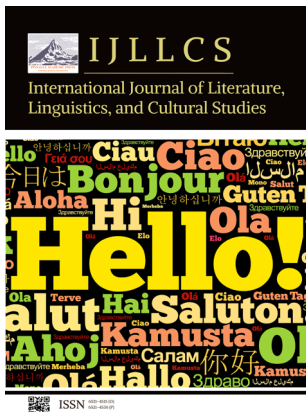


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# Discursive Construction of Traditional Culture of Southwest China in Modern Overseas Travelogues — Take *The Land of the Dragon* as an Example

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**Abstract:** There is a wealth of travelogues about southwest China left by overseas visitors since 1840. These travelogues record the traditional cultural imprints of the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze River, including landscapes, architecture, economic development, and social customs. Taking *The Land of the Dragon* as a representative overseas travelogue, this study aims to investigate the discursive construction of traditional culture in southwest China, particularly along the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze River. The findings show that the traditional culture in southwest China occupies a unique place in the history of traditional Chinese culture, characterized by rich ethnic characteristics as well as cultural depth and breadth. Overseas travelogues often reflect certain fixed impressions and partial understandings of traditional Chinese culture. This study has both theoretical and practical implications. It first demonstrates the applicability of critical discourse analysis to overseas travelogues about China and enriches methodological approaches through a content analysis of *The Land of the Dragon*. Second, this study helps to make a better understanding of Chinese traditional culture and enhance the readers' critical reading awareness, call on people to protect nature and traditional culture, and utilize them rationally so as to promote the sustainable development of material culture and spiritual culture.

**Keywords:** discursive construction; traditional Chinese culture; modern overseas travelogues; southwestern China

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## 1. Introduction

Southwest China, encompassing provinces such as Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and the municipality of Chongqing, is a region noted for its exceptional geographical and cultural diversity. Its abundant water systems and varied terrain have long supported the development of multiple ethnic communities, making it a valuable area for research in Chinese ethnology and cultural history. These communities reflect the broader richness of traditional Chinese civilization, and their cultural trajectories often provide insights into the evolution of national identity. Due to this academic significance, generations of scholars have explored the region, with travelogues emerging as an important means of recording and interpreting cultural encounters.

Travelogues are more than mere records of personal journeys; they function as literary and cultural texts through which travelers project their intellectual interests and worldview. Such narratives are inevitably shaped by the traveler's prior assumptions and

interpretive frameworks, even when presented as objective observation [1]. This subjectivity — particularly evident in travel writings produced by foreign authors — makes it essential to analyze these texts critically, as they may reflect limited cultural perspectives, preconceived notions, or selective representations of local cultures.

During the modern period (1840–1949), the increased presence of Western merchants, missionaries, diplomats, and explorers in China led to a significant body of foreign-language travel literature. These accounts, though often colored by the observers' cultural frameworks, provide complex portrayals of Chinese society. While certain descriptions may reveal oversimplifications or cultural misunderstandings, many writings also convey a sense of respect for China's traditions, contributing to a nuanced dialogue between appreciation and critique.

The cultural traditions of ethnic communities in China represent essential elements of the country's broader heritage, encompassing distinct worldviews, social customs, and artistic practices. These traditions play a key role in shaping group identity and fostering cohesion, values, and collective memory. As a historically multicultural region, Southwest China holds considerable academic value for the study of traditional cultural systems. Research into these traditions not only contributes to their preservation and revitalization but also supports cultural diversity and social integration.

This study carries both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it demonstrates the effectiveness of critical discourse analysis in examining foreign travelogues about China, offering methodological insights for future scholarship. By applying this approach to Percival's *The Land of the Dragon*, the study enriches the interpretive strategies available for analyzing such texts. Practically, it promotes broader public understanding of China's cultural diversity and encourages critical reading habits. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of protecting and promoting traditional cultural resources in the face of globalization, ensuring their relevance and sustainability in contemporary society.

## 2. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary research framework centered on exploring the interrelationship between language and social structures. It investigates how language use contributes to the maintenance or disruption of power dynamics and social inequalities. CDA maintains that discourse is not merely a communicative tool but a mechanism through which social realities and ideological structures are produced and reinforced. Its theoretical foundations are drawn from a range of influences, including the British-American school, Michel Foucault's theories on discourse and power, critical linguistics, and Halliday's conception of language as a social semiotic system.

As an evolving field, CDA focuses on uncovering the power relations and sociocultural practices embedded in language. Emerging during the 1970s and 1980s, it has grown into an interdisciplinary paradigm shaped by the contributions of several foundational scholars. Scholar was instrumental in formalizing the theoretical underpinnings and analytical strategies of CDA. His works, such as *Language and Power* and *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, emphasize the role of discourse in shaping and reproducing social inequality by situating language within its broader sociopolitical context [2].

Scholar extended the scope of CDA by integrating cognitive science and social psychology, highlighting the role of discourse in shaping public knowledge and mental models [3]. His research provides a cognitive perspective on how ideologies are disseminated and internalized through language. Researcher, through her discourse-historical approach, has made important contributions to the analysis of political discourse, particularly within European contexts. Her work examines the role of language in constructing

national identity and addressing issues related to historical narratives and social exclusion [4].

In the Chinese academic context, CDA has been widely applied to examine social, cultural, and political transformations. Scholars have used it to analyze media discourse, educational texts, and language policy, showcasing the framework's adaptability to localized contexts while maintaining global theoretical relevance.

Together, these scholars have established CDA as a vital tool for analyzing how language both reflects and constructs social power. When applied to modern overseas travelogues about China, CDA provides a robust analytical framework for investigating how cultural representations, ideological positions, and intercultural perceptions are embedded in narrative structures.

### 2.1.2. Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism, a widespread phenomenon and psychological tendency present in every culture, leads individuals to judge the behavior of other cultures through the lens of their own values [5]. This manifests as stereotyping members of other groups and often involves a subconscious, patronizing attitude towards different cultures. Scholars have explored this phenomenon from various angles. Scholar noted that while national sentiment can act as a cohesive bond — strengthening individual identity and fostering group cooperation — it also lays the groundwork for ethnocentrism when taken to extremes [6]. He highlighted that ethnocentrism possesses a positive, creative dimension, though excessive national sentiment can foster outwardly aggressive paranoia. Scholar characterized ethnocentrists as exhibiting an "authoritarian personality", driven by a pursuit of status and power while perceiving others as threats [7]. In the consumer realm, ethnocentrism takes the form of consumer ethnocentrism, which reveals the psychological aspects that influence consumers' ethical assessments of foreign products. Studies have explored various factors related to ethnocentrism, considering demographic elements such as education and income, as well as behavioral factors like perceptions of mobile phone images in Central Europe, to illustrate how ethnocentrism manifests across different generations. Additionally, ethnocentrism is associated with other forms of prejudice, such as racism, xenophobia, and religious intolerance. Nevertheless, it can be lessened through education and exposure to different cultures. By applying ethnocentric theory to the analysis of overseas travelogues, we can gain meaningful insights into tourists' cultural biases and their strategies for adapting to new cultures. This approach encourages deeper reflection on the complexities of cross-cultural interactions.

### 2.1.3. Cultural Relativism

As a pioneer of cultural relativism, scholar emphasized that every culture is unique and must be understood within its specific historical and social context [6]. Anthropologist further developed this concept in *Man and His Works*, defining cultural relativism as "a social training that respects difference and demands mutual respect... It stresses the value of multiple ways of life and the aim of seeking understanding and harmonious co-existence without judging or destroying what differs from one's own culture" [8]. The progressive nature of cultural relativism thus lies in its promotion of cultural equality, diversity, and pluralism, while rejecting notions of cultural superiority and ethnocentrism.

Cultural relativism provides an essential theoretical perspective for analyzing traditional culture in Southwest China as depicted in travelogues. When studying such accounts, researchers should examine not only the author's descriptions of the southwestern region, but also the underlying cultural connotations and differences revealed through these depictions. This approach enables deeper interpretation of the author's viewpoint.

#### 1) Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity embodies the coexistence and interaction of various cultures, customs, beliefs, languages, arts, and lifestyles within a society. It underscores the uniqueness

of each culture and advocates for their respect and preservation. Such diversity is essential for the richness of global culture and serves as a vital foundation for the development and progress of both nations and the world. In today's globalized era, cultural diversity fosters innovation, social cohesion, and intercultural understanding, thereby serving as a cornerstone of societal advancement. Zou has delved into strategies for safeguarding this diversity, emphasizing its significance for nation-states [9]. The Convention on Cultural Diversity further highlights its importance in international relations, illustrating how cultural diversity can influence and enrich global interactions [10].

Using the theory of cultural diversity to interpret travelogues of overseas visitors to China involves several aspects. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting different customs and lifestyles encountered by travelers. The theory suggests that cultural exchange can enhance mutual appreciation and foster a culturally relativistic perspective, where cultures are valued based on their own merits rather than being judged against external standards. It also provides a framework for analyzing adaptation strategies, cultural conflicts, and the complexities of cultural interactions. Furthermore, cultural diversity theory encourages reflection on the impact of cultural encounters on personal values and behaviors, and it acknowledges the dynamic nature of cultures, recognizing their evolution over time and across different social contexts. This approach not only deepens our comprehension of the travel experiences of overseas visitors to China but also promotes thoughtful consideration of cross-cultural exchanges and their implications.

## 2) Cultural Equality

Cultural equality involves respect for and equal treatment of different cultural backgrounds, beliefs and values. It emphasizes that in pluralistic societies each individual has the right to maintain his or her own cultural identity and that these cultures should be equally respected and recognized. The goal of cultural equality is to ensure that every individual is able to freely express and develop his or her cultural identity in an environment free from discrimination. No particular individual can be credited with the creation of this concept, as cultural equality has gradually evolved as a universal value, shaped by growing global awareness of human rights and social justice. However, the concept has been elaborated and studied by many sociologists, philosophers and anthropologists.

Several prominent scholars have contributed to the discourse on cultural equality, emphasizing the importance of respect and equal treatment for diverse cultures within society. Zhang advocated for a critical approach to overseas Sinology, encouraging open dialogue and academic critique of Western centrism. Some scholars highlighted the role of Chinese civilization in global integration, stressing the need for equal dialogue and harmonious cultural interaction [11]. Scholar delved into cultural capital, examining how cultural factors within educational systems can reflect or challenge cultural equality [12]. Some scholars discussed the concept of cultural equality, including equal rights to cultural interpretation and respect, confronting ideas of cultural and racial superiority [13]. Scholar studied Western multiculturalism from an ethnic sociology perspective, exploring its application in addressing ethnic issues and promoting cultural equality [14]. Collectively, their research fostered a deeper understanding of cultural equality and advanced social policies and practices that embrace cultural diversity and inclusion.

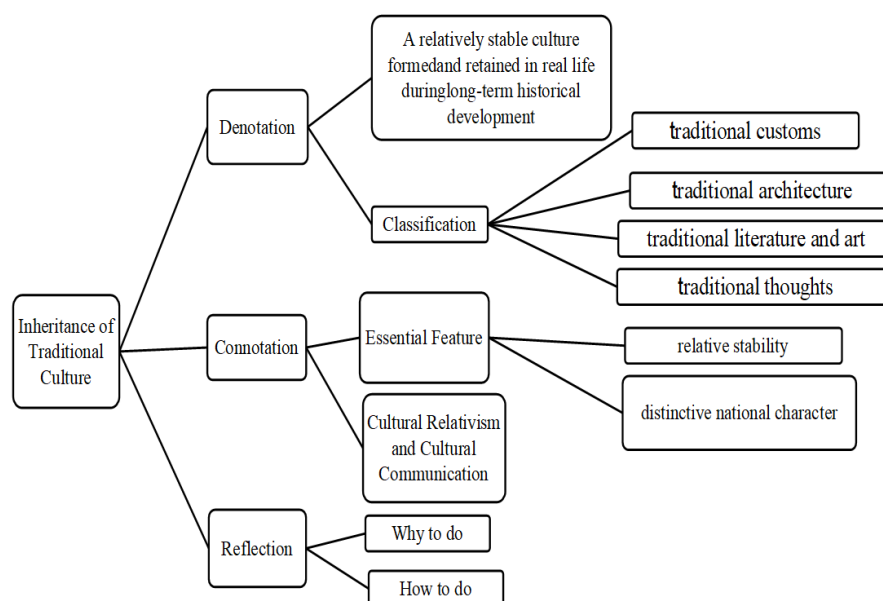
Cultural equality, the principle of respecting and valuing all cultures equally, offers a framework to interpret travelogues of overseas visitors to China. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and appreciating the cultural nuances and social practices encountered by travelers. Through this theory, a travelogue can reflect the diverse cultural exchanges, mutual respect, and the recognition of China's rich heritage. Cultural equality in travel narratives promotes an inclusive perspective, encouraging travelers to engage with local customs and traditions with an open mind, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and learning.

## 2.2. Analytical Framework

Traditional culture refers to the inherited cultural expressions developed by a nation or social group over time, encompassing language, religion, customs, festivals, arts, and core values. Traditional culture is an important part of a nation's history and identity, and it still plays an important role in modern society.

Several renowned scholars have significantly contributed to the study of traditional culture, employing diverse methodologies and perspectives. Scholar has deeply explored the philosophical underpinnings of Chinese traditional culture, emphasizing the role of Confucianism in shaping Chinese worldviews and societal values [15]. Scholar is known for his sociological insights into the cultural practices of rural China, providing a nuanced view of the interplay between traditional culture and social structures [16]. Chen has focused on the modern interpretation of Confucian thought and its integration into contemporary Chinese society [17]. Li has written extensively on the aesthetic dimensions of Chinese traditional culture, offering a unique perspective on the evolution of traditional Chinese art and literature [18]. These scholars have enriched the academic discourse on traditional culture through their multifaceted analyses, which range from philosophical inquiries to sociological examinations and from cognitive perspectives to aesthetic evaluations.

Furthermore, the analytical framework of this study is demonstrated in Figure 1. Different scholars have different classifications of traditional culture, but some common features can be seen from their studies. Therefore, the author divided traditional culture into four aspects, namely traditional customs, thoughts, architecture and literature and art, which will be examined in depth in a later chapter.



**Figure 1.** Analysis Framework of This Study.

## 2.3. Summary

This section has introduced the theoretical foundation of the study. The interaction between the travelogue and traditional culture is interpreted through three theories, namely CDA, ethnocentrism, and cultural relativism. Meanwhile, Chinese traditional culture will be analyzed from four aspects: traditional customs, thoughts, architecture, and literature and art.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, this study aims to analyze the depictions of the traditional culture of China's southwestern region in overseas travelogues and why these tourists produced such descriptions and comments. Therefore, this study aims to address two research questions:

- 1) What traditional cultures of Southwest China were written about in the travelogues of modern overseas visitors to China?
- 2) How is the traditional culture of Southwest China represented in travelogues from the perspective of the other?

#### 3.2. Research Methods

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods include literature research and discourse analysis, while content analysis is employed as a quantitative research method.

Content analysis is a scientific method for in-depth examination of research material, aiming to uncover the underlying essence behind observed phenomena. As a scientific method to study social reality, content analysis has gradually developed after continuous theoretical exploration and practical application. As a result, it evolved into three types, namely, Hermeneutic content analysis, Empirical content analysis and Computer-aided content analysis. As a quantitative research method, its specific research process can be divided into the following six steps: The first step, put forward research questions. The research question of the essay is the embodiment of traditional culture in southwest China in modern overseas travelogues. The second step is to extract literature samples. The literature samples in this essay are from *The Land of the Dragon* written by Percival. The third step is to identify the analysis unit. The unit of analysis consists of passages related to traditional culture extracted from the book. The fourth step is to develop a system of categories. The author divides traditional culture into four categories, namely, traditional customs, traditional thoughts, traditional architecture and traditional literature and art. The fifth step is content coding and statistics. The selected units from the book are categorized correspondingly into the four categories. The sixth step, interpretation and testing. According to each category, the author consulted the relevant literature for analysis and interpretation.

#### 3.3. Research Material

First published in 1889, *The Land of the Dragon* chronicles William Spencer Percival's experiences as a British civil servant in late-nineteenth-century Shanghai [19]. Writing as an experienced travel author, Percival leverages his British contemporaries' ostensibly "sympathetic" prejudices toward China to frame a comprehensive narrative of Eastern life. The text vividly recounts his boating expeditions and hunting forays through the Chinese hinterlands, weaving extraordinary anecdotes — from camping excursions and wild pig hunts to perilous river navigations — that illuminate encounters with the landscape, local communities, and foreign residents including American and Roman Catholic missionaries. Blending travelogue with anthropological observation, this work offers critical insights into the complex dynamics between British expatriates and Qing dynasty society.

### 4. Results

Traditional culture can be categorized in numerous ways. This essay employs a four-part classification: traditional customs, traditional thoughts, traditional architecture, and traditional literature and art. As the latter category is not addressed in William Spencer Percival's *The Land of the Dragon*, the following analysis will focus on the first three aspects presented in the work. Specific examples illustrating these categories will be referenced

directly from the text. For detailed classification and textual correspondences, refer to Table 1.

**Table 1.** Traditional Culture in *The Land of the Dragon*.

Example	Title	Chapter	Page number
1	River-side Dwellings	2	57
2	River-side Dwellings	2	58
3	River-side Dwellings	2	58
4	The "Bothwell Castle"	2	60
5	A Flood	2	62
6	The City of Sha-sze	3	80
7	Limestone Quarries	3	82
8	Engaging Boat-coolies	3	83
9	Getting a Crew on Board	3	86
10	The Dangers of "Tracking"	3	96
11	Our First Night Out	3	99
12	Night Illuminations	3	101-102
13	Canonization	5	136-137

#### 4.1. Traditional Customs

Traditional customs permeate every aspect of social life, and their moral content encompasses the full range of spiritual and cultural activities of ethnic minorities. It is embodied in the material and cultural aspects of life, such as dress, food, housing, production, marriage, funeral, festivals, entertainment, rituals, etc. Among these aspects, funeral customs and Feng Shui practices are mentioned by the author of the book.

Funeral customs in Southwest China are diverse and deeply rooted in the region's ethnic heritage and geography. The area encompasses provinces like Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan, home to various ethnic groups such as the Yi and Miao peoples, each with unique burial practices. As shown in Figure 2, the Yi ethnic group, for instance, conducts solemn funeral ceremonies that last several days, including rituals, mourning, and the final burial. They believe in the afterlife and perform shamanic rites to guide the soul's journey to the next realm. As shown in Figure 3, Tibetan funerals are notably characterized by celestial burials, where the deceased's body is left on mountaintops to be consumed by birds of prey. This practice reflects the Tibetan respect for the cycle of life and the natural environment. Many funeral traditions in Southwest China are not only a reflection of the ethnic groups' religious beliefs and worldview but also demonstrate their reverence for ancestors and the sanctity of life. These cultural practices form a significant part of the region's intangible cultural heritage, holding great value for research and preservation.



**Figure 2.** Solemn Funeral Ceremonies.**Figure 3.** Celestial Burial.

"Crackers are let off by the thousand, small floating fires are set adrift on the stream to pacify the river god, gongs are beaten, and altogether the priests have a busy time [19] (E1)."

"The river became illuminated with many hundreds of lanterns, made of different colored papers, fixed on a square piece of thin wood, and floating in clusters down the stream, while every now and again came a raft, on which was stuck an enormous torch, blazing furiously, illuminating the sides of the rocks in a most effective and weird manner. Some of the rafts held fireworks, with slow matches attached, which went off at various intervals and in various places [19] (E2)."

These two examples are extracted from Chapters 2 and 3 of this book.

In the first example, "crackers", "small floating fires", "gongs" and "priests" are elements commonly seen in traditional Chinese funerals. However, when the author traveled to the region and witnessed this scene, he commented that "so little value do the Chinese set upon human life in disasters of this description", revealing his misunderstanding rooted in cultural differences. In fact, these traditional customs precisely reflect the importance that the Chinese place on funerals. These elaborate rituals are not only a farewell to the dead, but also a symbolic ritual to give hints and education to the living.

The second example demonstrates that the funeral was so grand that the writer mistook it for a welcome celebration for the visitors. This grand funeral, which included setting off fireworks and prayers by the priests for the deceased, indicates the importance that local people place on funerals.

"The peculiar form and situation of this hill was formerly supposed by the learned in such matters to interfere with the Chinese 'Fung Shui', which would affect to a very important extent the trade, health, and general prosperity of Ichang. So the powers of the period selected a hill on the Ichang side, opposite to the pyramid, on which they built a monastery [19] (E3)."

It is chosen from chapter 5 of the book. It shows that there is a special hill named Pyramid Hill in Yichang, whose shape and location are unique. It is believed to be associated with traditional Chinese Feng Shui. Feng Shui is an ancient Chinese cultural belief that the layout and geographical features of an environment can affect a person's health, wealth and overall fortune. The basic principle of Feng Shui is the flow of Qi, the energy or life force in nature. The purpose of Feng Shui is to promote health, wealth, harmony and overall prosperity by adjusting the relationship between people and their environment. This hill is considered inauspicious according to Feng Shui principles, so the local authorities built a monastery opposite the hill to align with Feng Shui practices. As can be seen from the part, people in this region believe in Feng Shui because they take the measure to get rid of the inauspicious.

#### 4.2. Traditional Thoughts

Traditional thought is often reflected in people's daily lives in terms of food, clothing, housing and transportation, so there is no direct portrayal of traditional thought in the book. Like most writers who travel to China, Percival has both positive and negative views of Chinese behavior, but most of the book presents a negative image.

"Hundreds of coolies, natives of every grade and occupation, men, women, and children dressed and undressed, in all stages of rags, unhealthiness, and dirt, the great unwashed, talking, shouting, gesticulating, and bargaining all at the same time. And with the air reeking with the one perfume so celebrated throughout all China, strongly flavored with garlic, and other nauseous compounds [19] (E4)."

"Not very long ago the Spanish Consul fell into the water when stepping from his boat to the pontoon. The boatman could have saved his by simply leaning over the side of the boat and stretching out his hand. But no; instead of doing this very simple and natural thing, he paddled his boat a short distance higher up the river, and went ashore to the consul's house to tell his wife that her husband was drowned [19] (E5)."

The two examples are extracted from chapter 2 and 3 of this book.

In the first example, the use of "collie" indicated an extremely pejorative connotation. The term has a specific historical background and meaning. It originated in the 19th century and originally referred to Chinese and Indian drudges, i.e. workers engaged in manual labor. It was later used to refer to those workers who were socially inferior and exploited. It reflects the discrimination and unequal treatment of these workers at that time. The use of the term has triggered reflection and criticism of issues such as colonialism, racial discrimination and labor exploitation. Therefore, the descriptions of Chinese laborers in this book are full of discrimination and prejudice.

In the second example, there is a cultural difference between the boatman's approach and the author's ideas. From the boatman's perspective, he believed that informing the consul's wife promptly was necessary as she had the right to know about the accident, reflecting respect for social hierarchy and roles. In addition, as an individual of lower social status, the boatman could not and did not dare to rescue the consul on his own, reflecting the more pronounced boundaries between social classes. However, in the author's view, the boatman's behavior was callous and indifferent to life.

As shown by the above two examples, the author recorded several negative traits attributed to the Chinese, including arrogance, rudeness, lack of kindness, sloppiness, habitual begging, and so on. All of these negative descriptions are presented from the perspective of the other. As a result of cultural adaptation, the author's records may have been influenced by his own cultural background when he encountered this series of events. For example, individualism and collectivism can produce different perceptions and behaviors towards the same event.

The following contrasting observations from Chapter 2 illustrate regional differences in local attitudes towards foreigners:

Sha-sze: "In this place the natives have a very strong dislike to foreigners, and the very few who have ever landed here have experienced a very rough and unhappy time, which lasted until they found themselves safely on board their steamer again [19] (E6)."

Percival directly encountered this hostility in Sha-sze, where locals met him and his companions with unfriendliness, suggesting a deep-seated aversion to outsiders.

Yichang (in contrast to Sha-sze): "The natives of this place, unlike those of Sha-sze, show a very friendly feeling towards foreigners, so long as their customs and prejudices are not interfered with [19] (E7)." Percival's experience in Yichang aligned with this description of receptiveness. He noted not only the welcoming attitude of the people – exemplified by a ship captain who willingly acted as their guide, interpreter, and friend – but also the region's striking natural beauty, particularly its grand gorges.

As shown by the above two examples, the author thought that the people of the two regions treated foreigners very differently. The former were indifferent or even disgusted by foreigners, while the latter were friendly.

The following passages from Chapter 2 reveal distinct cultural perspectives on disaster and mortality:

This example reflects fatalism:

"Some of them were much displeased at being fished up out of the water. The Chinese said it was 'joss pidgeon', their fate, and, as the river joss had taken away their all, he had much better take themselves also [19] (E8)."

This passage offers insight into local beliefs concerning fate and death. The term "joss pidgeon" appears related to "joss stick" (xiāng), an object used in Buddhist or other religious worship. Facing catastrophic flooding that swept away their possessions, the individuals described here interpreted their potential drowning as preordained destiny ("joss pidgeon" or fate) – a decree from the "river joss" (river deity) that should not be resisted. Their reaction suggests a cultural framework where accepting such fate was paramount.

This example reflects resilience and differing values:

"The local response to disasters often involves a rapid resumption of daily life, with new people occupying the places of those lost, reflecting a cultural resilience in the face of hardship.....these people follow the lead of their predecessors [19] (E9)."

Percival contrasts the observed local response to disaster recovery with Western norms familiar to him. He expresses surprise at the apparent speed with which life returned to normal, interpreting the lack of prolonged, visible grief as evidence that the local population placed less value on individual lives than he expected. However, an alternative interpretation views this rapid rebuilding and resumption of life not as devaluing life, but as demonstrating remarkable societal resilience in the face of overwhelming hardship.

Collectively, these examples highlight the profound cultural differences Percival encountered regarding attitudes towards life, death, and disaster. While he interpreted the behaviors as indicating a lack of value placed on life, the underlying cultural logic reveals complex beliefs in fate and potent societal resilience.

Chapter 3 of Percival's work offers revealing insights into the lives and character of Sichuan boatmen, captured in the following observations:

The statement, "The Szechuen boatmen will not engage themselves to go beyond this point", highlights their preference for operating within familiar geographical limits [19] (E10). This practice reflects a strategy to maintain income stability by avoiding the uncertainties of unknown waters and routes.

Percival notes a distinct contrast in their behavior: "When sober, they were a good hard-working lot [19] (E11)." This observation indicates that the boatmen demonstrated significant professionalism, diligence, and responsibility when sober, implicitly acknowledging that intoxication negatively impacted their job performance.

The most vivid description captures the harsh reality of their existence: "Szechuen boatmen pass their lives, always running the finest possible chance of its being brought to a violent and sudden termination; working hard, through rain and storm, fair weather and foul, from daylight to dark, all for the good round sum of two hundred cash, equivalent to tenpence sterling per day [19] (E12)." The phrase "running the finest possible chance of its being brought to a violent and sudden termination" underscores the constant, life-threatening dangers inherent in their work navigating treacherous rivers. Descriptions of working "through rain and storm, fair weather and foul, from daylight to dark" emphasize their extraordinary endurance and unwavering toil. The stark revelation of their daily pay a mere "tenpence sterling", highlights the profound disparity between the immense risks they shouldered and the paltry financial reward they received.

Collectively, these passages paint a portrait of a workforce defined by resilience and tenacity. Despite confronting extreme physical danger and exploitation through low wages, the Sichuan boatmen persevered with remarkable diligence. Their commitment to labor, driven by the necessity of sustaining themselves and their families, embodies the

traditional Chinese cultural values of industriousness, thrift, and a deep respect for hard work.

Percival observes a distinct cultural tendency in Chinese naming practices through his description of the "Tiger Teeth" gorge in Chapter 2:

"'Tiger Teeth' gorge — the people all over the country are very fond of the fanciful titles, and frequently give high-sounding names to very common objects [19] (E13)."

This passage highlights how the gorge's name derives from its physical resemblance to a tiger's teeth, embodying the local preference for imaginative and grandiose nomenclature. Percival's observation taps into a significant aspect of Chinese culture where naming conventions are culturally significant. There exists a tendency to bestow evocative names upon objects or places to enhance their perceived value, beauty, or significance. The specific name "Tiger Teeth" gorge serves as a prime example. It employs a vivid metaphor, evoking the image of a tiger's sharp teeth — a potent symbol of danger and power within Chinese cultural imagery. Consequently, the name not only describes the gorge's likely steep and treacherous physical character but also subtly foreshadows the perilous experiences Percival later encountered navigating it.

Therefore, the designation "Tiger Teeth" gorge transcends mere geographical labeling. It encapsulates rich layers of cultural meaning, symbolism, and an aesthetic appreciation that intertwines observations of nature with linguistic artistry. Analyzing such names provides valuable insight into Chinese naming habits and their role in reinforcing cultural identity, expressing local characteristics, and shaping the perception of the natural world.

#### 4.3. Traditional Architecture

Chinese traditional architecture, renowned for its profound historical and cultural heritage, emphasizes harmony with nature, distinctive timber structures, and intricate decorative arts. Beyond its aesthetic value, it embodies cultural values and social hierarchies, manifesting in diverse scales, forms, and regional characteristics that reflect the ingenuity of ancient craftsmen.

A defining characteristic is the adaptive use of local materials, such as bamboo and wood. This practice demonstrates sustainable resource utilization and responsiveness to environmental conditions, particularly the humid climate prevalent in many regions. For instance, vernacular dwellings along riverbanks in Southwest China, such as those depicted in Figure 5.3, are frequently elevated on substantial piles to mitigate flood risk. A vivid contemporary description captures these structures: "All the most miserable shanties, letting in both wind and rain — on the bank of the river, are raised well up on piles, thirty to forty feet above high-water mark; narrow wooden pathways, running between the rows of houses, and small bridges connecting these pathways where the houses are not continuous [19] (E14)." This design, along with the accompanying infrastructure, showcases builders' pragmatic adaptation to the riparian landscape.

The reliance on locally sourced materials extended deeply into daily life and economic activities. This is exemplified by a concise list of essentials from the period: "Bamboo mats, food, clothes, hats, umbrellas, houses, ornaments, boats [19] (E15)." The prominence of bamboo products in this inventory underscores a significant dependence on natural resources, reflecting both environmental adaptation and sustainable lifestyle practices.

Furthermore, traditional architecture expresses distinct cultural identities across ethnic groups. Tibetan structures, utilizing rammed earth and stone, respond to rugged terrain and prioritize durability. Conversely, the stilted houses with sloping roofs characteristic of the Dai people are optimally suited to the region's wet, monsoon-influenced climate.

The description of the riverside dwellings also reveals socio-economic dimensions. Characterizing them as "miserable shanties" and noting that household boats were

"mostly rotten and leaky" suggests the economic precarity faced by some communities. Nevertheless, the universal household ownership of boats (Each house possesses either a sampan or a small, home-made, flat-bottomed boat) highlights the critical role of aquatic transport in daily subsistence within this fluvial environment.

In conclusion, these traditional structures transcend mere functionality as shelter. They represent a vital cultural heritage, embodying the accumulated wisdom of communities living in sustained harmony with their specific environments. Architectural designs, structural solutions, and material choices are intrinsically shaped by local climate, topography, and available resources, creating a resilient built legacy deeply integrated with the natural world. The analysis of the cited descriptions and Figure 4 provides a vivid depiction of life along Southwest China's rivers, elucidating the inhabitants' relationship with their environment and the inherent challenges they navigated.



**Figure 4.** Traditional Architecture.

## 5. Discussion

According to the extractions of Chinese traditional culture from the book, the writer would like to give a further explanation from the following aspects.

### 5.1. Ethnocentrism

In the ethnocentric perspective, culture is seen as a hierarchy in which the culture of one's own people is regarded as superior, while other cultures are regarded as inferior or subordinate. In his book, William Spencer Percival's depiction of traditional Chinese culture may have been influenced by his own cultural background and values, which is evident in his depiction of traditional Chinese customs, thoughts and architecture.

#### 5.1.1. Traditional Customs

In traditional customs, for example, Percival referred to Chinese funeral rituals in E1 and E2, and he described firecrackers, small fires on the river, and the activities of monks at the funeral. However, his interpretation of this may reflect a Western-centric perspective that perceives Chinese attitudes toward life in disasters differently. In fact, when a person passes away in western China, the person responsible for arranging the funeral will purify the body, recite prayers, and hold a solemn funeral. They also commemorate the anniversary of the death, visit the grave to recite sutras, offer alms, and perform rites aimed at relieving the deceased of sins and helping them find peace. These are folkloric activities deeply rooted in local traditions.

All these activities are aimed at alleviating the sins of the deceased and helping them find peace and liberation. This shows that the funeral culture of the region is characterized by a distinct humanism. Percival's view may not fully appreciate the deeper cultural and spiritual significance of these rituals in Chinese funerals, such as honoring ancestors and commemorating the deceased, and fireworks are actually a manifestation of filial piety, which is also in line with the ethical character honored by the Chinese people.

In E3, Percival referred to Pyramid Hill in Yichang. Because of its unique shape and location, it was considered to be in conflict with traditional Chinese Feng Shui and could have a significant impact on Yichang's trade, health and overall prosperity. As a result, the authorities chose a site opposite the hill to build a temple with a view to conforming to Chinese Feng Shui principles and removing the ominous energy. This description may reflect the author's limited understanding or stereotyping of Chinese Feng Shui culture. Ethnocentrism often involves imposing one's own cultural values and belief systems on others, leading to the perception of foreign cultural practices as irrational or superstitious. For example, they may not understand or agree with the principles of Feng Shui and view it as a superstitious practice rather than an environmental philosophy deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture.

#### 5.1.2. Traditional Thoughts

In traditional thoughts, Percival's descriptions reflected Western stereotypes of Chinese people in E4 and E5, such as the description of Chinese laborers as "coolies", a pejorative term used at the time to refer to low-status manual laborers. Such descriptions not only reflected the discriminatory and unequal treatment of these workers in the West, but also ignored the unique social structure and cultural context of Chinese society. From a further analysis, the two examples reveal certain negative behaviors observed in some individuals, which can be explained from the following aspects. On the one hand, it's obvious that most of the author's contacts are with lower-class individuals who lack education and are forced to make ends meet. Therefore, these people have to bargain for their life and family and little value their appearance and behavior. On the other hand, it has to do with Percival's personal experience. When he was traveling in China, he suffered from blackmail, robbery, scam, and indifference, which made him prejudiced against the locals and think everyone was like that. However, discussions about the ill-nature of the Chinese people do not imply an overall evaluation of Chinese, but rather a reflection of traditional Chinese culture, social psychology and national character. In addition, these discussions were also influenced by the historical background and ideology at that time, and thus may be viewed today with a certain degree of prejudice and misunderstanding. In today's pluralistic and open era, we should look at it more objectively and rationally.

In terms of attitudes towards foreigners, from E6 and E7, Percival referred to the strong antipathy of the Chinese towards foreigners and the unfavorable treatment of foreigners in certain areas. Such descriptions may have been influenced by Western colonial and racist ideologies that viewed Chinese attitudes towards foreigners as irrational or hostile, without taking into account cultural differences and historical contexts. Actually, E6 and E7 are the embodiment of the concept of family-and-nation. The reason why people in Sha Shi seem to be indifferent to foreigners can be illustrated as follows. The attitude of the people of modern Sha Shi towards foreigners, like the people of many parts of China at that time, was complex and varied. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the signing of a series of unequal treaties after the Opium War, foreign powers entered China and many port cities, including Sha Shi, were forced to open up [20,21]. The entry of foreigners had a profound impact on local society, economy and culture. In economic terms, the intrusion of foreign capitalist forces impacted on local craftsmen and traders, as foreign goods tended to compete with local products at lower prices and higher quality. In political terms, Sha Shi became a colony of the Great Powers, who enjoyed privileges in the area, which caused resentment among the locals. In cultural terms, the activities of foreign missionaries may clash with local culture and religious beliefs, leading to resentment among the local.

In terms of attitudes towards life from E8 and E9, Percival observed cultural differences in Chinese reactions to disasters compared to Western expectations, which he interpreted as indicating differing attitudes toward the value of life. This view may not fully understand the way Chinese society reacts to disasters and the acceptance of fate and the

forces of nature in Chinese culture. It can be explained by the Confucian view of fatality. Human beings are extremely tiny in the face of nature, and in the face of uncontrollable forces from nature, people are prone to attribute them to "fate". That's why they are able to face death unflinchingly. In addition, they are able to get over the death of a loved one as quickly as possible and move on to a new life. From a spiritual perspective, amidst the fear of death, the Chinese realized the brevity and beauty of life, and thus rose to the occasion. At the same time, an intense focus on spiritual or afterlife beliefs may sometimes lead to less emphasis on present life. This has led to the Chinese people's numbness and illusion of reality, and their contempt and indulgence of life.

### 5.1.3. Traditional Architecture

In traditional architecture, Percival described the architecture of southwestern China in E14 and E15, mentioning river-side shacks, wooden walkways and bridges, and boats owned by each household. These descriptions may reflect an exoticized Western perspective on the architecture of the East, without delving into how these buildings were adapted to the local natural environment and the needs of their inhabitants.

The relationship between traditional houses with Chinese characteristics and the natural environment is extremely close, and this is particularly evident in the traditional architecture of the southwestern region of China. The geographic environment of the southwest region is diverse, including subtropical, humid and semi-humid climate zones, with complex topography, interspersed with mountains and basins, which together affect the style and characteristics of local architecture. Take "the miserable shanties" as an example: they are built on stakes as foundations, which fully reflects adaptation to the local natural environment. Bamboo is abundant in Sichuan, making it a commonly used material for various purposes. Therefore, there are many objects made of bamboo, which not only adapts to the humid climate, but also embodies the concept of sustainable use of natural resources. In addition, these two architectural styles also reflect the harmonious coexistence of national culture and nature. Their architectural styles, structures and materials take into account the local climate, topography and resources, reflecting the residents' harmony with the natural environment and a deep understanding of the laws of nature.

In general, traditional architecture in Southwest China is not only a carrier of culture, but also reflects people's wisdom and creativity in interacting with the natural environment.

## 5.2. Cultural Relativism

Cultural diversity and cultural equality provide a more open and inclusive perspective to understand and respect the uniqueness and value of different cultures.

### 5.2.1. Traditional Customs

Cultural diversity emphasizes the uniqueness of each culture and that these uniquenesses are valuable assets of that culture. In E1 and E2, Chinese funeral rituals demonstrated the respect for ancestors and the honoring of the deceased in Chinese culture. For example, firecrackers, small fires on the river, and the activities of monks are all ways of expressing mourning and remembrance in Chinese culture. From the perspective of cultural diversity, these practices are an expression of the diversity of Chinese culture and they enrich the diversity of human culture and should be respected and protected.

Cultural equality requires that we treat all cultures equally and do not regard any culture as superior or inferior. If we look at Chinese funeral rituals in E1 and E2 from the perspective of cultural equality, we can realize that these practices are just as much about respect and remembrance of the departed as those in the West, but only in different forms of expression. This perspective of equality helps us to transcend cultural differences and see the universal values behind different cultures.

In E3, Feng Shui is viewed by some as a feudal superstition, while others regard it as a form of rational environmental philosophy. Literally, Feng shui refers to the direction of the wind and water, that is, the natural geographical environment. Folk believes that good or bad Feng Shui can affect the prosperity and fortune of their family. That's why the people of Yichang built a monastery opposite Pyramid Hill to avoid evil influences. According to scholar, the ancient Chinese Feng Shui theory advocates that on the basis of the observation and protection of the natural environment, people should fully and reasonably adapt to and utilize nature, and create a harmonious and unified living environment between human and nature, rather than conquer and transform nature, let alone violate and destroy the law of nature [22]. As a result, Feng Shui embodies the philosophy of the unity of Heaven and man.

#### 5.2.2. Traditional Thoughts

In E6 and E7, Percival referred to the different reactions of Chinese people to foreigners. From the perspective of cultural diversity, such differences reflected the uniqueness and complexity of cultures in different regions. Each region has its own specific cultural traditions and social norms, which may influence local attitudes and behaviors towards outsiders. Understanding and respecting the cultural characteristics of each region is therefore key to promoting cross-cultural communication and understanding [23].

In E8 and E9, Percival observed that Chinese people react differently in the aftermath of a disaster than is expected in Western culture. The way Chinese society reacts to disasters reflected a unique attitude of understanding and acceptance of fate and the forces of nature in Chinese culture. This attitude is part of the diversity of Chinese culture, and it adds a unique dimension to the treasury of human cultural diversity. In addition, if we look at the way Chinese society responded to the disaster from the perspective of cultural equality, we can recognize that different cultures have different ways of understanding and accepting disasters. It helps us to transcend cultural differences and understand that each culture has its own unique value and meaning.

From E10, E11 and E12, the behavior of boatmen reflected their need for stability and security, and their preference for a known environment. It reflected a cultural emphasis on family and livelihoods, and a cautious attitude towards risk. Cultural equity requires that we understand and respect the motivations for behavior and decision-making in different cultural contexts. In E11, it referred to Chinese diligence, Percival has mentioned several times in the book. In Chinese tradition, diligence is not only an inspirational spiritual force, but also has ethical and moral overtones. They believe that diligence is rewarded by higher powers or through personal virtue. Arthur Henderson Smith once praised Chinese diligence in his book *Chinese Characteristics*, which mentioned "The Chinese are paragons of frugality [19] ". According to the above examples, Sichuan boatmen were hardworking and thrifty. On the positive side, it's a manifestation of self-improvement, while it may also be forced by the environment and livelihood from the passive perspective.

In E13, the cultural connotation of landscape inscriptions in the region is discussed. Allegory and symbolism are very important in Chinese culture. Some names of places and attractions are named through exaggeration or high-profile naming in order to express good wishes and connotation. Names can be based on imagery or figurative. Take "Tiger Teeth Gorge" as an example, the gorge is named by its appearance, which is similar to a tiger's teeth. In addition, the name can reflect not only the shape of the gorge, but also its sheer grandeur, which implies deep-rooted traditional cultural values. This practice enriches cultural traditions, strengthens local identity and is an expression of cultural diversity. We should appreciate and respect this cultural practice, recognizing that naming and assigning value to the environment and natural phenomena is unique across cultures.

### 5.2.3. Traditional Architecture

In terms of traditional architecture, Percival described the architecture of Southwest China in E14 and E15. From the perspective of cultural diversity, these buildings adapt to the local natural environment and the inhabitants' living needs. They reflect the regional characteristics and innovative spirit of Chinese architecture. For example, the shacks along the riverside, the wooden walkways and bridges, and the boats owned by each household are all expressions of China's cultural diversity, and they demonstrate how Chinese architecture harmonizes with the natural environment and meets the practical needs of its inhabitants. While from the perspective of cultural equality, it can be recognized that these buildings, like Western architecture, these traditional architectures are the result of human wisdom and creativity. These buildings are adapted to the local natural environment and the living needs of the inhabitants, reflecting the uniqueness and value of Chinese architecture.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper investigates Chinese traditional culture of southwest China in modern overseas travelogues to China and the book *The Land of the Dragon* written by Percival is the main research object. The following part includes the major findings, implications and limitations of this study.

According to the framework of traditional culture combining Content Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, this study employs qualitative methods to make a comprehensive and systematic analysis of traditional culture in the book *The Land of the Dragon*. The research has found some results as follows.

First, in traditional customs, the travelogue described various customs, notably funeral rituals and the concept of Feng Shui. In traditional thoughts, it also touched upon traditional thoughts and social behaviors. In traditional architecture, the architecture of Southwest China was described, highlighting the adaptation to the local natural environment. In general, the traditional culture in southwest China has both commonness and individuality to the traditional Chinese culture. This shows that our traditional culture is characterized by distinct national features and extensiveness and profoundness.

Second, the representation of Southwest China's traditional culture was influenced by the authors' own cultural backgrounds and values, leading to interpretations that might have been tinged with Western-centered views. That is to say, there are a lot of stereotypes and misunderstanding of traditional Chinese culture in overseas travelogues in modern times. Moreover, despite the ethnocentric lens, there were opportunities to view these cultural practices through cultural relativism, which would involve understanding and respecting the unique cultural expressions and values of Southwest China's traditional culture.

In summary, the travelogues of modern overseas visitors to China provided a varied representation of Southwest China's traditional culture, influenced by the authors' cultural perspectives and the historical context of the times. While there were elements of ethnocentrism and stereotyping, there were also opportunities for a more nuanced understanding and appreciation of the region's rich cultural heritage.

This study makes contributions in the following aspects. Firstly, this paper verifies the applicability and practicability of critical discourse analysis in overseas travelogue to China, and provides reference for critical discourse analysis research. In addition, this study makes a content analysis of the overseas travelogue to China *The Land of the Dragon* written by Percival, enriching the research methods of overseas travelogues.

Second, we want to help readers develop critical reading awareness when they're reading travelogues. Most overseas travelogues, being subjective in nature, tend to portray China in a negative light for various reasons. Only a few portrayed China from a fair

and objective standpoint. It necessitates a deeper understanding of the ideology underlying the language. Efforts should be made to maintain a positive image of China and to showcase its rich traditional culture.

Finally, this research aims to encourage the preservation of local traditional culture in Southwest China and to promote the use of modern technologies such as big data and the Internet to disseminate this valuable cultural heritage, fostering sustainable development of both material and spiritual culture.

This research has certain shortcomings as well. Firstly, reliance on manual retrieval of content may lead to omission or misclassification of information. As a result, this may have a slight impact on the results of the analysis. Secondly, the corpus selected for this study only focuses on one book, which is not a broad enough coverage so as to cause the low reliability, and subsequent studies could add more travelogues appropriately. Thirdly, this study only explores a few spots in southwest China due to the travelogue covering a small area, and subsequent studies could widen the scope of area in southwest China.

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