chinese.
- (3) The authors each respectively drew on our own knowledge as both cultural insiders and outsiders of British culture and Chinese culture, identified each British and Chinese characteristic represented in the fiction and grouped it into one of the broad categories. The coding results for British and Chinese characteristics were presented discretely.
- (4) After initial coding, we conducted peer-checks by comparing and discussing the coding results by the three authors.
- (5) Then, the authors carefully examined and compared the British and Chinese characteristics represented in the fiction and adopted an inductive (data-driven) approach to identify recurring themes in the rendering of both the British and the Chinese. These themes are the expression of the latent content; they elicit the deep meaning and essence from the fiction (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). By doing so, three themes of British-Chinese binary opposition were identified.
- (6) In order to answer whether Guo’s (2007) representation of the British and the Chinese reflects ethnocentric Occidentalism and/or reverse Occidentalism, the authors also identified a positive delineation of the Chinese and a negative delineation of the British (ethnocentric Occidentalism) as well as a negative depiction of the Chinese and a positive depiction of the British (reverse Occidentalism consisted) in the text.

### 3.2 *Semi-structured Interviews*

The participants of the research were 25 students (of whom 24 were female) in the second year of their four-year university education in a university located in central Taiwan. All the participants were Taiwanese and spoke Chinese as their mother tongue, except an Indonesian Chinese who can also speak Chinese. They all enrolled in an “English for specific purposes” (ESP) course and had already passed some relevant mandatory freshman English courses. In this ESP course, students were invited to read Guo’s fiction under study as a resource for enhancing their intercultural awareness.

The interviews were conducted after their completion of reading the novel. Each interview ranged in length from approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The purpose of each interview was to understand their perceptions of Occidentalist ideologies underlying the text, and how they interpreted and evaluated the dichotomous national characteristics represented in the text. Whilst following a pre-determined structure, as suggested by Gillham

(2005), the interviewer posed probing questions wherever it was needed to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the issues under study.

All the interviews were recorded by digital recording devices and transcribed verbatim. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before conducting the interviews. Following a tradition in qualitative research, the transcripts of the interviews were first analysed by “open coding” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.204), that is, reading and rereading transcripts and making notations which were relevant for answering research questions. Throughout the process, recurring issues or patterns emerged and became the categories which were constructed, renamed, and sorted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

#### 4. Research Findings

What make Gou's fiction interesting are its complexity and its contradictory elements. On the one hand, the research results reveal that there are three binary opposites between the British and the Chinese underlying Guo's narrative of the love story: individualism versus collectivism, sexual freedom versus sexual reticence, and cosmopolitan versus rooted. These dichotomies reflect the essentialist nature of Occidentalism. On the other hand, they also indicate a mixed picture where ethnocentric Occidentalism and reverse Occidentalism are juxtaposed. This mixed picture to some extent infuses the image of the British and the Chinese with a dynamic and fluid nature within intercultural interaction. In what follows, each theme derived from the analysis of the text is articulated and followed with undergraduate students' perceptions of it based on the empirical data from interviews.

##### 4.1 Theme 1: Individualism versus Collectivism

###### 4.1.1 The Analysis of Text

Throughout the fiction, the gulf between individualism and collectivism is one of the origins of the conflicts between Z and her British boyfriend. This significant chasm between the British as individualists, and the Chinese as collectivists, is difficult for them to resolve. This difficulty is essentially related to the degree of importance that an individual gives to the concept of “self”. The following statements by Z demonstrate collectivist viewpoints on the concept of “self”:

*We Chinese are not encouraged to use the word “self” so often. The old comrades in the work unit would say, how can you think of “self” most of the time but not about others and the whole society? (269)*

*The “self” is against “group” and “collectivism.” The “self” is the enemy of the Communist party. In middle school we were taught “the most admirable person” should forget about himself, shouldn't satisfy his own needs (269).*

On the other hand, Z recognises that the concept of “self” plays an important role in British society:

*But here, in this rainy old capitalism country, “self” means everything, “self” is the original creativity for everything (270).*

Further, a serious discord regarding privacy between the two protagonists reflects the opposition between individualism and collectivism. Z's boyfriend accuses her of invading his privacy because she reads his diary without permission. He argues that “[e]verybody has privacy!” (106). However, for Z, there is no privacy in an intimate relationship, be it between lovers or family members, because in a collectivist society sharing everything is the prerequisite for the operation of a group and “privacy make[s] family fallen apart” (106).

###### 4.1.2 Students' Perceptions

In the interviews, all students agreed that the fiction amplified their impression of the binary opposition between British individualism and Chinese collectivism. This impression mainly came from the two protagonists' conflict derived from Z's reading her boyfriend's diary, which invaded her boyfriend's privacy. On top of that, the students' impression of Chinese collectivism came from their observation of Z's extended family (57, 106, 141) and her strong attachment to her family (124). They were also aware that Z's boyfriend emphasised the importance of personal space and an unfettered individual life because he refused Z's pleas to accompany him visiting his friends (83-84), encouraged Z to travel the Europe on her own (198) and was not willing to establish a “real family” with Z (124-125).

##### 4.2 Theme 2: Sexual Freedom versus Sexual Reticence

###### 4.2.1 The Analysis of Text

In general, it is ignorance, shamefulness and embarrassment regarding sex that is portrayed as the norm from the

Chinese perspective. On the contrary, the protagonist gives the reader the impression that there is far more openness in Britain, and far greater acceptance of a variety of sexual preferences and experiences.

Early in the piece, Z explains to her boyfriend that she has little knowledge of the subject of sex (65). When she sees pieces of her boyfriend's art work containing nudity in the garden, Z feels embarrassed (66). With increasing knowledge of British sexual practices and ideas, she explicitly acknowledges that the people of London are more comfortable with the idea of a casual sexual encounter (71) and "everything to do with the sexuality is not shameful in West" (119). She does not suggest that this relaxed attitude is simply a feature of the current generation. Rather, it is an ingrained cultural feature. When she reads her boyfriend's diary, the boyfriend's father is described as a drifter, and his drifting includes many sexual experiences (92).

Z appears to be particularly shocked by her boyfriend's homosexual preference and narratives about homosexuality. She does not explicitly state that PRC law restricts homosexuality, but her discomfort is expressed in the writing (96). This portrait of a British man's sexual experiences and orientation resonates with Zhang's (2015) "sexual Occidentalism" in which the binary opposite between asexual socialism and sexual capitalism is constructed, and "queer Occidentalism", referring to the discourse constructing the binary opposite between hetero-socialism and homo-capitalism.

However, things change when she meets the man who is to become her boyfriend in London (68-69), and there is much reference to sexual activity and sexual attitudes, indeed to an enjoyment of sex, which is, at first, alien to her (e.g. 131-132). By introducing Z's change of sexual attitude in London into the fiction, the text to some extent signals cultural hybridity in the globalisation process which blurs the dichotomy between the sexually-open British and the sexually-repressed Chinese.

#### 4.2.2 Students' Perceptions

Compared to the other two themes, students' perceptions of this binary opposition are relatively more mixed. There are ten interviewees (40%) obtaining the impression of the binary opposition between sexually-free British and sexually-reticent Chinese and fifteen (60%) having no impression of this opposition from the novel. Those who negated the opposition argued that Z's British boyfriend was more sexually conservative than they anticipated because he disagreed with Z's reading erotic magazines in public (118-119). On the other hand, Z was not as sexually conservative as they thought in terms of Chinese sexual attitudes in that she learnt English through pornographic magazines in a café (118-119) and had sexual relations with his boyfriend and others (68, 131, 251-252). Sin-lin's response demonstrates the above viewpoint:

*The heroine is a Chinese. But after arriving in Britain, she became very open. Hence, she is open in nature. Because Chinese society is conservative, she cannot talk [about sex] in China. After entering Britain, she revealed the true [sexually open] self. However, her boyfriend is a British. When finding the heroine reading porn magazines, he was very angry. Can we then regard heroine's boyfriend as sexually conservative like the Chinese? I think it is not decisive that there are Chinese conservativeness and British openness [in the novel] because the above episode is an obvious counterexample. (I-0410-Sin-lin)*

It seems that for those perceiving no sexual contrast in the novel their impressions came from what Z had done after arriving in England rather than what happened in China before her departure. It is also worthy of attention that some students interpreted Z's sexual relations with her British boyfriend as the representation of British sexual freedom.

### 4.3 Theme 3: Cosmopolitan versus Rooted

#### 4.3.1 The Analysis of Text

One of the striking features of the fiction is the debate between Z's perspectives on family and that of her British boyfriend. We use the term "rooted" in this paper to refer to an attitude of valuing family commitment and giving much weight to one's home as one's intimate and safe physical space, whereas the term "cosmopolitan" is employed to imply the contrasting attitude of avoiding family commitment and valuing mobility and adventure without being fettered by the ties of family and home.

In the fiction, both Z's boyfriend and his father are described as "drifters", with little desire for a stable family and home (92, 106). The father abandoned his family. Z's boyfriend also broke away from his family (124), started a long voyage with a man from his hometown at the age of nineteen (93) and travelled around different countries (96). There are echoes here of the Occidental discourse which sees the Occidental Other as 'rootless' (Buruma & Margalit, 2004) and "adventurous" (openly embracing the outside world)(X. Chen, 1992, 1995). By contrast, Z is represented as a young Chinese female being deeply attached to her British boyfriend (84) and her

family (124), and desperate to build a family and home with her boyfriend (124-125).

It is clear that Z and her boyfriend have different concepts of family. Demonstrating how the Chinese and English languages are related to and embedded in particular cultural systems of value, Z explains how for her, family consists not only of husband and wife, but also of children and home. She uses the Chinese character “家” to elaborate the Chinese concepts of home and family which also refers to a house (125-126). For Z, “family means everything” (139) and should always be the very first priority. In contrast, her boyfriend detests the concept of family because it is “a selfish product” and “against community” (123).

#### 4.3.2 Students’ Perceptions

All interviewed students agreed that the rendering of male and female protagonists produced a dichotomy between cosmopolitan British and rooted Chinese. Many of them noticed that Z was strongly attached to her family (124) while her boyfriend broke away from his family (124). Some of them were also aware that Z was desperate to build a family and home with her boyfriend (124-5) but her boyfriend was not willing to have a stable family and home (92, 106). Furthermore, three of them commented on the difference of attitude toward social life between the two principal characters. Z was deeply attached to her British boyfriend (84) while her boyfriend was a social butterfly (265) and encouraged her to travel in Europe alone (198).

#### 4.4 Theme 4: Ethnocentric Occidentalism - Celebrating Chinese Ancient Wisdom and Modernisation

There are several episodes of the fiction where Chinese ancient wisdom and achievement are emphasised. The text seems to support a Chinese intellectual model by frequently quoting proverbs from the works of ancient Chinese thinkers and literati. Guo’s text suggests the superiority of Chinese civilization by pointing out the contribution of China’s longstanding ancient inventions to the contemporary achievements of the British Empire:

*Our Chinese invented paper so your Shakespeare can write two thousand years later. Our Chinese invented gunpowder for you English and Americans to bomb Iraq. And our Chinese invented compass for you English to sail and colonise the Asian and Africa (289).*

The inferior side of the British is to some extent depicted in the instances where misbehaviours are described, such as bullying passengers, robbery (42), drug dealing, drunken disturbances (125) and social problems are mentioned, e.g. slum areas in London (22) and beggars on streets (55).

In Z’s discussion of Chinese medicine, the concept of *Qi* (vital energy) is adopted to explain the scientific principle of the body’s operation system and the cause of the male protagonist’s disease (287-288). This scientised image of Chinese medicine imbues an archaic China, which is putatively full of irrational tradition, with a sense of scientific and technological modernisation.

Regarding economic modernisation, tectonic economic change in China is underlined through the presence of Z’s parents’ shift of occupation from peasants to shoemakers (127, 141). Large companies in her hometown, Wenzhou, participate in the process of globalisation to export their products around the world (12-13).

#### 4.5 Theme 5: Reverse Occidentalism - The British as Generous and Cultivated Nature Lovers and Artists

In some of the earlier episodes of the fiction, the British are depicted as noble and sophisticated, whereas the Chinese seem to be portrayed as lacking moral fibre and manners. Z’s admiration of her boyfriend reflects the celebration of the British as a “model” in a reverse Occidentalist discourse:

*I think you are a noble man with noble words. I am not noble. I am humble. And I speak humble English. I [come] from [a] poor town in south China. We never see noble (79).*

Z sneaks a coffee cup and a glass for personal usage in her room, bread and boiled eggs for lunch, and even some slices of bacon for supper from the dining room of a hostel after breakfast (17). In contrast to Z’s efforts to save money and “being mean to [herself] and others” (12), her British boyfriend generously accommodates her (54). Furthermore, her boyfriend is represented as a nature lover and environmentalist who is captivated by nature, loves gardening and is determined to be a vegetarian. By contrast, Z is firmly convinced that “eating animals is the human nature” (183). As pointed out by her boyfriend, the Chinese “eat anything, even endangered species” (183) and are considered as “the enemy of animals” (182).

Instead of scientific rationality and modernity emphasised in contemporary Chinese reverse Occidentalist discourse, the cultivation and elegance of the British are significantly emphasised by the presence of several famous British writers and their works in the fiction. British people’s love of arts is demonstrated in Z’s boyfriend’s studying in an art school (95) and creating sculptures in daily life (66, 72) together with his observation that “art is fashionable in the West” (332) and “everybody wants to be an artist” (332). Z also claims that the focus on the self rather than the group allows a creative urge for art and fashion (270).

#### 4.6 Occidentalism in Students' Minds

Even though the result of the above analysis indicates the fiction represented a mixed picture of ethnocentric and reverse Occidentalism, the students' perceptions of Occidentalist ideologies in their reading are still subject to scrutiny. In order to understand the students' perception of Occidentalist ideologies, each of them was asked with the following question, together with follow-up 'why' questions wherever appropriate: "Did you obtain the impression from the novel on the whole that China was economically less developed and the Chinese were relatively irrational compared to the British counterparts?" Ten out of twenty five interviewees (40%) obtained no impression of an underdeveloped China and irrational Chinese people from the novel. Among the other fifteen students (60%), five (20%) sensed the image of an underdeveloped China, eight (32%) perceived that of irrational Chinese people, and two (8%) discerned both images of underdeveloped China and irrational Chinese people. The image of underdeveloped China was mainly evaluated based on the concept of the sector of the economy, and derived from the depiction of Z's family in China who earned a livelihood in primary (farming) and secondary (making shoes) sectors. Students' impressions of irrational Chinese people came from their observation that Z had considerable anxiety about losing her boyfriend's love, and so became very emotional in her interaction with him. The following excerpt from the interview with Lar-rou vividly articulated the image of irrational Chinese people in students' minds:

*I think the Chinese control others in the name of love. This is irrational. The heroine wanted to control her boyfriend day and night, the heroine's parents wanted to control the heroine all the time, and the Chinese authorities always tried to manipulate their people. I think all of them were irrational relations. (I-0429-Lao-rou)*

The delineation of Z's lack of independent thinking also contributed to the image of irrational Chinese people. For example, Z abided by and repeatedly cited what Chairman Mao had said (I-0425-Siang-yan), and could not propose a persuasive argument to convince her boyfriend of the imperative of marriage (I-0418-Sin-wu). Furthermore, the blind obedience common in collectivist China also resulted in the image of irrationality (I-0515-Chi-li). All in all, the acknowledged underdevelopment and irrationality seems to reflect a reverse Occidentalism.

#### 5. Discussion

Generally speaking, the results of critical content analysis indicated that Guo's representation of the British and the Chinese is mixed and intricate. On the one hand, her representation of the British as everything that the Chinese are not in the first three themes is a clear example of binary opposition. The British are depicted as cosmopolitan and sexually liberated individualists in contrast to the Chinese who are characterised as sexually reticent and family-oriented collectivists. On the other hand, by interlacing ethnocentric Occidentalism and reverse Occidentalism into the fiction, the text to some extent blurs the hierarchical binary opposition between the British and the Chinese.

In terms of students' perceptions of the dichotomies underlying the fictional text, it can be seen that two of the three dichotomies were commonly perceived by interviewed undergraduates while only forty percent of interviewees confirmed the second one, sexual freedom versus sexual reticence. In other words, there is a distinct possibility of undergraduate readers reducing the fictional text to a matter of Occidentalist dualism which solidifies national stereotypes in terms of the opposites between individualism and collectivism and between cosmopolitan and rooted, and to a lower degree between sexual freedom and sexual reticence. This implies the utmost importance of guiding students to decode and deconstruct the binary oppositions and national stereotypes underlying the fictional text.

Secondly, students' negative judgements on the Chinese characters depicted in the fiction suggest a reverse Occidentalism where the independent and free British could be a model for the Chinese, who are politically, sexually, ideologically, and economically repressed and suffered from collectivist, irrational, omnipresent domination by families and authorities. Here students' reverse Occidentalist discourse resonates with Holliday's (2018) "the West as steward" discourse.

Thirdly, the research findings give prominence to students' different readings and interpretations of the same text. For example, Z's sexual relation with her British boyfriend was interpreted as the evidence of British sexual freedom by some and as a counter-example of Chinese sexual reticence by others. Z's boyfriend's moving out of his parents' home after growing up was deemed independent by some but unfilial by others. These diverse readings of the same text reflect the complexity of intercultural actors and situations and can be a seedbed for reflecting upon the ideologies and values students brought into the reading and providing the class with a variety of viewpoints which can be adopted to deconstruct Occidentalist ideologies within the text.



In order to decode and deconstruct the ideologies of binary oppositions and reverse Occidentalism, critical intercultural pedagogy foregrounding reflexive awareness of hidden ideologies, dynamic and fluid concepts of meaning and culture, and intersectional analysis is indispensable. There are three suggestions for intercultural pedagogy of undergraduates' reading global literature proposed by the authors.

Firstly, in terms of reflexive awareness of hidden ideologies, teachers need to guide students to delve into and unearth the hidden "West versus the rest" discourse (Holliday, 2018) under the surface of novel narratives (e.g. the binary oppositions of individualism/collectivism, cosmopolitan/rooted, and sexual freedom/sexual reticence). Some analytical methods adopted from critical content analysis (as shown in this paper), discourse analysis, conversation analysis and pragmatics can be helpful (Dervin, 2017). Of equal importance is to encourage students to reflectively discern "hidden concept-pair of superiority and inferiority" (adopted from Dervin, 2017) underlying their reverse Occidentalist interpretations and evaluations of novel characters in global literature.

Secondly, reconceptualisation of meaning and culture as dynamic and fluid co-construction process can facilitate undergraduates to deconstruct Occidentalist ideologies (both binary oppositions and concept-pair of superiority and inferiority). Here Bhabha's (1994) "Third Space" is an apt conceptual configuration for intercultural pedagogy. "Third Space" is described as a place where "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity of fixity" (Bhabha, 1994, p.37) and where "the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew" (Bhabha, 1994, p.37). The third space perspective provides teachers with a new cultural horizon where, in Kramsch's (2009, p.247) words, "Culture is seen as heterogeneous, fluid, conflictual" with context-dependent, multifaceted and dynamic nature. In the case of Guo's (2007) fiction, for instance, students can investigate how the Chinese girl Z in the intercultural contact as the third space reread, reinterpret and re-appraisal her own family and societal cultures, and reenvision and revisualise her past imagination of Britishness. Here Z's change of sexual attitude in London is a good case in point.

Thirdly, critical intercultural pedagogy goes beyond dynamic and fluid concepts of meaning and culture, and digs deeper into the socio-economic and politico-historical context of intercultural encounters to unmask the impact of power and structural forces on the in-between sphere of interaction. Here "intersectionality" as an analytical tool is fruitful for undergraduates to investigate intersecting power relations and structural forces of intercultural contact. Intersectionality regards categories or identity markers e.g. race, class, gender, nation, and ability as interconnected and mutually shaping one another and power relations in social interactions (Collins & Bilge, 2020). For example, Liddicoat (2016) and Yoon (2013) indicated that due to difference in command of the language between interlocutors both native and international students acknowledged power asymmetries where international students perceived being marginalised and inferior status. Such intersectionality of ability and nation can also be seen in the interaction between the two protagonists in Guo's (2007) novel.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, we attempted to critically analyse Taiwanese undergraduate EFL learners' responses to the representation of the British and the Chinese in a particular text from the viewpoint of Occidentalism, and to configure a critical intercultural pedagogy as a catalyst for students' decoding and deconstructing Occidentalist ideologies underlying global literature. It is hoped that the pedagogy for intercultural exploration proposed in this paper can shed some light on how to utilise global literature to create a space in the EFL classroom for undergraduate students to explore intercultural encounters, and to decode and deconstruct Occidentalist ideologies.

## Acknowledgments

This article is a report of a part of the research results from the research project (MOST1062410H260023MY2) funded by the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), Republic of China (Taiwan). The authors would like to thank the NSTC and all the student participants.

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