

PRZEGLĄD HUMANISTYCZNY

QUARTELY • VOLUMEN LXVIII / 2024 • NUMBER 2 (485)

English version

IN THIS ISSUE:

D.M. OSIŃSKI: *Dialogues with Chineseness in the Polish Literature of the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries – Forms of Presence, Ways of Absorbing. Approximations*

L. YINAN: *The Cultural Dialogue between Poland and China from the 13th Century to the Beginning of the 20th Century*

T. ZHANG: *Mickiewicz, a Poet of Vengeance or a Preacher of Forgiveness? In Search of a "Third Way" of Intercultural Translation on the Example of Adam Mickiewicz's Zdania i uwagi*

M. ROMANOWSKA: *The Philosopher and the Simpleton from "the Imperial City of Shang-hai". The Status of Early Humorous Tales in the Works of Bolesław Prus*

P. BORDZOŁ: *The Borrowed and Mediated China: Eliza Orzeszkowa's Publicist Voice on the Question of Women's Equal Rights*

I. PRZYBYSZ: *"People Born to Live in Their Motherland". The Encounter of China and the West in Wacław Sieroszewski's Novel Zamorski diabeł*

A.A. JASTRZĘBSKA: *Was Tadeusz Miciński Familiar with Taoism? On The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China*

Z. SATKOWSKA: *What Can Be Seen from Manchuria? Polish Community on the World Map According to the Polish Press for Children and Youth in Harbin (1919–1937)*

D. YUE: *Polish Non-Fiction in China: Discussion and Translations*

X. CHUYUE: *Presentation and Analysis of Xiehouyu in Literature and as a Linguistic Phenomenon*



Warszawa 2025

PRZEGLĄD HUMANISTYCZNY

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

Irena Fedorowicz (Wilno), Małgorzata Grzegorzewska, Ryszard Kulesza,
Luigi Marinelli (Rzym), Gabriela Olchowa (Bańska Bystrzyca),
Józef Porayski-Pomsta, Kinga Siatkowska-Callebat (Paryż), Paweł Stępień,
Dorota Walczak-Delanois (Bruksela), Jerzy Wasilewski,
Andrzej Waśkiewicz, Elżbieta Wichrowska, Nina Witoszek (Oslo)

PRZEGLĄD HUMANISTYCZNY

QUARTELY • VOLUMEN LXVIII / 2024 • NUMBER 2 (485)

English version



Warszawa 2025

EDITORIAL BOARD

Dawid Maria Osiński (Editor-in-Chief)

Piotr Okniński (Assistant Editor-in-Chief)

Karol Hryniewicz (Editorial Secretary)

*Marta Bucholc, Roman Chymkowski, Agnieszka Nowakowska,
Radosław Pawelec, Marcin Poręba, Elżbieta Wierzbicka-Piotrowska,
Grażyna Szelańska, Jagoda Wierzejska, Tomasz Wójcik*

Address:

02-678 Warszawa, ul. Smyczkowa 5/7

www.przegladhumanistyczny.pl

e-mail: przegladhumanistyczny@uw.edu.pl

SCIENTIFIC EDITOR

Dawid Maria Osiński

Managing Editor: *Dorota Dziedzic*

Translator: *Blanka Domachowska*

Copyeditor: *Małgorzata Sulęta-Sildatke*

ISSN 0033-2194, e-ISSN 2657-599X

© Copyright by Authors, 2025

© Copyright for English translation by Uniwersytet Warszawski /
Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2025

Peer-reviewed journal

The print edition is the primary version of the journal

University of Warsaw Press

PL 02-678 Warsaw, 5/7 Smyczkowa St.

e-mail: wuw@uw.edu.pl

www.wuw.pl

DTP: *Beata Steleńska*

Print and binding: POZKAL

Contents

ARTICLES

Dawid Maria Osiński – Dialogues with Chineseness in the Polish Literature of the Second Half of the 19 th and Early 20 th Centuries – Forms of Presence, Ways of Absorbing. Approximations.	7
--	---

ARTICLES

Li Yinan – The Cultural Dialogue between Poland and China from the 13th Century to the Beginning of the 20 th Century	41
Tingting Zhang – Mickiewicz, a Poet of Vengeance or a Preacher of Forgiveness? In Search of a “Third Way” of Intercultural Translation on the Example of Adam Mickiewicz’s <i>Zdania i uwagi</i>	60
Magdalena Romanowska – The Philosopher and the Simpleton from “the Imperial City of Shang-hai”: The Status of Early Humorous Tales in the Works of Bolesław Prus	74
Piotr Bordzoł – The Borrowed and Mediated China: Eliza Orzeszkowa’s Publicist Voice on the Question of Women’s Equal Rights	87
Iwona Przybysz – “People Born to Live in Their Motherland”: The Encounter of China and the West in Wacław Sieroszewski’s Novel <i>Zamorski diabeł</i>	100
Agnieszka Agata Jastrzębska – Was Tadeusz Miciński Familiar with Taoism? On <i>The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China</i>	115
Zofia Satkowska – What Can Be Seen from Manchuria? Polish Community on the World Map According to the Polish Press for Children and Youth in Harbin (1919–1937)	126
Duan Yue – Polish Non-Fiction in China: Discussion and Translations.	139
Xie Chuyue – Presentation and Analysis of <i>Xiehouyu</i> in Literature and as a Linguistic Phenomenon	151

REVIEWS AND SURVEYS

Olga Dawidowicz-Chymkowska – Civilising Children with a Question Mark	165
---	-----

Dialogues with Chineseness in the Polish Literature of the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries – Forms of Presence, Ways of Absorbing. Approximations¹

Dawid Maria Osiński

University of Warsaw, Poland

e-mail: d.osinski@uw.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-9468-1569

Abstract

The aim of this introductory survey article is to present the various ways in which Chineseness is dialogued with and exposed in the Polish literature of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Another objective of this exploratory paper is to indicate the forms of presence and the ways and functions of absorbing Chinese themes, as well as to reflect on their functionality in different genres and discourses of that period. Following the findings and diagnoses of Bogdan Mazan (and other scholars focused on the second half of the 19th century), the author tries to indicate and bring closer slightly different areas of meaning than those investigated in research to date. He points to possibilities of interpreting traces of Chineseness in the literature of that period and in other texts determining important, albeit often marginal and not central, messages of the analysed works authored by Polish positivist and modernist writers.

Keywords

China, Chineseness, literature of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, dialogue, allusion

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: “Dialogi z chińszczyzną w piśmiennictwie polskim drugiej połowy XIX i początku XX wieku – formy obecności, sposoby absorpcji. Przybliżenia”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 7–38, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.1>.

To Professor Bogdan Mazan

Chinese and Polish researchers' reflection concerning the ways of diagnosing the diverse forms of Chinese-Polish and Polish-Chinese relationships in literary texts is undoubtedly an important element of intercultural dialogue. Such reflection brings together different research traditions and various schools of reading literary texts as well as other forms of writing and, in consequence, displays a vast array of attitudes to literature, understood as a reservoir of questions related to the construction of identity. The present issue of *Przegląd Humanistyczny* is not meant as an exploration of an entirely unknown research area. Indeed, it often turns to lesser-known texts, which lack due recognition and which (to a large extent) share a common perception of China and Chineseness as well as of figures of their presence used by writers of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Those texts also use similar ways of absorbing, making present and domesticating elements of culture and tradition or, less frequently, of various works, in a conscious or accidental manner, with a fainter or stronger use of cultural stereotypes. Moreover, this issue portrays interesting social and cultural initiatives, reconstructs Chinese-Polish relationships (throughout the ages) and highlights literary events on the Chinese ground in the contemporary literary milieu.

A dialogue thus understood does not have to presume equal participation of both "parties": the Polishness and the Chineseness in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Namely, it shows that the vector of investigation is, more often than not, turned towards one of the participating subjects, broadly speaking – from Poland towards China. It can, therefore, be directed to various objects of description and it can interact with them. A dialogue does not have to be an exchange that leads to an understanding between the two subjects. Nor does it have to resemble a communicative transaction or a barter agreement with the aim of enhancing cross-investment within the exploration areas in order to specify their characteristics. Dialogue is understood here as a process of diagnosing the Chinese culture, civilisation and customs, in an attempt to determine their understanding based on the literature (mainly literary texts, but also press materials or selected passages from personal writings) created on the Polish territory in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This exchange is of a particular kind, for it makes use – in the form of reference, allusion and costume – of culturemes of Chineseness in diverse types of genres and discourses. Therefore, the intercourse between the addressee and the addresser follows the rule of close observation and absorption of various forms of cultural intertexts in order to determine their specific character and function in the text, which leads to clearer diagnoses, which are not necessarily always and directly related to China and Chineseness.

Diagnosing the contact points and the forms of Chinese-Polish and Polish-Chinese cultural presence is not an easy task. It requires to develop tools and to find a language allowing one to speak about the blurred issues stigmatised by stereotypes, ignorance or incomplete knowledge of the writers of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, who nonetheless made insightful observations about the role of prejudices

and stereotypes in the social and cultural life in their times and determined “circles of foreignness” of diverse phenomena on the map of local and global geopolitics.

The difficulties with diagnosing those relationships from today’s perspective and with clear evaluation of the presence of various forms of Chinese motifs in the Polish literature of that time can be attributed to yet another problem. Namely, in the 20th and 21st centuries, humanities developed styles of research and possibilities of reading texts (not only those from the second half of the 19th century) which allow us to ask different questions about the conscious or accidental artistic strategies, about the adopted conventions, the ways of approaching philosophical, moral, ethical, cultural, ethnical, material, historical and political issues (not exempt from stereotyping) that informed the knowledge of the 19th-century writers about the world and about the relationship with the Middle Kingdom.² Images of Chineseness produced by writers in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, their reflection on the necessity of incorporating diverse textual signals that create (sometimes quite handy) matrices for the development of a given notion or phenomenon, had various sources of fascination. They resulted undoubtedly from other experiences of wonderment and in various ways (sometimes consistently, sometimes not) they would describe the attempts at defining the Polish-Chinese relationships, as well as the presence of China in the journalistic, ethnographic, cultural, social and literary discourses of the time. It is not easy to prove which direct sources were used in the reconstruction of those perceptions. Not always is it easy to answer the question about the motivations of the writers from the second half of the 19th century who used China as a country with determined codes of conduct, a geographical and political territory with a specific approach to statehood, and who treated Chineseness as a set of conventions, beliefs, fashions and signs, and the Chinese people – as representatives of a nation defined by a set of specific characteristics (usually stereotyped, if not grotesquely exaggerating certain national dominants of character, physiognomy and worldview).

It would be invaluable if we could clearly indicate (for instance based on the forms of journalistic enunciations, which, as we know, also use distinctive strategies of constructing ideological and cultural notions in order to depict the literary world of meanings) when and in what respect “China” – evoked or used as an important point of reference (in texts that are not dedicated to China, but merely signal its presence in a side thread) – became a vector-sign that reveals more than the word implies. Therefore, we need findings demonstrating that “China” became an imaginary notion and a construct; this would allow to ask questions about the possibilities of reconstructing the principles applicable in the Middle Kingdom of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries

² Important diagnoses for conducting research on the stereotype in the press of the second half of the 19th century were presented by Tadeusz Budrewicz, “Stereotypy Chin i Chińczyków w polskiej prasie satyrycznej drugiej połowy XIX wieku”, in: *Bez antypodów? Konfrontacje i zbliżenia kultur*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słowinia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2008, pp. 207–230.

thanks to hidden allusions, which speak in fact about the events taking place in Poland at that time. Do the changing ruling dynasties and the intellectual initiatives or national movements have their corresponding counterparts in the country partitioned between three occupants? To what extent could the administrative, juridical and state systems as well as the cultural activity of China in the second half of the 19th century serve as a substitute for speaking about the weighty and burning issues concerning Warsaw, Lublin, Łódź, Kraków, Lviv, Poznań, Grodno and smaller towns and provinces in the three partitions? These are fundamental questions that should be answered by way of a comprehensive reflection on the matter of Chinese-Polish relationships in the literature (mainly in press discourse) of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The researchers of Polish-Chinese relationships still have to investigate, for instance, the following questions: how to assemble the diverse forms of substitute speech, the “prison language”, the Aesopian language – so important for the users of language and culture in the second half of the 19th and early 20th century (with the diminishing of various forms of censure after the October ukase in 1905) – and how to evaluate this register and the limits of its applicability as well as the degrees of its actual application? Finally, how to describe the metonymies of China used by writers, how are they introduced in the literary, journalistic and personal writing (especially in epistolography)? Does the sole fact that a writer read a given philosopher’s texts, together with the presence of ideological motifs, legal aspects, a cultural and social *entourage*, constitute sufficient proof that their use is conscious (and significant for the reconfiguration of textual notions)? Does indicating the ethnical interpretations of behaviour and the presence of phenomena, conduct and features, which highlight specific dimensions of meaning within a refer-compare scheme, help understand their contribution to the wider plan of plots, actions, enunciations? Those questions also demand a separate reflection and particular attention.

Moreover, special thought should be given to translation studies, both with respect to translating Polish authors into Chinese – whether directly from the original or via English or German – and Chinese authors into Polish. Undeniable contribution was made in this field by works dedicated to comparative studies and translations of Polish and Chinese works:³ the synthesising monograph by Li Yanan *Literatura polska w Chinach* [Polish Literature in China] (2017),⁴ which meticulously registers all

³ Zhang Zhenhui, “*Lalka* Bolesława Prusa, *Ziemia obiecana* Władysława Reymonta i *Północ* Mao Duna – interesujące analogie na tle różnych warunków historycznych”, trans. Barbara Li, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 269–280; Lin Hongliang, “Henryk Sienkiewicz i Lu Xun – analiza porównawcza na podstawie małych form prozatorskich”, trans. Barbara Li, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm*, pp. 283–300; Zhao Gang, Yi Lijun, Mao Yinhui, “Od Sienkiewicza do Sienkiewicza, czyli o literaturze pozytywistycznej w Chinach”, trans. Barbara Li, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm*, pp. 303–315.

⁴ Li Yanan, *Literatura polska w Chinach*, preface by Yi Lijun, afterword by Zhao Gang, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego 2017.

possible translated works, and other works by this researcher from Beijing University of Foreign Languages, and recently – Thomas Starky’s doctoral dissertation (2024)⁵.

The present thematic issue of *Przegląd Humanistyczny* is guided by research questions of different rank and it seeks to evaluate and gain an insight into the Polish-Chinese dialogue – which appears as an unobvious cultural and literary intertwining – on the ground of mutually distant literatures. The two cultures dialogue in a fluctuating manner, scatteringly, meanderingly, accidentally, based on a moderate or scant knowledge about the world or about each other. This set of adverbs seems to be an adequate description of this complex and ambiguous phenomenon. “Single signals”, “isolated spots” – such phrases most accurately indicate the degree of presence of Chinese references in the texts from the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Further questions concern the degree of possible absorption of cultural components, the understanding of a foreign tradition in one’s own (national) cultural code, the ways of processing knowledge about the Chinese reality. In the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, that cultural and geographical area was perceived as a tremendously attractive, exotic enclave, a place of opportunities (if only by comparing the familiar to the unknown). This allows us to discover important components of philosophical, aesthetical, perhaps less literary nature, present in the thinking of the 19th- and 20th-century writers.

The evaluation of questions asked by journalists and writers in those times is all the more difficult that their knowledge of China and Chineseness was limited and usually acquired from second-hand sources. Therefore, when we are dealing with knowledge that had been mediated, overheard, gained by means of various transfers, and thus mutated and altered, it is hard to point without any ambivalence to the original model, the source reference purified and freed from foreign mediations and, in consequence, to find the author’s own (even less so – one that is based on experience) way of absorbing it. First of all, when it comes to the writers from the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, it is worth noting that their dialoguing with the Chinese tradition was not so much a dialogue with the Chinese literature and the tastes it shaped, with its deeply interiorised nature and potential, nor with its hallmark genres, but rather with imaginary notions created through someone else’s perceptions (and by the languages of the cultural transfer through reading). In the second half of the 19th century diverse comparative syntheses were published, which included Chinese examples, but they were not implemented, applied or overtly discussed in the common consciousness and practice of writers living by the rivers Vistula, Oder, Bug, Nemen, Poltva (I intentionally

⁵ Thomas Starky, *Kartografia międzyperyferyjna. Transfery literackie i rola centrum w zapośredniczonych tłumaczeniach małych form prozatorskich Henryka Sienkiewicza autorstwa Zhou Zuorena i Lu Xuna* [Inter-peripheral cartography: Literary transfers and the role of the center in the mediated translations of Henryk Sienkiewicz’s short prose forms by Zhou Zuoren and Lu Xun], doctoral dissertation supervised by Żaneta Nalewajk-Turecka, Małgorzata Religa, Warsaw 2024, electronic manuscript.

indicate here topographic belonging to various partitions of Poland). They were part of general humanistic knowledge, applied marginally and accidentally.

Speaking about the Chinese-Polish and Polish-Chinese motifs may resemble the exploration of “urban text”, as Vladimir Toporov put it in his analysis of Petersburg and the “Petersburg text” in the work of Fyodor Dostoevsky.⁶ Including such terms as “Chinese” or “Chineseness” in the reflection on Polish literature (especially in the second half of the 19th century) was a word-forming mechanism indicating a certain topographical imaginary construct – in a similar way one could speak of “Atlantisness” or “Madagascarianness”. We tend to refer in this way to sensitive sites of cultural memory and to experientially difficult (often unnameable) entanglements of relations, as it is in reflections on the “Hutsulianness”⁷ or (in a different way) on “Siberianness”. Each of these terms refers of course to a different reservoir of meanings – each evokes different emotions and different, incomparable experiences; each indicates different stereotypes, anguishes and tragedies. And yet, despite those differences, we could say that the “Chinese text” is one of the least described, least known and least resonating thread on the map of the Polish 19th-century literature and culture in the three partitions. In the second half of the 19th century, beginning with diverse geographical-travel narrations and ethnographical-historical accounts, the “Chinese text” could often be grasped in confrontation with the “Siberian text” and by referring to the interpretative scheme which revealed geographical and topographical (and only afterwards: historical and political) correlations resulting from the proximity of those territories. This fact (and its reciprocal nature) was already suggested by an Anglican missionary Henry Lansdell (1841–1919) in his book *Through Siberia* (which was published in 1882, several years before Bolesław Prus’s *The Doll*).

For many travellers and deportees who described their odysseys, Siberia stretches all the way to China, with Irkutsk as a transmission belt for the exchange of goods between the East and the West, Europe and China. It becomes an important place for Wokulski in *The Doll*, because it changed his perception of the experience of deportation and constituted an area of prosperity, of modern capitalism. Irkutsk was still an important city in *Miranda* (1924), Antoni Lange’s late science-fiction short story, in which the topics of materialisation of bodies, catalepsy, mediumship (in the sense of communication with spirits), bilocation, shamanism (in its Siberian and Mongolian versions) provide the foundation for a reflection on the coerced four-year-long errand of one of the characters – Jan Podobłoczny, whose fate is reconstructed by the narrator. The involuntary journey during the Great War, in the years 1915–1919, takes place at a time of great political reshuffling in Europe between Germany and Russia (“at that time, Warsaw had already been taken by the Germans and of course the

⁶ Vladimir Toporov, “Petersburg and the Petersburg Text of Russian Literature (Introduction to the Topic)”, in: *Myth. Ritual. Symbol. Image: Studies in Mythopoeitics: Selected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishing Group – Culture 1995, pp. 259–367 (in Russian).

⁷ Hutsuls are ethnic minority of a mountaineer people inhabiting Eastern Carpathians (trans. note).

postal communication between Russia and Central Europe was disrupted”⁸). The title character Miranda – a Scottish woman Ketty Douglas – and her story of imprisonment in Germany are in fact a pretext for a narration about the experience of “materialisation of an astral body into a human form” (M, 7) and the interdependence between the materialisation of a spectre and the dematerialisation of the medium. And although the routes of escape from Siberia lead through various geographical and political territories (Ceylon, India, China, Japan), no doubt this liminal moment, connecting the civilisations of the West and the East, becomes a distinctive trait in the literary reflection of the 1920s.⁹ The narrator recounts how he came to Li-cza-cheń, a village “by the Irkut, at the place where this river flows into the Baikal” (M, 10), inhabited by tribes of Mongol origin who profess the Tibetan version of Buddhism. Reflection on shamanism, the dethroning of Tsar Nicholas II in 1917 and the travels to the cities of Kyakhta, Urga,¹⁰ lead the main character to the Republic of China and then to Japan (M, 14). Yet the reflection on the specific nature of this civilisation, on the social relations and cultural otherness, is based on a simplified, superficial mechanism of diagnosis. Moreover, it makes use of well-known, stereotypical interpretative matrices, well-established in the consciousness of a European reader:

The Chinese and Japanese realm awoke a great interest in me, and if my desire to return to Europe had not been so strong, I would have gladly spent my time on the study of local relations. I saw there plenty of things worthy of attention, but for the most part they are commonly known, because many travellers described those wonders. Some other time I will tell you the details of my stay in the Blue Republic and in the Land of the Rising Sun [...] (M, 14).

Lange makes use of a symptomatic reference – travel accounts, which should replace his own wider, new story, as if it did not require a different language of description and was restricted to the models and forms of narration developed in the travel accounts from long ago, which relied on the 17th-century diagnosis of an Italian philosopher and theologian, Tommaso Campanella, from his utopian reflection in *The City of the Sun* (*Civitas Solis*, 1623). It was helpful in responding to the questions concerning the nature of the Middle Kingdom, the forms of mythologising the “yellow-skinned Tellurians” and “half-black Calibans” (M, 42), the significance of utopian primal societies in “the Suntown Republic” (M, 46), as well as the role of social stratification, the models of upbringing in India and the forms of Hindu religiousness. The “translatable” nature of various temporal horizons, the correspondences with historical and political events

⁸ Antoni Lange, *Miranda*, ed. Paweł Bukowiec, Kraków: Universitas 2002, p. 6. Further quotations are indicated in the main body of the article as follows: (M, number of the page).

⁹ It is worth adding that even in the memoirs of Jadwiga Ostromecka, dedicated to her Siberian experiences, the author draws attention to the fact that in the city of Tomsk there was a shopping centre run by the Chinese. Several decades later, she reconstructs the images drawn from her memory, revealing the cultural otherness of the Chinese, their habits, rituals and everyday life. Jadwiga Ostromecka, *Pamiętnik z lat 1862–1911*, ed. Anna Brus, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG 2004, pp. 62–63.

¹⁰ Today known as Ulaanbaatar or Ulan Bator (trans. note).

(the Great War, the Russian Revolution, actions taken in Europe and in Russia) and the events related to a specific understanding of time (due to a different notion of space-time, rituals, entering into a trance state, medium experiences and the fortunes of Miranda, the burning at the stake of Damayanti, the functioning of the microsocieties of Eastern tribes) are meant to enable a return, in the European interwar period, to exotic myths, which could give a new account of the structure of the world. Finding a new narration about the functioning of reality was Lange's reaction to the tragic experiences of the World War I, the horror of revolutions and the consequences in the form of deportations – inescapable 19th-century practices enforced by the Russian coloniser.

If we were to define what is the manner of speaking of various texts revealing the presence of the “Chinese text”, we could say that in the literary discourse, beneath the mimetic-referential veristic layer, there is a hidden fictional-imaginary, enigmatically allusive form of discussion with the Chinese culture and civilisation, which is very important for the understanding of the principles of writing in the second half of the 19th century (despite the differences of genres and literary forms). It is impossible to conclusively indicate the referential sources. Nevertheless, several potentially important sources should be enumerated, as they might have constituted basic texts that allowed the reader to imagine China and Chineseness.

In the first half of the 19th century, the referential matrix, establishing the paradigm for understanding the Chineseness, was still the two-volume travel account by Egor Fedorovich Timkovski (1790–1875) *Podróż do Chin przez Mongoliję w latach 1820 i 1821* (*Travels of the Russian Mission Through Mongolia to China, and Residence in Peking, in the Years 1820–21*), published in Polish in 1828 by Piotr Piller's printing house in Lviv, translated by Tomasz Wilhelm Kochański.¹¹ Other potential matrix of diagnoses related to the acquiring (at least a trace of) knowledge not only about the Chinese culture and civilisation, but also about the specificity of Chinese language and genealogy (taking into account the 19th-century consciousness and knowledge about the literary theory, and the resulting genre divisions) could be the reflections of an eminent aesthete and philosopher of the mid-19th century, a scholar and polyhistor – Józef Kremer. In his works, reflection on the condition of culture and aesthetics was combined with the experience of travel writing, an important educational component both at the beginning of the 19th century (immediately after the Enlightenment's grand tours) and at the turn of 1850s and 1860s. Józef Kremer, a perspicacious and sophisticated critic of culture, in his letters (*Listy z Krakowa* [Letters from Kraków], first ed. Vilnius 1855)¹² reflected upon the Chinese art and culture in a simplified and stereotypical way

¹¹ Egor Fedorovich Timkovski, *Travels of the Russian Mission Through Mongolia to China, and Residence in Peking, in the Years 1820–21*, trans. Hannibal Evans Lloyd, ed. Julius von Klaproth, London: s.n. 1827; idem, *Podróż do Chin przez Mongoliję w latach 1820 i 1821*, trans. Tomasz Wilhelm Kochański, Lviv: printed by Piotr Piller 1828.

¹² See, inter alia, Andrzej Borowski, “Józef Kremer o literaturze”, in: *Józef Kremer (1806–1875). Studia i materiały*, eds. Urszula Bęczkowska, Ryszard Kasperowicz, Jacek Maj, Kraków: IHS UJ 2016, esp. p. 371: “Kremer took into account «the peoples of the East», so first of all the Chinese literature.

(resulting from the absorption of mediated sources, mainly in French),¹³ and created in the mid-19th century the following vision of the Chinese drama, theatre and actor's status:

[...] dramatic spectacles present today the same level as they did several hundred years ago; actors are a bunch of rascals, who temporarily make attempts at comedy, then scatter in all directions to live a life of vagrancy. None of them turns dramatic art into a vocation, and to this day they have not arrived at a permanent troupe, a permanent theatre; indeed, without these two conditions there can be no stage art.¹⁴

Similarly, Kremer had a simplified, infantile perception of the nature of opera and theatre in China:

In the Chinese theatre, only the costumes are rich and much adorned, but the entrepreneur does not rack his brain over stage illusion. When, for example, a Chinese general on the stage sets off with his army to a far-away province, he lifts his leg, pretending to be mounting a horse, and, like our schoolboys, starts riding on a stick, cracking his whip, running around the stage; meanwhile others are

On this occasion, he included some very concise and rather cursory mentions about the drama and the «lyre» (i.e. Chinese poetry), in which – in his opinion – «feelings [are] soft, gentle, sentimental; those songs are sometimes sweet and lovely; but there is in them, just as in the entire spiritual disposition of this people, no true depth».

See also: Agnieszka Marszałek, “Józef Kremer o dramacie i teatrze”, in: *Józef Kremer (1806–1875)*, esp. pp. 411–415. The author points to Kremer's views on the development of the Chinese theatre and drama in isolation from Europe and to the fact that he treats it as something exotic. She concludes: “the image emerging from his descriptions is marked, on the one hand, by incredulity, and on the other – by the conviction of aesthetic infantilism of the Chinese, who used to be intellectually more advanced, but, apparently, stopped developing culturally and are now far behind the younger, but more mature and sophisticated Europe” (pp. 413–414).

See also: Damian Włodzimierz Makuch, “Nieoczywisty inspirator. Myśl estetyczna Józefa Kremera okiem polskich pozytywistów”, in: *Józef Kremer (1806–1875)*, pp. 123–150.

See also: Józef Kremer, *Listy z Krakowa*, vol. 2: *Dzieje artystycznej fantazji*, part 1, Warsaw: S. Lewental 1877 [Vilnius: J. Zawadzki 1855], p. 193.

¹³ This fact is pointed out by Agnieszka Marszałek, who demonstrates that in his letters from Kraków (*Listy z Krakowa*, vol. 2, pp. 161–163), the philosopher and aesthetician makes imprecise references, in the form of short signaling notes, to various accounts authored by missionaries working in China, e.g.: the 18th-century four-volume reflection of a French Jesuit, geographer and sinologist Jean-Baptiste du Halde, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise, enrichie des cartes générales et particulieres de ces pays, de la carte générale et des cartes particulieres du Thibet, & de la Corée; & ornée d'un grand nombre de figures & de vignettes gravées en taille douce* (Paris 1736), most probably known to the Cracovian philosopher in German translation (*Ausführliche Beschreibung des Chinesischen Reichs und der grossen Tartarey*, 1747–1749); the work by pastor Evan Davies, *China and her Spiritual Claims* (London 1845); the work by English protestant missionary, naturalist and diplomat George Tradescant Lay, *Chinese as They Are: Their Moral, Social and Literary Character; a New Analysis of the Language, with Succinct Views of Their Principal Arts and Sciences* (London 1841).

¹⁴ Józef Kremer, *Listy z Krakowa*, vol. 3: *Dzieje artystycznej fantazji*, part 2, Warsaw: S. Lewental 1877, p. 163.

drumming, trumpeting, stamping their feet and yelling terribly; the general, still riding on the stick, keeps running around the stage; finally, he stops saying: "So, I have arrived!". When such general besieges a fortress, two or three of his soldiers lie down one on top of another, imitating a rampart. When one has to open a door, existing in his mind only, he makes an appropriate gesture and says: "Here, the door is open", and so on, and so forth. Clearly, those poor Chinese artists, and the audience alike, resemble our youngster boys, for whom a ruler is a sword, a stick is a spear, a stool is a horse, a wardrobe – a fortress. In sooth, such childlike thinking evokes the early European theatres, mocked by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.¹⁵

An important referential matrix in the second half of the 19th century for thinkers, artists and theoreticians of Chinese culture and literature could be the reflection of Lucjan Siemieński included in his survey of world literature (*Przegląd dziejów literatury powszechnej*, Kraków 1855). After an introduction and a section dedicated to Hebrew literature, the author undertakes a reflection on the culture-forming role of China. The third chapter of the synthesis begins with a discussion of this culture's patriarchalism and the sources of its religious, moral and philosophical concepts. The central axis of the study is the thesis about "the idea of exclusion from the society of nations", intensified by separation from the world by means of a wall.¹⁶ Further subchapters are dedicated to holy books, canonical books, the importance of Confucian thought, Chinese historiography, and above all the significance of Chinese libraries and encyclopaedias, which help contemporary Poles understand the phenomenon of Chinese history – which could be helpful in the self-evaluation of cultural questions concerning identity in the second half of the 19th century that have been asked on the ground of national literatures and cultures.¹⁷

Even though journals and reviews – mainly those with ethnographic, anthropologic and travel orientation, like, for instance, *Wędrowiec* [The Wanderer] in the first years of publishing, but also, occasionally, other newspapers (such as *Opiekun Domowy* [Household Protector], *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* [The Illustrated Weekly], even *Biesiada Literacka* [Literary Feast] and, published already in the 20th century, *Świat* [The World]) – presented various scraps of information about China, still it is difficult to say that they offered a functional reflection on a system of acquiring knowledge about that culture, tradition, philosophy, literature.

The process of familiarising with Chineseness is a separate and important topic in the press for children published on the Polish territories in the second half of the 19th century. This kind of literature, as the vanguard of creating any form of knowledge about the world in a young recipient of culture, even if it is taught in a simplified way, not exempt from stereotypes (corresponding to the authors' own consciousness and intellectual development), has its own significance in the process of absorbing

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 188.

¹⁶ Lucjan Siemieński, *Przegląd dziejów literatury powszechnej*, Kraków: published by the author 1855, vol. I, esp. pp. 66–76.

¹⁷ Ibidem, esp. pp. 88–91.

and familiarising oneself with the world. The press presenting diverse components of knowledge about the world, especially about its far-away corners, served as a substitute for encyclopaedia and supplemented for the ethnographical and cultural shortcomings of school education. Its aim was to make up for civilisational retardations and to shape national identity, often in comparison with other nations and ethnoses. A good example revealing methods of absorbing Chineseness can be found in consecutive issues of *Przyjaciół Dzieci* [Children's Friend] or *Wieczory Rodzinne* [Family Evenings].

In 1870, one of the issues of *Przyjaciół Dzieci* opened with the article "Bonza kapłan w Chinach" [Bonza, a Priest in China].¹⁸ The journal presents Chinese habits, indicating their differences and their counterparts in the European tradition (hairstyle, significance of colours and trees, the role of work, bodily conduct, attitude to wisdom, function of priests). In the same year, the young reader becomes acquainted with the specific character of the Amur and Ussuriysk regions.¹⁹ It is explained in what ways the wanderings of free people called Mansi are unique and what forms of religious practices can be found in those cultures. A vivid description is given of the different nature of shamanism and Buddhism. Issue number 25 from 1873 begins with the article entitled "Chińczycy" [The Chinese], accompanied by an engraving representing a group of men.²⁰ In a positive (or even approbatory) form, the authors show the entrepreneurial skills, resourcefulness and intellectual qualities of the Chinese, as well as their practical wisdom and different attitude to tradition and customs. According to a frequent practice in the 1860s and 1870s, a sketch of physiognomy is used to represent the reality that is being described and created. Its aim is to show the child, in a stereotypical way, the differences in the appearance and physique of the Chinese, to indicate the characteristic physiognomic features useful in a skilful stone carving, and above all to explain the nature of Chinese crafts in contrast to the crafts known in the Polish lands in the post-resurrection period (the phenomenon of puppet production, the differences in gardening, the use of lighting, the production of paper toys, eating meals with chopsticks). Attention is also drawn to the specific character of Chinese and Polish peasantry. Apart from this extensive survey article, a shorter one was published (issue no. 39), entitled "Mieszkania Chińczyków" [Habitations of the Chinese],²¹ which vividly presented not only the architecture of houses and the manners of inhabiting them, but also methods of heating common rooms, and even leisure activities at home as well as the role and status of elderly people in families.

The engraving which opens issue number 15 in the year 1874 (just below the masthead) presents a marionette theatre in China.²² Once again, this magazine published

¹⁸ "Bonza kapłan w Chinach", *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1870, no. 52, pp. 505–506.

¹⁹ "Kraj amurski", *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1870, no. 32, pp. 319–320.

²⁰ "Chińczycy", *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1873, no. 25, pp. 289–292.

²¹ "Mieszkania Chińczyków", *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1873, no. 39, pp. 462–463.

²² "Teatr marionetek w Chinach", *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1874, no. 15, pp. 169–170. The article "Dążenie do oświaty w Chinach" [Educational Efforts in China], included in the list of contents, appeared neither in no. 27, nor in no. 28.

on the first page a survey article concerning the culture of China. The short sketch defines the significance of marionette theatre, shows the role of a marionette in culture and appreciates its outstanding quality in comparison with European products. We observe a similar pattern in the issue number 41 in the year 1877, in the opening text.²³ There is an engraving of the Great Wall of China and a brief article (in fact a summary information note) dedicated to the construction of the wall by the Chinese and their fencing off from the world. In 1880, issue number 19 opened with an engraving showing a Chinese palanquin,²⁴ corresponding with the contents of an instalment of one the most interesting literary accounts published in this magazine. Namely, in 1880, *Przyjaciół Dzieci* published in instalments (issues 8–22) an autobiographical memoir entitled “Z Paryża do Pekinu. Dziennik podróży” [From Paris to Beijing. A Travel Journal].²⁵ The hero’s reconstructed journey (which he undertook with his father) from Paris to Petersburg, Perm, Omsk, Tomsk, Irkutsk, Lake Baikal, Kyakhta and all the way to the Far East – Mongolia and China, contains geographical, historical, ethnographical and cultural features that are invaluable for children’s mentality. It also makes use of various devices known from the travel and adventure literature. It highlights the role of self-improvement (typical of Daniel Defoe’s hero), draws from the echoes of Samuel Smiles’s book about self-made men who overcome the adversities of fortune thanks to their ingenuity, resourcefulness, the force of their own hands and the tempering of their character on the consecutive stages of the journey. It finishes with a retrospective apostrophe: “Siberia, Mongolia, Gobi, China and Beijing, farewell, maybe even forever!”²⁶

As for the magazine *Wieczory Rodzinne*, in 1890, a brief note was published about the Great Wall of China, entitled “Wan-li-Czang-Czing”, preceded by an engraving presenting this artifact.²⁷ In the same year, a propaedeutic article “Ze wspomnień młodego Chińczyka” [From the Memories of a Young Chinese Boy] was published.²⁸

From the end of 1850s, the press for adult readers also occasionally turns to the anthropological, ethnographical and social aspects as well as philosophy in the Chinese culture. The presence of China in the press from 1860s began with the Second Opium War in China in 1860, which was mentioned now and then by *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, a magazine that had been launched less than a year earlier. An important transmission field, which facilitated the absorption and domestication of Chineseness, were no doubt world’s fairs, a phenomenon discussed by Henryk Sienkiewicz already in 1873, in the

²³ H. K., “Mur chiński”, *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1877, no. 41, pp. 481–482.

²⁴ *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1880, no. 19, p. 257.

²⁵ “Z Paryża do Pekinu. Dziennik podróży”, *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1880, nos. 8–22: no. 8, pp. 101–103; no. 9, pp. 113–115; no. 10, pp. 129–131; no. 11, pp. 142–144; no. 12, pp. 157–159; no. 13, pp. 170–172; no. 14, pp. 185–187; no. 15, pp. 205–207; no. 16, pp. 222–223; no. 17, pp. 231–232; no. 18, pp. 245–248; no. 19, pp. 258–260; no. 20, pp. 274–278; no. 21, pp. 285–286; no. 22, pp. 301–303.

²⁶ Ibidem, no. 22, p. 303.

²⁷ “Wan-li-Czang-Czing”, *Wieczory Rodzinne* 1890, no. 4, p. 38.

²⁸ “Ze wspomnień młodego Chińczyka”, *Wieczory Rodzinne* 1890, no. 50, pp. 399–400, no. 52, pp. 415–416.

journal *Gazeta Polska* [Polish Journal]. The future novelist, at that time an apprentice journalist, reported in the Warsaw press about, inter alia, the “Chinese section” of Paris Exposition.

Late 1860s saw the infamous book by a Russian historian Dmitry Ilovaysky (1832–1920), who clearly meant to contribute to the russification activities and presented a falsified vision of the world history. This author of schoolbooks, which were obligatory in the Congress Kingdom of Poland towards the end of the 19th century (and which the youth in the Russian partition were forced to read, as we learn, for example, from Stefan Żeromski’s *Szyfowe prace* [The Labours of Sisyphus]²⁹), in his *Przewodnik do wykładu historii powszechnej* [A Guide to the Lecture on World History] (1st ed. 1867; 3rd ed.: trans. K. and Ł., Warsaw 1890), in the chapter entitled “The Chinese” provided general and simplified information about the development of the Chinese culture and civilisation.

1870s and 1880s brought two further interesting and significant publications. They allow to perceive in a new way the Chinese culture, customs, judiciary sphere, administration and, above all, the emancipatory questions (which were at that time very important in the epistemological and axiological reflection of various civil projects concerning identity and equality). The first one is the posthumous *La femme en Chine* (1876) authored by a French historian and sociologist of customs Louis Auguste Martin (1811–1875). The second one is an extensive, two-volume monograph *Cesarstwo Chińskie według współczesnych badań podróżnika* [The Chinese Empire according to Contemporary Traveller’s Research] by Évariste Régis Huc (1813–1860), published in Warsaw in 1886.

Undoubtedly, the important schoolbooks and synthetising surveys of world literatures played a vital role in the absorption (albeit cursory and superficial at times) of knowledge about the Chinese language, culture and crucial literary works in the Chinese literature, and, thereby, they contributed to the formation of ways of thinking and helped establish the canon of notions related to that specific and very different cultural circle.

An important synthesis-schoolbook was no doubt the one issued as late as 1892 by the printing house of Wł. A. Anczyc and Co. in Kraków and, in parallel, by Teodor Paprocki and Co. in Warsaw – *Podręcznik do nauki literatury powszechnej* [Handbook for Studying World Literature] compiled by Teresa Prażmowska. It was dedicated to teachers and youth (as the author’s foreword suggested). If such was the intended reader, then we may presume that this handbook was meant to provide knowledge (or a vision of knowledge) about world literatures. Even the very brief second chapter (pp. 12–19) of this monumental (over 500 pages long) book began with indicating “the otherness of China”, the specificity of Chinese language and writing system, as well as the significance of Confucius, main Books of Wisdom, the importance of moral doctrines, finally the character of *belles-lettres* and the Chinese poetics and poetry.

²⁹ Stefan Żeromski, *Szyfowe prace*, afterword by Jan Zygmunt Jakubowski, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1987, p. 208.

Further parts were dedicated to drama, novels, short stories, historical romance and the last one – to scientific literature.

In 1901 Julian Adolf Świącicki published *Literatura chińska* [The Chinese Literature]. It was a modified version of the text he had written earlier for the first volume of *Dzieje literatury powszechnej z ilustracjami* [The History of World Literature with Illustrations], a gargantuan collective work by Julian Adolf Świącicki, Teofil Krasnosielski, Ignacy Radliński, Kazimierz Kaszewski and Florian Łagnowski (complete edition published in Warsaw, 1880–1897). Although at the beginning of 1930s, Bogdan Richter called both these works outdated,³⁰ it should be noted that in their time they were in fact the only synthesising, organised studies, which, we could venture to say, established a certain paradigm and a way of projecting knowledge about the Chinese culture and literature, even though they were not exempt from simplifications and a schematic form of narration. Still, the plasticity and universality of Świącicki's syntheses became, for lack of solid studies, the only presentation of literature that could be interpreted as a familiarisation of a reader from the Russian partition of Poland with various elements of knowledge about the Chinese culture and literature and the otherness of the Chinese language (in the pictorial, graphic dimension). The aim and the main task was the anti-exoticising tendency, meant to present China and the Chinese in an anti-stereotypical way. This transmission channel was important at the moment of its publication, because it tried to absorb reliable knowledge and to show synthetically the specific nature of the Chinese literature and its cultural context. It familiarised the readers with the otherness of the attitude to language and to its beginnings, with the otherness of culture and ethical, moral and legal models, finally with the narrative techniques and canonical genres in this literature. It was not until 1909 that Wilhelm Gruby's *Geschichte der Chinesischen Literatur* [History of Chinese Literature] was published in Leipzig, presenting in a more modern way further findings concerning the evaluation of Chinese literature and its periodisation models, often depending on the development of consecutive dynasties. Much later, in 1922 in Wrocław, Edouard Erkes published *Chinesische Literatur* [Chinese Literature] (which – as Richter points out – “in its pro-Chinese enthusiasm often lacks criticism”³¹). The year 1927 brought Herbert A. Giles's synthesis *A History of Chinese Literature*, published in New York and containing numerous translations of Chinese works or their fragments.

In his discussion concerning the validity and impact of the scientific reflection of Świącicki, Richter clearly indicates the necessity to revise the conclusions drawn hitherto from research, to change the attitude, to complement and opalize the research questions and to gain access to the most recent texts through translations that were lacking so far. Richter overlooks here an important (albeit created very late) book which was well known thanks to Leopold Staff's translation – *Fletnia chińska* [The

³⁰ Bogdan Richter, “Literatura chińska”, in: *Wielka literatura powszechna*, vol. I (*Wschód – Literatura klasyczne*), ed. Stanisław Lam, Warsaw: Trzaska, Evert, Michalski 1930, p. 63.

³¹ Ibidem.

Chinese Flute], a collection of classical Chinese poetic texts edited by the publishing house of Jakub Mortkowicz in 1922. Staff did not know Chinese (although he did have an interest, like other modernists, in the oriental languages and the Far East culture). He performed the translation (which strongly reveals features of the Young Poland's poetic phrase) most probably by mediation of the French language. The source text was surely the collection published in 1920 under the title *La Flûte de Jade. Poésies Chinoises*, translated from Chinese by Cao Shangling (Ts'ao Shangling) and edited by Franz Toussaint. Staff's impeccable German might have opened an additional field of comparison (which was so important in the 19th- and early 20th-century translations mediated through another language, as it was done for instance by Syrokomla, Konopnicka, Zyndram-Kościałkowska, Kasprowicz, Leśmian). In 1907, poet Hans Bethge published in Leipzig a collection of poetry entitled *Die chinesische Flöte*, partially inspired by Hans Heilmann's prose translations from his *Chinesische Lyrik*³² and much earlier translations into French – by Marie-Jean Léon Lecoq, Baron d'Hervey de Juchereau, Marquis d'Hervey de Saint-Denys (*Poésies de l'époque des T'ang*, 1862)³³ and by Judith Gautier (*Le livre de jade*, 1867). The content of the German *Die chinesische Flöte* does not entirely correspond with the content of the French and Polish versions. It is worth noting that Marie-Jean Léon Lecoq is important because of his sinological interests and skills, proven by several dozens of studies on China and translations from the Chinese (which included, inter alia, books by medieval historians, such as: Ma Duanlin (马端临), Yang Weizhen (杨维桢)).³⁴

Speaking of Chinese-Polish and Polish-Chinese relations in the context of incorporating various motifs, matrices, elements of knowledge from different domains of life into the target culture may be defined by means of “modes of dispersion” of diverse intensity. They create a mosaic of multifaceted forms of presence, within which we can trace isles of conscious or accidental references and their meanings. Those modes could largely be called: historical, political, aesthetical, philosophical,

³² Hans Bethge, *Die chinesische Flöte*, Leipzig: YinYang, Media Verlag 2007 [Insel Verlag, 1907], pp. 103–104.

³³ Léon d'Hervey de Saint-Denys, *Poésies de l'époque des T'ang*, Paris: Amyot Éditeur 1862.

³⁴ It is impossible to list them all, but it would be worthwhile to indicate the most important ones, which formatted the ways of absorption and which were commonly used in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. See, e.g.: Léon d'Hervey de Saint-Denys, *Recherches sur l'agriculture et l'horticulture des Chinois et sur les végétaux, les animaux et les procédés agricoles que l'on pourrait introduire avec avantage dans l'Europe occidentale et le nord de l'Afrique* (1850), *La Chine devant l'Europe* (1859), *Recueil de textes faciles et gradués en chinois moderne, avec un tableau des 214 clefs chinoises et un vocabulaire de tous les mots compris dans les exercices, publié à l'usage des élèves de l'École spéciale des langues orientales* (1869), *Le Li-sao, poème du III^e siècle avant notre ère, traduit du chinois* (1870), *Mémoire sur l'histoire ancienne du Japon d'après le Ouen Hien Tong Kao de Ma-Touan-Lin* (1872), *Mémoire sur l'ethnographie de la Chine centrale et méridionale, d'après un ensemble de documents inédits tirés des anciens écrivains chinois* (1873), *Ethnographie des peuples étrangers de la Chine* (1876–1883), *Trois nouvelles chinoises* (Bibliothèque Orientale Elzévirienne, 1885, vol. XLV), *Mémoire sur les doctrines religieuses de Confucius et de l'école des lettres* (1887).

anthropological, ethnographical, ethical, juridical, linguistic and literary. The circles of influence and mediations of motifs and themes complemented one another in various ways and got integrated with previous knowledge.

The numerous references played above all (albeit in subtle forms) two functions. Firstly, they overtly determined the degree of exoticisation of the topic and issue raised in literature – an issue that had an informative role, livening up the discourse, giving food for thought and, finally, provoking questions about the identity of China and, more broadly, about the culture and tradition of the Far East. Secondly, they were a component of substitution, an Aesopian sign of concealed identity, a replacement of a theme that could not overtly appear in the Polish culture of the unsaid, as a semantically potent, meaningful gesture.

Indeed, it seems symptomatic that in *The Doll*, the most important Polish novel of that period, which was a discussion of various ways of revealing the meaning of the past and the present on the map of political reshufflings in the late 1870s, the lexeme “China” appears nine times and “Chinese woman” one time, as demonstrated by Bogdan Mazan.³⁵ In Bolesław Prus’s journalistic writing, the researchers notice the presence of the Chinese costume; especially in the chronicles, the author seeks the historical patterns and gives diagnosis of the Chinese-Japanese war of 1894.³⁶ In his short story *Ze wspomnień cyklisty* [From a Cyclist’s Memories] (1904), in the context of a reflection on the role of fantasy, there appears an image of a small exchange counter

³⁵ Bogdan Mazan, “Z obrazów Chin i Chińczyków w piśmiennictwie polskim drugiej połowy XIX wieku. ‘Chińskie cienie’ w *Lalce* Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm*, p. 345. In the context of possible sources of Prus’s inspiration with the Chineseness, the researcher indicates: Jerzy Tymkowski (Egor Fedorovich Timkovski), *Podróż do Chin przez Mongolię w latach 1820 i 1821*, vols. 1–2, trans. Tomasz Wilhelm Kochański, Lviv: printed by Piotr Piller 1828; Piotr Czychaczew, *Podróż naukowa w Altaju Wschodnim i okolicach przyległych granicy chińskiej odbyta z rozkazu Najjaśniejszego Cesarza Wszechrosji*, trans. from French Wojciech Szymanowski, Warsaw: The Printing House of *Gazeta Codzienna* 1850; Évariste Régis Huc, *Wspomnienia z podróży po Tartarii, Tybecie i Chinach w latach 1844, 1845, 1846 odbytej przez Huc’a*, trans. Aleksander Kremer, Warsaw: S. Orgelbrand 1858; Laurence Oliphant, *Poselstwo lorda Elgin do Chin i Japonii w latach 1857, 58, 59*, trans. A[del]a z Kr[asińskich] M[alletska], Warsaw: Aleksander Nowolecki 1862; Ludovic de Beauvoir, *Podróż naokoło świata*, vol. III: *Pekin, Yeddo, San Francisco*, trans. s.n., suppl. to *Wędrowiec* 1873, vol. 7, no. 176; Évariste Régis Huc, *Cesarstwo Chińskie według współczesnych badań podróżnika*, vols. 1–2, Warsaw: printed by *Wiek* 1886. See Bogdan Mazan, “Z obrazów Chin i Chińczyków”, p. 386.

³⁶ The Chinese motifs in Prus’s juvenile writings were discussed in: Jan Data, “O Chinach i Chińczykach w juvenaliach i kronikach Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków*, eds. Józef Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marcei Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 359–366. It is also worth noting here that *Kurier Warszawski* [The Warsaw Courier] quite often mentioned the colonial politics and the imperial power status of China as well as, from the European point of view, the role of Catholic missions in preventing war conflicts. Already towards the end of 1930s, the Japanese aggression in China in 1937 (called the “Rape of Nanjing” – a massacre of four thousand Chinese men and rapes of eighty thousand Chinese women) had its journalistic echo in the Polish press (in journals and weekly magazines, among others).

transformed into a bank for the commerce with the Far East. Even in the journal *Kurier Codzienny* [The Daily Courier] in 1904, when reflecting about Japan and the Japanese, Prus makes a contextual reference to China.

It is difficult to unequivocally identify the mediums of mediation; nor is it easy to say which texts were primary sources – which elements of imagery owe something to the author's personal fascinations, and which were borrowed and merely enforced by other components of the work. Similarly ungraspable is the degree of absorption (whether conscious or not) of Confucianism, as philosophy and legislature, by writers of the Polish positivism, for whom – particularly for Orzeszkowa as a journalist and for Świętochowski as a columnist – both those references, or rather their wise and balanced conjunction, helped understand that system of thought, which incorporated the rules of legal system into the reflection on the status of man, the limits of human freedom and the definition of human ontological possibilities.

The allusive way of citing and suggesting the Chinese motifs in the Polish literature of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries consists in making signal indications, rather in the form of enumerative textual signs, and only rarely as meticulous descriptions. An important mode of reading is a suspicious reading, demanding to seek in the scattered intertexts and in their functions additional meanings, and to appreciate the significance of double encoding, as we learned from the research conducted at the beginning of 1990s by Wiesław Olkusz, which resulted in a two-part study “Perły japońskie i chińskie, czyli pozytywistyczne zainteresowania Dalekim Wschodem. Rekonesans” [The Japanese and Chinese Pearls, or the Positivist Interest in the Far East. A General Survey] printed in *Kwartalnik Opolski* [Opolski Quarterly].³⁷

A number of irrefutable findings comprehensively identifying the presence of Chinese motifs in the Polish literature of the second half of the 19th century resulted from the research conducted by Bogdan Mazan at the University of Łódź.³⁸ The creation of a conceptual foundation in the form of a network of terms that allows to name the presence of Chinese motifs and to integrate those thematic reflections into a wider circle of “textual microworlds” (a term proposed by the scholar for thinking about the specificity of diverse discourses and forms of narration appearing in the works of writers from the generation of Polish positivism) has proven invaluable for the Polish literary studies. The scholar for many years had been seeking for “concealed” traces, “shadows”, afterimages as well as subtle manifestations and forms of allusiveness related to the Chineseness in the Polish literature of the second half

³⁷ Wiesław Olkusz, “Perły japońskie i chińskie, czyli pozytywistyczne zainteresowania Dalekim Wschodem. Rekonesans”, *Kwartalnik Opolski* 1993, no. 1, pp. 40–52; no. 2, pp. 53–59.

³⁸ The crowning achievement of those works is above all the following study: Bogdan Mazan, “Chińszczyzna. Kulturowe przeobrażenia pojęcia”, in: *Awangardowa encyklopedia, czyli słownik rozumowany nauk, sztuk i rzemiosł różnych. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Grzegorzowi Gaździe*, eds. Irena Hübner, Agnieszka Izdebska, Jarosław Pluciennik, Danuta Szajnert, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2008, pp. 69–103.

of the 19th century.³⁹ The longstanding fascination with contacts and dialogues with researchers from China and with the phenomenon of the Middle Kingdom brought fruit in the scholar's scientific output, most notably in the exquisite, groundbreaking multi-author monograph *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach* [Positivism and Negativism. We and You a Hundred Years Later] (Łódź 2005), and later in diverse studies pursuing the traces of "Chineseness" in the novels by Orzeszkowa, Prus, Sienkiewicz and others.

If the second half of the 19th century saw also a fascination with Japan (its art, culture, exoticism, less with its literature) – intensified in the magazine *Wędrowiec*⁴⁰ and by the activity of Feliks Manggha Jasieński, and represented in particular by texts published in *Chimera*⁴¹ – the turn towards the Chineseness could be observed as a necessity to reflect upon the phenomenon of colonisation and its powerful impact as well as on the Middle Kingdom as an important empire (next to Russia) exerting influence on the international relations and on the balance of power (also in Europe). Due to the chosen thematic and the scope of research, China and Chineseness are virtually absent both from the monograph by Grażyna Legutko, who diligently enumerated all possible manifestations of contact and presence of motifs from world literatures (mainly European!) in the *Chimera* magazine, and the studies by Grzegorz P. Bąbiak, dedicated to this magazine (including a bibliography of its contents), so important for the modernists.⁴² In both those monographs, there are (obviously) more Japanese elements and motifs related to the understanding of art (mainly art nouveau)

³⁹ Bogdan Mazan, "Z obrazów Chin i Chińczyków", pp. 317–404; idem, "'Kierunek idealny' (wobec przeciwności) na konfrontatywnym tle kultury rodzimej i egzotycznej. Chiny Sienkiewicza (I)", in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz w kulturze polskiej*, eds. Krzysztof Stępnik, Tadeusz Bujnicki, Lublin: UMCS 2007, pp. 453–467; idem, "Pozytywistyczny bilans duchowej konfrontacji Wschód – Zachód: Chiny Sienkiewicza (II)", in: *Światło w dolinie. Prace ofiarowane profesor Halinie Krukowskiej*, eds. Krzysztof Korotkich, Jarosław Ławski, Danuta Zawadzka, Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie Trans Humana 2007; *Bez antypodów? Konfrontacje i zbliżenia kultur*, ed. Bogdan Mazan; idem, "Figury myśli i (anty) wzory. Motywy chińskie w Przeglądzie Tygodniowym 1871–1876", in: *Pozytywiści warszawscy: „Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1866–1876. Seria II: Świat, Europa, Polska*, ed. Anna Janicka, Białystok: Temida2 2020, pp. 105–124.

⁴⁰ A doctoral dissertation entitled *Obrazy Chin w „Wędrowcu” 1863–1906* [The Images of China in *Wędrowiec* 1863–1906] (2010), dedicated to those issues, was written by Joanna Wypych under the supervision of Bogdan Mazan.

⁴¹ See the doctoral dissertation entitled *Kultura i sztuka japońska w polskiej prasie przełomu wieków (XIX i XX)* [The Japanese Culture and Art in the Polish Press at the Turn of the Century (19th/20th)] written by Marta Maśka, supervised by Danuta Knysz-Tomaszewska (defended viva voce in 2014 at the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw); Marta Maśka, "Drzeworyt japoński a sprawa polska – o japońskich aspektach batalii o nową sztukę", *Litteraria Copernicana* 2014, no. 2(14), pp. 139–149.

⁴² See: Grażyna Legutko, *Zenon Przesmycki (Miriam) – propagator literatury europejskiej*, Kielce: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. Jana Kochanowskiego 2000; *Bibliografia zawartości „Życia” warszawskiego i krakowskiego „Strumienia” oraz „Chimery”*, ed. Grzegorz Paweł Bąbiak, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Wydziału Polonistyki UW 2000; Grzegorz Paweł Bąbiak, *Metropolia i zaścianek. W kręgu „Chimery” Zenona Przesmyckiego*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Wydziału Polonistyki UW 2002.

and to the correspondences with painting in the that culture and, consequently, in the press, which is a seismograph and an image of reflection on the cultural imagery and the needs of the moment.

The references to Chinese-Japanese motifs in their equivalence of meaning, which define a certain kind of exoticism, otherness, regardless of their differentiation and subtleties, were a constant element of dialoguing in the literature of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries and are difficult to define without ambiguity. The Japaneseness and the Chineseness seem sometimes to be one component conveying certain styles of conduct, which are significant, because they differ very little. They constitute a matrix of references, which could be in itself a generically indefinite, but potent form of metonymy and parabolisation of narration. This way of referencing becomes also a form of dialogue, not so much with specific genological models, but rather with symptomatically convenient models of constructing narration, in line with the rule of using the unknown in order to describe the known, the here and now. One of such methods is the application of fables in early tendentious novel, which used a simplified – and thereby somewhat risky – exegesis of the laws of social phenomena and followed an uncomplicated logic of interpretation, which could be understood by a non-qualified reader. Early 1870s saw this interesting aspect of reflection upon the Chineseness (and the Japaneseness) in Eliza Orzeszkowa's novel *Cnotliwi* [The Virtuous], finished by the young writer in autumn 1869, published in the press and in book form in 1871. It was her fifth novel, without taking into consideration – in accordance with genological classification – the unfinished prose bucolic *Beata* and the literary picture *Z życia realisty* [From a Realist's Life] (yet it was published as a separate book sooner than *Pan Graba* [Mr. Graba], which was fourth). This early work presents an allegorical story with a strong ironical component, present in different dimensions, revealing the narrator's distance towards the constructed events. The Chinese (or in fact, as the plot develops, Chinese-Japanese) motif is exposed in the form of a fable told by one of the characters, with allegorical message concerning the pseudo-virtuousness, the pharisaism of the society and the forms of religious oppression accepted by the tertiary caste of friends, who ostracised women's independence of thinking in their milieu.

Parabolisation constitutes an example of philosophical discussion with the Chinese-Japanese cultural realm. What happens here is evocative of an important aspect of Orzeszkowa's emancipation programme – one that could provide an answer to the question of the identity of man in community and of the distribution of dominants between the centre and the peripheries – namely, the transformation of Confucian models. Their importance for the understanding of the Chinese mythology and the Confucian reflection is discussed in Lidia Kasarek's brilliant book.⁴³ For the young writer this philosophical system is associated with the possibility of discussion about the ethics, the rule of law, the manners of conduct as well as the responsibility for

⁴³ Lidia Kasarek, *Totemy życia... Chińska literatura poszukiwania korzeni*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog 2000, esp. pp. 101–102.

oneself and others (the issues of slander, intolerance, meaning of the civil code). In this stylised story, set in a far-away country, not exempt from stereotypes and simplifications that were characteristic of that stage of development of the novel in the Polish lands at the turn of 1860s and 1870s, there appear positive and negative types of human behaviour. They constitute an important point of reference in the diagnoses concerning the conduct of characters in an interventional tendentious novel.

Orzeszkowa (just like other 19th-century writers) owes her knowledge of the Confucian thought to Évariste Régis Huc's work translated by Grzegorz Zachariasiewicz and published in the form of *Myśli moralne Konfucjusza* [Moral Thoughts of Confucius] (1784). In *Cnotliwi*, there is, for instance, a strong reference to Ignacy Krasicki, when one of the heroines recites one of his fables (in a largely modified form, as a kind of variation). Orzeszkowa, admittedly, does not refer here directly to the educational novel *Mikołaja Doświadczńskiego przypadku* (The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom, written in 1774/1775, first published in Warsaw in 1776), but she knows it perfectly well and understands the message emerging from the utopian thinking and from the diverse projects of self-education and development implemented by the man travelling throughout the world, who experiences multifaceted aspects of life and begins to understand life's complexity by testing all of its dimensions in practice. The island of Nipu from Krasicki's novel, as a Polish version of Rousseau's enlightenment utopia, presenting the educational master-disciple model on the example of the wise man Xaoo of Nipu,⁴⁴ does not need to be referenced here *expressis verbis* for the reader to make such association. Orzeszkowa, without mentioning in her novel this intertext by Krasicki, incorporates his fable about a heron, which is cited and recited, thus filling with content one of the scenes in her novel. The Confucian reference in the educational novel by Krasicki (who had known Zachariasiewicz's translation for at least twelve years before writing it), in the form of the master's name Xaoo, is close to the Chinese xiao – which means obedience, childlike respect for the parents' authority (for parental power), and this is how it functions in Confucius' teachings.⁴⁵

Orzeszkowa's late writings, containing scattered Chinese motifs signalled by suggestive allusions and isolated references, have already been meticulously studied by Bogdan Mazan.⁴⁶ It is merely worth adding, on the margin of *Argonauci* (The

⁴⁴ A similar model of a Chinese wise man, though in an entirely different convention (and in context of the Second World War experiences), was used by Jan Brzechwa in *Professor Inkbłot's Academy* (1946), when the young reader of this utopian Neoplatonic academy meets doctor Pai-Chi-Wo, the Chinese Emperor's court doctor, a scholar and the master of Ambrose Inkbłot, first encountered in Salamanca. In further volumes the authority of this scholar and master continues to be invoked.

⁴⁵ Wolfram Eberhard, *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols: Hidden Symbols in Chinese Life and Thought*, trans. G.L. Campbell, London–New York: Routledge–Kegan Paul 1986, p. 318.

⁴⁶ Bogdan Mazan, "Zepsuty ornament. Odtajnianie chińszczyzny w powieściach Elizy Orzeszkowej o 'argonautach'", in: *Sekrety Orzeszkowej*, eds. Grażyna Borkowska, Magdalena Rudkowska, Iwona Wiśniewska, Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN 2012, pp. 228–249.

Argonauts)⁴⁷ – bearing in mind the famous phrase by Henryk Sienkiewicz, who in his approbative opinion of Orzeszkowa's style and ingenuity spoke about her "upholsterer's instinct" – that the writer's method of constructing the enumerative spatial syntax, which she uses to characterise the millionaire's house as well as the self-made man and his personality (and the gradual devastation of his house), reveals a symptomatic trait. Namely, Aloysius Darvid is ridiculed here by objects.⁴⁸ Julia Wroniewicz pointed to this fact in her presentation entitled „*Waza chińska śmieje się...*” – *motywy chińskie w „Argonautach” Elizy Orzeszkowej* [“The Chinese Vase Is Laughing...” – Chinese Motifs in Eliza Orzeszkowa's The Argonauts], delivered during an international Chinese-Polish scientific conference (Beijing–Warsaw, 12 June 2023).

Scattered bits of Chineseness can also be found in Stefan Żeromski's novels, and the first symptoms were already present in the future writer's journal from his youth. On 6 September 1883, Żeromski writes that he is reading a borrowed *History of World Literature* (as he calls it)⁴⁹ and joyfully looks forward to reading it during the coming days free from work. He means the above-mentioned copious (870 pages long) first volume of *Dzieje literatury powszechnej z ilustracjami* [The History of World Literature with Illustrations], subtitled *Dzieje literatury starożytnej* [The History of Ancient Literature], edited by Julian Adolf Świącicki, Teofil Krasnosielski, Ignacy Radliński, Kazimierz Kaszewski and Florian Łagnowski. This is an important signal of the reading list of a young middle school student in Kielce, that is, in the Russian partition. This fundamental work prepared the youth from male middle schools for comparative literatures. The section dedicated to the Chinese literature holds a special place there (it counts 58 pages, pp. 1–58, and is written by Świącicki). For the schoolboy, his fascination with this section must have been very important, since for three consecutive days he wrote down how much this particular part absorbed him. On 7 September, he wrote: “In the evening, I continue reading *The History of the Chinese Literature* until 11 o'clock”.⁵⁰ On 8 September, he noted down: “In the evening, I continued reading the H. of Lit. of the Chinese until 11 o'clock”.⁵¹ On 9 September: “In an elegant notebook I am making notes from the H. of Lit. of the Chinese”.⁵²

In *Ludzie bezdomni* (The Homeless), in Joanna Podborska's journal there appears, as a pars pro toto, “a being [that] calls to mind the foot of a Chinese girl” – a wooden form with a beautiful, small foot of a geisha:

⁴⁷ Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Argonauci*, Warsaw: Gebethner i Wolff 1900; eadem, *The Argonauts*, trans. Jeremiah Curtin, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1901.

⁴⁸ See: *ibidem*, p. 282.

⁴⁹ Stefan Żeromski, *Dzienniki*, vol. 2: 1883–1885, eds. Zdzisław Jerzy Adamczyk, Beata Utkowska, in: *idem, Pisma zebrane*, vol. 28, ed. Zbigniew Goliński, continued by ed. Zdzisław Jerzy Adamczyk, Warsaw: Czytelnik 2023, p. 11.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

Poor Teczka sits in Mękarzyce and waits. All her being calls to mind the foot of a Chinese girl, molded in a wooden form from childhood. She smiles, speaks, recounts things, jokes and cries after the pattern set by my aunt and uncle.⁵³

The fact of pointing to the oppressiveness of that culture, with its aesthetic model that led in fact to bodily deformations, seems to be symptomatic. With this signal, Żeromski tries to ask about the relativity of various cultural constraints, wondering what sacrifices man is capable of and above all – why, when subjected to the dictate of someone else’s narrations and ideas, he ceases to be himself, thus losing his identity and individuality. Living someone else’s life, according to someone else’s ideas (and orders) is a constant thematic component of this novel, tantamount to a conformist attitude resulting in the attachment to “small stabilisation”.

A different method of dialoguing with the Chineseness in the novel about homelessness can be found in the entry dated December 4th, when the author of the diary recalls the moment when she entered (with a feeling of stage fright) into Miss Helena’s drawing room. There follows a passage speaking of why the company of men may be important for a young woman (this applies to reasonable men, not pedants, as Joanna claims). The description of the drawing room shows in a characteristic way the dominants of thinking about the Japaneseness and the Chineseness:

Miss Helena’s drawing room is as it was some time ago: lovely big palms, sofa and chairs in the Chinese-Japanese-Maison-Nippon style. Dimmed light as formerly. Various distinguished personalities in their places on the sofas. Everything centered on our celebrities.⁵⁴

The most important is the fact that the atmosphere and general aura are described in the context of thinking about the role and the cultural status of men and women. It is not without reason that several lines below a prominent Russian female mathematician and writer is mentioned. It is Sofja Kovalevskaja (1850–1891), whose biography shows best how an educated and talented woman, repeatedly rewarded for her works and discoveries (especially in the field of mathematical functions), was denied access to the circles of Russian, Swedish and French scientists of that time. She was just a curious exception.

In *The Homeless*, towards the end of the novel’s plot, when Judym and Korzecki walk together to Kalinowicz, the two doctors discuss various attitudes towards a sick person (quoting diverse examples from the history of medicine concerning the treatment of the sick and the work for others’ good). In their conversation, yet another important topic is evoked, related to the perception of euthanasia and the attitude to death. Judym refers here to a simplified vision of the Chinese culture and the law governing the Middle Kingdom:

⁵³ Idem, *The Homeless*, trans. Stephanie Kraft, intr. Jennifer Croft, Boris Darlyuk, Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books 2024, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 154 (trans. mod.).

So for you there are no fixed rules? Do we not know for certain that infanticide, or the murder of elders, are bad things, and that the sense of solidarity among people is a good thing? That to speak truth is good and to lie is evil? And that whoever wants to propagate the idea of infanticide or destroy the sense of solidarity ought to be removed...⁵⁵

In *Szyfowe prace* [The Labours of Sisyphus], one of the interesting elements of registering and describing the space are the little Chinese folding screens in Mr. Majewski's drawing room. The writer reconstructs their structure in fine detail, thus highlighting the eclectic, kitschy decoration of the room resembling a little box. This image is intensified by pictures of geishas, kittens and parochial urbanity. The diminutives make an impression on the reader, for they reveal an emotional attachment and indicate the status of the Chineseness through metonymical use of elements of its identity:

On every wall there hung little Chinese folding screens, with photographs attached to them and spread wide in the shape of fans, presenting virgins with extraordinarily large eyes and very low cleavage, or reproductions of lovely kittens, amusing scenes and views from the governorate city of Kleryków.⁵⁶

In this educational novel about growing up and struggling with the despotic russification, Żeromski once again uses a reference to the Chinese intertext, when he speaks in a simplified manner about the "Vistulans" holding high positions:

People living there got so much accustomed to all kind of oddity that if one beautiful morning Polish speech were entirely abolished and they were ordered to speak, write and think in Chinese, no one would be surprised. Naturally, they would continue to speak in their own language, by the law of inertia, but in public they would write and speak in Chinese.⁵⁷

This is an important passage, telling us a lot about the significance of censorship and the foreignness of language. The oppressive Russian language, as an imposed system of communication and exchange, used as means of colonisation, becomes close to Chinese language due to its divergence from the Polish culture. The obligation to learn Russian provokes aversion and difficulty with accepting its neutral value, because it evokes not so much the language of Pushkin or Lermontov, but the official idiom of tsars, governors-general and school superintendents.

Admittedly, in Żeromski's play *Róża* [The Rose], in an utterance of Czarowic (after Zagozda's reflection on the Siberianness of space and the experience of Siberia), there appear words spoken with distance and irony: "Wait and you'll see heavens spring for you from the earth, like for Buddha!...",⁵⁸ but they (accidentally) refer to a philosophical

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 297.

⁵⁶ Idem, *Szyfowe prace*, p. 58.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 143.

⁵⁸ Idem, *Róża. Dramat niesceniczny*, in: idem, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 20, eds. Zbigniew Goliński, Elżbieta Jaworska, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1999, p. 43.

system, rather than to a specific religious experience. They are meant to ironically underline the seeming harmony of earthly experience as a process of psychological reintegration bringing internal peace and balance.

In a three-act comedy, written by Żeromski towards the end of his life, China returns when Ciekocki and Przełęcki discuss the latter's project to undertake a voyage to that country,⁵⁹ an idea that stands in sharp contrast to the Polish idleness and boredom. In this conversation of the two men, China becomes an embodiment of access to some kind of indefinite knowledge, which is referred to with enigmatic pronouns and which may bring potentially dangerous consequences indicated by Przełęcki: "He learned this and that, misinterpreted something – and got morally corrupted".⁶⁰

Another way of perceiving Chineseness, which is significant because it opens the 20th century in the Polish and European culture, is the reflection contained in the dramaturgical works of Stanisław Wyspiański. One of the most important national plays, which enriched Polish imagination with many winged words, namely *Wesele* (*The Wedding*), begins, as we know, with a famous conversation and scene. It is often referred to and played in the Polish culture, because it projects the key meanings that make up questions concerning the position of power and the potential movements related to establishing the ranking of the dominant players in international politics. The Dialogue between Czepiec (the Headman) and the Journalist opens the drama in the following manner: "So, what's new in politics, sir? / Haven't the Chinese answered yet?" – asks Czepiec, and the Journalist answers: "You, too, farmer? Have a heart! / Chinese – Chinese all day long!".⁶¹ From the first utterances, this dialogue reveals its phatic function – a representative of the less educated social group makes an attempt to establish and maintain contact with a representative of the intellectual social group (the Journalist), who no doubt knows perfectly well the current events in the world (due to his profession); at the same time, this dialogue is an example of demanding knowledge about the arcana of great politics, which cannot be known to an average guest at a country wedding.

The scene begins with a glance at great international politics, which has impact on the reflection concerning Polish countryside's opportunities under partitions and tells a lot about the reshufflings of power on the world map. A clear reference that Wyspiański makes here to the Boxer Rebellion, which broke out in China in autumn 1899 (and was extensively covered in the press of the three partitions and closely observed, with the development of events, by Bolesław Prus in his chronicles; the writer also illustrated it in two microstories entitled "Z roczników chińskich" [From Chinese Annals]),⁶² is meant to completely detach the conversation from its actual

⁵⁹ Idem, *Uciekla mi przepióreczka. Komedia w 3 aktach*, eds. Justyna and Zbigniew Golińscy, in: idem, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 23, ed. Zbigniew Goliński, Warsaw: Czytelnik 2004, p. 119.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Stanisław Wyspiański, *The Wedding*, trans. Noel Clark, London: Oberon 2013, p. 32.

⁶² See, e.g.: Józef Bachórz, "Prawda Aleksandra Świętochowskiego o chińskim powstaniu bokserów", in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków*, pp. 349–358. See also: Bolesław Prus, "Z roczników chińskich",

context. It seems inadequate in this place and time: at a wedding (ironically described by the playwright), that is, at a moment of apparent conciliation and entry into a new spacetime. Indeed, it is no more than a scrap of information, rather a hearsay about the events that arouses the peasants' interest. From the countryside – as Wyspiański points out – comes the impulse to know what is happening in the world, what steps Europe is taking, what is being said in the spheres of great politics, the principles and strategies of which are being reported by the Polish press. Implied in the Headman's question was the opposition of China against the politics of power and the domination of European countries in the territories of the Celestial Empire, which ended in 1901 with a defeat and sad repressions (violent suppression of the rebellion). But the action of the drama takes place at a moment (November 1900) when European countries continue a lively discussion concerning the possible further development of this international conflict. Echoes of those discussions also reach the countryside, all the more disoriented by lack of knowledge as it is ignored by the elites and condemned to marginalisation.

A separate theme, which must be incorporated in a wider philosophical and epistemological context of meanings, is the reflection on the modernist search for prescriptions for life in the multiplied, chaotic world of contradictions and loss of control over the understanding of ethical horizons. This theme reveals, inter alia, an attempt to overcome the acedia, the disappointments, the nirvanic and nihilistic attitudes of many characters in the literature of that period. A good example of such reflection on the transformation of the forms of culture is the finale of Waław Berent's *Próchno* [Rotten Wood]. In this novel, one important consequence of the experience of searching for and overcoming one's own understanding of oneself in a world of constant change and games of appearances, is the exposal of the significance of the Tibetan Buddhism and the path (ladder) of perfection. The gist of this reference lies in the character's realisation of the paramount importance of identifying human soul with the soul of the universe and understanding that in order to internalise the essence of art, the only open path that offers new opportunities is the path of Buddhist tradition, filtered through the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, which was fashionable and important in that period. Berent's critical discussion on the search for the path of life and self-perfecting is located and concluded in the figure of Agni, at the same time a guide and the desired nirvana: this "internal director of life, [...] the great, creative and fatal OM!..."⁶³ is, simultaneously, the final stage of a human's soul process of identification with the soul of cosmos, a mysterious, ineffable experience of plenitude. This state can be achieved in a variety of ways, but no doubt for Berent the reference to the tradition of a Chinese version of stoicism becomes an (ironic) game with this

in: idem, *Humoreski, nowele, opowiadania*, vol. 1, eds. Tadeusz Żabski, Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna et al., Warsaw–Lublin: Episteme 2014, esp. pp. 189–190.

⁶³ Waław Berent, *Próchno*, ed. Jerzy Paszek, Biblioteka Narodowa no. 234, ser. I, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1979, p. 364.

cultural heritage, when in the conversation between Jelsky and Kunicki, an interesting, albeit stereotypical, phrase is spoken:

You, sir, you are always as calm as a Chinese... Now, I don't like you in the least – he relieved his heart instantly. – Always so elegant, dressed up to the nines. It nudges me to blow you away...⁶⁴

Similar themes, defining the directions and methods of dialoguing with the Chinese culture, or more broadly – the Far East culture, appear in one of the most important national plays, written after the experience of 1905 revolution, namely *Kniaz Potiomkin* [The Battleship Potemkin] by Tadeusz Miciński. After the gruesome events of the sailors' rebellion, and following a number of great ethical-existential treatises pronounced by mutually opposed characters, the emerging light of Dalai Lama and the image of a small Buddha become signs of a new search for strength within oneself and for overcoming the evil. In relation to the internal spiritual revolution on the "thought battleship", the figure of Buddha in the shape of an innocent child additionally brings a spiritual restoration and a forecast of a new form of thinking about the course of the world and new ways to get insight therein. Miciński proves that since the old political, historical and moral order in Europe compromised itself (under the influence of various national movements, and most forcibly in the recent armed revolutionary movement), then looking for solutions and ethical alternatives in the philosophical and religious tradition of the Far East will constitute a new opening.

In *Nietota. Księga tajemna Tatr* [Nietota: The Secret Book of the Tatra Mountains], in line with the principle of "cultural levelling" (Polish *równanie kulturowe*, a term coined by Michał Głowiński, who used it to diagnose the above-mentioned novel by Berent)⁶⁵, Miciński still discusses with the possibility of absorbing various pieces of myths that could be rewritten and creatively applied in new semantical relations. But the presence of Chineseness is merely allusive. It appears in the form of accidental encounters, distant reconfigurations of motifs and meanings, which allow for an original and extraordinarily spectacular discussion on the possibilities of mixing cultural patterns, of transforming their original applications in completely new contexts and absorbing their genetic (and thus alien) rules of functioning. Nonetheless, a number of unusual references show that this tradition is not dead and empty. It helps better define the status of artifacts, better incorporate variable elements in the construction of identity and determine in a larger perspective the relationships between the characters and their behaviour. Apart from a reference to the real Amur River in East Asia and the real Alashan Desert in Northern China, in this intertextually saturated novel, there are several interesting motifs contributing to the constructions of spatial landscape. In a prayer-monologue, a soliloquy creating a climate and atmosphere of mystery, the main character confesses: "Cascades of Chinese lanterns, bloody flames of ambergris on

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 233.

⁶⁵ Michał Głowiński, *Mity przebrane. Dionizos, Narcyz, Prometeusz, Marcholt, labirynt*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1994, p. 8.

tripod stands – I need to hide in the shadow of a baobab”.⁶⁶ When he was on a flatboat, the mount of Ornak they were passing evoked the image of a Monster growing into “a caravan of Chinese towers” (N, 78), resembling a heap of railway locomotives. The Name of Lucifer can be smelled, inter alia, in “scarlet wallflowers, and pied begalias, and Chinese purple roses” (N, 144). Zolima, who is looking at Ariaman standing at the entrance to an oak cave, is shown as a figure who:

poured quickly the boiling water into a teapot, sprinkled it with some strange kind of tea, for the air instantly filled with Chinese roses. On a golden tray she brought for Ariaman two cups made of old translucent china and knelt by him like a dream lover Peri (N, 205–206).

Baron Rabsztyński’s mother – a patriot with symptoms of “aristocratic daltonism” – is described, with a tinge of irony and distance, as an educated person, whose knowledge reached

the great regions of Science, including the Chinese-Hebrew dialect, for the studies on a Jewish tribe living in China, which is said to have its own biblical traditions; including the Arabic, to convince the Mahometan nabis of the deity of Christ – Mrs. Marshall understood nothing of the matters of Great Nature, of the history of Humanity who is kin to Angels and apes (N, 243).

Moreover, in Prince Hubert’s orangery – described as “a mirage thicket” (N, 307) passed by the prince and Ariaman – among a diversity of miscellaneous objects gathered from all the corners of the world (as if taken directly from Duke Jean des Esseintes’s collection from Huysmans’s *À rebours*) one element draws particular attention. The following passage renders it best:

In aquariums filled with marvellous plants [...], the strangest were Chinese fish, which changed their hue with every motion of internal passion; fighting each other constantly, they blazed like volcanos; ring after ring appeared on them, with bloody or black puffs on those rainbows – as for the fight, it consisted in the bigger fish stifling the smaller by not allowing it to reach the surface to have a breath of air (N, 307).

Miciński’s modernist lesson, drawn from the determinist fight for existence of those small creatures, shows how terrifying an inclination (bordering on obsession) for various strange collections may be.

Elements of Chineseness may be used as a synonym for wealth, but also of uniqueness and sophistication. Such notions are present in Stanisław Przybyszewski’s *Złote runo* [The Golden Fleece] (1901), where we find a suggestively constructed image of white peacocks: “I am rich now – you want white peacocks? You’ll get white peacocks – and there are indeed white peacocks in China...”⁶⁷ – says the seducer

⁶⁶ Tadeusz Miciński, *Nietota. Księga tajemna Tatr*, Kraków: Universitas 2002, p. 72. Further quotations are indicated in the main body of the article as follows: (N, number of the page).

⁶⁷ Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Złote runo. Dramat*, 2nd ed., Lviv: B. Połoniecki 1902, p. 31.

Przesławski to Irena. This motif appears incidentally, as a synonym for uniqueness, but it serves cynical intentions, so the inaccessibility of the designate seems to diagnose the superficiality of the relationship between the man and the woman.

Modernism brought along many ways of dialoguing with traditions. Perhaps the least recognisable, but also the most subtle method of encrusting texts with motifs from various cultural and aesthetic traditions (including those related to the Far East), is the presence of diverse versions of masculine and feminine dandyism⁶⁸ conjugated with Chineseness. It is worth mentioning here the example of a collection of short prose by Ewa Łuskińska (1879–1942), published under the title *Chińskim tuszem* [With Chinese Ink].⁶⁹ The dandy short stories have one common feature – they are subtly sketched, encrusted with intricate phrase, written with “Chinese ink”. We will not find Chineseness here, but it is hidden in the entire conception of this miniature as a cycle of images elucidating one another. The reflection on experiencing the elusive world, on the meaning of existence, on the attempt of writing down once own everyday life, finally, on the possibility of writing about oneself by means of available formulas – these are the thematic dominants of Łuskińska’s collection. The modernist writer uses parabolisation as a form of dialogue with the tradition of Chinese sapiential stories. This is the case of *Salamandra* [Salamandra], *O królownie uklutej w serce* [On the Princess Stung in the Heart], *Nicotiana* [Nicotiana], *Mrące motyle* [The Dying Butterflies], *Klaczę króla Mihadzi* [King Mihrajah’s Horses], *Romans posągów* [The Romance of Statues]. Strangeness becomes here (like in the Mehoffer’s painting *Dziwny ogród* [A Strange Garden], “stung” in its imagery, because this seemingly veristic scenery is distorted by a surrealist element of unfitting size – a gigantic dragonfly) a synonym for exoticism, otherness and a chance to recount the elusive experiences that cannot be thought, those situations that remain ineffable, fragile and transient. Thus understood Chinese line – sketched with ink that at any time can become smudged, unreadable – is a signal of feminine dandyism, but also a reflection on the inaccessibility and subtlety of the Chinese culture, presented in the form of the metonymic ink, as a sign of time and a tool making it possible to write, that is – to perpetuate. And for Łuskińska perpetuation is the most important process of participation in the everyday life, confirming the individuality and originality, that is, the writer’s exotic personality. The latter, in turn, becomes a necessary manifestation of the writer’s “I” – at any cost, against the current of everyday life, in defiance of history (especially its macro dimension), in spite of the events of great politics (the collection was published one year after the 1905 revolution).

⁶⁸ I pointed to this fact in my previous studies: “Dandysa dziewiętnastowieczny tekst o ciele. Przyczynek do teorii cielesności dandysa”, *Tekstualia* 2007, no. 1(8), pp. 23–42; “Dandyski tekst o ciele. Przyczynek do teorii cielesności dandyski”, in: *Lektury płci. Polskie (kon)teksty*, ed. Mieczysław Dąbrowski, Warsaw: Elipsa 2008, pp. 130–144; “Dandyska w podróży po Europie. Diarystyczny zapis obecności Marii Baszkirczew”, in: *Europejczyk w podróży 1850–1939*, eds. Ewa Ihnatowicz, Stefan Ciera, Warsaw: Neriton 2010, pp. 445–465.

⁶⁹ A short story under the same title was first published in *Chimera* in 1899, III, no. 3, pp. 49–50; the whole collection was published in 1906 in Kraków.

A difficult motif, resulting from the catastrophic image of Chineseness, is the one incidentally mentioned in Witkacy's interwar novel *Pożegnanie jesieni* [Farewell to Autumn] from 1927, the time when the spectre of communism (together with the accompanying fear for existence, individuality, possibility of free development in spite of ideological dictates) left its mark on the understanding of the Russianness (Sovietness) and the Chineseness. Witkacy's version of Chineseness as a peculiarity, characterising the demonic femme fatal, is comprised in the metonymy (recurring three times in the novel) of Hela Bertz's blue almond eyes:

She was so beautiful that he could hardly stop himself from biting into her lips parted with lust. Her almond eyes, covered with tired, fluttering eyelids, seemed to cast a lascivious shadow over her entire body. The scent...⁷⁰

For this heroine, Buddhism is a religion without ethics, and she professes this conviction as a threefold stranger in the Polish culture: a woman, a pretended convert to Catholicism and a Jew. Witkacy enhances her stigma of strangeness by calling her as inaccessible and unattainable as "a Chinese coolie",⁷¹ with whom you try to make contact.

We could perhaps say without a tinge of pretentiousness that the various dialogues with Chineseness in Polish literature (mainly in literary texts) of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, despite the diversity of approaches and various depth of reflection, to a large extent repeated, in different form and different cultural and stylistic context, the famous phrase by Mickiewicz from his early-19th-century poem "Zima miejska" [Winter in the City] (1818). The Mickiewiczian periphrasis "thoughts inhaled from Chinese herbs" allows to describe quite accurately, though still enigmatically, the modes of contact, the character of reflection, the accessibility of sources and the approach to Chineseness of Polish writers in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Therefore, it would be difficult to finish now with synthetic, scientific conclusions – especially that we are conscious of the numerous queries of the press and literary works that still need to be done in search of the presence of various forms of dialoguing with Chineseness – with the Chinese culture, religiousness, philosophy, customs, law and, above all, the Chinese worlds of literature.

The present issue of *Przegląd Humanistyczny* contains preliminary survey studies, offering a wide range of insights into the specific nature of the Chinese-Polish dialogue, as well as studies of individual cases analysed in a broader context of discussions held in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries with the Chinese culture and tradition. This encounter has the undeniable advantage of showing how diverse perceptions of Chineseness and philosophical-aesthetic traditions elucidate one another – those elicited from literary texts (e.g. by Adam Mickiewicz, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Bolesław Prus, Tadeusz Miciński, Waław Sieroszewski), from the journalistic texts

⁷⁰ Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, *Pożegnanie jesieni*, Warsaw: Drukarnia Narodowa F. Hoesicka 1927, p. 49. 'Coolie' is a pejorative term for unskilled, cheap labourer of Indian or Chinese descent.

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 373.

of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, from the press of that period, including the Polish emigration press published during the European interwar period in Harbin (the same town where Teodor Parnicki learned Polish in Henryk Sienkiewicz Secondary School). The most frequent mode of perceiving Chineseness in this issue is the one that appreciates the Polish positivist and modernist writers' perspective marked by the context of a partitioned country. Further invaluable contributions are the new approaches and insights into the translation issues, the question of mediated translations, the ways and reasons of showing interest in particular literary genres (the case of non-fiction and reportage), as well as bringing to our attention some phenomena that are entirely absent from the Polish literary and genealogical tradition (the case of two-part riddle-metaphor called *xiehouyu*).

The present issue of *Przegląd Humanistyczny* dedicated to Chinese-Polish and Polish-Chinese dialogue is published at the moment of an important jubilee – the 70th anniversary of Polish Studies at the Beijing Foreign Studies University.⁷² This is a perfect opportunity to remember the prominent Polish philologists, founders of the Polish Studies at the Beijing university, and to congratulate its Academic staff who promote the Polish language, culture and literature in China. We express our support for the Beijing Polish Studies and our wishes that you break the barriers, overthrow the walls and build a shared network of important, creative dialogues. One would like to sing into the air and over the continents not so much the traditional “Happy Birthday”, but rather the words of Agnieszka Osiecka’s famous song “Na wesoło” [On a Cheerful Note], due to its intimate, personal and contextually slightly different message: “Get drunk with me on Chinese vodka”.

References

- Bachórz Józef, “Prawda Aleksandra Świętochowskiego o chińskim powstaniu bokserów”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków*, eds. Józef Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marcei Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 349–358.
- Bąbiak Grzegorz Paweł, *Metropolia i zaścianek. W kręgu „Chimery” Zenona Przesmyckiego*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Wydziału Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2002.
- de Beauvoir Ludovic, *Podróż naokoło świata*, vol. III: *Pekin, Yeddo, San Francisco*, trans. s.n., suppl. to *Wędrowiec* 1873, vol. 7, no. 176.
- Berent Waław, *Próchno*, ed. Jerzy Paszek, Biblioteka Narodowa no. 234, ser. I, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1979.
- Bethge Hans, *Die chinesische Flöte*, Leipzig: YinYang, Media Verlag 2007 [Insel Verlag, 1907].
- Bibliografia zawartości „Życia” warszawskiego i krakowskiego „Strumienia” oraz „Chimery”*, ed. Grzegorz Paweł Bąbiak, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Wydziału Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2000.

⁷² The original, Polish version of this issue was published in spring 2024 (trans. note).

- “Bonza kapłan w Chinach”, *Przyjaciel Dzieci* 1870, no. 52, pp. 505–506.
- Borowski Andrzej, “Józef Kremer o literaturze”, in: *Józef Kremer (1806–1875). Studia i materiały*, eds. Urszula Bęczkowska, Ryszard Kasperowicz, Jacek Maj, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2016, pp. 369–389.
- Budrewicz Tadeusz, “Stereotypy Chin i Chińczyków w polskiej prasie satyrycznej drugiej połowy XIX wieku”, in: *Bez antypodów? Konfrontacje i zbliżenia kultur*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2008, pp. 207–230.
- “Chińczycy”, *Przyjaciel Dzieci* 1873, no. 25, pp. 289–292.
- Czychaczew Piotr, *Podróż naukowa w Altaju Wschodnim i okolicach przyległych granicy chińskiej odbyta z rozkazu Najjaśniejszego Cesarza Wszechrosji*, trans. from French Wojciech Szymanowski, Warsaw: The Printing House of *Gazeta Codzienna* 1850.
- Data Jan, “O Chinach i Chińczykach w juvenaliach i kronikach Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków*, eds. Józef Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marcei Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 359–366.
- Davies Evan, *China and her Spiritual Claims*, London: John Snow 1845.
- Du Halde Jean Baptiste, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l’empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise, enrichie des cartes générales et particulieres de ces pays, de la carte générale et des cartes particulieres du Thibet, & de la Corée; & ornée d’un grand nombre de figures & de vignettes gravées en taille douce*, Paris: chez P. G. Lemercier, Imprimeur Libraire 1736.
- Dzieje literatury powszechnej z ilustracjami*, vol. 1, eds. Julian Adolf Świącicki, Teofil Krasnosielski, Ignacy Radliński, Kazimierz Kaszewski, Florian Łagnowski, Warsaw: S. Lewental (supervised by the editorial board of *Kłosy*) 1880.
- Eberhard Wolfram, *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols: Hidden Symbols in Chinese Life and Thought*, trans. G.L. Campbell, London–New York: Routledge–Kegan Paul 1986.
- Głowiński Michał, *Mity przebrane. Dionizos, Narcyz, Prometeusz, Marcholt, labirynt*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1994.
- H. K., “Mur chiński”, *Przyjaciel Dzieci* 1877, no. 41, pp. 481–482.
- d’Hervey de Saint-Denys Léon, *Poésies de l’époque des T’ang*, Paris: Amyot Éditeur 1862.
- Huc Évariste Régis, *Cesarstwo Chińskie według współczesnych badań podróżnika*, vols. 1–2, trans. s.n., Warsaw: printed by *Wiek* 1886.
- Huc Évariste Régis, *Wspomnienia z podróży po Tartarii, Tybecie i Chinach w latach 1844, 1845, 1846 odbytej przez Huc’a*, trans. Aleksander Kremer, Warsaw: S. Orgelbrand 1858.
- Iłowajski Dmitrij I., “Chińczycy”, in: idem, *Przewodnik do wykładu historii powszechnej*, 3rd ed., trans. K. and Ł., Warsaw: Main depository in the publisher’s apartment at Elekoralna Street 37, 1890, pp. 11–13.
- Kasarek Lidia, *Totemy życia... Chińska literatura poszukiwania korzeni*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog 2000.
- “Kraj amurski”, *Przyjaciel Dzieci* 1870, no. 32, pp. 319–320.
- Kremer Józef, *Listy z Krakowa*, vol. 2: *Dzieje artystycznej fantazji*, part 1, Warsaw: S. Lewental 1877.
- Kremer Józef, *Listy z Krakowa*, vol. 3: *Dzieje artystycznej fantazji*, part 2, Warsaw: S. Lewental 1877 [Wilno: J. Zawadzki 1855].
- Lange Antoni, *Miranda*, ed. Paweł Bukowiec, Kraków: Universitas 2002.
- Lay George Tradescant, *Chinese as They are: Their Moral, Social and Literary Character; a New Analysis of the Language, with Succinct Views of Their Principal Arts and Sciences*, London: William Ball & Co. 1841.

- Legutko Grażyna, *Zenon Przesmycki (Miriam) – propagator literatury europejskiej*, Kielce: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. Jana Kochanowskiego 2000.
- Li Yinan (李怡楠), *Literatura polska w Chinach*, preface by Yi Lijun (易丽君), afterword by Zhao Gang (赵刚), Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego 2017.
- Lin Hongliang (林洪亮), “Henryk Sienkiewicz i Lu Xun – analiza porównawcza na podstawie małych form prozatorskich”, trans. Barbara Li, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 283–300.
- Makuch Damian Włodzimierz, “Nieoczywisty inspirator. Myśl estetyczna Józefa Kremera okiem polskich pozytywistów”, in: *Józef Kremer (1806–1875). Studia i materiały*, eds. Urszula Bęczkowska, Ryszard Kasperowicz, Jacek Maj, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2016, pp. 123–150.
- Marszałek Agnieszka, “Józef Kremer o dramacie i teatrze”, in: *Józef Kremer (1806–1875). Studia i materiały*, eds. Urszula Bęczkowska, Ryszard Kasperowicz, Jacek Maj, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2016, pp. 391–431.
- Maśka Marta, “Drzeworyt japoński a sprawa polska – o japońskich aspektach batalii o nową sztukę”, *Litteraria Copernicana* 2014, no. 2(14), pp. 139–149.
- Maśka Marta, *Kultura i sztuka japońska w polskiej prasie przełomu wieków (XIX i XX)*, doctoral dissertation supervised by Danuta Knysz-Tomaszewska (defended *viva voce* in 2014 at the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw).
- Mazan Bogdan, “Chińszczyzna. Kulturowe przeobrażenia pojęcia”, in: *Awangardowa encyklopedia, czyli słownik rozmowany nauk, sztuk i rzemiosł różnych. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Grzegorzowi Gaździe*, eds. Irena Hübner, Agnieszka Izdebska, Jarosław Pluciennik, Danuta Szajnert, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2008, pp. 69–103.
- Mazan Bogdan, “Figury myśli i (anty)wzory. Motywy chińskie w *Przeglądzie Tygodniowym* 1871–1876”, in: *Pozytywiści warszawscy: „Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1866–1876. Seria II: Świat, Europa, Polska*, ed. Anna Janicka, Białystok: Temida2 2020, pp. 105–124.
- Mazan Bogdan, “‘Kierunek idealny’ (wobec przeciwnieństw) na konfrontatywnym tle kultury rodzimej i egzotycznej. Chiny Sienkiewicza (I)”, in: *Henryk Sienkiewicz w kulturze polskiej*, eds. Krzysztof Stępnik, Tadeusz Bujnicki, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS 2007, pp. 453–467.
- Mazan Bogdan, “Pozytywistyczny bilans duchowej konfrontacji Wschód – Zachód: Chiny Sienkiewicza (II)”, in: *Światło w dolinie. Prace ofiarowane profesor Halinie Krukowskiej*, eds. Krzysztof Korotkich, Jarosław Ławski, Danuta Zawadzka, Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie Trans Humana 2007, pp. 721–738.
- Mazan Bogdan, “Z obrazów Chin i Chińczyków w piśmiennictwie polskim drugiej połowy XIX wieku. ‘Chińskie cienie’ w *Lalce* Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 317–404.
- Mazan Bogdan, “Zepsuty ornament. Odtajnienie chińszczyzny w powieściach Elizy Orzeszkowej o ‘argonautach’”, in: *Sekrety Orzeszkowej*, eds. Grażyna Borkowska, Magdalena Rudkowska, Iwona Wiśniewska, Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN 2012, pp. 228–249.
- Miciński Tadeusz, *Nietota. Księga tajemna Tatr*, Kraków: Universitas 2002.
- “Mieszkania Chińczyków”, *Przyjaciel Dzieci* 1873, no. 39, pp. 462–463.
- Oliphant Laurence, *Poselstwo lorda Elgin do Chin i Japonii w latach 1857, 58, 59*, trans. A[dela] z Kr[asińskich] M[alletska], Warsaw: Aleksander Nowolecki 1862.

- Olkusz Wiesław, "Perły japońskie i chińskie, czyli pozytywistyczne zainteresowania Dalekim Wschodem. Rekonesans", *Kwartalnik Opolski* 1993, no. 1, pp. 40–52; no. 2, pp. 53–59.
- Orzeszkowa Eliza, *Argonauci*, Warsaw: Gebethner i Wolff 1900.
- Orzeszkowa Eliza, *Cnotliwi*, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1965.
- Orzeszkowa Eliza, *The Argonauts*, trans. Jeremiah Curtin, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1901.
- Oströmęcka Jadwiga, *Pamiętnik z lat 1862–1911*, ed. Anna Brus, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG 2004.
- Prus Bolesław, "Z roczników chińskich" [inc. "Niedawnymi czasy..."], "Z roczników chińskich" [inc. "Onego czasu..."], in: idem, *Humoreski, nowe, opowiadania*, vol. 1, eds. Tadeusz Żabski, Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna et al., Warsaw–Lublin: Episteme 2014, pp. 184, 189–190.
- Przybyszewski Stanisław, *Złote runo. Dramat*, 2nd ed., Lviv: B. Połoniecki 1902.
- Richter Bogdan, "Literatura chińska", in: *Wielka literatura powszechna*, vol. I: *Wschód – Literatury klasyczne*, ed. Stanisław Lam, Warsaw: Trzaska, Evert, Michalski 1930, pp. 21–64.
- Siemieński Lucjan, *Przegląd dziejów literatury powszechnej*, vol. I, Kraków: published by the author 1855.
- Starky Thomas, *Kartografia międzyperyferyjna. Transfery literackie i rola centrum w zapośredniczonych tłumaczeniach małych form prozatorskich Henryka Sienkiewicza autorstwa Zhou Zuorena i Lu Xuna* [Inter-peripheral cartography: Literary transfers and the role of the center in the mediated translations of Henryk Sienkiewicz's short prose forms by Zhou Zuoren and Lu Xun], doctoral dissertation supervised by Żaneta Nalewajk-Turecka, Małgorzata Religa, Warsaw 2024, electronic manuscript.
- "Teatr marionetek w Chinach", *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1874, no. 14, pp. 169–170.
- Toporov Vladimir, "Petersburg and the Petersburg Text of Russian literature (Introduction to the Topic)", in: *Myth. Ritual. Symbol. Image: Studies in Mythopoeitics: Selected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishing Group – Culture 1995, pp. 259–367 (in Russian).
- Timkowski Egor Fedorovich, *Podróż do Chin przez Mongolię w latach 1820 i 1821*, vols. 1–2, trans. Tomasz Wilhelm Kochański, Lviv: printed by Piotr Piller 1828.
- Timkovski Egor Fedorovich, *Travels of the Russian Mission Through Mongolia to China, and Residence in Peking, in the Years 1820–21*, trans. Hannibal Evans Lloyd, ed. Julius von Klaproth, London: s.n. 1827.
- "Wan-li-Czang-Czing", *Wieczory Rodzinne* 1890, no. 4, pp. 38.
- Witkiewicz Stanisław Ignacy, *Pożegnanie jesieni*, Warsaw: Drukarnia Narodowa F. Hoesicka 1927.
- Wyspiański Stanisław, *Wesele*, ed. Jan Nowakowski, Biblioteka Narodowa no. 218, Ser. I, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1977.
- "Z Paryża do Pekinu. Dziennik podróży", *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1880, nos. 8–22: no. 8, pp. 101–103; no. 9, pp. 113–115; no. 10, pp. 129–131; no. 11, pp. 142–144; no. 12, pp. 157–159; no. 13, pp. 170–172; no. 14, pp. 185–187; no. 15, pp. 205–207; no. 16, pp. 222–223; no. 17, pp. 231–232; no. 18, pp. 245–248; no. 19, pp. 258–260; no. 20, pp. 274–278; no. 21, pp. 285–286; no. 22, pp. 301–303.
- "Ze wspomnień młodego Chińczyka", *Wieczory Rodzinne* 1890, no. 50, pp. 399–400, no. 52, pp. 415–416.
- Zhang Zhenhui (张振辉), "Lalka Bolesława Prusa, Ziemia obiecana Władysława Reymonta i Północ Mao Duna – interesujące analogie na tle różnych warunków historycznych", trans. Barbara Li, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 269–280.
- Zhao Gang (赵刚), Yi Lijun (易丽君), Mao Yinhui (茅银辉), "Od Sienkiewicza do Sienkiewicza, czyli o literaturze pozytywistycznej w Chinach", trans. Barabra Li, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm*.

- My i wy po stu latach*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 303–315.
- Żeromski Stefan, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 28: *Dzienniki. T. 2 (1883–1885)*, eds. Zdzisław Jerzy Adamczyk, Beata Utkowska, Warsaw: Czytelnik 2023.
- Żeromski Stefan, *Ludzie bezdomni*, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1984.
- Żeromski Stefan, *Róża. Dramat niesceniczny*, in: idem, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 20, eds. Zbigniew Goliński, Elżbieta Jaworska, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1999, pp. 5–226.
- Żeromski Stefan, *Szyfowe prace*, afterword by Jan Zygmunt Jakubowski, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1987.
- Żeromski Stefan, *Uciekła mi przepióreczka. Komedia w 3 aktach*, eds. Justyna and Zbigniew Golińscy, in: idem, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 23, ed. Zbigniew Goliński, Warsaw: Czytelnik 2004, pp. 5–134.

The Cultural Dialogue between Poland and China from the 13th Century to the Beginning of the 20th Century¹

Li Yinan

Beijing Foreign Studies University, China

e-mail: liyinan@bfsu.edu.cn

ORCID: 0000-0002-5777-6622

Abstract

The cultural dialogue between Poland and China can be traced back to the 13th century, the time of Mongol invasions of Europe. It can also be linked to the activities of the missionary, Benedict of Poland. Significant place should be attributed to the Jesuit Michał Boym and his fascination with learning about the life, customs, flora, fauna and medicine of China, as well as his sense of research and substantive scholarly preparation. Concurrently, Chinese researchers, historians and politicians spread knowledge about Poland in China through a number of historical and geographical studies about the world; at the same time, essayists and reformers drew practical knowledge from Polish historical fate and made their compatriots aware of the need to modernize China. Those first attempts to learn about both cultures had a significant impact on the contemporary cultural dialogue between Poland and China.

Keywords

cultural contact, historical fate, China, Poland

The tradition of Polish-Chinese friendship reaches far back in the past. It began at a time of intensified contacts between the East and the West.² The knowledge that China and Poland had gained about each other before the 20th century was undoubtedly

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: “Chińsko-polski dialog kulturowy od XIII do początku XX wieku”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 39–54, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.2>.

² In this article, “East” refers to Asian countries, whereas “West” designates Europe.

the starting point for contemporary bilateral relations in the fields of literature and culture.

The earliest mentions of Poland come from the 13th century, the time of concurrent reign of several dynasties, such as the Southern Song, Jin or Western Xia, before the unification of China by the Mongol Yuan dynasty. It was in this period that Poland suffered from Mongol invasions from the East. They were called “Tatars” by the Poles. As the “Bulwark of Christendom” and the main battlefield in Europe, Poland fought several long, fierce battles against the forces of the Mongol Empire. In the battle of Legnica (1241), when the Mongols equipped their troops with gunpowder, Poland could feel the power of the East. A description of this battle is presented in Jan Długosz’s *Roczniki czyli kroniki sławnego Królestwa Polskiego* [Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland]. In the 17th century, a Polish missionary, Michał Boym (1612–1659), came to China and brought to Europe information about the geography, medicine and other aspects of life in China. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Poles broadened their knowledge of China thanks to the monographs written by missionaries about the history, geography, ethnic origins and culture of the Middle Kingdom.

On the other hand, thinkers and politicians from the “Eastward Spread of Western Learning” movement, towards the end of the Qing dynasty and at the beginning of the Republic of China, spread in China knowledge about the world, including Poland, through such works as 四洲志 [A Gazetteer of the Four Continents, 1839], 海国图志 [The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms, 1842] or 瀛寰志略 [Brief Records of the World, 1848]. They drew practical knowledge from Poland’s historical fate and made their compatriots aware of the need to modernise China. We could say that this type of historical sources was the main channel of mutual cognition and understanding among the citizens of both countries, with this exchange taking place above all in a small group of intellectuals.

The earliest mutual cognition (13th century)

The commonly known legend in Poland about the St. Mary’s Trumpet Call refers to the history of Mongols, also called Tatars, invading Europe in 1241. The over 40-year period of Mongol invasions left its mark on the Western countries, but, to some extent, it also familiarised the Europeans with the distant civilisation, laying the ground for Eastern-Western cultural and economic contacts. Chinese inventions, such as gunpowder, paper, print and compass, were brought to West Asian and European countries, whereas China adopted Western astronomy, medicine and calendar, which led to contacts and integration of Asian and European nations on a large scale. Polish chronicler Jan Długosz (1415–1480) described a method – unknown to Polish chivalry – of diffusing sulphur or gunpowder, a new kind of weapon used by the Mongols in a manner that in the chronicler’s eyes was close to alchemy:

Among the Tatar standards is a huge one with a giant X painted on it. It is topped with an ugly black head with a chin covered with hair. As the Tatars withdraw some hundred paces, the bearer of this standard begins violently shaking the great head, from which there suddenly bursts a cloud with a foul smell that envelopes the Poles and makes them all but faint, so that they are incapable of fighting³.

Ding Chao (丁超), co-author of the work 中外文学交流史:中国—中东欧卷 [China and Central and Eastern Europe: A History of Literary Contacts], pointed to the fact that the Mongol military expedition to the West broke the isolationism of Eastern and Western civilisations, exerting a positive influence on the promotion of intercivilisational communication.⁴ From this perspective, we can conclude that the Mongols' arrival in the West was the moment when the Poles began to discover the Chinese. The Tatars' expedition all the way to Kraków, the capital city of the Seniorate Province, and the invasions of the Duchy of Silesia constituted, objectively speaking, a factor fostering interpenetration of Chinese and Polish civilisations.

Mongol expeditions to the West shook the entire European continent. Later, due to the great khan Ögedei's death, the Mongol army retreated, and Europe breathed a sigh of relief. In spring 1245, Pope Innocent IV (1195–1254) called the First Council of Lyon, which also discussed the “question of the Tatars”. It was decided that the Franciscan provincial Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (ca. 1180–1252) would be sent with a papal letter to the country of Genghis Khan. On 16 April 1245, the legate set off from Lyon with friar Stephen of Bohemia; at a further stage of the journey, in Wrocław, Benedict of Poland (ca. 1200–1251) joined them. He was a Franciscan from Wrocław and the first Polish traveller who reached, together with the delegate sent by the Pope, the capital city of the Mongol Empire, Karakorum, where he attended the coronation of the third great khan, Güyük. Upon his return to Poland, Benedict made an account of his impressions to the friar C. de Bridia, who later wrote down this relation in Latin under the title *Historia Tartarorum* [History of Tatars]. Shortly after, Benedict himself wrote a treatise entitled *De Itinere Fratrum Minorum ad Tartaros* [The Journey of Friars Minor to the Tatars]. It was an account documenting his journey to Asia. This over 3,000-word-long relation was the first scientific work in Europe describing the culture and languages of the Far-East countries. It included many Mongol words translated into Latin and was of groundbreaking scholarly importance. Since the Italian Marco Polo arrived in China in 1275, thirty years later than Benedict, we can affirm that the Pole was undoubtedly the first traveller from Poland and from Europe who reached the Far East. His travel account was at that time the only “field study” of China conducted by a Pole and a European, and it marks the historical beginning of discovering the Eastern culture by Poland, and even by Europe.

³ Jan Długosz, *The Annals of Jan Długosz: An English Abridgement*, trans. Maurice Michael, Chichester: IM Publications 1997, p. 180.

⁴ Ding Chao (丁超), Song Binghui (宋炳辉), 中外文学交流史:中国—中东欧卷 [China and Central and Eastern Europe: A History of Literary Contacts], Jinan: Shandong Education Press 2014, p. 47.

Missionaries as the main exchange-promoting force (16th century)

Towards the end of the 15th century, following the great geographical discoveries and the Spanish and Portuguese overseas expansion, the European missionaries began to travel to various parts of the world to preach the Christian teachings. Among the destinations of those missionary expeditions was also China. In 1583 (in the eleventh year of the reign of the Wanli Emperor of the Ming dynasty), the Jesuits Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607), Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and others arrived at Zhaoqing (肇庆) in Southern China as “foreign monks”, thus establishing the first Jesuit community in continental China. More Jesuits were successively sent to proclaim missionary teachings and spread knowledge about the West, including Poland. They wrote letters, diaries and travel journals to reconstruct their wanderings. They described what they had seen or heard, presenting a panorama of the Chinese society and culture. In fact, they popularised the achievements of Chinese civilisation and the Chinese society’s lifestyle in the West, thus promoting cultural exchange between China and the West. At that time, numerous monographs on those topics were translated and published in Poland, giving the Polish people an idea of what China was like and laying the foundations for early “sinological research”. For instance, in 1611, Polish priest Szymon Wysocki translated into Polish the account written by Matteo Ricci and João Rodrigues *Nowiny abo dzieie dwvletnie z Iaponu y z Chiny, krain poganskich, Nowego Świata* [Tidings or A History of Two Years in Japan and China, pagan countries, the New World],⁵ which was published in Kraków by Jan Scharffenberger. The monograph was a collection of letters sent by Matteo Ricci to the Superior General of Jesuits, Claudius Aquaviva, in the years 1606 and 1607. In his correspondence, the friar documented his journey to China. The same kind of literature is represented by António de Andrade’s account *Tybet wielkie panstwo w Azyey* [Tibet, a Great Country in Asia],⁶ which was translated into Polish by Fryderyk Szembek and published in Kraków in 1628. The travel literature of that period was mainly interested in the Far East, and China was only mentioned within the discourse concerning Eastern civilisations. The authors of travel journals were, for the most part, missionaries, emissaries or voyagers, who documented their expeditions to various countries of the Far East, with particular focus on China. This type of works continued to be published in Poland until the 19th century and they played an important role in fostering knowledge and understanding of the Middle Kingdom.⁷

⁵ Matteo Ricci, João Rodrigues, *Nowiny abo dzieie dwvletnie z Iaponu y z Chiny, krain poganskich, Nowego Świata*, trans. Szymon Wysocki, Kraków: Jan Scharffenberger 1611.

⁶ António de Andrade, *Tybet wielkie panstwo w Azyey*, trans. Fryderyk Szembek, Kraków: Drukarnia Franciszka Cezarego 1628.

⁷ Examples of such books include: George Leonard Staunton, *Podroz lorda Makartney posla W. Brytanii do Chin w roku 1792, 1793 i 1794 zawieraiqca wiadomosc o kraiu, rzadzie i narodzie chińskim, tudziez o części Tartaryi chinskiej & c.* Cz. 2, trans. Roman Markiewicz, Kraków: Drukarnia

One of the missionaries who contributed the most to the cultural exchange between China and Poland was Michał Boym, also known as “Polish Marco Polo”, an orientalist and emissary of the emperor Yongli (永历) of the Southern Ming dynasty. Desiring to preach the Christian faith in the Far East, he petitioned the Roman Catholic Church numerous times for permission to depart for China, which he eventually obtained. In March 1643, he left Lisbon, travelled around Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and India, passed the Indonesian Strait and arrived at Macau. At the beginning, he taught at the local Jesuit school and was studying the Chinese language, then he went to Hainan (海南) island, where he preached the missionary teachings. Later, he also visited the provinces of Hunan (湖南), Henan (河南), Shaanxi (陕西) and other places, where he conducted detailed research on the inscriptions from the Xi'an Stele, “A Monument Commemorating the Propagation of the Ta-Chin Luminous Religion in the Middle Kingdom”. He ended up at the Yongli Emperor's court and was sent by him to Europe to solicit help from the Roman Catholic Church in resisting the army of the Qing dynasty. On the return journey to China, having completed the mission in Rome, Michał Boym died in Guangxi (广西). When he had come to Europe as a Chinese emissary, he had brought with him an eighteen-page-long atlas of China (*Mappa Imperii Sinarum*) drawn by himself, with nine chapters introducing basic information about that country. In fact, thanks to those texts, the atlas became a handbook of knowledge about China. *Mappa Imperii Sinarum* specified for the first time the location and size of the Middle Kingdom. It was also the first work explaining that “Cathay” mentioned in Marco Polo's writings and China, where the Portuguese had arrived, are the same country, and the capital city called “Cathay” or “Cambuluc” or “Khanbaliq” is in fact Beijing.⁸ Also, precise localisations were marked for certain Chinese cities, the Great Wall and the Gobi Desert. Many illustrations were attached to the map, presenting Chinese fauna and flora, architecture and scenes from the life of the Chinese. Those materials greatly enriched the knowledge of the Far East among the Europeans. During his stay in China, Michał Boym conducted in-depth, systematic research concerning Chinese history, politics, language, culture, geography, regional products, customs, medicine, and he wrote a series of works, including the first European monograph on Chinese flora

Jana Maya 1801 (English original: George Leonard Staunton, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China; Including Cursory Observations made, and Information obtained, in travelling through that Ancient Empire and a small part of Chinese Tartary*, London: G. Nicol 1797); Laurence Oliphant, *Poselstwo lorda Elgin do Chin i Japonii w latach 1857, 58, 59*, trans. Adela Karolina Malletska, Warsaw: Aleksander Nowolecki 1862 (English original: Laurence Oliphant, *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's mission to China and Japan in the years 1857, '58, '59*, New York: Harper and Brothers 1860); Józef Pawlicki, *Wiadomość o życiu i śmierci Jana Gabryela Perboara, kapłana Zgromadzenia księży Lazarystów, umęczonego w Chinach d. 11 września 1840 r.*, Warsaw: Drukarnia Księży Misjonarzy u Ś. Krzyża 1852.

⁸ Adam Robiński, “Michał Boym – pierwszy polski sinolog, ambasador Chin”, *Rzeczpospolita* 17/02/2012, <https://www.rp.pl/kultura/art6253631-michal-boym-pierwszy-polski-sinolog-ambasador-chin> [accessed 13 June 2025].

(*Flora sinensis*) and Chinese medicine (*Specimen medicinae Sinicae*)⁹. All of this gave Poland, and Europe as a whole, a better understanding of China and the Far East. It also substantially contributed to spreading Chinese science and culture, and had a profound influence on future sinologists.

Around the same time in China, in 1602, an Italian Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci, drew in Beijing a complete map of the earth – 坤輿万国全图 [A Map of the Myriad Countries of the World], thus presenting Poland for the first time to the Chinese. Among the geographic names placed on the map, there is the name “Polonia”, which refers to Poland. It was probably at this point that the Chinese officially gained knowledge of the existence of that country. Soon after, another Italian, Giulio Aleni, completed in 1623 his chronicles – 职方外纪 [Chronicles of Foreign Lands],¹⁰ which were the first Chinese version of world geography written by a missionary with the use of the Western perspective of religious geography. The book is composed of five volumes, the second of which focuses on Europe. It includes a chapter dedicated to Poland, which, back then, constituted the earliest and most lucid description of that country in Chinese historical sources.

In 1646, missionary Michał Boym sent to Beijing Johannes Kepler’s Rudolphine Tables (*Tabulae Rudolphinae*), praising the book as “unique and the best for calculating total and partial eclipses and the movements of the heavens”,¹¹ which can be deemed as the first introduction of Nicolaus Copernicus’ theory in China. Later that same year, Jan Mikołaj Smogulecki (1610–1656), another Jesuit missionary, came to China and, together with the Chinese scholar Xue Fengzuo (薛凤祚), wrote and published the monograph 天步真原 [True Principles of the Pacing of the Heavens] treating the subject of European mathematics, astronomy and astrology, thus spreading Copernicus’ astronomical theory.

The beginnings of sinological studies in Poland (18th–19th centuries)

At the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries, in Poland, a style called *chinoiserie* from the French appeared, visible mainly in architecture and interior design, which increased the Poles’ fervour to seek a better understanding of Chinese culture. In 1787, Ignacy Manugiewicz (ca. 1750–?) translated from the Russian *Historyczno-geograficzne opisanie miasta Pekinu ciekawsze od innych edycji*

⁹ Michał Boym, *Flora sinensis*, Viennae Austriae: typis Matthaei Rictij 1656; idem, *Specimen medicinae Sinicae*, ed. Andreas Cleyer, Frankfurt: J.P. Zuberdt 1682.

¹⁰ Giulio Aleni, 职方外纪 [Chronicles of Foreign Lands], Fujian: s.n. 1623.

¹¹ Pasquale M. D’Elia, *Galileo in China: Relations Through the Roman College Between Galileo and the Jesuit Scientist-Missionaries (1610–1640)*, trans. Rufus Suter, Matthew Sciascia, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1960, p. 53.

[A Historical-Geographical Description of the City of Beijing, More Interesting Than Other Editions],¹² originally authored by a German geographer Johann Gotthelf von Stritter (1740–1801). This treatise presents a detailed description of such domains as the philosophy, religion, history, politics, society, economy and art of China.

Moreover, studies were conducted on the Chinese language and the Chinese natural environment, thus shaping the style of contemporary sinological studies. In the second half of the 19th century, the Poles extended their research on the history of China, taking a more systematic approach. For instance, Czesław Pieniążek (1844–1917) and Adolf Spamer (1883–1953) wrote together a book entitled *Illustrowana historia starożytna. T. 1, Od czasów najdawniejszych aż do zawiązków historii greckiej* [Illustrated Ancient History. Vol. 1, From the Most Ancient Times to Early Beginnings of the Greek History],¹³ which described the history of China up to the 5th century. In the field of social and political studies, Polish author Józef Kenig (1821–1900) published in 1896 the work *Sprawa chińsko-japońska i dwa odczyty* [The Chinese-Japanese Issue and Two Lectures],¹⁴ describing the beginning and the outcome of the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). Whereas Władysław Michał Dębicki (1853–1911) in his book *Przyszłość Chin: groźne wnioski z przesłanek lekceważonych* [The Future of China: Fearsome Conclusions from Neglected Premises],¹⁵ departing from a comparison of the power of China and other countries, presents an analysis of the international situation of China as well as the chances and challenges that the Middle Kingdom was facing.

In that period, the Poles began to translate classic Taoist texts, thereby opening the door to a better knowledge of the ancient Chinese civilisation. In 1784, Grzegorz Zachariasiewicz (1740–1814) translated from French *Krótki zbiór starożytnych moralistów* [A Short Collection of Ancient Moralists].¹⁶ The second volume of that work – *Myśli moralne Konfucjusza* [Confucius' Moral Thoughts] and the third volume – *Myśli moralne różnych filozofów chińskich* [Moral Thoughts of Various Chinese Philosophers] constitute examples of the first comprehensive studies of the ancient Chinese philosophy conducted by Polish scholars. Descriptions included in the book present mostly the essential features of Chinese philosophical thought, as well as Confucius' life and his idea of morality, and they are accompanied by 329 translations and interpretations of quotes. The work discusses three main religious-philosophical

¹² Johann Gotthelf von Stritter, *Historyczno-geograficzne opisanie miasta Pekinu ciekawsze od innych edycji*, trans. Ignacy Manugiewicz, Warsaw: Drukarnia Nadworna Jego Królewskiej Mości i Komisji Edukacji Narodowej 1787.

¹³ Czesław Pieniążek, Adolf Spamer, *Illustrowana historia starożytna. T. 1, Od czasów najdawniejszych aż do zawiązków historii greckiej*, Vienna: F. Bondy [1894].

¹⁴ Józef Kenig, *Sprawa chińsko-japońska i dwa odczyty*, Warsaw: S. Lewental 1896.

¹⁵ Władysław Michał Dębicki, *Przyszłość Chin: groźne wnioski z przesłanek lekceważonych*, Warsaw: Gebethner i Wolff 1898.

¹⁶ *Krótki zbiór starożytnych moralistów*, trans. Grzegorz Zachariasiewicz, Łowicz: Drukarnia Prymasa 1784.

currents in China, that is: Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, therefore, we can assume that it provides a basic insight into ancient Chinese philosophy.

In the 1890s in Poland, Chinese literary works began to be translated from the original. The first titles offered to the readers were Chen Jitong's novels published in 1891 and 1892: *Romans żółtego człowieka, osnuty na tle chińskich obyczajów* [A Romance of a Yellow Man, Set Against the Background of Chinese Customs]¹⁷ and *Nowelle z życia Chińczyków* (*The Chinese Painted by Themselves*).¹⁸ Today, there is no possibility of finding information about the Polish translators. On the yellowed title page, we only see the note: *tlómaczenie z francuskiego* ("translation from French"). The publisher's foreword to *Nowelle z życia Chińczyków* presents the initial motivation for translating Chinese literary works into Polish:

About China and the Chinese, we know in general very little; only what the scanty travel accounts explain to us – and even those were merely travels along the shores, because foreigners are forbidden to make inland journeys. Recent wars, especially the victories of the French, have slightly lifted that mysterious veil – yet it was only general Chen Jitong, until recently a Chinese ambassador in Paris, who by an entire series of short stories and literary pictures shed some light on the local customs, private life, traditions and literature of that nation.

We believe, therefore, that by offering to our readers a small collection of stories in Polish translation, we will provide them with pleasant entertainment and, in some part, also with learning, because the above-mentioned work by the Chinese author unveils to some degree the mystery of the internal social system in the Celestial Empire.¹⁹

Chen Jitong, a diplomat, translator and Chinese author writing in French, was sur-named "The First One Who Presented the Western Knowledge in the East". He played a crucial role in the cultural exchange between the East and the West in those times, particularly in terms of spreading the traditional Chinese culture outside of China. *Le roman de l'homme jaune* (French edition of *Romans żółtego człowieka*, based on 霍小玉传 [The Legend of Huo Xiaoyu]) was the first Chinese novel written in a Western language.²⁰ Published in Paris in November 1890 by the Charpentier publishing house, it tells the story of a tragic love between Li Yi and Xiaoyu. It became popular among the French and helped Chen Jitong gain a reputation in the French literary milieu. As for *Nowelle z życia Chińczyków*, the French version (*Contes chinois*) is a translation of the Chinese 聊斋志异 [Strange Tales from A Chinese Studio] by Pu Songling (蒲松龄) and constitutes the most important literary translation by Chen Jitong.²¹ The first Polish

¹⁷ Czeng-Ki-Tong [Chen Jitong], *Romans żółtego człowieka, osnuty na tle chińskich obyczajów*, trans. s.n., Warsaw: Noskowski 1891.

¹⁸ Idem, *Nowelle z życia Chińczyków*, trans. s.n., Warsaw: T.H. Nasierowski 1892. English edition: Tcheng-Ki-Tong [Chen Jitong], *The Chinese Painted by Themselves*, trans. James Millington, London: Field & Tuer, The Leadenhall Press [1885?].

¹⁹ Idem, *Nowelle*, pp. V–VI.

²⁰ Idem, *Le roman de l'homme jaune*, Paris: Charpentier 1890.

²¹ Idem, *Contes chinois*, Paris: Calmann Lévy 1889.

translations of this author's French works reflect certain tendencies among 19th-century Polish translators. They often took interest in books written in foreign languages by Chinese (or Chinese-American) authors, who depicted Chinese history, society, culture and presented scenes from everyday life in China, thus satisfying the Polish readers' imagination, avid for details about the Far East countries.

In this period, the Poles acquired knowledge about China also from literary fiction written by Western authors. In 1869, Joanna Belejowska (1820–1904) translated *Przygody Amerykanina w Chinach* [The Adventures of an American in China], a novel by Émile Souvestre²² telling the story of an American called Walter Effendon, who traveled thousands of miles in China in search of his daughter. The book contains many descriptions of China and Chinese customs, including the geographical location and urban functions of Guangzhou, the residences and courts of Chinese officials as well as traditional Chinese gardens. Various aspects have been considered, such as poetry, opera performances, culinary culture, funeral traditions, imperial examinations, means of transport and many others. The novel reconstructs a vivid image of the streets of Beijing and the scenery of imperial gardens – the Old Summer Palace.

In the Age of Enlightenment, during the reign of King Stanisław II August Poniatowski, the Far Eastern culture also had an enormous influence on Polish writers, such as, for instance, Ignacy Krasicki (1735–1801), who included in his works inspirations drawn from Chinese themes. In his novel *Mikołaja Doświadczynskiego przypadki* (*The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*), elements of Confucian thought are woven into the teachings of a fictitious great master Xaoo of the island of Nipu.²³ In Krasicki's satire *Żona moda* [The Fashionable Wife], one of the signals of Chinese influence is "the Chinese honey ginger", a necessary treat among the heroine's exotic specialties.²⁴ In the 20th century, in the works by Stefan Żeromski, we can observe social and custom-related mentions of China. In *Ludzie bezdomni* (*The Homeless*), Joanna Podborska, one of the heroines and the narrator of confessions from the chapter "Confidential", refers to customs in the times of the Qing dynasty when she characterizes her aunt with a surprising comparison: "Poor Teczka sits in Mękarzyce and waits. All her being calls to mind the foot of a Chinese girl, molded in a wooden form from childhood".²⁵ Binding

²² Émile Souvestre, *Przygody Amerykanina w Chinach*, in: idem, *Im więcej komu dano, tem z większego rachunku słuchanym będzie*, Biblioteka dla Młodocianego Wieku, ser. I, vol. II, trans. Joanna Belejowska, Warsaw: Gebethner i Wolff 1869, pp. 37–103. This short novel was originally published in French as a book chapter: Émile Souvestre, "Le facteur de Canton", in: idem, *Pendant la moisson*, Paris: Michel Lévy Frères 1859, pp. 117–180.

²³ Ignacy Krasicki, *Mikołaja Doświadczynskiego przypadki*, Warsaw: Michał Gröll 1776; English translation: idem, *The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*, trans. Thomas H. Hoisington, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1992.

²⁴ Ignacy Krasicki, *Żona moda*, <https://wolnelektury.pl/media/book/pdf/satyry-czesc-pierwsza-zona-modna.pdf> [accessed 13 June 2025].

²⁵ Stefan Żeromski, *The Homeless*, trans. Stephanie Kraft, intr. Jennifer Croft, Boris Darlyuk, Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books 2024, p. 174.

the feet of Chinese girls, especially those of aristocratic origin, was a ritualised testimony of beauty and attractiveness, but also an exceptionally cruel act against women, a blind subordination to the rules of patriarchy. Joanna Podborska, well-versed in the issues of equal rights and emancipation of women, knows about the cruel ritual, so these words sound authentic in her mouth, they are full of empathy for the women who cannot rebel against the ossified tradition.

Such mentions of China in various aspects, e.g., social, custom-related, philosophical, political, historical and geographical, can be found in Polish literature in great numbers. Indeed, this fact has already been discussed by Bogdan Mazan, for instance, in his article “Figury myśli i (anty)wzory. Motywy chińskie w *Przeglądzie Tygodniowym* 1871–1876” [Figures of Thought and (Anti)Models. Chinese Motifs in *Przegląd Tygodniowy* 1871–1876],²⁶ and Tadeusz Budrewicz in the article “Stereotypy Chin i Chińczyków w polskiej prasie satyrycznej drugiej połowy XIX wieku” [The Stereotypes of China and the Chinese in Polish Satirical Press of the Second Half of the 19th Century].²⁷ Since the subject matter of the present article is different, I merely refer to these researchers as a valuable bibliographical suggestion without analysing their reflections.

The historical fate of Poland as a reflection of the modern social reforms in China

Towards the end of the Qing dynasty, at the turn of the 20th century, Chinese politicians, diplomats and thinkers wrote books and theories through which they strived to present Poland and other “weak and small nations”²⁸ to the Chinese people. The historical fate of Poland became a reflection of the modern social reforms in China. Works such as 四洲志 [A Gazetteer of the Four Continents]²⁹ by Lin Zexu (林则徐), an eminent politician, thinker and poet of the end of the Qing dynasty, the treatise 海

²⁶ Bogdan Mazan, “Figury myśli i (anty)wzory. Motywy chińskie w *Przeglądzie Tygodniowym* 1871–1876”, in: *Pozytywiści warszawscy: „Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1866–1876. Seria 2: Świat, Europa, Polska*, ed. Anna Janicka, Białystok: Temida2 2020, pp. 105–124, <http://hdl.handle.net/11320/11006> [accessed 13 June 2025].

²⁷ Tadeusz Budrewicz, “Stereotypy Chin i Chińczyków w polskiej prasie satyrycznej drugiej połowy XIX wieku”, in: *Bez antypodów? Konfrontacje i zbliżenia kultur*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Fundacja Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2008, pp. 207–230.

²⁸ Lu Xun (鲁迅) was the first one in the history of Chinese literature who called Eastern European countries, such as Poland or Hungary, small and weak nations. He meant by this that those countries were continually invaded, occupied or partitioned by hostile nations.

²⁹ Lin Zexu, 四洲志 [A Gazetteer of the Four Continents], ed. Zhang Man (张曼), Beijing: Huaxia Press 2002.

国图志 [The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms]³⁰ by Wei Yuan (魏源), a famous philosopher, politician and Enlightenment writer of the Qing dynasty, and 瀛寰志略 [Brief Records of the World]³¹ by Xu Jiyu (徐继畲) who was proclaimed “the Galileo of the East”, familiarised Chinese readers with the history of other countries.

Providing the Chinese with new information about the world contributed to China’s better understanding of the West and accelerated the process of modernisation of Chinese society. The common feature of those books was the choice to present small and medium-sized countries and ethnic groups that were little known to the Chinese, including Poland.

In 1839, Lin Zexu went to Guangzhou as the emperor’s emissary in order to implement the prohibition of opium smoking and to destroy opium stocks. At that time, he studied the history and contemporary situation of Western countries and popularised *An Encyclopaedia of Geography*, written by a Scottish scholar Hugh Murray (1779–1846), by commending his workers and advisers to translate this work into Chinese. Lin Zexu refined the translation, edited the work and published it under the title 四洲志 [A Gazetteer of the Four Continents]. The translation briefly describes the geography, history and political situation of over thirty countries on four continents of the world. At that time in China, it was the first systematised description of the geography of the world and it played an important role in the pioneering modern history. The book is divided into thirty-five chapters, thirteen of which discuss various European countries. In comparison to other Central and Eastern European countries, Poland was presented in a separate chapter, which begins with the foundation of the Polish state and describes historical and dynastic transformations of Poland, in particular the consecutive partitions and the changes of Polish boundaries. The authorial translations of Polish names of localities and people differ a lot from today’s versions. For instance, the word *Waxiao* (洼肖) meant Warsaw, *Genaou* (格那耦) stood for Kraków and *Chazhe’erlun* (查遮尔伦) referred to the Grand Duke of Lithuania Jagiełło. In the course of the translation work, the author did not verify the dates from the history of Poland, which resulted in some mistakes. In the *Gazetteer of the Four Continents*, it is stated that “in the year 990 after the birth of Jesus Christ (the first year of the reign of Taizong (太宗) Emperor of the Song dynasty), Mieszko I established a kingdom with the capital city in Warsaw”.³² Historians, as is generally known, date the foundation of the State of Polans at 966 and, of course, the capital city was Gniezno. Yet those several mistakes do not diminish the worth of the work as a whole. The general description of the history, geographical conditions, ethnic groups and religions in Poland in the *Gazetteer of the*

³⁰ Wei Yuan (魏源), 海国图志 [The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms], Changsha: Yuelu Publishing House 2011.

³¹ Xu Jiyu (徐继畲), 瀛寰志略 [Brief Records of the World], Fujian: s.n. 1848.

³² Lin Zexu, 四洲志 [A Gazetteer of the Four Continents], pp. 95–96 (in the entire article, quotations from Chinese sources had been first translated into Polish by Yi Linan).

Four Continents is definitely correct and it constituted a valuable source of knowledge about Poland for the Chinese.

The author of *The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*, Wei Yuan, advocated the adoption of advanced Western technologies to be able to oppose the invasion of the most powerful Western states. This initiated in China a new model of acquiring knowledge about the world and learning from the West. Wei Yuan's work was published in 1842 and it was inspired by the *Gazetteer of the Four Continents*. Additionally, the author made use of new information and source materials, but also included his essays, thus creating a compilation that treated historical, political, ethnographical and culture-related issues. At that time, it was the most precise presentation of the science, technology and historical geography of Western countries. Two chapters were dedicated to Poland: "The Polish State" and "The Changes Taking Place in Poland". The 'Discord of Five Dukes' that is mentioned there refers to the fragmentation of the realm of Poland between 1138 and 1320. The history of the three partitions of Poland is also described, with the following words of warning: "people died in uprisings, but even ten fights did not suffice to overthrow the reign of the Russian occupant",³³ which refers to the November Uprising in the years 1830–1831, a national liberation upsurge of Poles against the rule of Tsarist Russia.

In 1848, the General Office of Fujian (福建) Province published for the first time Xu Jiyu's work 瀛寰志略 [Brief Records of the World]. The work is divided into ten volumes in six collections with 44 illustrations. The detailed descriptions of regions of all continents, human races, populations, ongoing transformations, architecture, local products, everyday life, customs, religions, the beginnings and the declines of various nations, as well as comparisons with other countries, became for the Chinese a window to the Western world. The *Brief Records* do not include a separate chapter dedicated to Poland. Information on this subject is contained in the chapter "European Russian State", which tells the history of the Polish-Lithuanian union and describes Poland's unique natural geography and its rich resources. At that time, the Chinese name for the Polish Mazovia was *Masuoweiya* (马索维亚), Kraków was referred to as *Jialageweya* (加拉哥维亚), Kalisz as *Jialisi* (加利斯), Lublin as *Lubolin* (鲁伯林), Płock as *Boluoge* (波罗咯), and Podlachia as *Bodalageiya* (波达拉给亚). Also, in the chapters entitled "European Austrian State" and "European Prussian State", there are descriptions of Poland under the Austrian and Prussian partitions.

A Gazetteer of the Four Continents describes the first partition of Poland executed by Russia, Prussia and Austria. *The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*, in turn, pays particular attention to the influence that the Polish feudal separatism, lasting from the 12th to the 14th centuries, exerted on future generations; it also mentions the November Uprising against the Russian occupant. Whereas the *Brief Records of the World* tell the story of the Polish-Lithuanian union. Chinese politicians, diplomats and scholars were from the very beginning particularly interested in this type of events

³³ Wei Yuan (魏源), 海国图志 [The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms], p. 1347.

from the history of Poland. They served as a warning for the politicians reforming the late Qing dynasty and encouraged them to make efforts to remedy the empire.

Kang Youwei (康有为, 1858–1927) was an important politician, thinker, pedagogue and a representative of bourgeois reformism in the late Qing dynasty in China. His book 波兰分灭记 [Record of the Partition and Destruction of Poland], based to a large extent on the history of Poland and submitted to the emperor in 1898, was

an important work [...] in the late period of Hundred Days' Reform, aimed to repulse the counter-attack of the conservative faction, which moved the emperor Guangxu (光绪) to take the decision to "hold fast to the chosen path" and actively promote the new politics.³⁴

The book is composed of seven volumes following the chronological order. It introduces historical events, like for example the fact that in the 18th century, during the reign of King Stanisław II August Poniatowski, reforms in Poland were blocked by influential aristocrats and conservative nobles, which led to the partitions of the country by neighbouring political powers – Russia, Prussia and Austria, and resulted in the downfall of Poland. The author of the *Record of the Partition and Destruction of Poland*, by referring to those events and applying a rhetoric of fear, tries to convince the emperor Guangxu to implement reforms and new politics that will save and strengthen the country. In the introduction, Kang Youwei clearly highlighted the importance of the sovereignty of a strong country:

When a country makes no attempt to compete with others, it is digging its own grave. For what a country is that?! Based on the partitions and the downfall of Poland, we know that a country cannot exist without sovereignty.³⁵

Kang Youwei recorded the historical fact that the king of Poland depended at first on Russia's support to ascend to the throne, but later found himself under the pressure of the Russian government. At the beginning, the petty and middle nobles were in favour of the reforms, but "their monarch and aristocratic ministers, who questioned the reforms' rightness, opposed them fiercely".³⁶ Later, even though the king and aristocrats changed their attitude and tried to save the country through reforms, it was too late. Kang Youwei compared this fact to contemporary Russia's control over Northeast China, resulting from the railway construction at that time, and with a bitter sigh, he stated: "In my opinion, there is no hope for Poland anymore!". He also underlined that those who hindered the reforms "contributed to the partitions of Poland", therefore he "sheds tears and sighs each time when he analyses Poland's situation for the purpose

³⁴ Kong Xiangji (孔祥吉), 从《波兰分灭记》看康有为戊戌变法时期的政治主张 [Kang Youwei's Political Ideas in the Time of Reform Movement in 1898, as Reflected in the *Record of the Destruction of Poland*], *The Journal of Humanities* (人文杂志), 28 November 1982, p. 84.

³⁵ Kang Youwei, (康有为), 康有为全集 [Kang Youwei's Collected Works], eds. Jiang Yihua (姜义华), Zhang Ronghua (张荣华), Beijing: People's University Press 2007, p. 395.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 396.

of preparing a general overview and a record of his own observations”.³⁷ The history of Poland told by Kang Youwei inspired the emperor Guangxu’s empathy for that distant country that had collapsed. This persuaded him to some degree of the need for reforms and modernisation of the empire. The *Record of the Partition and Destruction of Poland* may be deemed as an essay that directly influenced the course of the contemporary history of China.

Before Kang Youwei presented the *Record of the Partition and Destruction of Poland* to the emperor Guangxu, Liang Qichao (梁启超) mentioned the tragic situation of Poland subjugated by Russia, in an article published on 29 August 1869 in the Shanghai journal 時務報 [Current Affairs]. In the late Qing dynasty, this was the first work in the academic world that studied the history of the downfall of Poland.

Later, Liang Qichao wrote in 1901 *A New Theory of a Country’s Destruction*, published in three parts in the issues number 85, 86 and 89 of the journal 清议报 [Chinese Discourse]. In the article, he included the history of the downfall of Poland, which he perceived as a typical example of “instigation of a civil war for the purpose of destroying a country”.³⁸

Both imperial reformers who analysed the reasons of Poland’s downfall indicated the need to implement quick and effective reforms, and, by use of analogy to Poland, they demonstrated that if China did not undertake remedial actions, it would fall just as Poland did. From then on, the allegory of the suffering, subjugated Poland served as a historical argument in favour of the reform of the empire, especially in the situation of foreign political powers exerting their influence in China and the urgent need for changes.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a Chinese translation of *The History of Poland’s Demise* (Jap. *Pōrando suibō senshi*)³⁹ written by a Japanese scholar Shibue Tamotsu was a turning point in recording the history of that country. According to the latest research, there are at least three Chinese translations of that work: the first one was published in 1901 by Central Compilation and Translation Press (译书汇编社), the second one, authored by Chen Danran (陈澹然), was published in 1902 by Jiangxi Official Press (江西官报社), the third one, authored by Xue Gongxia (薛公侠), was published in 1904 by Jingjin Press in Shanghai (上海镜今书局). The original work was completed in 1895 and consisted of two parts. Shibue Tamotsu listed the following reasons for Poland’s downfall: firstly, “disadvantages of public elections of the monarch”, referring to the Polish system of free elections, which strengthened the Polish nobility and resulted in the fragmentation of the nation. Secondly, “the disaster provoked by the intervention of a foreign state”, above all, Russia’s intervention in the

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 398.

³⁸ Zou Zhenhuan (邹振环), 晚清波兰亡国史书写的演变系谱 [The Evolutions of Describing the History Poland’s Downfall in the Late Qing Period], *Journal of PLA Nanjing Institute of Politics* (南京政治学院学报), 2016, 4(32), p. 84.

³⁹ Shibue Tamotsu, *Pōrando suibō senshi* [The History of Poland’s Demise], Tokyo: Hakubunkan 1895.

matters of the Polish parliament. Thirdly, “prohibition on citizens’ decision-making in political matters”, which refers to the limitations of the Polish “Nobles’ Democracy”. Not only was *The History of Poland’s Demise* translated and published in China three times, but it also became a major topic in many progressive journals and magazines. Ding Chao’s research demonstrates that just in the first few years at the beginning of the 20th century, several articles on this subject appeared in the press. These include, inter alia: 波兰国的故事 [A History of the Polish State] from 1901, published in issues number 1, 2 and 3 of 杭州白话报 [The Review of Hangzhou Colloquial Speech]; the article 波兰灭亡始末记 [The Beginning and the End of Poland’s Demise] printed in issues number 15 and 16 of the journal 经济丛编 [Economic Series]; the article 波兰亡国之由 [The Origin of the Downfall of Poland] published in 1903 in issue number 27 of 外交报 [Foreign Affairs Magazine]; and an article in several parts entitled 讲俄国和普奥两国瓜分波兰的事 [Discussing Poland’s Partition by Russia, Prussia and Austria] published in issues number 44, 49, 50, 52, 54, 56 of 俄事警闻 [Warnings Regarding Russia] in 1904.⁴⁰

At the beginning of the 20th century, the subject of Poland, which played an important role in the studies of a country’s downfall, penetrated into literature. An example of such inspiration was a new Beijing opera 瓜种兰因 [The Causes of Poland’s Partition] from 1904, written by Wang Xiaonong (汪笑侬), an esteemed authority in the matters of opera stage at that time. Most of the scripts he created or adapted were based on historical events with allusions to contemporary times in the form of anecdotes speaking of past times, but reflecting the direction of contemporary politics. The opera script, based above all on Shibue Tamotsu’s *The History of Poland’s Demise* in Xue Gongxia’s translation, tells the history of the partitions of Poland, which is in fact a metaphorical representation of the fate of China and a warning for the Chinese, inscribed in the analysis of the causes of that European country’s downfall. In contrast to previous works discussing the subject of Poland’s demise, Wang Xiaonong’s opera redefined the role of foreign political powers in the loss of the liberty of the Polish nation. This opera, staged in 1904 in Shanghai, presents a fictitious partition of Poland by Turkey. It became the most discussed and appreciated new-style opera in the first decade of the 20th century. Turkey is presented there as the principal agent of the partitions of Poland, whereas other texts perceived the intervention of Russian forces, the limitations of the Nobles’ Democracy and the ruling class’s reluctance to reform as the main causes of the partitions. The difference between *The Causes of Poland’s Partition* and other works on that subject consists in the fact that, in the previous texts, Liang Qichao and other authors underlined that the downfall of the Polish Commonwealth resulted mainly from the Russian intervention and the lack of influence of average people on the politics, with Turkey presented rather as an ally in the resistance against Russia. Wang Xiaonong was perfectly aware that the Russian-Japanese war, fought at that time

⁴⁰ Ding Chao, Song Binghui, 中外文学交流史: 中国—中东欧卷 [China and Central and Eastern Europe: A History of Literary Contacts], p. 182.

in Northeast China, was a forerunner of severe attacks that the Middle Kingdom would suffer from some political superpowers. The role of Japan back then was similar to the role of Turkey in *The Causes of Poland's Partition*. We can thus assume that Wang Xiaonong intentionally tried to warn the Chinese by means of obliterated or fabricated historical facts. Therefore, it is worth highlighting that towards the end of the Qing dynasty, Poland functioned as a topos of a sinking ship, which had a persuasive, but also appellative function in journalistic texts and historical essays – it warned against the possibility of the Chinese Empire's demise.

The cultural dialogue between Poland and China, which is the subject of the present article, dates back to the Mongol invasion of Europe in the 13th century and is linked in its beginnings to the activity of the missionary Benedict of Poland. The contact with Mongols during the invasions, just as later with the Turks, gave the Poles an idea of the hitherto unknown power of the Eastern countries and nations. Those invasions were not only recorded in the chronicles, but also represented in iconography and in many legends that have been transferred in Poland from generation to generation to this day. The death of Silesian Duke Henry II the Pious on the battlefield of Legnica in 1241 turned the ruler into a martyr of faith, thus laying the foundations for the first important national myth – Poland as the bulwark of Christendom. A particularly significant place in this process of intercultural communication should be attributed to the Jesuit Michał Boym, to his fascination with learning about the life, customs, flora, fauna and medicine of China, as well as his sense of research and substantive scholarly preparation.

Chinese researchers, historians, essayists and reformers drew from the history of Poland a rhetorical argument in the form of an allegory warning against the downfall of the country. It was extremely important for the process of reform implementation at the end of the Qing dynasty, when the empire was subject to influence from Western political powers – Great Britain or France. The analogy between the situation of China and the downfall and destruction of Poland, eagerly used by the journalists, had therefore an enormous persuasive potential – it was a living admonition and an evocative illustration warning against what could happen in China. No doubt all those contacts – related to Mongol invasions of Poland, the activity of missionaries, historians, journalists, translators and writers – created solid foundations for today's relationships and for the mutual understanding of historical processes in both countries. Those early attempts to get to know each other's cultures, to become familiarised with one another, e.g., by drawing information (as Chinese historians did) or transferring knowledge (as the missionaries coming to China did), despite the mistakes and certain simplifications, had a significant impact on the contemporary cultural dialogue between Poland and China.

References

Chinese sources

- Aleni Giulio, 职方外纪 [Chronicles of Foreign Lands], Fujian: s.n. 1623.
- Chen Jitong (陈季同), *The Chinese Painted by Themselves*, trans. James Millington, London: Field & Tuer, The Leadenhall Press [1885?].
- Czeng-Ki-Tong [Chen Jitong] (陈季同), *Nowelle z życia Chińczyków*, trans. s.n., Warsaw: T.H. Nasierowski 1892.
- Czeng-Ki-Tong [Chen Jitong] (陈季同), *Romans złotego człowieka, osnuty na tle chińskich obyczajów*, trans. s.n., Warsaw: Noskowski 1891.
- Ding Chao (丁超), Song Binghui (宋炳辉), 中外文学交流史: 中国—中东欧卷 [China and Central and Eastern Europe: A History of Literary Contacts], Jinan: Shandong Education Press 2014.
- Kang Youwei (康有为), 康有为全集 [Kang Youwei's Collected Works], eds. Jiang Yihua (姜义华), Zhang Ronghua (张荣华), Beijing: People's University Press 2007.
- Kong Xiangji (孔祥吉), 从《波兰分灭记》看康有为戊戌变法时期的政治主张 [Kang Youwei's Political Ideas in the Time of Reform Movement in 1898, as Reflected in the *Record of the Destruction of Poland*], *The Journal of Humanities* (人文杂志), 28 November 1982, pp. 80–84.
- Lin Zexu (林则徐), 四洲志 [A Gazetteer of the Four Continents], ed. Zhang Man (张曼), Beijing: Huaxia Press 2002.
- Wei Yuan (魏源), 海国图志 [The Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms], Changsha: Yuelu Publishing House 2011.
- Xu Jiyu (徐继畲), 瀛寰志略 [Brief Records of the World], Fujian: s.n. 1848.
- Zou Zhenhuan (邹振环), 晚清波兰亡国史书写的演变系谱 [The Evolutions of Describing the History Poland's Downfall in the Late Qing Period], *Journal of PLA Nanjing Institute of Politics* (南京政治学院学报), 2016, 4(32), pp. 81–91.

Polish sources

- de Andrade António, *Tybet wielkie państwo w Azyey*, trans. Fryderyk Szembek, Kraków: Drukarnia Franciszka Cezarego 1628.
- Budrewicz Tadeusz, "Stereotypy Chin i Chińczyków w polskiej prasie satyrycznej drugiej połowy XIX wieku", in: *Bez antypodów? Konfrontacje i zbliżenia kultur*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Fundacja Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2008, pp. 207–230.
- Dębicki Władysław Michał, *Przyszłość Chin: groźne wnioski z przesłanek lekceważonych*, Warsaw: Gebethner i Wolff 1898.
- Długosz Jan, *The Annals of Jan Długosz: An English Abridgement*, trans. Maurice Michael, Chichester: IM Publications 1997.
- Kenig Józef, *Sprawa chińsko-japońska i dwa odczyty*, Warsaw: S. Lewental 1896.
- Krasicki Ignacy, *Mikołaja Doświadczyńskiego przypadki*, Warsaw: Michał Gröll 1776.
- Krasicki Ignacy, *Żona modna*, <https://wolnelektury.pl/media/book/pdf/satyry-czesc-pierwsza-zona-modna.pdf> [accessed 13 June 2025].
- Krótki zbiór starożytnych moralistów*, trans. Grzegorz Zachariasiewicz, Łowicz: Drukarnia Prymasa 1784.

- Mazan Bogdan, "Figury myśli i (anty)wzory. Motywy chińskie w *Przeglądzie Tygodniowym* 1871–1876", in: *Pozytywiści warszawscy: „Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1866–1876. Seria 2: Świat, Europa, Polska*, ed. Anna Janicka, Białystok: Temida2 2020, pp. 105–124, <http://hdl.handle.net/11320/11006> [accessed 13 June 2025].
- Oliphant Laurence, *Poselstwo lorda Elgin do Chin i Japonii w latach 1857*, 58, 59, trans. Adela Karolina Malletska, Warsaw: Aleksander Nowolecki 1862.
- Pawlicki Józef, *Wiadomość o życiu i śmierci Jana Gabryela Perboara, kapłana Zgromadzenia XX Lazarystów, umęczonego w Chinach d. 11 września 1840 r.*, Warsaw: Drukarnia Księży Misjonarzy u Ś. Krzyża 1852.
- Pieniążek Czesław, Spamer Adolf, *Illustrowana historia starożytna. T. 1, Od czasów najdawniejszych aż do zawiązków historii greckiej*, Vienna: F. Bondy [1894].
- Ricci Matteo, Rodrigues João, *Nowiny abo dzieje dwvletnie z Iaponu y z Chiny, krain poganskich, Nowego Świata*, trans. Szymon Wysocki, Kraków: Jan Scharffenberger 1611.
- Robiński Adam, "Michał Boym – pierwszy polski sinolog, ambasador Chin", *Rzeczpospolita* 17/02/2012, <https://www.rp.pl/kultura/art6253631-michal-boym-pierwszy-polski-sinolog-ambasador-chin> [accessed 13 June 2025].
- Souvestre Émile, *Przygody Amerykanina w Chinach*, in: idem, *Im więcej komu dano, tem z większego rachunku słuchanym będzie*, Biblioteka dla Młodocianego Wieku, ser. I, vol. II, trans. Joanna Belejewska, Warsaw: Gebethner i Wolff 1869, pp. 37–103.
- Staunton George Leonard, *Podroz lorda Makartney posła W. Brytanii do Chin w roku 1792, 1793 i 1794 zawieraięca wiadomosc o kraiu, rzadzie i narodzie chińskim, tudzież o części Tartaryi chinskiej & c. Cz. 2*, trans. Roman Markiewicz, Kraków: Drukarnia Jana Maya 1801.
- von Stritter Johann Gotthelf, *Historyczno-geograficzne opisanie miasta Pekinu ciekawsze od innych edycyi*, trans. Ignacy Manugiewicz, Warsaw: Drukarnia Nadworna Jego Królewskiej Mości i Komisji Edukacji Narodowej 1787.

English sources

- D'Elia Pasquale M., *Galileo in China: Relations Through the Roman College Between Galileo and the Jesuit Scientist-Missionaries (1610–1640)*, trans. Rufus Suter, Matthew Sciascia, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1960.
- Krasicki Ignacy, *The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*, trans. Thomas H. Hoisington, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1992.
- Oliphant Laurence, *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's mission to China and Japan in the years 1857, '58, '59*, New York: Harper and Brothers 1860.
- Staunton George Leonard, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China; Including Cursory Observations Made, and Information Obtained, in Traveling Through that Ancient Empire and a Small Part of Chinese Tartary*, London: G. Nicol 1797.
- Żeromski Stefan, *The Homeless*, trans. Stephanie Kraft, intr. Jennifer Croft, Boris Darlyuk, Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books 2024.

Other sources

Boym Michał, *Flora sinensis*, Viennae Austriae: typis Matthaei Rictij 1656.

Boym Michał, *Specimen medicinae Sinicae*, ed. Andreas Cleyer, Frankfurt: J.P. Zubrodt 1682.

Shibue Tamotsu, *Pōrando suibō senshi* [The History of Poland's Demise], Tokyo: Hakubunkan 1895.

Souvestre Émile, "Le facteur de Canton", in: idem, *Pendant la moisson*, Paris: Michel Lévy Frères 1859, pp. 117–180.

Tcheng-Ki-Tong [Chen Jitong], *Contes chinois*, Paris: Calmann Lévy 1889.

Tcheng-Ki-Tong [Chen Jitong], *Le roman de l'homme jaune*, Paris: Charpentier 1890.

Mickiewicz, a Poet of Vengeance or a Preacher of Forgiveness? In Search of a “Third Way” of Intercultural Translation on the Example of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Zdania i uwagi*¹

Tingting Zhang

University of Warsaw, Poland

e-mail: cebulkapekin@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-4080-7082

Abstract

The literature of Polish Romanticism, which Marta Piwińska called “a Renaissance of Christianity”, from the beginning of its presence in China has had a contrastingly different reception from that of Polish readers. This article offers a reading of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Zdania i uwagi. Z dzieł Jakuba Bema, Aniola Ślqzaka (Angelus Silesius) i Sę-Martena* [Sentences and Remarks. From the Works of Jakob Böhme, Angelus Silesius and Saint-Martin], conducted to open up a space for reflection on a set of questions that are crucial to cross-cultural studies: Will cultural differences always impede intercultural translations and, in a similar manner, the reception of works originating from one tradition by readers from another? Is it possible to find a platform that would allow for a dialogue between an author rooted – often in a dialogical way – in the Christian Romantic tradition on the one hand and a reader brought up in the Confucian culture on the other? This article aims to propose an answer to these questions.

Keywords

Adam Mickiewicz, Saint Augustine, *Zdania i uwagi* [Sentences and Remarks], Christianity, Confucianism, intercultural translation

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: “Mickiewicz poetą mściwym czy nauczającym przebaczenia? W poszukiwaniu ‘trzeciej drogi’ przekładu interkulturowego na przykładzie *Zdań i uwag* Adama Mickiewicza”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 55–67, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.3>.

Over a hundred years ago, Lu Xun,² the father of contemporary Chinese language and the first promoter of Adam Mickiewicz's works in China, in his treatise entitled *On the Power of Mara Poetry*³ wrote the following passage:

In Mickiewicz [...] we already have explicit poetry of revenge. The key message of such poetry consists in saying that those who [...] suffered human injustice are allowed to resort to all kinds of measures if only the purpose is to resurrect or to defend their homeland. This is a sacred principle. [...] that for the aim of destroying enemies, all methods are allowed.⁴

The above quoted interpretation of the poet's work may surprise a Polish reader, since, as observed by Bernadetta Kuczera-Chachulska, a Polish scholar of Romanticism, forgiveness holds a priority place in the thought of the Polish poet, and "the question of conscience in Mickiewicz's works shall reveal itself as one of the most important – if not the most important? – issue of his writing".⁵

Although Lu Xun's interpretation of Mickiewicz developed on a specific historical-political ground and, therefore, bears a clear ideological mark, it provoked undesired consequences that hold fast to this day. Even though the Chinese have two translations of *Pan Tadeusz*⁶ and a translation of *Dziady (Forefathers' Eve)*,⁷ the reception of these works seems to be rather schematic, and sometimes even fossilised and restrictive.⁸

² Lu Xun (pseud.), in fact Zhou Shuren (周树人, 1881–1936) – a prominent writer, ideologist, considered the father of contemporary Chinese language and literature.

³ *On the Power of Mara Poetry* (摩罗诗力说, mó luó shī lì shuō) is a treatise written by Lu Xun in 1907, dedicated to European literatures. It is composed of nine chapters, the eighth of which describes the writings of "the Three Bards" of Polish Romanticism. As source material for my text, I only chose the chapter that is closely related to the topic discussed. The treatise is included in the collection entitled *The Tomb* (坟), containing twenty-three essays written by Lu Xun in the years 1907–1925.

⁴ Lu Xun (鲁迅), *摩罗诗力说* [On the Power of Mara Poetry], in: idem, 坟 [The Tomb], in: idem, 鲁迅全集 [Lu Xun. Complete Works], vol. I, eds. Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), Ma Yuzao (马裕藻), Shen Jianshi (沈兼士), Zhou Zuoren (沈兼士), Shanghai 1938, pp. 65–120 (quotations from Chinese sources had been first translated into Polish by Tingting Zhang, and then from Polish into English – trans. note).

An abridged English translation of the treatise can be found in: Lu Xun, "On the Power of Mara Poetry", trans. Shu-ying Tsau (应应哇), Donald Holoch, in: *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893–1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996, pp. 96–110, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503615830-011>.

⁵ See: Bernadetta Kuczera-Chachulska, "Między teologią a poezją. Przebaczenie u Mickiewicza", *Paedagogia Christiana* 2016, vol. 37, no. 1, p. 223.

⁶ There are two translations of *Pan Tadeusz* into Chinese. The first one, a prose translation from English executed by the eminent translator Sun Yonga (孙用, 1902–1983), was published in 1950. The second one, translated in verse directly from the original, was published as late as 1998, on the 200th anniversary of Adam Mickiewicz's birthday. The translation work was done by Professor Yi Lijun (伊丽君, 1934–2022), a graduate from the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw in 1950s.

⁷ *Dziady (Forefathers' Eve)* in the Chinese language, translated by Yi Lijun and Lin Hongliang, were published in 2015 by Sichuan Literature and Publishing House.

⁸ Such narrow interpretation e.g. of *Konrad Wallenrod*, in a way contradicting the authorial intention, was practiced already among the poet's contemporary. See: Maria Janion, *Życie pośmiertne*

Concurrently, for several decades, a growing fascination with Polish literature has been observed in China. There is an interest, *inter alia*, in the works of Adam Mickiewicz, who, owing to Lu Xun, is still perceived one-dimensionally as a prominent revolutionary poet. At the same time, some important features of his writing still remain unknown in China, while they could be particularly attractive to a contemporary Chinese reader, who is increasingly prone to seek answers to existential questions in literature.

In search of a “third way” of intercultural translation

Theoreticians of translation described various solutions applied in the translation practice. In the 20th century, there were basically two dominant schools of the theory of translation. The first one, aptly described by Lawrence Venuti, proposed the concept of “domestic inscription”. The advocates of this school contend that

the translator negotiates the linguistic and cultural differences of the source text by reducing them and supplying another set of differences drawn from the receiving situation to enable the translation to circulate there.⁹

As for the second school, whose eminent theoretician was Antoine Berman, it understands translation as pure experience of the foreign and proposes to retain maximum faithfulness to the original, even at the cost of making the text incomprehensible for the projected target reader.¹⁰

However, it seems that neither of the proposed solutions will meet the challenge faced by a translator who tries to present the works of Polish Romantics to Chinese readers. For we are dealing here with a different kind of translation problem. The principal poets of Polish Romanticism, called by Marta Piwińska “a renaissance of Christianity”,¹¹ often tried to convey in their works a message deeply rooted in the religious tradition (not always orthodoxically conceived, to be sure), which may be alien to a reader deprived of that vital cultural context. Christian tradition was the natural ground from which their works sprang. As for Lawrence Venuti’s method, which consists in replacing

Konrada Wallenroda, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1990; see also: Stefan Chwin, *Literatura a zdrada. Od „Konrada Wallenroda” do „Małej Apokalipsy”*, Kraków: Oficyna Literacka 1993; Ewa Hoffmann-Piotrowska, “Konrad Wallenrod. Zanegowana wolność”, *Tematy i Konteksty* 2023, vol. 18, no. 13, pp. 41–53.

⁹ Lawrence Venuti, “Translation, Community, Utopia”, in: idem, *Translation Changes Everything. Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge 2013, p. 11.

¹⁰ See: Antoine Berman, “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign”, trans. Lawrence Venuti, in: *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, London: Routledge 2000, p. 286.

¹¹ Marta Piwińska, “Bóg utracony i Bóg odnaleziony. Buntownicy i wyznawcy”, in: *Problemy polskiego romantyzmu*, vol. I, eds. Maria Żmigrodzka, Zofia Lewinówna, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1971, p. 253.

with domestic equivalents the notions and terms that appear in the original and that may be incomprehensible to target readers, it could paradoxically provoke greater misunderstandings in the reconstruction of the translated text's meaning. For instance, the seemingly corresponding terms, metaphors or symbols may harbour additional content, some unwanted domestic associations, which are being evoked, but they are not necessarily helpful – in extreme cases, they may even impede comprehension or alter the meaning of works translated from a different cultural tradition.

My aim in the present article is to share my reflection concerning the attempts I have been making to find an interpretative key that would make it possible to translate not only the content of the discussed work by Adam Mickiewicz, but also its values and message, for the readers educated and living in a non-Christian culture, namely the Chinese one. Moreover, I shall try to answer the question whether a third way is possible between the two translation methods proposed above, that is, between, on the one hand, simple replacing foreign notions with domestic equivalents in order to facilitate the target reader's comprehension, which carries the risk of losing the meaning of original notions in the foreign work, and, on the other hand, the attempt to remain as faithful as possible to the foreignness of the translated work at the cost of it being incomprehensible for the target readers.

I shall try to find an answer to the posed question on the example of a work presenting important Christian themes and messages, which may be difficult to translate into a different culture. Adam Mickiewicz's *Zdania i uwagi. Z dzieł Jakuba Bema, Aniola Ślęzaka (Angelus Silesius) i Sę-Martena* [Sentences and Remarks. From the Works of Jakob Böhme, Angelus Silesius and Saint-Martin] is no doubt such a work. Indeed, this poetic cycle bears the mark of the influence of prominent Christian thinkers, it is the result of profound spiritual reflections, a work that finishes the path of religious pursuit undertaken by a poet who eagerly read the Fathers of the Church¹² and great Christian thinkers, such as Saint Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Saints Thomas Aquinas¹³ or Thomas à Kempis. The poet constantly refers in his work to the transcending reality, to the Absolute, by which he conveys metaphysical reflections (and, as a result, a vision of the world and human being), the translation of which into a different culture requires a ground that would provide a similar set of philosophical and religious notions, allowing the target readers to assimilate the message of *Zdania i uwagi*.

Such ground, I believe, could be provided by Confucianism. The Confucian teaching, apart from strong insistence on the human and political matters, contains a clearly metaphysical dimension:

Confucianism [...] does not end with the material satisfaction of human needs, nor does it reject pursuing the spiritual Absolute. Although it holds a different conception of what can be counted as 'spiritual', Confucianism does not have a common sense of the ultimacy of a personal experience of

¹² See: Władysław Mickiewicz, *Żywot Adama Mickiewicza podług zebranych przez siebie materiałów oraz z własnych wspomnień*, vol. II, Poznań: Drukarnia Dziennika Poznańskiego 1892.

¹³ See: Piotr Chmielowski, "Filozoficzne poglądy Mickiewicza", *Przegląd Filozoficzny* 1897, fasc. 4.

the sacred and a personal commitment to the Ultimate. It is thus [...] a humanistic tradition manifesting spiritual longing [...] and leading to a religious destination that answers human ultimate concerns. [...] Confucianism is a kind of humanism that seeks sacredness in an ordinary yet disciplined life.¹⁴

The second very characteristic feature of Confucian doctrine (apart from the metaphysical one) points to the ethical dimension of human life. Confucianism, as many scholars contend, due to the exceptionally exposed place attributed to morality, can be deemed as an ethical tradition or even an ethical system. Prominent Western scholars also underlined the unique importance that Confucius and his disciple Mencius attached to upbringing that should lead to the realisation of virtues. This strong insistence on morality may prove particularly helpful (by law of analogy) in translating the Mickiewiczian cycle, which – as I shall try to demonstrate below – also has a strong moral accent.

Zdania i uwagi may prove attractive to Chinese readers also in terms of form. Mickiewicz's poetic cycle is, for the most part, composed of aphoristic couplets (or, less often, quatrains). This form feels familiar in the Chinese culture. The origins of aphoristic poems in China date back to the 11th century BC. In the *Book of Odes* (诗经),¹⁵ particularly important for the literature of the Middle Kingdom, compiled between the 11th and the 7th centuries BC, they already appear in their mature form. Aphoristic enunciation can also be encountered in the writings of ancient Chinese philosophers, who "were accustomed to express themselves in the form of aphorisms, apothegms".¹⁶ I assume, therefore, that the work of the Polish Romantic poet can be translated into Chinese with no detriment to the original's literary qualities. The conjunction of meditation and didacticism will not feel alien to Chinese readers, because, as noted by Feng Youlan, eminent historian of Chinese philosophy, "ethics [...] provided the spiritual basis in Chinese civilization",¹⁷ including literary works. Another helpful element in familiarising the readers with Mickiewicz's thought may be the analogy to the Confucian tradition, with its fundamental writing, the *Confucian Analects*, in which "each paragraph consists of only a few words, and there is hardly any connection between one paragraph and the next".¹⁸

At this point, we should add another methodological remark. Reflections that Mickiewicz included in his poetic cycle are the fruit of many years' maturation. They did not result from a sudden spiritual revolution or illumination, which we so gladly

¹⁴ Yao Xinzong, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 45.

¹⁵ The *Book of Odes* (诗经) is a compilation of Chinese poetry from the period between the 11th and the 7th centuries BC. It is composed of 305 poems. The original version of the book comprised 311 poems, but six of them have not been preserved and we only know their titles.

¹⁶ Feng Youlan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, New York: Macmillan 1958, p. 12.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 4. See also: Derk Bodde, "Dominant Ideas in the Formation of Chinese Culture", *Journal of American Oriental Society* 1942, vol. 62, no. 4, p. 293.

¹⁸ Feng Youlan, *A Short History*, p. 11.

attribute to Romantic heroes. Nor are they a consequence of the poet's intellectual deliberations and spiritual readings, but rather the effect of their profound and personal experience and assimilation. This is why they show unusual consistency and find confirmation in other spheres of the poet's creative biography. They encompass all dimensions of his activities, both in the cycle and in the letters which he wrote at that time. This consistency can also be seen later in the Paris lectures, which Mickiewicz held at Collège de France in the years 1840–1844. Therefore, I shall interpret Mickiewicz's gnomes both in the context of the poet's personal correspondence with friends from the years 1833–1836 (that is, from the time when he was working on the cycle) and in the light of his utterances from Paris lectures, which I treat as an auto-commentary or a testimony of reflections conveyed in an aphoristic form in *Zdania i uwagi*.

The morality of happiness

Researchers have noticed a strong moral-didactic accent of *Zdania i uwagi*. Such instruction was given by the poet himself, who seems to indicate the purpose of his work in a letter to his Parisian publisher, Januszkiewicz:

Szanowny Panie Eustachy.

Posyłam maksymy dla zbudowania ciebie i tomiku. Ostrzegam, że werset pod tytułem *Pax Domini* ma być drugim z porządku i iść po wersecie *Rzecz zaniedbana*, a zaś werset pod tytułem *Reszta prawd* ma być ostatni.¹⁹

Dear Mr. Eustachy.

I am sending you maxims to edify you and the collection. Please note that the verse entitled *Pax Domini* should be second in order and follow the verse *Rzecz zaniedbana* [A Neglected Thing], whereas the verse entitled *Reszta prawd* [The Rest of Truths] should be the last one.²⁰

The key phrase in this letter seems to be “dla zbudowania” (“to edify”). According to *Słownik języka Adama Mickiewicza* [Dictionary of Adam Mickiewicz's Language], in the poet's works, “zbudowanie” (‘edification’) means, inter alia, “raising to a higher moral level, perfectioning”.²¹ Thus, *Zdania i uwagi* were meant to be, in line with the author's intention, an edifying work, serving to raise the moral level of the reader.

¹⁹ Adam Mickiewicz, “Do Eustachego Januszkiewicza”, [Domont, beginning of Sept. 1836], in: idem, *Dzieła. Wydanie Rocznicowe 1798–1998*, eds. Zbigniew Jerzy Nowak, Maria Prussak, Zofia Stefanowska, Czesław Zgorzelski, vol. XV: *Listy. Część druga 1830–1841*, eds. Maria Dernałowicz, Elżbieta Jaworska, Marta Zielińska, Warsaw: Czytelnik 2003, p. 337.

²⁰ Quotations from Adam Mickiewicz's letters and *Zdania i uwagi* were translated into English by Blanka Domachowska for the purposes of this article (trans. note).

²¹ *Słownik języka Adama Mickiewicza*, vol. X, ed. Konrad Górski, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1980, p. 606.

Researchers followed this authorial guideline: “Mickiewicz – says Barbara Łazińska – concentrates not on theosophical questions, but on the ethical ones, which are close to everyone, giving instructions that can be put into practice”.²² However, if the first part of the researcher’s remark perfectly renders the poet’s spirit, the second part raises a doubt. “Instructions” – to use the author’s language – that Mickiewicz gives in his poetic cycle often seem impossible to realise in purely human practice. Moral perfectioning of man, and the poet’s anthropology in general, are strongly Christocentric, in the sense that in the poet’s thought “edification” of man comprehends in its essence an infinite possibility, transcending man’s earthly life only by a constant reference to Christ, as Alina Witkowska fittingly put it: “a man following Christ would become a proposal of permanent change, with indeed infinite perspective of self-perfectioning”.²³ If this is the case, then we can also conclude that moral perfectioning in life is not the ultimate goal in itself, but finds its justification in the transcendent, metaphysical reality, as the poet seems to be claiming himself already at the beginning of the cycle:

PAX DOMINI

Pokój jest przyszłym dobrem, przyszłym szczęściem mojem;
Nie chciałbym Boga, gdyby Bóg nie był pokojem.²⁴

PAX DOMINI

Peace is my future good, my future bliss;
I would not want God if God were not peace.

Interestingly, a moral-didactic work, by principle directed to the reader and written with a specified intention, begins with a couplet, in which the speaking persona makes an internal, almost intimate confession about who God is for him. It seems that precisely in this poem, the poet’s deep understanding of the spirit of the Gospel is revealed. Indeed, the moral message of the Gospel begins with the *Sermon on the Mount* – the *magna charta* of Christian morality²⁵ based on eight beatitudes, which contain the essence of the conception of happiness. Therefore, we should read this personal confession in *Pax Domini* as a romantic self-expression. It seems that the poet is trying to provoke by these means the metanoia of the reader by showing him a different perception of the high evangelical demands that are impossible to realise

²² Barbara Łazińska, “Mistycyzm i dydaktyzm *Zdań i uwag*”, in: *Mickiewicz mistyczny*, eds. Andrzej Fabianowski, Ewa Hoffmann-Piotrowska, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2005, p. 298.

²³ Alina Witkowska, *Mickiewicz. Słowo i czyn*, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1986, p. 103.

²⁴ Adam Mickiewicz, *Zdania i uwagi*, in: idem, *Dzieła. Wydanie Rocznicowe 1798–1998*, eds. Zbigniew Jerzy Nowak, Maria Prussak, Zofia Stefanowska, Czesław Zgorzelski, vol. I: *Wiersze*, ed. Czesław Zgorzelski, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1993, p. 379.

²⁵ Cf. for instance: John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html [accessed 1 July 2025].

on the purely human level – namely, they can be perceived as a guidepost leading to happiness. At the same time, by his subjective tone (“my”), far from any ambition of preaching *ex cathedra*, the poet seems to suggest that he will share his “instructions” not as someone who “assumes entirely the role of the teacher; teaches and preaches”,²⁶ nor as someone who “knows for certain and tries to impose on us that certain faith of his”,²⁷ but as someone who gives advice: “this is what I believe; if you want, my reader, we can set off together on a spiritual journey, and I will accompany you and guide you through this work of mine”.

The question of happiness is, in turn, no great concern for Confucius or his followers, nonetheless, the notions elaborated by Confucians may help assimilate concepts originating from other philosophical and religious traditions. We need to begin with some terminological remarks. Explaining the Confucian notions to Polish readers belongs to my method of practicing intercultural translation, so it may prove useful for the reflections developed in this article.

The fundamental concept for the Confucian worldview is *Dao* (道, dào), a word of such vast meaning that it would be difficult to render it with a single term in other languages. It could be translated as: doctrine, teaching, order or way. Yet each of these words has considerable limitations. In my work, I have decided to use the term “way”, mainly because it is easily accessible to readers brought up in Christian tradition, for whom this word has strong spiritual connotations. Such passages from the Bible are indeed very well-known: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord” (Is 55,8) or “Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths” (Ps 25,4).²⁸

Taken in general, the Confucian way has three constitutive elements, in other words, three ways which are concrete manifestations of the one Way. They are namely: the Way of Heaven, the Way of the Earth and the Way of Humans. The Way of Heaven plays the principal role.²⁹ A lot of space is dedicated to this issue in the *Confucian*

²⁶ Barbara Łazińska, “Mistycyzm i dydaktyzm”, p. 299.

²⁷ Adam Poprawa, Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, *Mickiewicz, czyli wszystko. Z Jarosławem Markiem Rymkiewiczem rozmawia Adam Poprawa*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Literackie OPEN 1999, p. 194.

²⁸ The Bible is quoted according to New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE), <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-Updated-Edition-NRSVue-Bible/> [accessed 2 July 2025].

²⁹ In my article, I will not try to resolve the question whether Heaven is a personal being in the Christian sense, because, in my opinion, this question is wrongly formulated, so it cannot be answered in a scientifically proper way. Neither Confucius, nor great Confucian thinkers reflected upon the definition of Heaven. We can informally make such comparison, but scientifically speaking, we should not impose on Confucian concepts a dimension drawn from a different (in this case – biblical) tradition. Such approach leads to the sin of confusing different orders, and whatever answer is given to an erroneous question, it has no scientific value. The fact that to this day there is no agreement among researchers regarding the essence of Heaven, was discussed by the above-quoted Yao Xinzhong, see: Yao Xinzhong, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, pp. 143–144.

Analects. According to the Confucian doctrine, Heaven endows man with virtues³⁰ and establishes moral principles.³¹ It is the supreme, ultimate sanction of human actions, which reveals itself both in the individual and political-social dimensions. In the individual dimension, according to Confucian doctrine, the agency of Heaven manifests itself by sending a noble, virtuous man, similar to Old Testament prophets, in order to remedy the universal moral corruption.³² Whereas in the political-social dimension, Heaven bestows its Mandate on the ruler,³³ which is comparable, though not entirely, to the anointing of kings in the Old Testament tradition. This Mandate can be revoked when the ruler begins to break moral principles established by Heaven. The Way of Heaven, therefore, means the Way of morality. And the Way of Humans “is essentially the way of moral life”,³⁴ “follow[ing] the Way of Heaven”.³⁵ When humans, both the ordinary people and the rulers, follow the Way of Heaven, that is, when they abide by the rules established by Heaven, then the reign of the ruler will endure, and the society and individuals will live in harmony and prosperity.

The aim of the above explanations, by necessity only cursory, was to outline certain common features of both traditions, the Christian and the Confucian: virtuous life is good for man, and moral principles are guideposts on the way leading to happiness. These traditions differ in their understanding of happiness. While in the reflections of Confucianists, men (the people and the rulers alike) experience already in this life the consequences of their moral or immoral conduct, the Christian tradition – and so also

³⁰ In deciding to render one of the fundamental Confucian notions, namely the concept of 德 (dé), with the word ‘virtue’, I applied the theory of “domestic inscription” presented at the beginning of the article, because the words figuring in dictionaries as corresponding in terms of meaning, comprise essentially different content. Confucius elaborated and organised a system of virtues that is different from the Christian one. There are eight of them (八德, bāde). Sinological tradition proposed various translations. The translations presented here are in part a contamination of traditional options and my own propositions: ren (仁, rén), usually translated as *humaneness*, *goodness* or *benevolence* in relation to people; yi (义, yì), *righteousness*, the accent being laid on behaviour; xiao (孝, xiào), which, contrary to traditional translations, I translate as *piety* or *filial virtue*; ci (慈, cí), *parent’s love for children*; xin (信, xìn) – again, in spite of traditional translation of this virtue as *honesty*, I would render it as *trustworthiness*, *being true to one’s word*; zhong (忠, zhōng) – *faithfulness*, *loyalty*; ti (梯, tī), *care*, which the elder siblings should show for the younger ones; and shu (恕, shù), a virtue semantically analogous to Christian forgiveness.

³¹ The Master said: “Heaven engendered the moral virtue [...]” (子曰: “天生德於予 [...]”), *Lunyu*, Book VII, Chapter 23). English translation is based on the Polish version: *Konfucjusz. Analekta*, trans. and ed. Katarzyna Pejda, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2018, p. 80.

³² Compare this passage from the *Analects*: “This world has long ago lost the way, so Heaven uses the Master as a wooden bell-clapper” („天下之無道也久矣, 天將以夫子為木鐸”, *Lunyu*, Book III, Chapter 24). English translation is based on Tingting Zhang’s translation into Polish.

³³ Mandate of Heaven (天命) could also be translated as “the calling of Heaven”. It may be understood, as Dawid Rogacz explains, as “Heaven’s vote of confidence offered to the ruler. This Mandate is bestowed each time to the emperor of the dynasty that begins its reign”. See: Dawid Rogacz, “Pojęcie Nieba (Tian) w filozofii konfucjańskiej”, *Przegląd Religioznawczy* 2015, no. 3(257), p. 172.

³⁴ Yao Xinzong, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, p. 154.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 148.

the author of *Zdania i uwagi* – directs human thought towards the reality transcending earthly life. And though it may seem that this difference constitutes an obstacle in assimilating Mickiewicz's collection by Chinese readers, perhaps precisely this is its strength. For a man of thought, who no longer struggles with material deficiency, who lives in a world that still deserves the Weberian qualification of "disenchanted"³⁶ and who seeks answers to existential questions in literature, Mickiewicz's cycle, by virtue of the metaphysical reflections it conveys and a different perception of happiness, could prove to be a very attractive proposal.

3. *Unde malum?*

Having considered the positive aspect of morality, Mickiewicz, following Saint Augustine, asks the essential question: *unde malum?*

SKĄD ZŁO?

Bóg jest dobrem: więc wszystko, na co duch narzeka,
Zło, śmierć i potępienie, pochodzą z człowieka.³⁷

WHENCE EVIL?

God is goodness: so all things that make the soul complain,
Evil, death and damnation, they all come from man.

"God is goodness" – with this strong statement, Mickiewicz, again in line with the saint Bishop of Hippo, who argued with the Manicheans, excluded the possibility of God creating any kind of evil. The statement is reinforced by the absolutising word "all". Did the Romantic poet mean to entirely encumber the human will and acts with evil? Could it be that Mickiewicz's Christocentric anthropology proposes such a pessimistic vision of man?³⁸ It seems that this couplet may be elucidated by another gnome from Mickiewicz's cycle:

CNOTA

Gdy pełniąc cnotę cierpisz trudy i kłopoty,
Jeszcześ nie jest cnotliwym, tylko szukasz cnoty.³⁹

³⁶ See, e.g.: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1930.

³⁷ Adam Mickiewicz, *Zdania i uwagi*, p. 385.

³⁸ In this poem, Mickiewicz's reflection on the causes of evil reveals strong influence of Saint Augustine. However, this issue would require detailed explanations. The great Bishop of Hippo treated this matter especially in *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 2,2,2 (PL 32;1345). Polish discussion thereof can be found in: Hanna Cholwińska, "Zagadnienie genezy zła w myśli świętego Augustyna", *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 1999, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 87–113.

³⁹ Adam Mickiewicz, *Zdania i uwagi*, p. 381.

VIRTUE

If your acts of virtue make you suffer dearly,
You are still not virtuous, but seeking it merely.

In the first line, the poet sketched the image of a man who clearly knows what virtue is, he even has a certain spiritual adherence to it, otherwise he would not act by it. The paradox is brought about by the word “seeking” from the second line. This word suggests that one can and should seek something to which one already internally adheres, and only the search for it will enable full realisation of that which one already knows and even, to some degree, possesses.

This internal adherence to virtues is called by Mickiewicz, in his Parisian *Wykład IX kursu IV* [IX Lecture of the IV Course], “God’s germ within us”.⁴⁰ This statement seems to show that, in the poet’s perception, virtues have their transcendental source in God himself (“God’s germ”), who bestowed them upon man in germinal form, as the bard put it. Man has to seek within himself this God’s germ, find it and cultivate it. It depends upon man, upon his “seeking”, as we read in the analysed poem “Cnota”, whether a beautiful tree of virtuousness will grow from this seed, or whether, as in the case of the gnome “*Skąd zło?*”, the seed will wither, and the man will indeed become the source of “all things that make the soul complain”.

Surprisingly similar anthropological thoughts can be found in the reflections of great Confucian thinkers. In their doctrines, good and evil are “terms for the moral character of an individual”,⁴¹ and the concept of evil is “a moral concept, designating a kind of moral situation in which the moral and physical activities of a human being are conducted in a wrong way”.⁴²

The teachings of Mencius, a disciple of Confucius, seem particularly helpful in conveying Mickiewicz’s thought. The eminent continuator of Master Kong’s philosophy was convinced that man is born naturally good, and evil appears as a deviation from this essential, primordial goodness. Mencius explained his teachings by means of concepts that may be particularly useful for intercultural translation of *Zdania i uwagi*. When trying to answer the question of why evil exists in man, Mencius refers to the concept of human nature (性, xìng), which he believes to be good. At the same time, he persuades that this primordial, innate goodness exists in man only in the form of germs, which is shockingly evocative of Mickiewicz’s “God’s germ within us”. Such germinal goodness is extremely fragile and vulnerable to all destructive influences from the outside, so it demands to be cultivated by man in order to grow into true virtues. It requires a man to undertake a labour, which Mencius, exactly like Mickiewicz, called

⁴⁰ Idem, “Wykład IX kursu IV”, in: idem, *Dzieła. Wydanie Rocznicowe 1798–1998*, eds. Zbigniew Jerzy Nowak, Maria Prussak, Zofia Stefanowska, Czesław Zgorzelski, vol. XI: *Literatura słowiańska. Kurs czwarty*, ed. Julian Maślanka, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1998, p. 104.

⁴¹ Yao Xinzong, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, p. 160.

⁴² Ibidem.

“seeking”: “Seek – encourages Mencius – and you will find them [innate germinal virtues – TZ]. Neglect and you will lose them”.⁴³

4. Personal reflections in lieu of conclusion

Mickiewicz’s cycle may unceasingly inspire admiration with its inexhaustible spiritual depth, which the poet conveyed by means of concise, masterly constructed gnomes. As a person who was brought up in the Confucian culture and at the same time has the opportunity to learn about the Christian tradition and the literature it originated, I am well aware of the challenge that Mickiewicz’s work presents for a translator.

At the beginning of this article, I presented two schools in the field of translation studies and the theories they propose. In my opinion, neither of them could meet the challenges faced by a translator trying to present to Chinese readers Mickiewicz’s *Zdania i uwagi*. The poetic cycle of the Polish Romantic comprises all the riches of metaphysical reflection. Even though the Confucian tradition can offer a set of philosophical-religious terms as a key allowing to translate the work of Mickiewicz into Chinese, yet for a Chinese reader, each of these terms evokes associations, which, if they are applied literally and thoughtlessly, may obscure and even deform the original message of Mickiewicz’s poems. The resulting risk is that the work may lose its identity and become a “blend” of Confucian notions. As for the second theory, which understands translation as a platform for experiencing the foreign in its pure form, it may leave the target reader disoriented, and the process of reading the work will be at best an adventure with a taste of novelty, never an existential or metaphysical experience.

In view of the above, I think that in order to make Mickiewicz’s poetic collection and the reflections contained therein understandable for a Chinese reader, a third way is needed, namely a critical translation, which would contain a thematically organised introduction, obligatorily prepared by a person with adequate competences, not necessarily by the translator himself. Such an introduction should begin with an explanation of gnomes speaking of those moral issues that are particularly close to Chinese readers.

Man, says Christian theology, is a creation *capax Dei*. It lies in his nature to seek the supernatural meaning and for the answers to ultimate, metaphysical questions. I am convinced that such a desire, even unconscious or unspoken, may be satisfied in a Chinese reader by Mickiewicz’s *Zdania i uwagi*, upon the condition, however, that they be translated with proper respect for the original work and for the values it contains.

⁴³ Yang Bojun (杨伯峻), 孟子译注 [Menzi Yizhu], Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 1960, 6A: 8. English translation: *The Chinese Classics*, trans. and ed. James Legge, vol. II: *The Life and Teachings of Mencius*, London: Trübner 1875, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/legge-the-chinese-classics-vol-2-the-life-and-teachings-of-mencius> [accessed 3 July 2025].

I take Confucius' thought ultimately as a context that may help understand the thoughts expressed in Mickiewicz's collection. As a meditative work encouraging reflection (an attitude very deeply rooted in the Chinese culture), it should be approached by a Chinese reader in an individual, subjective way, which would make it possible to draw personally important thoughts and adapt the reading process to one's own needs and culture.

References

- Berman Antoine, "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign", trans. Lawrence Venuti, in: *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, London: Routledge 2000, pp. 282–295.
- Bible, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE), <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-Updated-Edition-NRSVue-Bible/> [accessed 2 July 2025].
- Bodde Derk, "Dominant Ideas in the Formation of Chinese Culture", *Journal of American Oriental Society* 1942, vol. 62, no. 4, pp. 293–299.
- Chmielowski Piotr, "Filozoficzne poglądy Mickiewicza", *Przegląd Filozoficzny* 1897, fasc. 4.
- Cholwińska Hanna, "Zagadnienie genezy zła w myśli świętego Augustyna", *Studia Theologica Varsoviensia* 1999, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 87–113.
- Chwin Stefan, *Literatura a zdrada. Od „Konrada Wallenroda” do „Malej Apokalipsy”*, Kraków: Oficyna Literacka 1993.
- Confucius, *Lunyu* (论语), <https://ctext.org/analects> [accessed 1 July 2025].
- Feng Youlan (馮友蘭), *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, New York: Macmillan 1958.
- Hoffmann-Piotrowska Ewa, "Konrad Wallenrod. Zanegowana wolność", *Tematy i Konteksty* 2023, vol. 18, no. 13, pp. 41–53.
- Janion Maria, *Życie pośmiertne Konrada Wallenroda*, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1990.
- John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html [accessed 1 July 2025].
- Konfucjusz. *Analekta*, trans. and ed. Katarzyna Pejda, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2018.
- Kuczera-Chachulska Bernadetta, "Między teologią a poezją. Przebaczenie u Mickiewicza", *Paedagogia Christiana* 2016, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 223–232.
- Lu Xun (鲁迅), 摩罗诗力说 [On the Power of Mara Poetry], in: idem, 坟 [The Tomb], in: idem, 鲁迅全集 [Lu Xun. Complete Works], vol. I, eds. Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), Ma Yuzao (马裕藻), Shen Jianshi (沈兼士), Zhou Zuoren (沈兼士), Shanghai 1938, pp. 65–120.
- Lu Xun (鲁迅), "On the Power of Mara Poetry", trans. Shu-ying Tsau, Donald Holoch, in: *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893–1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton, Redwood City: Stanford University Press 1996, pp. 96–110, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503615830-011>.
- Łazińska Barbara, "Mistycyzm i dydaktyzm *Zdań i uwag*", in: *Mickiewicz mistyczny*, eds. Andrzej Fabianowski, Ewa Hoffmann-Piotrowska, Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2005, pp. 297–303.
- Mickiewicz Adam, "Do Eustachego Januszkiewicza", [Domont, beginning of Sept. 1836], in: idem, *Dziela. Wydanie Rocznicowe 1798–1998*, eds. Zbigniew Jerzy Nowak, Maria Prussak, Zofia

- Stefanowska, Czesław Zgorzelski, vol. XV: *Listy. Część druga 1830–1841*, eds. Maria Dernałowicz, Elżbieta Jaworska, Marta Zielińska, Warsaw: Czytelnik 2003, p. 337.
- Mickiewicz Adam, “Wykład IX kursu IV”, in: idem, *Dziela. Wydanie Rocznicowe 1798–1998*, eds. Zbigniew Jerzy Nowak, Maria Prussak, Zofia Stefanowska, Czesław Zgorzelski, vol. XI: *Literatura słowiańska. Kurs czwarty*, ed. Julian Maślanka, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1998.
- Mickiewicz Adam, *Zdania i uwagi*, in: idem, *Dziela. Wydanie Rocznicowe 1798–1998*, eds. Zbigniew Jerzy Nowak, Maria Prussak, Zofia Stefanowska, Czesław Zgorzelski, vol. I: *Wiersze*, ed. Czesław Zgorzelski, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1993.
- Mickiewicz Władysław, *Żywot Adama Mickiewicza podług zebranych przez siebie materiałów oraz z własnych wspomnień*, vol. II, Poznań: Drukarnia Dziennika Poznańskiego 1892.
- Piwińska Marta, “Bóg utracony i Bóg odnaleziony. Buntownicy i wyznawcy”, in: *Problemy polskiego romantyzmu*, vol. I, eds. Maria Żmigrodzka, Zofia Lewinówna, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1971, pp. 207–249.
- Poprawa Adam, Rymkiewicz Jarosław Marek, *Mickiewicz, czyli wszystko. Z Jarosławem Markiem Rymkiewiczem rozmawia Adam Poprawa*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Literackie OPEN 1999.
- Rogacz Dawid, “Pojęcie Nieba (*Tian*) w filozofii konfucjańskiej”, *Przegląd Religioznawczy* 2015, no. 3(257), pp. 167–185.
- Słownik języka Adama Mickiewicza*, vol. X, ed. Konrad Górski, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1980.
- The Chinese Classics*, trans. and ed. James Legge, vol. II: *The Life and Teachings of Mencius*, London: Trübner 1875, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/legge-the-chinese-classics-vol-2-the-life-and-teachings-of-mencius> [accessed 3 July 2025].
- Venuti Lawrence, “Translation, Community, Utopia”, in: idem, *Translation Changes Everything. Theory and Practice*, London–New York: Routledge 2013, pp. 11–31.
- Weber Max, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons 1930.
- Witkowska Alina, *Mickiewicz. Słowo i czyn*, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1986.
- Yang Bojun (杨伯峻), *孟子译注 [Menzi Yizhu]*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 1960.
- Yao Xinzong (姚新中), *An Introduction to Confucianism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000.

The Philosopher and the Simpleton from “the Imperial City of Shang-hai”: The Status of Early Humorous Tales in the Works of Bolesław Prus¹

Magdalena Romanowska

University of Warsaw, Poland

e-mail: magdalena.romanowska@student.uw.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-4044-1911

Abstract

The article presents an analysis of Bolesław Prus’s satirical microstory “Filozof i prostak” [The Philosopher and the Simpleton] from the collection *To i owo, właściwie zaś: ani to, ani owo, czyli 48 powiastek dla pełnoletnich dzieci* [This and That, or Rather Neither This Nor That: 48 Tales for Children of Age]. It discusses the manner in which China, as the setting of the story, is portrayed, in line with the 19th-century knowledge and awareness of the remote country. The article addresses the question of the appropriateness of choosing China as the backdrop for events, given its geographical and cultural distance from the perspective of a Polish reader. In addition to embodying a significant concept in Prus’s entire body of work, namely humour understood as a precise and sophisticated literary tool, the work bears the characteristics of a parable. As shall be demonstrated, certain features that are present in this early work evolved and returned in fuller form in Prus’s later works.

Keywords

China, Bolesław Prus, philosopher, money, parable, humorous tale, microstory

The microstory “Filozof i prostak” [The Philosopher and the Simpleton], published anonymously in the magazine *Mucha* [The Fly] (1873) and then included in the debut collection *To i owo, właściwie zaś: ani to, ani owo, czyli 48 powiastek dla pełnoletnich*

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: “*Filozof i prostak* ‘z cesarskiego miasta Szang-hai’”. Miejsce wczesnej humoreski w twórczości Bolesława Prusa”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 68–80, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.4>.

dzieci [This and That, or Rather Neither This Nor That: 48 Tales for Children of Age], belongs to Bolesław Prus's juvenile writings and has not yet been subject to broader analysis.² Its action takes place in Shanghai and the whole is stylised as a story “from a foreign land” which is intended to convey a universal message. What makes this youthful text interesting is precisely the unusual location, very distant from the local surroundings, as well as the figure of the first of the title characters, whose analogues can be found in Prus's later and more mature prosaic forms. Therefore, this short text should be carefully re-analysed (also in comparison with other, thematically close microstories from the *To i owo* collection) and the following question should be investigated: are there in this text meanings encoded amidst Chinese ornaments and names, other than the “universal” message and the presentation of a gallery of human types? For what other purposes are Shanghai and Beijing evoked as the place of action? Finally, if one of the concepts that will be later developed in the works of the author of *Lalka* (*The Doll*) is the use of such figures as philosopher or money, in what ways do the prototypes correspond to their later versions?

The presented events take place in China, in the imperial city of “Shang-hai”. The key theme is the fraud committed by the wealthy merchant Y-ang on the poor S-ju. First, he declined to repay the debt he owed, and then, having bribed the court, led to the judges' proclamation that S-ju had deprived himself of the money in question (by entrusting his wife with the task to retrieve it). Accused by the mandarin of being a thief who robbed himself, he was sentenced to a cruel death.

The text, published in the magazine *Mucha*, is sometimes called a parable, similarly to two other short stories, both entitled “Z roczników chińskich” [From Chinese Annals], which appeared in print that same year. The text's belonging to the genre of parable is supported by the moralistic-didactic message of the story, the simplified construction of characters and plot, as well as the place of action, which for the Polish reader in the 1870s must have seemed remote, inaccessible, almost fable-like. According to Zygmunt Szweykowski, the foreign background of events is supposed to highlight the moral and social thesis and make it more universal.³ In his monograph on Bolesław Prus's writings, the scholar defines this text as a short story⁴ constituting “a surprise among

² Fragments about this microstory can be found in the following studies: Zygmunt Szweykowski, *Twórczość Bolesława Prusa*, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1972; Jan Data, “O Chinach i Chińczykach w juvenaliach i kronikach Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków*, eds. Józef Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marcei Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 359–366; Agnieszka Czajkowska, “Filozof na prowincji w utworach pisarzy XIX wieku”, *Wiek XIX. Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego im. Adama Mickiewicza* 2016, no. 1, pp. 121–143.

³ Zygmunt Szweykowski, *Twórczość*, p. 63.

⁴ The genological incongruities concerning this text only confirm the difficulties with finding unambiguous terms to define the short literary forms created in the second half of the 19th century. Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna claims that “in Positivism, and in particular in the works of Prus, there are in fact no pure genres, hence the troubles with nomenclature, with defining and exposing the genological features of individual texts” (Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna, *Gatunki literackie w twórczości Bolesława*

the laughing, bouncing, caricatural or grotesque scenes”⁵ filling the collection *To i owo*. Indeed, in “Filozof i prostak”, Prus’s exceptional sensitivity to human injustice can easily be seen – perhaps for the first time in such a vivid manner. The writer pictured the greed and duplicity of the socially privileged, who abuse the working groups, while jeering at them and constructing a narration according to which material wealth goes together with intellectual superiority. This is a suitable description of Y-ang’s attitude to S-ju and his wife. The greatest trespass of S-ju was his too well accomplished service (perhaps this is why Y-ang delayed repayment of the debt, so that he could keep the dutiful doorkeeper) and the lack of resources to bribe the representatives of the judicial system. As for his wife, whose part in the story is small but significant, her subordinate position was related not only to her social class, but also to her sex. Y-ang destroys the debt receipt in the very presence of the woman and sends her away with no money; then, the bribed mandarin judge uses those circumstances against S-ju:

If you had a receipt from Y-ang for the money you deposited with him, why did you give so valuable a paper to your wife? He robs himself who entrusts his treasure to a woman, preach the sages; so it was not Y-ang who robbed you, but you robbed yourself, and thus you are a thief.⁶

A Polish reader could easily refer those power relations to the situation in his country. The relationship between the wealthy master and the poor servant, who is given work as “loan interest”, recalls the still vividly remembered system of serfdom, the remnants of which continued to exist in the Polish lands. While the biased court official represents the mistrust of authorities, the conviction that they are unjust and work for the citizen’s harm, thus resonating with the experience of an inhabitant of Warsaw under the Russian partition. We may add that the imperial system may have evoked associations with another imperialistic country – Russia and, in consequence, with Polish lands.⁷ This trope is all the more plausible since the use of Chinese ornaments by young positivist writers was often a means to avoid censure and to express, with Aesopian language, the opposition to or criticism of the homeland’s politics and conditions of life. In the

Prusa, Wrocław: Agencja Wydawnicza Alinea 2007, p. 23). On this subject see also: Barbara Bobrowska, “Wstęp”, in: eadem, *Male narracje Prusa*, Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria 2004, pp. 5–15.

⁵ Zygmunt Szweykowski, *Twórczość*, p. 63.

⁶ Bolesław Prus, “Filozof i prostak”, in: idem, *Humoreski, nowele, opowiadania*, vol. 1, ed. Tadeusz Żabski, Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna et al., Warsaw–Lublin: Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza; Wydawnictwo Episteme 2014, p. 194.

⁷ This would not be the last time that Prus uses a “Chinese costume” to present one of the occupants in a negative light. In the chronicle entitled *List młodego Chińczyka Yang-tze-kinga do starego Chińczyka Li-yang-tze* [The Letter of a Young Chinese, Yang-tze-king, to an Old Chinese, Li-yang-tze], the core of this text is not the correspondence between two Chinese men offering a presentation of their relationship or a commentary on their surrounding reality, life or culture (as the title might suggest). In fact, this story is a pretext for the criticism of Germany and for predicting its fall that was to come soon in spite of its apparent power. See: Bolesław Prus, *Kroniki*, vol. 17, ed. Zygmunt Szweykowski, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1967, pp. 108–116.

loosest form, these were jokes, with the pair of a Chinese man and a Chinese woman as main characters, with props such as the Great Wall of China, the figure of a mandarin, or with concepts such as politeness or wisdom qualified with the epithet “Chinese”.⁸ Frequently, the Middle Kingdom functioned as an anti-model, reinforcing the aversion to obsolete civilisations with little interest in progress. It was referred to in this vein, for instance, in the first years of publication of *Przegląd Tygodniowy* [Weekly Review].⁹

The presented interpretations are not the only models of reading the parabolic text of “Filozof i prostak”, but they constitute possible variants. Each of them relies on a network of associations, probabilities and conjectures. Indicating a specific city and country is only a game, perhaps even a conscious transfer of the reader into a country he knows little about.¹⁰ In fact, the China presented in the humorous tale is some remote, unspecified place, leaving much room for imagination. Nor is the time specified – we only know that the events take place during the rule of an emperor (which, in the case of China, spans a very long period of time). Such a device clearly points to the parabolic nature of the text, which in turn links it with Prus’s late works (but also with the works of other positivist writers, who made use of this genre equally often, as demonstrated by Anna Martuszewska).¹¹ This is, of course, not a parable of mature realism, introducing oneiric poetics, bearing features of a fable, a fairy tale or a legend (Martuszewska speaks also of those genres in this context).¹² Nonetheless, the imprecise indication of time, the truncated exposition of the place of action, as well as the shifting meanings and the nonliteral presentation of the surrounding reality allow this text to

⁸ See: Bogdan Mazan, “Figury myśli i (anty)wzory. Motywy chińskie w *Przeglądzie Tygodniowym* 1871–1876”, in: *Pozytywiści warszawscy: “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1866–1876. Seria II: Świat, Europa, Polska*, ed. Anna Janicka, Białystok: Temida2 2020, p. 110.

⁹ See: ibidem. As indicated by Mazan, the pattern of writing about China as a conglomerate of negative phenomena developed especially under the pen of Aleksander Świętochowski, who in his manifesto article “Tradycja i historia wobec postępu” [Tradition and History in the Face of Progress] (*Przegląd Tygodniowy* 1872, no. 17, p. 145) called the Chinese “almost a barbarous nation” (see: ibidem, pp. 110–114). However, it should be underlined – after Józef Bachórz – that in consequence of the events related to the Chinese Boxer Rebellion, in 1900 and 1901, the magazine *Prawda* published current news from China and articles concerning the culture-creating role of this country in history. See: Józef Bachórz, “*Prawda* Aleksandra Świętochowskiego o chińskim powstaniu bokserów”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków*, pp. 354–353.

¹⁰ The state of general knowledge about China was deplored by the author of an article published in *Niwa* [The Field] in July 1874, see: *Niwa* 1874, no. 38, pp. 39–41. According to Bogdan Mazan, texts printed, among others, in *Wędrowiec* [The Wanderer], helped to spread knowledge about this country and to nuance its image in the common perception; see: Bogdan Mazan, “Figury myśli i (anty)wzory”, pp. 107–108. On the Chinese motifs in Prus’s work see also: idem, “Z obrazów Chin i Chińczyków w piśmiennictwie polskim drugiej połowy XIX wieku. ‘Chińskie cienie’ w *Lalce* Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, ed. Bogdan Mazan, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 317–404.

¹¹ See: Anna Martuszewska, *Pozytywistyczne parabole*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 1997.

¹² Ibidem, pp. 110–111.

be included within the category of allegory or parable. This shows that certain budding ideas were already present in the early, “frivolous” works of the author of *The Doll* and would gradually become more mature as he continued to practice further literary forms. Thus, the conclusions drawn by Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna from her discussion of the literary genres in the works of that writer are corroborated:

Prus’s work is a testimony to the evolution of forms and thus an indication of the history of literature as a logical sequence of interrelated “genological” particles, which, by determining one another, give origin to more mature genres and, what is more – by expanding the boundaries of cognition, in accordance with the chief principle of realism – they break with conventions, not allowing for passivity, stimulating development.¹³

The universally human dimension of the story is typical both of the genre of parable, and of the satire that clearly resounds from the text. Even though the work presents crucial issues, which could move a European just as much as an inhabitant of the Far East, the convention of a humorous tale is maintained. The absurdity of the principles formulated by the philosopher allows us to qualify them as one of Prus’s humorous devices. As a distinguishing feature of this individual, unique style, Szweykowski indicates “the writer’s ability of rigorous thinking and a lot of practice in formulating thoughts”.¹⁴ Prus’s wit, writes the scholar, is based on a reverse logic, on the conscious presentation of reverse order of things, on the incorrect nomenclature of phenomena and objects and – as it is the case in the microstory in question – on a subversive conception of justice, an exaggerated abuse of the law. At the same time, the reader is aware that the illogicalities are there on purpose, and the author, by making use of them, demonstrates his talent and inventiveness.¹⁵ Thanks to the sense of humour, Prus’s works do not strike as artificial, nor do they repel with exceeding tendentiousness or didacticism. As Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna observed:

The author of humorous tales ridiculed various deviations from social norms, modes of conduct and attitudes towards reality. The readers were able to clearly interpret his intentions and, what follows, to perceive the ridiculed traits as negative.¹⁶

In this context, we need to refer again to the Chinese background of the microstory “Filozof i prostak”. The very first observation coming to mind is that the Middle Kingdom was also functionalised so as to make it easier to criticise corruption and false philosophy on an entirely foreign ground, not the author’s native one. Moving those problems to a remote end of the world created distance between the reader and the negative characters, thus diminishing the risk of unambiguous identification with persons living in the reader’s immediate surroundings. When we look at reality from

¹³ Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna, *Gatunki literackie*, p. 353.

¹⁴ Zygmunt Szweykowski, *Twórczość*, p. 60.

¹⁵ See: *ibidem*.

¹⁶ Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna, *Gatunki literackie*, pp. 18–19.

such a great distance, it is easier to make an objective judgment of an attitude and to accept its ridiculousness or absurdity. In this way, the readers could perform the task given to them by Prus as a “humourist in grand style”, who

is not trying to win anything, is not converting anyone and does not yield to anyone; he is rather observing everything and everyone with indulgent calm. He accepts no dogma, takes nothing for necessary or impossible, but only for probable.¹⁷

It is the reader who should draw conclusions from the text, the writer-observer is merely presenting to him an object for viewing and assessing. The device that makes this possible is humour, which, according to Prus, consists “not in creating fantastical combinations, not in punning, but in a diligent observation of a thing at least from two sides: good and bad, small and great, dark and bright”.¹⁸ The germs of this attitude can already be found in “Filozof i prostak”; even though the psychology of characters is not deepened, the work is extremely short and the heroes are black and white, yet even on their example we can see that Prus’s humour was based on unobviousness, sometimes on surprise, on finding wickedness where we would least expect it.

The short story “Filozof i prostak” can be compared with two other microstories, which create a mini-cycle “Z roczników chińskich”. All three texts come from the juvenile period of Prus’s creative work, all were published in the humour magazine *Mucha* and were then included by the author in his collection *To i owo* (1874). In both texts entitled “Z roczników chińskich”, the moralistic tendency seems to be the most important aspect. The plot of the first one is based on the theft attempt undertaken by “a poor young man” on a scholar, who had agreed to give him medical treatment for a lower payment. The whole story is maintained in an ironic tone, which suggests that the youth did not mean to commit a crime, but merely hid the money in the silk hat “out of care”. The second tale is also focused on a theft, but one that was actually completed. This time, however, the wickedness of the crime is even greater, because it is committed by Ya-o-tse, a scholar who keeps the secrets of science and crafts and, what is more who prepares the young generation for those tasks. In this case, we should note that part of the “guilt” of corrupting Ya-o-tse is attributed to his “foreign” education, received outside of the Celestial Empire.

The hero does not experience redemption, he persists in falsehood and rejects his conscience. Yet, the final paragraph pronounces an alarming moral of universal nature:

But woe to him! For there is Someone who watches over both the flight of a mosquito and the theft of a mandarin; He has a thousand eyes wide open, from which nothing can hide, and thousands of hands armed with swords, the brightness of which makes the crowd tremble and the mandarins cry: a – oh!¹⁹

¹⁷ Bolesław Prus, “Słowo o krytyce pozytywnej”, in: idem, *Publicystyka filozoficzno-społeczna i literacka*, vols. 3–4, ed. Cezary Zalewski, Lublin–Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Episteme; Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza 2016, pp. 140–141.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 139.

¹⁹ Bolesław Prus, “Z roczników chińskich” [inc. “Onego czasu”], in: idem, *Humoreski*, p. 190.

Although the title may suggest historical credibility – “from annals”, that is, from written historical sources, yet the time of action is not specified (“Onego czasu...” [At that time...],²⁰ “Niedawnymi czasy...” [Not long ago...]²¹), and the plot of both these stories is even more condensed and schematised. Nor do they show any larger intention behind the choice of Beijing as the place of action, they rather constitute a set of loosely connected images, which the young writer disposed of at that moment. We can also find here characters’ names stylised to resemble Chinese names and surnames, there is a name of a city and once again the figure of a Chinese official-intellectual.

The figure of a mandarin is always presented in a negative light. It represents the corrupted, biased authority (“Filozof i prostak”) or simply a thief (“Z roczników chińskich”, [inc. “Onego czasu”]).²² Many years later, Prus will openly condemn this part of the Chinese society, blaming it for China’s defeat in the war with Japan in 1894. In the chronicle entitled *Wojna chińsko-japońska. Mandarynizm, egoizm klasowy i konserwatyzm z 1894 r.* [The Chinese-Japanese War. Mandarinism, Class Egoism and Conservatism of 1894], the writer expressed his wonder at how a country with a long tradition, inhabited by millions of hard-working and courageous people could fall “under the first blow from a ten times weaker enemy”.²³ Allegedly, what contributed to the defeat was the internal weakening of the country, which resulted from “the debasement of Chinese intellectuals called mandarins, whose first feature was egoism or conservatism”.²⁴ On the pages of *Mucha*, in turn, the mandarin appeared as a character type which often served as the basis of a work’s humour.

This shows that in the vague, imprecise notions about the Far East that functioned in the collective consciousness, the figure of a mandarin was by far the most dominant, sometimes even constituting the only element of cultural otherness. This is the case, for example, of the anonymous microstory entitled “Traktat o czystości” [Treatise on Cleanliness]: “One rich mandarin living near Beijing was taking care of the suburban cleanliness for the sake of order and health”.²⁵ In this short work, we also meet his daughters, a bailiff comes in, a chase takes place and the whole story finishes with a moral lesson: “May it be known to the posterity that in the 19th century, cleanliness was taken care of even near Beijing”.²⁶

The microstories from the *To i owo* collection, which are related to China, concern frauds, absurdity, some of them, as “Filozof i prostak”, speak about exploitation

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 189.

²¹ Idem, “Z roczników chińskich” [inc. “Niedawnymi czasy”], in: idem, *Humoreski*, p. 184.

²² On the notions built in Europe about the figure of a mandarin, see: Bogdan Mazan, “Mandaryn polsko-chiński i ogólnokulturowy”, in: *Bez antypodów? Konfrontacje i zbliżenia kultur*, ed. Bogdan Mazan, Łódź: Fundacja Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2008, pp. 331–388.

²³ Bolesław Prus, *Kroniki*, vol. 14, ed. Zygmunt Szweykowski, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1966, p. 178.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 179. For a more extensive discussion of Chinese motifs in Prus’s *Kroniki*, see: Jan Data, *O Chinach*, pp. 359–366.

²⁵ “Traktat o czystości”, *Mucha* 1876, no. 27, p. 2.

²⁶ Ibidem.

and helplessness, but each of them involves the subject of money and its unlawful appropriation. Prus’s difficult relation with finances can be followed in his private correspondence, as demonstrated by Edward Pieścikowski.²⁷ The author of *The Doll*, struggling with economic problems, often evoked this subject in his epistolography or journalistic writing.²⁸

Echoes of those experiences can also be heard in his literary works, which are very remote – in terms of topics and time – from the first microstories published anonymously in *Mucha* or in *Kolce* [The Prickles]. Money appears as a destructive and creative power already in such works as *Katarynka* (*The Barrel Organ*), *Przekłète szczęście* [Cursed Happiness] or *Wielki los* [Great Fate], and it is present in an indirect manner in every Prus’s work that speaks about extreme destitution (*Pod szychtami* [Beneath the Layers], *Lokator poddasza* [The Tenant of the Attic]) or about functioning in poverty (often experienced by a young student, as in the short story *Sen* [A Dream]). Fortune is one of the main “heroines” of *The Doll*, as demonstrated by the frequency data provided by Pieścikowski: the noun ‘miłość’ [love] appears 104 times in the novel, whereas ‘pieniądz’ [money] is mentioned 229 times.²⁹ One of the interpretations of the character of Stanisław Wokulski suggested by researchers of Prus’s work says that this character was a fantasy of unlimited material resources, which never lack and which can be used to do good, something that the writer, struggling with financial problems, never experienced. This would have a therapeutic function both for the author and for the readers who, by delving into the world of luxury, would indulge in escapism.³⁰ Stefan Solski from *Emancypantki* (*Emancipated Women*), a wealthy magnate seeking a purpose in life and spending time on philanthropy, was in a way a continuation of Wokulski.³¹

Therefore, it is not devoid of significance that in Prus’s early, frivolous (though, after all, published later under a known pseudonym) works related to a remote country, money constitutes a vital element of the created setting. The juvenile Chinese texts speak about the poor exploited by the more powerful, or about crimes that may be committed just as much by a boyish stripling as by an experienced scholar. However, this is not the only interpretative key of those texts; indeed, “Filozof i prostak” speaks also about the powerlessness in the face of poverty, about the scope of conflict that may ensue from a dispute over debts. Concurrently, the message conveyed by the story also seems to be saying that in the modern world, it is fortune – not wisdom or simple “common sense” – that constitutes the greatest value and is even above the law (this is what happens in the microstory “Z roczników chińskich”: Ya-o-tse has knowledge

²⁷ Edward Pieścikowski, “Prus i pieniądze”, in: idem, *Bolesław Prus – “humorysta w wielkim stylu”*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie 2012, pp. 9–17.

²⁸ See: ibidem, pp. 9–12.

²⁹ Edward Pieścikowski, “Prus i pieniądze”, p. 13.

³⁰ See: Stefania Zahorska, “Wokulski – krzywe zwierciadło pozytywizmu”, quoted in: *Prus. Z dziejów recepcji twórczości*, ed. Edward Pieścikowski, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1988, pp. 382–383 and Edward Pieścikowski, “Prus i pieniądze”, pp. 15–16.

³¹ Edward Pieścikowski, “Prus i pieniądze”, p. 16.

and education, which give him a position of authority, but he instantly abuses it and reaches for the “true” power – silver and gold). If we realise at the same time that these reflections were authored by the same person who created such characters as Wokulski or Solski, the text seems to be permeated with the desire to possess a privilege that liberates from everyday concerns, from requests and loans, which often entail troubles. This is by no means to suggest that Prus, even in a playful way, wished for a corrupted world – he rather desired transparency in administration and human honesty at every level of the social ladder. Nevertheless, the author presents the hardships related to the shortage of money in the family purse and the humiliation resulting from the dependence on diverse “sovereigns”. In the parable, these misfortunes are juxtaposed with the unlimited wealth, which is the key that opens all doors in an easy, albeit immoral, way. As for the greed presented in both microstories “Z roczników chińskich”, although it is ridiculed and even associated with the menace of eternal damnation, it remains (especially in the case of youthful recklessness) a human impulse, a temptation to which anyone can yield if they are haunted by the desire to possess riches and the benefits they provide – both material and psychological.

Another artistic idea that will return more than once as a complex theme of Bolesław Prus’s short stories and novels is the figure of a philosopher. The humorous tale “Filozof i prostak” is one of the first literary effects of Prus’s interest in logic. As demonstrated by Agnieszka Czajkowska, at the time when this microstory was written, the author worked on a theoretical work in that field and was also probably in the course of translating John Stuart Mill’s *A System of Logic*.³² Hence, perhaps, the criticism included in the text of a certain mode of practicing philosophy, selectively, for the purpose of justifying one’s own interests. This method is presented in the text as a technique of fact manipulation. The merchant Y-ang uses his own “logic” and prefers to bribe the court rather than repay the faithful servant the due sum (and since he has enough money to bribe the court, he could as well repay the debt). As for the mandarin representing the justice, for his own benefit – that is to gain some money – he twists the facts and bends the reality in favour of the man who bribed him. Then the convicted S-ju meets the philosopher, who traps him mentally with his argumentation, neither explaining to him the real cause of his misfortune, nor giving him consolation. The ending of the microstory leaves the reader with the question of whether S-ju, had he “known some philosophy”, that is, had he tried to explain the absurdities of the world by means of vague and mutually contradicting principles, would have been happier and would have more easily accepted his fate:

After those words of the philosopher, happiness and peace filled the whole earth. Y-ak was happy, for he knew no one could equal him in wisdom; the mandarins were happy, for recently an English ship had sunk on the Yellow Sea; the common people were happy, for there was great abundance of rice and tea; finally, the executioner Fu was happy, for on that day, he cut off various limbs of many people and took their garments.

³² See: Agnieszka Czajkowska, “Filozof na prowincji”, pp. 139–140.

Only S-ju the coolie spoiled the general happiness with his untimely screams and complaints; yet no one was surprised, for it was well known that he was a simpleton and knew nothing about philosophy.³³

The irony of this epilogue highlights the futility of the philosopher’s achievements, thus ridiculing not only this field of knowledge but also the person of the sage. This is not the last time when Prus portrays a professional thinker in this way. In the short story *Doktor filozofii na prowincji* [Doctor of Philosophy in a Provincial Town], there is a dissonance between the image of the scholar that the community of the provincial town of X has created and the actual figure of the man. The doctor of sciences does not want to talk endlessly about the theory of the unconscious, he prefers to eat or sleep, and his appearance is very different from the elegant, idealised image of an intellectual. The disappointment experienced by the provincial town after the meeting with the scholar puts into doubt the social utility of philosophy, especially when it is practiced in a hermetic language, within the walls of a university, perhaps also in detachment from the learned man’s life. The satire is aimed mainly at the town’s narrow-minded community, for whom the distinguishing feature of intelligence is proper appearance or wise harangues, but it also uncovers the inconsistency in the thinker’s actions; it seems that he is not in the least interested in trying out his own theses – his practice of philosophy ends with the publication of a treatise. An echo of the mocking attitude towards certain representatives of that profession can also be found in a note from *Kroniki* dated 6 June 1874: “Oh... how hot it is today! [...] The house proprietors ventilate the vestibules and corridors, the tenants – their apartments, men of letters – their hats, and philosophers – even their new shoes, all in vain”.³⁴

Professor Dębicki from the *Emancipated Women*, who is sometimes deemed as the author’s *porte-parole*,³⁵ is a completely different kind of philosopher. Above all, this teacher at Mrs. Latter’s pension does not proclaim himself a philosopher; he teaches mathematics, which fits the positivist conception of science. Prus did not construct him as a grotesque figure, but rather one that arouses sympathy and respect, even if he is not devoid of eccentricity, as remarked by Tadeusz Budrewicz: “The professor is consistently presented as the opposition of mediocrity [...]. Dębicki is both comic and sublime, a goof in the practical matters of life and a discreet influence on other people’s

³³ Bolesław Prus, “Filozof i prostak”, p. 195.

³⁴ Idem, *Kroniki*, vols. 1–3, ed. Iwona Węgrzyn, Warsaw–Lublin: Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza; Wydawnictwo Episteme 2017, p. 131.

³⁵ See, e.g., Janina Kulczycka-Saloni, *Z dziejów Dickensa w Polsce: “Emancypantki” a “Bleak House”*, Łódź: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Polonista 1947, p. 20. Tadeusz Budrewicz pointed out that certain key notions from the professor’s lectures can be found in Bolesław Prus’s *Notatki o kompozycji* [Notes on Composition] or his philosophical treatises, see: Tadeusz Budrewicz, “Filozofia profesora Dębickiego sposobem analitycznym wyłożona”, in: *Prus i inni. Prace ofiarowane profesorowi Stanisławowi Ficie*, eds. Jakub A. Malik, Ewa Paczoska, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego 2003, pp. 103–104.

fate [...]”.³⁶ The character has humorous, comic features, but at the same time, he has a lot of agency and demonstrates extraordinary wisdom and maturity. The clumsiness or ridiculousness of Dębicki reinforces the effect of surprise when his knowledge is most exposed, that is, during his lectures.³⁷

Thus, we can clearly see the evolution of the image of a philosopher in the work of the author of *The Doll*. After the writer’s reaching for anti-models, after the ironic tone accompanying the “achievements” of thinkers, and that with a suggestion that this is their universal mode of action (since it could take place even in the remote Shanghai), Dębicki appears as one who practices his discipline in an exemplary manner. His philosophy is not limited merely to theories, but it has a direct influence on other people’s lives – after all, he played an important role in the spiritual development of some of the characters, in particular Madzia. Although this statement does not entirely unravel the meaning of this complex hero of the *Emancipated Women*, it shows to what extent the figure of a philosopher has come to be appreciated in Prus’s work since his first text that spoke of a similar character.

From a work as inconspicuous as “Filozof i prostak” one can deduce many meanings and discern numerous forerunners of Prus’s later novelistic peregrinations. We need to stress once more the great significance of the fact that those meanings were included in microstories taking place precisely in China. Indeed, the remoteness of that place universalises the presented truths, turning them into “parabolic vehicles of practical wisdom”.³⁸ Considering how Prus perceived the Middle Kingdom in later years, with what values he associated it (tradition, strength, citizens’ courage) and what he must have known, at least in part, already as a thirty-year-old journalist and writer, that place also evoked the permanence of ancient principles and their otherness resulting from cultural differences between Asia and Europe. Thus, “universalism” does not fully render the semantic potential of China – even the imaginary China, full of stereotypes – as a place of action in a work of early realism. Shanghai and Beijing were radically different from the places known to the inhabitants of Polish lands (let us recall the ending of the humorous tale “Traktat o czystości”: “in the 19th century cleanliness was taken care of **even** [emphasis mine – MR] near Beijing”; near Beijing means not here, not at our place, in a location which we do not think about every day). Therefore, discovering a fragment of one’s own experiences among the foreign names of people and places was for the reader a surprise and thus had a cognitive value. According to the principles established by the humorous tale as a genre, but also by the profile of the magazine *Mucha*, in which the story was first published, the texts were supposed to be maintained in a frivolous tone, to entertain and not to encumber with knowledge or emotions. As a result, we do not find in them an analysis of the Confucian idea of

³⁶ Tadeusz Budrewicz, “Filozofia profesora Dębickiego”, p. 102.

³⁷ For more detail about the specific character of this figure see also: Dariusz Trzeźniowski, “*Emanypantki, czyli filozofia błazna*”, in: *Bolesław Prus – pisarz nowoczesny*, ed. Jakub A. Malik, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego 2009, pp. 71–86.

³⁸ Józef Bachórz, “*Prawda Aleksandra Świętochowskiego*”, p. 350.

social order or a detailed description of the geographical conditions of that part of Asia. However, we can learn what image of China was projected by the humour magazine and, to some extent, by Prus. Moreover, the comparison of this fragment of his writing with his later works has revealed which concepts were budding in his imagination from the first years of his activity and what shapes they took later.

References

- Bachórz Józef, “Prawda Aleksandra Świętochowskiego o chińskim powstaniu bokserów”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków*, eds. Józef Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marcei Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 349–358.
- Bobrowska Barbara, *Male narracje Prusa*, Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytorium 2004.
- Bolesław Prus, 1947–1912. *Kalendarz życia i twórczości*, eds. Krystyna Tokarzówna, Stanisław Fita, Zygmunt Szweykowski, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1969.
- Budrewicz Tadeusz, “Filozofia profesora Dębickiego sposobem analitycznym wyłożona”, in: *Prus i inni. Prace ofiarowane profesorowi Stanisławowi Ficie*, eds. Jakub A. Malik, Ewa Paczoska, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego 2003, pp. 97–125.
- Czajkowska Agnieszka, “Filozof na prowincji w utworach pisarzy XIX wieku”, *Wiek XIX. Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego im. Adama Mickiewicza* 2016, no. 1, pp. 121–143.
- Data Jan, “O Chinach i Chińczykach w juvenaliach i kronikach Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków*, eds. Józef Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marcei Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 359–366.
- Kulczycka-Saloni Janina, *Z dziejów Dickensa w Polsce: “Emancypantki” a “Bleak House”*, Łódź: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Polonista 1947.
- Lubczyńska-Jeziorna Elżbieta, *Gatunki literackie w twórczości Bolesława Prusa*, Wrocław: Agencja Wydawnicza Alinea 2007.
- Martuszevska Anna, *Pozytywistyczne parabole*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 1997.
- Mazan Bogdan, “Figury myśli i (anty)wzory. Motywy chińskie w Przeglądzie Tygodniowym 1871–1876”, in: *Pozytywiści warszawscy: “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1866–1876. Seria II: Świat, Europa, Polska*, ed. Anna Janicka, Białystok: Temida2 2020, pp. 105–124.
- Mazan Bogdan, “Mandaryn polsko-chiński i ogólnokulturowy”, in: *Bez antypodów? Konfrontacje i zbliżenia kultur*, ed. Bogdan Mazan, Łódź: Fundacja Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2008, pp. 331–388.
- Mazan Bogdan, “Z obrazów Chin i Chińczyków w piśmiennictwie polskim drugiej połowy XIX wieku. ‘Chińskie cienie’ w *Lalce* Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, ed. Bogdan Mazan, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 317–404.
- Pieścikowski Edward, “Prus i pieniądze”, in: idem, *Bolesław Prus – “humorysta w wielkim stylu”*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie 2012, pp. 9–17.
- Prus Bolesław, “Filozof i prostak”, in: idem, *Humoreski, nowele, opowiadania*, vol. 1, ed. Tadeusz Żabski, Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna et al., Warsaw–Lublin: Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza; Wydawnictwo Episteme 2014, pp. 194–195.
- Prus Bolesław, *Kroniki*, vols. 1–3, ed. Iwona Węgrzyn, Warsaw–Lublin: Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza; Wydawnictwo Episteme 2017.

- Prus Bolesław, *Kroniki*, vol. 14, ed. Zygmunt Szweykowski, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1966.
- Prus Bolesław, *Kroniki*, vol. 17, ed. Zygmunt Szweykowski, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1967.
- Prus Bolesław, "Słówko o krytyce pozytywnej", in: idem, *Publicystyka filozoficzno-społeczna i literacka*, vols. 3–4, ed. Cezary Zalewski, Lublin–Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Episteme; Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza 2016, pp. 129–170.
- Prus Bolesław, "Z roczników chińskich" [inc. "Niedawnymi czasy"], in: idem, *Humoreski, nowele, opowiadania*, vol. 1, ed. Tadeusz Żabski, Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna et al., Warsaw–Lublin: Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza; Wydawnictwo Episteme 2014, p. 184.
- Prus Bolesław, "Z roczników chińskich" [inc. "Onego czasu"], in: idem, *Humoreski, nowele, opowiadania*, vol. 1, ed. Tadeusz Żabski, Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna et al., Warsaw–Lublin: Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza; Wydawnictwo Episteme 2014, pp. 189–190.
- Prus. *Z dziejów recepcji twórczości*, ed. Edward Pieścikowski, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1988.
- Szweykowski Zygmunt, *Twórczość Bolesława Prusa*, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1972.
- "Traktat o czystości", *Mucha* 1876, no. 27, p. 2.
- Trzeźniowski Dariusz, "Emancypantki, czyli filozofia błazna", in: *Bolesław Prus – pisarz nowoczesny*, ed. Jakub A. Malik, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego 2009, pp. 71–86.

The Borrowed and Mediated China: Eliza Orzeszkowa's Publicist Voice on the Question of Women's Equal Rights¹

Piotr Bordzół

Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland

e-mail: piotr.bordzol@ibl.waw.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-4066-1850

Abstract

The article aims to present Eliza Orzeszkowa's unusual publicist voice on the question of women's equal rights. The unusualness is due to her use of Confucius as a figure of transfer, as well as her referring to the scientific and doctrinal fragments of his Chinese philosophical and social teachings. Eliza Orzeszkowa's passion for journalism resulted in a series of statements on the so-called woman question. In 2020, non-redacted parts of the manuscript of a study on women's equal rights, found in Vilnius by Iwona Wiśniewska, were published in print. The writer devoted the first part of her text to the position of a woman in ancient cultures. She referred, inter alia, to Confucian philosophical thought, which she adopted as one of the points of departure for defining her own vision of equal rights. However, she drew on the Confucian themes from secondary sources, citing the study of Edward Prądzyński. An important channel for transmitting the Confucian thought to Europe was the thought of the Enlightenment, which, as Grażyna Borkowska argues, is crucial for the discussion of the writer's position on the woman question.

Keywords

equal rights, woman question, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Confucius, journalism

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: "Chiny zapożyczone i zapośredniczone. Głos publicystyczny Elizy Orzeszkowej w sprawie równouprawnienia", *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 81–93, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.5>.

Chinese motifs (concerning philosophy, imagery and signs) present in the literary texts of the author of *Cnotliwi* [The Virtuous] have already been a subject of analyses and studies. On the Polish ground, the research on the presence of “rustling silk”, “paravanes”, “vases” and other references to the world of oriental objects is focused mostly on the literary texts of the writer and is presented in a wider literary context.² Whereas in the Chinese reception, Orzeszkowa – a novelist – is considered (next to Olga Tokarczuk) as the most typical representative of what is called female literature³ (although Orzeszkowa’s works were not included in the list of the most often interpreted Polish writers in China).⁴ The writer’s views on the woman question became the object of interest of a Chinese scholar Mao Yinhui and took the form of a monograph entitled 艾丽查·奥热什科娃的女性观与创作中的女性问题研究 [Feminism and Female Themes in the Works of Eliza Orzeszkowa] (the book is written in Chinese and has not been translated into Polish or English).⁵

An important component of the Chinese thought appears in one of the journalistic texts on women’s equal rights that were unfinished and unpublished during the author’s life. The first edition of non-redacted parts of the “Lithuanian” manuscript was issued four years ago under the title *O równouprawnieniu kobiet* [On Women’s Equal Rights]

² The most renowned findings were presented by Bogdan Mazan in relation to the writer’s “trilogy” of novels from 1890s. See: idem, “Zepsuty ornament. Odtajnianie chińszczyzny w powieściach Elizy Orzeszkowej o ‘argonautach’”, in: *Sekrety Orzeszkowej*, eds. Grażyna Borkowska, Magdalena Rudkowska, Iwona Wiśniewska, Warsaw: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna 2012, pp. 228–249. The researcher also analysed the Chinese motifs in the works of Bolesław Prus and in the press discourse of one of the most prominent positivist journals, see: idem, “Z obrazów Chin i Chińczyków w piśmiennictwie polskim drugiej połowy XIX wieku. ‘Chińskie cienie’ w *Lalce* Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słowinia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 317–405; idem, “Figury myśli i (anty)wzory. Motywy chińskie w *Przeglądzie Tygodniowym* 1871–1876”, in: *Pozytywiści warszawscy: “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1866–1876. Seria II: Świat, Europa, Polska*, ed. Anna Janicka, Białystok: Temida 2, Katedra Badań Filologicznych “Wschód-Zachód” (Uniwersytet w Białymstoku) 2020, pp. 105–124. See also: Małgorzata Sokalska, “Od podszewki, czyli o jedwabiu w literaturze (Honoré de Balzac – Bolesław Prus – Eliza Orzeszkowa)”, *Ruch Literacki* 2022, fasc. 4, esp. pp. 602–611. The research concerning Chinese motifs in the press of the second half of the 19th century is also well-known: Tadeusz Budrewicz, “Stereotypy Chin i Chińczyków w polskiej prasie satyrycznej drugiej połowy XIX wieku”, in: *Bez antypodów? Konfrontacje i zbliżenia kultur*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słowinia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Fundacja Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2008, pp. 207–230.

³ See: Li Yanan, (李怡楠), *Recepcja literatury polskiej w Chinach. Wybrane zagadnienia*, manuscript of doctoral dissertation, Katowice 2015, pp. 94–95. It is worth noting that in terms of number of translations, the most popular Polish writer in China is Henryk Sienkiewicz. Orzeszkowa’s works rank higher than the works of Bolesław Prus and Maria Konopnicka (see: *ibidem*, p. 106).

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

⁵ Mao Yinhui (茅银辉), 艾丽查·奥热什科娃的女性观与创作中的女性问题研究 [Feminism and Female Themes in the Works of Eliza Orzeszkowa], Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press 2008. I owe the original form of the title to Andrzej Ruszer Ph.D. from the School of European Languages and Cultures at the Beijing Foreign Studies University.

in the series *Publicystyka społeczna* [Social Journalism] of Orzeszkowa.⁶ The scholar who prepared the text for publication – Iwona Wiśniewska – presented detailed results of her analyses concerning the origin and the history of the manuscript compilation and its material layer; she also outlined the content of the treatise and discussed its main themes.⁷ In the introduction to this edition, Grażyna Borkowska added further themes to the discussion of the work, concerning mainly the role of the Enlightenment tradition in Orzeszkowa's thinking (on the woman question, among others) and she compared the writer's statements with those of the British thinker Mary Wollstonecraft.⁸

Orzeszkowa began to work on the treatise probably in the spring of 1879. This information can be found in her letter to Teodor Tomasz Jeż of 20 June 1879. We learn from this letter that the treatise was supposed to have the length and form of a book intended for "Eliza Orzeszkowa i S-ka" Publishing House (in the initial plan of the publishing series, the writer wanted to publish the study *O równouprawnieniu kobiet*), but – due to illness – the work on the text was abandoned when three quarters of the planned length was written. Iwona Wiśniewska claims that none of Orzeszkowa's works published at the beginning of the 1880s resembles the evoked project. However, in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives, an autograph has been preserved containing 308 pages, with the title written by someone else's hand (probably by Maria Obrębska): *O kobietach* [On Women], which can be treated as a draft of a finished whole.⁹

The treatise is composed of three parts. In the introduction, we are offered a historical overview of the woman question, a presentation of the woman's fate in different ages and cultures: in the primitive societies, the *Laws of Manu*, Buddhism, the Old Testament, in the Confucian thought, in the ancient Greece and Rome, in the first ages of Christianity, among Germanic peoples, in the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern and Modern Europe. In the second part, the writer describes the birth

⁶ Eliza Orzeszkowa, *O równouprawnieniu kobiet*, in: eadem, *Publicystyka społeczna*, vol. 2: *Rozprawy, studia, artykuły*, eds. Grażyna Borkowska, Iwona Wiśniewska, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 2020, pp. 29–43. Further referred to with the abbreviation "ORK" and page number.

⁷ Iwona Wiśniewska, "Nieznana rozprawa o kobietach. (Równość wobec prawa, pracy i wiedzy, czyli proste rozwiązanie kwestii)", in: *Poznanie Orzeszkowej. W stulecie śmierci (1910–2010)*, eds. Ireneusz Sikora, Aneta Narolska, Częstochowa–Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego 2010, pp. 95–122.

⁸ Grażyna Borkowska, "Wprowadzenie", in: Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Publicystyka społeczna*, vol. 2, pp. 29–43. The scholar discussed in detail the woman question in Orzeszkowa's journalistic writing. See: eadem, "Wstęp", in: Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Publicystyka społeczna*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 2005, pp. 36–49; eadem, "Wprowadzenie", in: Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Publicystyka społeczna*, vol. 1: *Myślenie obywatelskie, Żydzi, kwestia kobieca*, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 2020, pp. 48–67. Meticulous reflections on Orzeszkowa's "outgrowing the Enlightenment" are presented in Dawid Maria Osiński's monograph *Pozytywistów dziedzictwo Oświecenia. Kierunki i formy recepcji*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Episteme 2018, especially the chapter "Elizy Orzeszkowej wyrastanie z Oświecenia", pp. 606–656.

⁹ Iwona Wiśniewska, "Nieznana rozprawa o kobietach", pp. 96–97; Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Publicystyka społeczna*, vol. 2, pp. 295–298.

of individualism in Europe (the Enlightenment, the Great French Revolution), which began the process of liberating women and men from their social and family roles. In the third part, Orzeszkowa argues against the objections to women's remunerated work. The treatise breaks off when the religious education of women is discussed (ORK, pp. 295–298).¹⁰ In the first part of the treatise, Orzeszkowa, as mentioned above, “delves into the depths of history” and seeks “the thread of the woman's history, which weaves through various times and places” (ORK, p. 300):

No one unbiased can deny it that in the beginnings of the history of the societies that we know of, the woman held a low and degrading place in the family and in society. In the turbid light of those dawns, the depths of which have not yet been penetrated by even the most fervent efforts of science, she appears to us in the posture of a creature bent to the ground by humility, suffering and shame (ORK, p. 300).

Referring to Hindu sacred books – *The Laws of Manu* and *Padma Purana* – she writes that “to be sure, from this one of all cradles of human race” stems the thought that the woman is naturally evil, she is faithful to her husband “for fear of blows and prison”, and the husband is the woman's god on earth (ORK, p. 301). In relation to Hindu sacred books, the author develops Chinese themes:

Like sullen echoes, from the depths of the huge and mysterious China, the following cries can be heard, corresponding to the above phrases: “The woman's condition is one of contempt and weakness...”. “The task of a man is to practice virtue, the task of a woman is to renounce knowledge”. “You should listen to your wife but not believe her”. “A woman should be at home like a shadow or an echo” (ORK, p. 301).

She also argues that:

The degraded position of woman in the family and the obscure ideas about her entailed corresponding customs and public acts concerning women. In China, a woman was forbidden to sit at the same table with a man, and when a female child was born, before it was wrapped in swaddling clothes, it was laid on the ground to symbolise the position it would hold for its entire future (ORK, p. 302).

The author says that Confucius was “a deep thinker and the moralist of China”, who, however, “in relation to women maintains: ‘A woman owes to her husband all that she is; she should, when he dies, remain a widow and submit herself to the authority of the elder son’” (ORK, p. 301). Orzeszkowa concludes the description of the position of a woman in ancient cultures with an important statement that, in relation to the subject of the woman's position, one can discern a “play of shadows and lights” (ORK, p. 306). It can be seen – according to the author – also in the Confucian thought:

¹⁰ See also: Grażyna Borkowska, “Wprowadzenie”, in: Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Publicystyka społeczna*, vol. 2, pp. 29–33.

That same Confucius who contends that a woman owes to her husband everything that she is, and who, after her husband's death, considering her to be permanently underage, commands her to submit herself to the authority of the elder son, claims at another place that only in marriage, that is, in the conjugation of a man with a woman, resides for that man the warranty of happiness and the just purpose of life, and as a rule of conduct for spouses of both sexes equally, he advises mutual tenderness, respect and trust (ORK, p. 306).

Orzeszkowa also noticed contradictions between theory and practice, philosophy and the laws and customs, in the *Laws of Manu*, just as much as in the thought of Confucius, the Old Testament, as well as ancient Greece and Rome. She situates those "cracks" in those moments in history when the old order clashed with the new one, and she explains them with practical reasons: "Every doctrine, when it takes control over the world, always gives up some of its ideal content in favour of the habits and notions of those, over whose minds and lives it tries to dominate" (ORK, p. 320).

In the Confucian thought, the problem of marital relationships and its influence on women's lives is particularly interesting for Orzeszkowa. As Iwona Wiśniewska underlines, Orzeszkowa „stands unwaveringly on the ground of inviolability of family as the bedrock of morality, society and nation”.¹¹ She believes marriage to be the norm of a female biography – family is better than solitude.¹² However, marriage should consist in possessing equal laws, submission of one of the spouses to the other should be excluded. The writer also rejects the idea of marriage as the only means of a woman's physical survival.¹³ In the Confucian thought, as Józef Kremer wrote already in 1877, family “is the element permeating all private and public relations, it is the pulse of all life”.¹⁴ At the same time, the philosopher claimed that in China, there is no “true” family, because it is dominated by “paternal despotism, polygamy, that is by lack of recognition of women's dignity”.¹⁵ He believed the distortion of the ideas of family and state consisted in the mingling of the two. Contemporary researchers point to the fact that in the Confucian philosophy, a definition of human being was only possible in the social context. Human relationships existed in terms of dominion and submission. This found its application in the five relations of dependence (the Confucian obligations), including the wife's dependence on her husband:

Moreover, a wife, or in a broader sense – a woman, was obliged to follow additional rules, namely, before marriage, she had to be submitted to her father, after wedding – to her husband, and in the case of her spouse's death, she was bound by obligation towards the eldest son.¹⁶

¹¹ Iwona Wiśniewska, “Nieznana rozprawa o kobietach”, p. 111.

¹² Ibidem, p. 113.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 112.

¹⁴ Józef Kremer, *Listy z Krakowa*, vol. 1: *Wstępne zasady estetyki i dzieje artystycznej fantazji. Część pierwsza*, Warsaw: S. Lewental 1877, p. 287.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Pamela Kłityńska, “Myśl Konfucjusza”, *Acta Erasmiana* 2016, vol. XIII, pp. 74–75.

Family ties lay at the centre of the Confucian ethics, family relationships reflected the form of the functioning of the society and the state.¹⁷

It is worth noting at this moment, by way of digression, that the first Chinese translation of *Marta* (published six years before Orzeszkowa began to write the treatise on woman and regarded as “a literary image of the tragic consequences of impractical education of women from landed gentry”)¹⁸ appeared in print under the title *Tears of a Lonely Goose* (Shanghai 1929, translation Zhong Xianmin (钟宪民)).¹⁹ In the Chinese culture, goose is a symbol of marital happiness. This animal has only one partner for life, just like a woman should not marry for the second time.²⁰

In her letter to Erazm Piltz of 28 September 1883, Orzeszkowa included a list of Polish books and brochures dedicated to the woman question, which – in her opinion – “are of great or of certain” value.²¹ The list opens with Edward Prądzyński’s *O prawach kobiety* [On the Woman’s Rights], a book that had two editions (1873, 1875).²² Edmund Jankowski described Prądzyński as an advocate of moderate progress in the woman question.²³

Prądzyński’s work is important for the discussion on Orzeszkowa’s manuscript, because the first part of her treatise is based on the second chapter of that work. Quotations from Confucius are all drawn from Prądzyński. In the 1870s, this publication served as a model of reflection on the woman question, a reliable source of information, which resulted, among others, from the opinion on that work expressed by Aleksander Świętochowski. In 1873, this prominent positivist critic reviewed this work in four issues of *Przegląd Tygodniowy* [Weekly Review],²⁴ calling it “supreme” and assessing that no other article on this subject can equal it:

¹⁷ See: ibidem, p. 76. Sławomir Nowosad demonstrates that Confucius adopted the “set of rituals and ceremonies” existing in the Chinese society, which prescribed obedience and respect towards those who are higher in the social structure (see: Sławomir Nowosad, “Podstawowe pojęcia etyczne konfucjanizmu”, *Roczniki Teologiczne* 2017, fasc. 3, p. 59).

¹⁸ See, e.g., Hanna Miera, “O Mariach i Martach tego świata. Kobieta oczami Orzeszkowej na podstawie powieści *Maria*”, *Academic Journal of Modern Philology* 2022, vol. 17, p. 122.

¹⁹ Li Yinan, *Recepcja literatury polskiej w Chinach*, p. 47.

²⁰ See: Joanna Afek, *Kulturowe i językowe uwarunkowania chińskich przesądów i tabu*, manuscript of doctoral dissertation, Poznań 2013, pp. 177–178; Wolfram Eberhard, *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols: Hidden Symbols in Chinese Life and Thought*, trans. G.L. Campbell, London–New York: Routledge–Kegan Paul 1986, p. 132.

²¹ Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Listy zebrane*, vol. 1: *Listy do redaktorów i wydawców: Józefa Sikorskiego, Gebethnera i Wolffa, Franciszka Salezego Lewentala, Wacława Makowskiego, Erazma Piltza, Stanisława Posnera*, ed. Edmund Jankowski, Wrocław: Zakład im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo PAN 1954, p. 181.

²² Edward Prądzyński, *O prawach kobiety*, 2nd ed., Warsaw: Gustaw Sennewald 1875. Further referred to with the abbreviation “OPK” and page number.

²³ Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Listy zebrane*, vol. 1, p. 355.

²⁴ Aleksander Świętochowski, “Przegląd piśmiennictwa polskiego”, *Przegląd Tygodniowy* 1873, nos. 6–9. Further referred to with the abbreviation “PT”, issue number and page number.

Neither the treatises by Mrs. Dobieszewska²⁵ nor by Mrs. Orzeszko,²⁶ not to mention those by Hoffmanowa, Trębicka, etc., nor even the two latest valuable studies by Mrs. Dzieduszycka,²⁷ equal the work of Mr. Pr., both in terms of form and content (PT 9, p. 69).

And further:

The masses, who have been recently passionately consuming productions of this nature, and until now, for the most part, were fed with futile and paltry products of feeble minds, will draw from Mr. Pr.'s book wholesome and nourishing food (PT 9, p. 69).

Moreover, Świętochowski criticised the contemporary overflow of brochures and articles on the woman question, above all those belonging to "Mrs. Tańska's school" (PT 6, p. 44).

Nonetheless, we should note that Świętochowski was sceptical about the second chapter of Prądyński's book, that is, the historical outline of the woman question, which Orzeszkowa referred to in her treatise, quoting, for instance, the description of the position of woman in the Confucian thought. The critic reproached Prądyński for giving a characteristic of "the fate and position of woman among the Chinese, the Indians, the Israelites and, in short, among other nations of Asia" with the use of "second-hand excerpts" (PT 7, p. 52). According to Świętochowski, these views are in many places false "or at least they contradict the most recent scientific conclusions" (PT 7, p. 52), although – which is worth highlighting – the Apostle of Truth²⁸ denounces and corrects only the information concerning the Jewish, Greek and Roman philosophy and customs, but he omits the Chinese themes. Interestingly, in *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, Świętochowski presented China in a suggestive manner as "the optimal indicator of negative phenomena".²⁹ The journalist "was the first to use Chinese motifs in the Aesopian language" as examples of traditionalism and lack of progress.³⁰

²⁵ This is a reference to Józefa Dobieszewska's lecture *Wychowanie kobiet wobec dzisiejszych dążeń społecznych* [Women's Education in the Face of Contemporary Social Pursuits], which appeared in print in Lviv in 1871.

²⁶ This is a reference to Orzeszkowa's second (in terms of publication) treatise on the woman question entitled *Kilka słów o kobietach*, printed in installments in *Tygodnik Mód* [Weekly Magazine of Fashions] in 1870. The first one – *O kwestii kobiecej z powodu artykułu pana Antoniego Nowosielskiego w nrach 126 i 127 "Gazety Polskiej"* [On the Woman Question Because of Mr. Antoni Nowosielski's Article in the Issues 126 and 127 of *Gazeta Polska*] – was printed in 1870 in *Gazeta Polska* [Polish Journal].

²⁷ This is a reference to Anastazja Dzieduszycka's studies *Kilka myśli o wychowaniu i wykształceniu niewiast naszych* [Several Thoughts on the Upbringing and Education of Our Women] (Lviv: Gubrynowicz i Schmidt 1871) and *Gawędy matki* [Mother's Tales] (Lviv: Gubrynowicz i Schmidt 1872).

²⁸ "Poseł Prawdy", usually translated as "the Apostle of Truth" or "the Messenger of Truth", is one of Aleksander Świętochowski's pseudonyms (trans. note).

²⁹ See: Bogdan Mazan, "Figury myśli i (anty)wzory", p. 110.

³⁰ Ibidem.

In the introduction to the second chapter, Prądzyński admits that in his historical research he made use not only of primary, but also of secondary sources, above all works in French – by Louis-Auguste Martin, Paul Gide, Édouard Laboulaye, Ernest Legouvé (all of whom Orzeszkowa quoted extensively in her earlier treatise *Kilka słów o kobietach*), Joseph de Rainneville, but also in Polish – *Niewiasty polskie* [Polish Women] by Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki, *Stanowisko praktyczne dawnych niewiast* [The Practical Position of the Women of Yore] by Władysław Chomentowski, *Kobieta w Polsce* [Woman in Poland] by Zygmunt Kaczkowski (OPK, p. 68).

It should be noted that the Chinese themes evoked by Prądzyński refer not only to the Confucian thought, but they also encompass mythology, literature and Chinese legislation. The author systematises the material according to specific topics related to the woman question. He writes, for example, that legends in individual cultures attribute to one and the same hero both the discovery of agriculture and the establishment of marriage: it was Cecrops in Greece, Odin in Germanic lands and Fu Xi (the first mythical emperor and sage) in China. At every latitude, marriage entailed the obligation to have offspring. In his reflections on the woman question, Prądzyński considers “the legislative monuments of the East” as “the first clearly written page in history” (OPK, p. 70). Based on Louis-Auguste Martin’s *Histoire de la femme*, he quotes excerpts from *Shi-Jing* (*Book of Songs*, which belongs to the Five Classics of Confucianism), claiming that:

China has attained the unconditional dependence of a woman on the will and whim of a man. She is a permanent slave there: slave to her parents as a maiden, slave to her husband as a married woman, slave to her closest relatives when she is widowed (OPK, pp. 70–71).

In lower classes, women, especially abandoned wives and widows, live in destitution that pushes them to suicide; in wealthy classes, they are educated to become passive and inept creatures. As a result, polygamy has become popular among men. Women can leave their homes only in a covered litter, the uncovering of which is tantamount to adultery. If the uncovering was intentional, the woman deserves to receive a hundred whips and to be divorced; she can be sold as a slave. This situation remained unchanged until the author’s contemporary times, which he claims to be testified by the memoirs of missionaries. Prądzyński writes that the “ghastly notions” of the Confucian system are ingrained in the folk maxims and proverbs, and they even gained the women’s acclaim. As a proof, he quotes a female scholar and writer, Pan-hoei-pan, active in the 1st century CE, who included in her book reminiscences from *Shi-Jing* (quoted by Orzeszkowa in her unpublished treatise): “The woman’s condition is one of contempt and weakness...”; “A woman, says the proverb, should be at home like a shadow or an echo”. At the same time, the researcher of the second half of the 19th century points to the veneration and respect that the Chinese showed to virginity. He also quotes – still drawing from Martin – the Confucian views on marriage, which he perceives as morally elevated. Świętochowski deems the third chapter, dedicated to the sociological and economic dimensions, to be the most valuable part of Prądzyński’s work.

Grażyna Borkowska and Iwona Wiśniewska, who have already been mentioned in this article, tried to answer the question concerning the reasons for Orzeszkowa's abandoning the work on the manuscript. The author of the edition pointed out that the writer stopped in the middle of part three – perhaps the topic proved too complex (which was also mentioned by Iwona Wiśniewska), or maybe she directed her interests towards other social issues (she soon began working on the treatise concerning the Jewish question). In relation to the Chinese themes which she outlined in the first part of her work, we may wonder whether she took Prądzyński's work as the point of departure, but did not want merely to reproduce his conclusions regarding the condition of a woman in history and culture. Another reason could be Świętochowski's opinion about the scant value of the second chapter of Prądzyński's study, as well as the fact that one year after the second edition of *O prawach kobiety*, Louis-Auguste Martin, extensively quoted by Prądzyński, published the book *La femme en Chine* (1876). Thus, the fragments dedicated to Chinese themes became obsolete and required a fresh look. It is worth noting that Martin also authored other publications dedicated to Chinese philosophy and culture: *Histoire de la morale. Première partie: la morale chez les chinois* (1859) and *Les civilisations primitives en Orient: Chinois, Indiens, Perses, Babyloniens, Syriens, Égyptiens* (1861).

As said above, in her historical reflections in the first part of the manuscript, Orzeszkowa points to the inconsistencies in various cultures. Balancing the arguments, showing the subject from different sides was characteristic of the writer-journalist's reflection on history, society, judgements of phenomena and postulates of development. A reliable and complete understanding of Confucian thought might have been particularly important for her, considering the fact that the Chinese thinker preached charity, justice, virtue, respect for customs and mores, as well as modesty. As for marriage, he recommended tenderness, mutual trust and respect. Moral development based on virtue and the readiness to strive for self-perfection were, as we know, the foundation of Orzeszkowa's thinking. At the same time, the future translator of Ernest Renan, seeking her own form of religiousness, was certainly interested in the influence of Confucian ethics on Western European philosophy, including the undermining of biblical chronology and the questioning of faith as a necessary condition of morality.

And she could have known – at least in a broad outline – the chief postulates of Confucian thought based on the books that had been published in the Polish lands already from the end of the 18th century (when the most fervent discussions concerning the Chinese thought were conducted in Europe, with the participation of Voltaire, among others). It is worth mentioning at least *Krótki zbiór starożytnych moralistów z francuskiego na polski język przełożony* [Short Collection of Ancient Moralists Translated from French into Polish] translated by Grzegorz Zachariasiewicz, the second volume of which was entitled *Myśli moralne Konfucjusza* [Confucius' Moral Thoughts] (1784), or the short biography of Confucius and a summary of his thought, which were printed in 1837 in Warsaw in *Magazyn Powszechny* [Common Magazine]. Yet, as the writer herself informed in the above-quoted letter to Teodor Tomasz Jeż, at

the time when she was working on the treatise, she was not able to read, and thus to broaden her knowledge of Chinese thought. We should add that Orzeszkowa was not alone in her difficulties with gaining knowledge about the cultures of the East. In the second half of the 19th century, the knowledge of Orient was for the most part based on translations of original texts, mediated by Western languages, which resulted, among others, from the lack of academic orientalist studies: “Polish enthusiasts of Eastern cultures were well-versed in the European literature on the subject and it was on this basis that they formed and popularised among the readers an image of that world and its literatures”.³¹ Bogdan Mazan contends that according to “early positivist notions”, dealing with Chinese themes required no special qualifications.³² Therefore, a reader of the press of that time (including *Przegląd Tygodniowy*), but also of scientific works, received a petrified, simplistic image. China was regarded as

a civilisationally retarded country, not capable of internal reforms; as a symbol of stagnation, hieratic order, overconfidence, outward sumptuousness and rather internal emptiness, conscious sealing itself within tradition and inability to keep up with modernity.³³

It is also worth highlighting the opinion of contemporary researchers, who demonstrate that the discoveries concerning Chinese chronology and non-religious morality, made by the Jesuit milieu and interpreted by European philosophers, contributed to the development of the Enlightenment’s secularism.³⁴ At the same time, the European perception of the Chinese religiousness, philosophy, historiosophy and political thought was ambivalent. Voltaire, for instance, underlined the perfection of Chinese morality and considered the Chinese political system as the best possible. Montesquieu and Diderot, in turn, saw China as an example of despotism built upon the conjunction of religion, laws, customs and mores. German philosophers were also critical of China – they rejected the Chinese chronology of history and claimed that there is no such thing as a Chinese concept of virtue and morality. Hegel perceived

³¹ *Literatura Orientu w piśmiennictwie polskim XIX wieku*, part II, eds. Anna Krasnowolska et al., Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka 2016, p. 287. The authors observed that Piotr Chmielowski’s and Edward Grabowski’s anthology (*Obraz literatury powszechnej w streszczeniach i przykładach* [The Image of the World Literature in Summaries and Examples], Warsaw: Teodor Paprocki i S-ka 1895–1896) could be read as an image of knowledge about Eastern literature in the Polish lands.

³² See: Bogdan Mazan, “Figury myśli i (anty)wzory”, p. 108.

³³ Ibidem, p. 107.

³⁴ This issue has been meticulously analysed by Dawid Rogacz. See: idem, “Jak ‘Chiny’ stworzyły Europę. Narodziny oświeceniowego sekularyzmu z ducha konfucjanizmu”, *Diametros* 2017, no. 54, pp. 138–160. The traces of Enlightenment’s interest in China which are present in secondary sources have been discussed in detail by Irena Kadulska and Monika Kwietniewska in the article “Współczesna refleksja nad oświeceniowym zainteresowaniem Chinami w Polsce”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków. Księga jubileuszowa z okazji 60-lecia nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Chińską Republiką Ludową*, eds. Józef Arno Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marcei Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 179–190.

Confucian philosophy as popular morality.³⁵ The Enlightenment – as demonstrated by Grażyna Borkowska – was a particularly important age for Orzeszkowa in her writing on equal rights.³⁶ Perhaps she felt uneasy with the awareness of having only second-hand access to important threads influencing the Enlightenment thought.³⁷ Also, reading very recent studies may have aroused suspicion that further sinological research would have brought new conclusions in relation to the woman question. For instance, towards the end of the 19th century, a Dutch sinologist, Gustaaf Schlegel, opposed “the common conception of the unfortunate situation of Chinese women”, which, according to him, was better than that of women in Europe.³⁸ The researcher argued that women in China are not forced to labour in the fields, family rows are rare, widows enjoy the society's respect and mothers are deeply esteemed by their sons.³⁹

Finally, it is worth noting that some of Orzeszkowa's ideas discussed in the unfinished treatise were developed in the studies *Los i stanowisko kobiety pierwotnej* [The Fate and Situation of the Primitive Woman] and *O kobiecie indyjskiej* [On the Hindu Woman], which were chapters of the intended larger treatise *O kobietach. Rzut oka na społeczne i historyczne położenie kobiet* [On Women. A Glance of the Eye at the Social and Historical Situation of Women]. The writer never returned to the Chinese topics; in 1880, she was already gathering materials for chapters dedicated to the Egyptian, Jewish, Roman and Greek woman.⁴⁰ As we learn from the article by Zhao Gang, Yi Lijun and Mao Yinhui:

Orzeszkowa's works were translated and analysed by the Chinese literary milieu also for the reason that female heroines and, in general, the point of view of the Polish writer corresponded with the Chinese movement of women's emancipation, which appeared in the first half of the 20th century and intensified in the 1950s and later.⁴¹

In this context, it is certainly worthwhile to postulate the translation of Orzeszkowa's and other writers' journalistic texts into Chinese, which – if properly edited – would

³⁵ See: *ibidem*, pp. 153–156.

³⁶ See: ORK, p. 32.

³⁷ It is worth noting at this place that at least until mid-1890s, Orzeszkowa expressed scepticism in relation to dogmas and the Church as institution. At the same time, she underlined the importance of the ethical and moral context in all forms of activity.

³⁸ Schlegel delivered his lecture at the orientalist's convention in Geneva. An account of this lecture was published in *Wędrowiec* [The Wanderer] by Józef Stefan Ziemia (idem, “Etnografia i ludoznawstwo. I. Stanowisko kobiety w Chinach”, *Wędrowiec* 1895, no. 36, p. 718). The above-quoted Bogdan Mazan stated that publications in *Wędrowiec* were a “cognitive breach” in the spread of knowledge about China.

³⁹ See: *ibidem*. We should point out that the project of a new social system proposed by Kang Youwei was published as late as in 1902. In *The Book of Great Unity*, the philosopher indicated five barriers that must be overcome. The fourth chapter discusses “how to eliminate barriers between the sexes and give women equality”. See the entry “Married bliss”, in: Wolfram Eberhard, *A Dictionary*, p. 182.

⁴⁰ See: Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Publicystyka społeczna*, vol. 2, pp. 429–430.

⁴¹ Zhao Gang (赵刚), Yi Lijun (易丽君), Mao Yinhui (茅银辉), “Od Sienkiewicza do Sienkiewicza, czyli o literaturze pozytywistycznej w Chinach”, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm*, p. 313.

further elucidate the question of reception of the Chinese thought, including the thought on the emancipation of women, in the works of Polish Positivism. The example of the manuscript we have been discussing also shows that, from the Polish perspective, in order to scientifically examine the journalism of that period, it is necessary to have Polish translations of the works of Chinese thinkers as well as of studies concerning Chinese thought in historical perspective. This will allow to assess the scope of awareness of the journalists of that time, who for the most part made use of the transmission of knowledge from West European countries. Orzeszkowa's text demonstrates the importance that the writer attached to the conviction that it is possible to draw comparisons between cultures, for instance, in the discussion on women's status and rights.

References

- Afek Joanna, *Kulturowe i językowe uwarunkowania chińskich przesądów i tabu*, manuscript of doctoral dissertation, Poznań 2013.
- Borkowska Grażyna, "Wprowadzenie", in: Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Publicystyka społeczna*, vol. 1: *Myślenie obywatelskie, Żydzi, kwestia kobieca*, eds. Grażyna Borkowska, Iwona Wiśniewska, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 2020, pp. 48–67.
- Borkowska Grażyna, "Wprowadzenie", in: Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Publicystyka społeczna*, vol. 2: *Rozprawy, studia, artykuły*, eds. Grażyna Borkowska, Iwona Wiśniewska, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 2020, pp. 29–43.
- Borkowska Grażyna, "Wstęp", in: Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Publicystyka społeczna*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 2005, pp. 36–49.
- Budrewicz Tadeusz, "Stereotypy Chin i Chińczyków w polskiej prasie satyrycznej drugiej połowy XIX wieku", in: *Bez antypodów? Konfrontacje i zbliżenia kultur*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Fundacja Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2008, pp. 207–230.
- Chmielowski Piotr, Grabowski Edward, *Obraz literatury powszechnej w streszczeniach i przykładach*, Warsaw: Teodor Paprocki i S-ka 1895–1896.
- Dobieszewska Józefa, *Wychowanie kobiet wobec dzisiejszych dążeń społecznych*, Lviv: Kornel Piller 1871.
- Dzieduszycka Anastazja, *Gawędy matki*, Lviv: Gubrynowicz i Schmidt 1872.
- Dzieduszycka Anastazja, *Kilka myśli o wychowaniu i wykształceniu niewiast naszych*, Lviv: Gubrynowicz i Schmidt 1871.
- Eberhard Wolfram, *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols: Hidden Symbols in Chinese Life and Thought*, trans. G.L. Campbell, London–New York: Routledge–Kegan Paul 1986.
- Kadulska Irena, Kwietniewska Monika, "Współczesna refleksja nad oświeceniowym zainteresowaniem Chinami w Polsce", in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków. Księga jubileuszowa z okazji 60-lecia nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Chińską Republiką Ludową*, eds. Józef Arno Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marceli Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 179–190.
- Klityńska Pamela, "Myśl Konfucjusza", *Acta Erasmiana* 2016, vol. XIII, pp. 73–85.
- Kremer Józef, *Listy z Krakowa*, vol. 1: *Wstępne zasady estetyki i dzieje artystycznej fantazji. Część pierwsza*, Warsaw: S. Lewental 1877.

- Li Yinan (李怡楠), *Recepcja literatury polskiej w Chinach. Wybrane zagadnienia*, manuscript of doctoral dissertation, Katowice 2015.
- Literatura Orientu w piśmiennictwie polskim XIX wieku*, part II, eds. Anna Krasnowolska et al., Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka 2016.
- Mao Yinhui (茅银辉), 艾丽查·奥热什科娃的女性观与创作中的女性问题研究 [Feminism and Female Themes in the Works of Eliza Orzeszkowa], Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press 2008.
- Mazan Bogdan, "Figury myśli i (anty)wzory. Motywy chińskie w *Przeglądzie Tygodniowym* 1871–1876", in: *Pozytywiści warszawscy: "Przegląd Tygodniowy" 1866–1876. Seria II: Świat, Europa, Polska*, ed. Anna Janicka, Białystok: Temida 2, Katedra Badań Filologicznych "Wschód-Zachód" (Uniwersytet w Białymstoku) 2020, pp. 105–124.
- Mazan Bogdan, "Z obrazów Chin i Chińczyków w piśmiennictwie polskim drugiej połowy XIX wieku. 'Chińskie cienie' w *Lalce* Bolesława Prusa", in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 317–405.
- Mazan Bogdan, "Zepsuty ornament. Odtajnianie chińszczyzny w powieściach Elizy Orzeszkowej o 'argonautach'", in: *Sekrety Orzeszkowej*, eds. Grażyna Borkowska, Magdalena Rudkowska, Iwona Wiśniewska, Warsaw: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna 2012, pp. 228–249.
- Miera Hanna, "O Mariach i Martach tego świata. Kobieta oczami Orzeszkowej na podstawie powieści *Maria*", *Academic Journal of Modern Philology* 2022, vol. 17, pp. 119–129.
- Nowosad Sławomir, "Podstawowe pojęcia etyczne konfucjanizmu", *Roczniki Teologiczne* 2017, fasc. 3, pp. 51–61.
- Orzeszkowa Eliza, *Listy zebrane*, vol. 1: *Listy do redaktorów i wydawców: Józefa Sikorskiego, Gebethnera i Wolffa, Franciszka Salezego Lewentala, Wacława Makowskiego, Erazma Piltza, Stanisława Posnera*, ed. Edmund Jankowski, Wrocław: Zakład im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo PAN 1954.
- Osiński Dawid Maria, *Pozytywistów dziedzictwo Oświecenia. Kierunki i formy recepcji*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Episteme 2018.
- Prądyński Edward, *O prawach kobiety*, 2nd ed., Warsaw: Gustaw Sennewald 1875.
- Rogacz Dawid, "Jak 'Chiny' stworzyły Europę. Narodziny oświeceniowego sekularyzmu z ducha konfucjanizmu", *Diametros* 2017, no. 54, pp. 138–160.
- Sokalska Małgorzata, "Od podszewki, czyli o jedwabiu w literaturze (Honoré de Balzac – Bolesław Prus – Eliza Orzeszkowa)", *Ruch Literacki* 2022, fasc. 4, pp. 591–615.
- Świętochowski Aleksander, "Przegląd piśmiennictwa polskiego", *Przegląd Tygodniowy* 1873, nos. 6–9.
- Wiśniewska Iwona, "Nieznana rozprawa o kobietach. (Równość wobec prawa, pracy i wiedzy, czyli proste rozwiązanie kwestii)", in: *Poznanie Orzeszkowej. W stulecie śmierci (1910–2010)*, eds. Ireneusz Sikora, Aneta Narolska, Częstochowa–Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego 2010, pp. 95–122.
- Zhao Gang (赵刚), Yi Lijun (易丽君), Mao Yinhui (茅银辉), "Od Sienkiewicza do Sienkiewicza, czyli o literaturze pozytywistycznej w Chinach", in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 303–315.
- Ziomba Józef Stefan, "Etnografia i ludoznawstwo. I. Stanowisko kobiety w Chinach", *Wędrowiec* 1895, no. 36, p. 718.

“People Born to Live in Their Motherland”: The Encounter of China and the West in Waclaw Sieroszewski’s Novel *Zamorski diabeł*¹

Iwona Przybysz

University of Warsaw, Poland

e-mail: i.prybysz2@uw.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-0883-2074

Abstract

The article analyses methods of presenting the relationships between China and the West in *Zamorski diabeł* [The Overseas Devil] by Waclaw Sieroszewski. The novel presents factors that shape the negative image of relationships between the Chinese and the Europeans, such as stereotyping and fetishisation of the Chinese culture by Western people, their unwillingness to engage in contact with the Chinese as well as their colonialist attitude, visible both at the level of the economic practices and the symbolic definitions of terms such as “progress” and “civilisation”. The article also analyses different versions of the conclusion of the novel and their influence on the moral of the story.

Keywords

Waclaw Sieroszewski, *Zamorski diabeł* [The Overseas Devil], culture of China, colonialism, Boxer Rebellion

The Polish novel discussed in the present article, functioning under the title *Zamorski diabeł* or its Chinese variants *Jan-guj-tzy* / *Jang-hun-tsy* (placed always next to the Polish title), constitutes an interesting fragment of Waclaw Sieroszewski’s (1858–1945) literary writing, as an exception from his usual literary strategies and techniques. Indeed, the most significant and the most often discussed works he authored are texts

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: “‘Ludzie stworzeni, by mieszkać w swojej ojczyźnie’. Spotkanie świata Zachodu i Chin w *Zamorskim diable* Wacława Sieroszewskiego”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 94–109, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.6>.

(both literary and those with a scholarly verve), in which he explores his experiences of contacts with tribes living in Siberia (e.g., in the novels *Na kresach lasów* [At the Edge of the Woods] and *Ucieczka* [A Flight from Siberia], or in the ethnographic monograph *Dwanaście lat w kraju Jakutów* [Twelve Years in the Yakut Country]).² These books are a reworking of his personal history as a Siberian deportee,³ and at the same time, a testimony of his search for a new way of describing this region and presenting it to the Polish reader, with ethnographic curiosity, though not deprived of martyrologic streak.⁴ However, no direct relation between personal experience and the text can be found in *Zamorski diabeł*. This novel belongs (together with the short stories “Bokser” [A Boxer] and “Kulisi” [The Coolies]) to a small group of texts treating the subject of the Far East, but composed before Sieroszewski’s great voyage across Asia (including, among others, Northeast China, Japan and Korea),⁵ which he began in 1902 on commission from the Academy of Learning. His impressions from this journey are recorded, among others, in his documentary texts from China published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* [The Illustrated Weekly], in his book *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu* [Korea. The Key to the Far East] from 1905⁶ and in the Japanese motifs scattered in numerous literary works.⁷

This does not mean that the image of China presented in *Zamorski diabeł* is merely a product of the author’s imagination or that the references to this country function solely as an allegory of the Polish society, as was the case in the early humoresques

² Wacław Sieroszewski, *Na kresach lasów*, Lviv: Wydawnictwo Polskie 1920; idem, *Ucieczka*, Warsaw: Biblioteka Polska 1923 (English translation: idem, *A Flight from Siberia*, trans.: s.n., London: Hutchinson 1909); idem, *Dwanaście lat w kraju Jakutów*, Warsaw: Fr. Karpiński 1900.

³ As a student at the Railway Technical School in Warsaw, Sieroszewski had contact with the socialist milieu. On 27 July 1878, when securing the illegal departure of Jan Tomaszewski, a close collaborator of Ludwik Waryński, he was arrested and then accused of propagating socialism. Sieroszewski pleaded not guilty and refused to cooperate with the Gendarmerie. As a result, in August that same year, he was put in the 10th Pavilion of the Warsaw Citadel (see: Andrzej Sieroszewski, *Wacława Sieroszewskiego żywot niespokojny*, published from the manuscript, elaborated and supplemented by Andrzej Z. Makowiecki, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Iskry 2015, pp. 29–37). In 1879, he took part in the prisoners’ revolt, for which he was deported to Siberia (see: ibidem, pp. 43–46). It was not until 1896, after receiving the golden medal of Russian Geographical Society for the novel *Jakuty* [The Yakuts], that he obtained the permission to return to Poland and a year later came back to his homeland.

⁴ See, for example, Adrian Uljasz, “Syberia i Daleki Wschód w oczach polskiego pisarza. Wacław Sieroszewski (1858–1945)”, *Przegląd Nauk Historycznych* 2012, A. XI, no. 1, pp. 137–153.

⁵ This journey was an attempt to vindicate Sieroszewski – unjustly accused of organising a workers’ march during the ceremony of unveiling Adam Mickiewicz’s monument in Warsaw – in the eyes of the Russian authorities. Thus, this was a forced journey. More on this subject, see: Andrzej Sieroszewski, *Wacława Sieroszewskiego żywot niespokojny*, pp. 146–160.

⁶ See also: Marlena Oleksiuk, *Korea w twórczości Wacława Sieroszewskiego*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG 2022.

⁷ More on this subject, see, e.g., Zdzisław Kempf, *Orientalizm Wacława Sieroszewskiego. Wątki japońskie*, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1982.

or some weekly chronicles by Bolesław Prus.⁸ Sieroszewski tried to present a factual image of the events taking place there and of this country's culture. As for the gaps resulting from the lack of his own experience of this country, he supplemented them with knowledge drawn from the notes and texts given to him by Aleksandra Potanina, a Russian explorer and researcher of Central Asia. Sieroszewski first met the scholar and her husband, the ethnographer Grigory Potanin, in the 1890s in Irkutsk and he quickly developed a cordial relationship with them. The first version of *Zamorski diabeł*, written in Russian and published in the magazine *Mir Bozhiy* [God's World], was in fact a literary reworking of Potanina's notes from her expedition to China, and the nature of this edition was indicated by including the scholar and Sieroszewski as coauthors. However, none of the Polish editions, beginning with the first print in the press (*Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 1901), mentions the name of Potanina as a coauthor or a source of inspiration.

The influence of foreign texts on the shape of *Zamorski diabeł* was not limited to the descriptions of local realia drawn from Potanina's works. The motif of commercial expedition, which takes the protagonist to China and constitutes the trigger of the novel's plot, was based, as Piotr Grzegorzczak indicated,⁹ on the journal of Paweł Piasecki, member of the scientific-commercial expedition sent by the Russian government to China in 1874. This book, which at that time in Russia attracted tremendous interest (the first edition from 1880 sold out in an instant, and the second one was published already two years later), would serve not only as a source of inspiration for Sieroszewski in the descriptions of local conditions, but also as a basis for the description of incompetence of the members of the expedition and the revolt that grew within the team, which was the first step towards the demythologisation of the image of the Western world as more developed than the Far East.¹⁰ Hence, it can be concluded that one of the few elements stemming from the author's own artistic invention is the figure of Janek Brzeski, the novel's protagonist, through whose eyes the reader sees China. This literary device, albeit contentious in terms of analysis of originality of a literary text,¹¹

⁸ More on this subject, see, e.g., Jan Data, "O Chinach i Chińczykach w juvenaliach i kronikach Bolesława Prusa", in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków. Księga jubileuszowa z okazji 60-lecia nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Chińską Republiką Ludową*, eds. Józef Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marcei Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 359–366. The possibility of interpreting *Lalka* in the context of China-related symbolism, the presence of which may constitute a touchstone of the common image of this country in the Polish cultural consciousness, is indicated also by Bogdan Mazan (see: Bogdan Mazan "Z obrazów Chin i Chińczyków w piśmiennictwie polskim drugiej połowy XIX wieku. 'Chińskie cienie' w *Lalce* Bolesława Prusa", in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 317–407).

⁹ Cf. Piotr Grzegorzczak, "Źródło *Powieści chińskich* Wacława Sieroszewskiego", *Ruch Literacki* 1929, no. 9, p. 274.

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 273–274.

¹¹ The ambiguity of such device is best confirmed by the attitude of Grzegorzczak himself, who does not venture in his article to answer the question whether Sieroszewski commits plagiarism. Both because

made it possible for Sieroszewski to blur the boundaries between the fictional material and the information drawn from already existing sources, thus rendering the narration more credible.

At the same time, this compels us to read *Zamorski diabeł* in a different way than Sieroszewski's Siberian texts. The Chinese novel should not be treated as a reportage or an autobiographical text¹² (even if we cannot deny the author's reliability in the presentation of facts), but as a literary text, in which the description of China serves mainly to problematise the question of possibility of establishing relationships between the East and the West, and even to create a political allegory referring to the situation of Poland at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.¹³ In *Zamorski diabeł*, much more important than factual accuracy is the encounter of two substantially disparate cultural systems and the resulting chances and risks. Indeed, Sieroszewski chooses a different path than, for example, Henryk Sienkiewicz did in *W pustyni i w puszczy* (*In Desert and Wilderness*), when he presented the culture of Egypt from the perspective of a coloniser penetrating a virgin land and clearly approved of such perception.¹⁴ Instead, the author of *Zamorski diabeł* looks at China with respect and does not hide his negative attitude to the colonising inclinations of Western people, thus deconstructing the rhetoric of appropriation that was used to justify the ongoing process of economic exploitation of China. For this reason, it would be worthwhile to analyse the ways of creating the situations of encounter of the two cultures, beginning from the start, that is, from the characters' knowledge about China, through the perspective from which they view the culture of that country, ending with the ambivalence related to the two worlds colliding (seen not only from the perspective of a man entering the Middle Kingdom, but also from the point of view of the Chinese themselves facing the influx of foreigners).

of the textual limits (the journal counted over a thousand pages) and the formal ones, Piasecki's influence, most visible in the initial parts of the novel, gradually diminishes. Therefore, Grzegorzczuk chooses to analyse instead how the introduction of the figure of Brzeski adds nuance to the narration imposed by Piasecki and, from this perspective, he appreciates the novel as a successful text, which uses material drawn from other sources to broaden the author's own point of view (*ibidem*, p. 275).

¹² Although, at the most general level, we could find similarities between the experiences of Janek Brzeski and Sieroszewski's numerous encounters with foreign cultures, the argument against interpreting the novel in this key would be, above all, the fact that he chose as the place of action a country that he could not have known yet from personal experience. This decision, in conjunction with the specific origin of a large part of the novel, could be interpreted as a sign of his cutting off from literary reworking of his own biography in the way he did, for example, in *Na kresach lasów*. For these reasons, I also decided not to refer to Sieroszewski's egodocuments, which cannot constitute an interpretative context for the novel.

¹³ See: Aleksandra Kijak, *Odkrywca innej Syberii i Dalekiego Wschodu. O prozie Wacława Sieroszewskiego*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2010, pp. 89–90.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Anna Cichon, "W kręgu zagadnień literatury kolonialnej – *W pustyni i w puszczy* Henryka Sienkiewicza", *Er(r)go. Teoria – Literatura – Kultura* 2004, no. 8, pp. 91–108.

Starting point – the (lack of) knowledge about China

The first step necessary to present the relationships between the East and the West is the choice of perspective in the novel. The protagonist of *Zamorski diabeł*, through whose eyes the author will be viewing the world of China, is Janek Brzeski, a nineteen-year-old Pole living with his mother in the heart of Russia. The boy's decision to depart with a commercial expedition and to accept employment in a tea factory run by his uncle gives him the first opportunity to broaden his horizons. This is particularly important if we take into account that Brzeski's and his mother's knowledge about China is best described as "rudimentary", based mainly on stereotypes, false convictions and sometimes even on harmful prejudices:

It's unthinkable that you should stay with no penny on you in a country so distant and wild...

– Mum, China is not a wild country! Their civilisation is older than ours...

– So I have heard, but still I do not trust them a bit. They wear God knows what, men braid their hair, they greet each other on all fours, eat dogs, cats, worms... It's true, they have good porcelain and silk, I admit, but you, Janek, when you are among them, I beg you, beware of unchristian customs...¹⁵

In the characters' imaginarium, China is reduced to a cluster of images that favour the exoticisation of that country. The symbols invoked by Brzeski and his mother, deprived of their original semantic context, blend together, revealing in fact more about the persons pronouncing those judgments than about the country they describe. Men's queue braids mentioned by Brzeska serve as a good example, because they are not an integral part of that culture, but constitute a symbol of subjugation imposed by the Manchu peoples, who took control of China in the 19th century.¹⁶ Without this knowledge, the woman, although she aptly notices the cultural gender ambiguity of this hairstyle worn by men, yet she lacks the cultural and political context. Therefore, she takes the queues for a sign of blurring the characteristic differences between sexes, which constitute an integral part of Western culture, and she refers to male braids in similar categories as culinary customs.

At this point, it is worth indicating the difference between the attitude of Janek Brzeski and that of his mother. The image of China in the woman's eyes, despite certain positive attributes, constitutes above all a reflection of fears of this Polish woman devoted to tradition and living in a foreign country (this explains the importance of her recurring exhortations to Janek that he must cultivate elements of Polish tradition and Christian religion, for this should warrant that the boy will maintain his identity).¹⁷ Yet

¹⁵ Wacław Sieroszewski, *Zamorski diabeł. Powieść*, Kraków: Spółka Nakładowa "Książka" 1909, p. 10.

¹⁶ See: Norbert Bociański, "Chiny w XIX i na początku XX wieku. Zarys sytuacji politycznej i społecznej", *Przegląd Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Społeczny* 2014, no. 1, p. 5.

¹⁷ See: Wacław Sieroszewski, *Zamorski diabeł*, p. 153.

her son, facing his first adventure of a lifetime, although he also constructs his image of China based on stereotypical snapshots, he clearly romanticises and even, to some degree, fetishises the unknown land:

So, he is going to see China, the enchanted land, where men wear queues and skirts, the land of women with slanted eyes and small feet, the land of bizarre ceremonies and bizarre customs, the land where tea is flowering, where the famous teacups are made, where they smoke opium, and shoot at the sun during eclipses...¹⁸

The images creating the vision of China in Brzeski's conceptual system overlap only to some extent with his mother's imaginarium (and this usually concerns those components that can be deemed as positive or at least neutral), but they compose a mosaic of scenes formed in the perspective of superiority, in which cultural differences are instances of "bizarreness". Moreover, the gender aspect is more strongly represented here, revealing not only the incompatibility of Eastern models and Western customs (through the recurring figure of men's braided hair), but also the erotic potential hidden in the foreignness, based – again – on the lack of knowledge about the cultural context (indeed, the "small feet" that ignite the boy's imagination are nothing else but the result of feet binding, which was practiced from the youngest age in girls of higher social status to ensure that men will find them attractive and, in consequence, to increase their chances of getting married). However, in this case, the fetishisation of oppression, which was the feet-binding procedure, is reinforced by thoughtless exoticisation of China, only partially attributable to Brzeski's young age.

Progress and colonialism

If such mechanisms seem natural in Janek and his mother, as resulting from lack of direct contact with the civilisation of China, yet it may be surprising that equally low level of cultural awareness can be found in the boy's uncle, Tomasz Śnietycki, who manages a tea factory and has a regular contact with the Chinese, so he has had many opportunities to revise his views. Yet the possibility of broadening his horizons after confronting a different cultural system does not even appear in his conceptual repertoire. Instead, the uncle encourages Brzeski to join the expedition mostly due to the chance of making fast earnings, which he indirectly presents almost as a patriotic deed ("When you make quite a sum, we'll all meritoriously return to our country. Because the country is poor and we need to bring it money, to be an aid for it, not a burden"¹⁹). He does not give his nephew any guidelines that could help him adapt to

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 16.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 7.

the new conditions, and at the same time, he only underlines the benefits that Brzeski can gain from the journey, by which he adds the coloniser's perspective to the boy's set of images of China. From this point of view, the efforts made to get to know the country of arrival matter only inasmuch as they help construct the domination of the Western world (hence, e.g., the credit given to Janek for studying Chinese language, as this is necessary to do business, with a concurrent reluctance to maintain any further contacts, for they could bring the risk of losing one's own European identity). Yet this approach is a natural consequence of the dominant attitude among the Europeans in China, first expressed in the novel by Śnietycki.²⁰ Limiting contacts with the Chinese exclusively to business and otherwise total isolation are the result of the Western people's perspective of superiority, resulting from the conviction that their understanding of progress is the only right one and, therefore, absolutely has to be implemented in all parts of the world.

The unfettered feeling of superiority of the people of the West over Eastern culture, which is counterproductive to the expedition's goal, constitutes an immediate consequence of colonialism. The scene in which the characters meet with Chinese dignitaries in a tent prepared for the members of the expedition and allow their dog inside seems to be symptomatic. Despite full awareness that the Chinese do not accept these animals in public space, the characters not only commit a faux pas (though perhaps we should rather call it a purposeful violation of the norm), but they also stubbornly defend their position through the use of unfounded arguments:

Finally came Siuj and Dor, which, against the Chinese etiquette, was allowed into the room. He did not fail to leap at the opportunity and instantly began to sniff the shins and other parts of the body of the assembled dignitaries. They did not betray their disgust even with the slightest gesture, although their eyes blazed with angry thunders.

– The dog must be removed... It is a violation of Chinese decency... Chinese politeness does not allow for a dog to... – the topographer remarked impetuously.

– Please, spare us your remarks... I ain't in a Chinese lodging, but my own! – retorted the baron angrily.²¹

The absurd comment of the baron, who forgets that the lodging was made available to him by the sheer politeness of the Chinese, shows that he thinks about the territory on which he stands in terms of a conquered land. However, this attitude contributes to the growing tension between the members of the expedition and the Chinese, which can be seen in spite of the strict code of Asian politeness revealed in ceremonial smiles. In consequence, this also disrupts the rhythm of negotiations.

The specific treatment of the Chinese, also by the Western managers of the factory, stems from the Eurocentric attitude, which forces them to look at China merely as a land of cheap workers, and at Europeans as the conquerors bringing illumination and civilisation (conceived, of course, in European categories) to the ignorant folk.

²⁰ Ibidem, pp. 7–8.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 45.

This seemingly good gesture is, in fact, a false pretence, meant to justify the Western expansion, the aim of which is to impose on the autochthons the European technological achievements, the “proper” cultural code and the conviction of superiority of the foreign political powers over the Far East. To this end, it is necessary to revalue the image of the foreign culture and, at the same time, to disguise one’s own intentions:

– It is time for China to regain itself – perorated the manager. – This land of classic stagnation used to live and to develop, until bonzos and mandarins put it in the threefold chain of destitution, ignorance and fanaticism. Now, it is caught in a vicious circle: fanatic because ignorant – ignorant because fanatic. [...] Europe, by the natural course of the development of its civilisation, is called to break the vicious circle of the unfortunate folk.²²

This rhetoric serves only to falsify the reality by rejecting the achievements of Chinese culture and privileging the technological dimension in the definition of progress, thus justifying the expansive actions of Western countries. The remedy to the alleged ills of the Chinese would be the unification of this nation’s culture with the world of the West. Concurrently, the attitude instilled in the autochthones should be that of humble servility towards the white man. As a result, “superfluous” knowledge about China (i.e., knowledge going beyond stereotypes) would constitute an obstacle to those tasks, since it would require a revision of negative stereotypes.

Between the two worlds

Brzeski could easily adopt the Eurocentric way of thinking about China, but he chooses a different path – partly of his own will, partly by necessity, for the purpose of acquiring the competencies he needs to complete the tasks he has been given. The decision to limit contacts with other industrialists and to penetrate deeper into the foreign culture by living with the family of a Chinese teacher forces him to confront the unknown reality every day. Moreover, the adoption of a proactive attitude (studying the history and culture of China, participating in the family life of the hosts, taking part in the New Year ceremony) allows him to qualify – or, in fact, to form from scratch – his opinions on the relationship between China and the Western world.

Brzeski’s teacher, Wań-Siń-Li (whose name means “Ruler of Western Gates”), proves to be a perfect example of a person suspended between the two worlds. The former official is fascinated with the culture of the West,²³ as it is confirmed by his

²² Ibidem, p. 189 (emphasis mine).

²³ However, it has to be underlined that Wań’s relations with the West are of a different nature than the adoption of elements of foreign culture by the rich Chinese men whom Brzeski met during his short visit in the embassy: “Here all national things are cheap, but all that is European is extraordinarily expensive. Yet in the embassy even European servants would be ashamed to use local objects. You must

rudimentary knowledge of French, relatively good relationships with the Catholic missionaries (Father Paolo from Italy and Father Płoński from the Poznań region), as well as the implementation of elements of European culture in his children's upbringing. The most blatant example of the latter is the fact that he decided not to bind the feet of his daughter Lień (even if the girl herself identifies with the cultural heritage of her own country more than her father does, which will be manifested by her wearing the traditional make-up).²⁴

However, full Europeanisation cannot be completed in his case, mainly due to the influence of his wife, Chań-Wań – an opium addict descended from an eminent Chinese family. Any deviation from tradition is for her a clear testimony of the moral decline of the whole family and, therefore, a deterioration of her own situation after she married Wań. Particularly important proves to be her objection to her husband's methods of upbringing their daughter Lień, because – in line with the patriarchal view of the world – they may restrict the girl's chances to get married, and thus make it significantly more difficult or even impossible for her to survive in the society. Hence, Chań-Wań is the guardian of the patriarchal tradition, which may seem surprising, considering her sex, but results mainly from her own upbringing. In a society that cannot keep pace with the cultural changes introduced by Wań under the influence of Western people, any deviation from the imposed norms leads to the exclusion of the deviating individual. Therefore, Chań-Wań's attitude constitutes for her, above all, a survival strategy.

Decisions taken by Wań, even though they influence mainly himself and his family, are seen as a kind of political act also by the Catholic missionaries, whose willingness to grant financial aid to the Ruler of Western Gates depended on whether he sent his son Ma-czzy to the school run by the missionaries. Wań's decision to send his son to a Chinese school, although made also for pecuniary reasons (as it resulted from his fear of losing orders from companies reluctant to cooperate with a deviant)²⁵ was perceived by them as turning away from the path of progress. From this perspective, their will to help Wań, which in the spirit of Catholic religion should be disinterested, becomes another step contributing to the reinforcement of colonial expansion of the West, based mostly on the transfer of material goods.

Yet Wań and his family are not merely victims, they can take advantage of their position – not only by charging Brzeski for the lessons (that is, by selling their competencies), but also through the later manipulation of the boy, when Chań-Wań, seeking funds to buy opium, simply plays with the erotic tension stemming from the

always take what is best and most expensive: walking on foot is unfitting, you should rent a palanquin straightaway" (ibidem, p. 111). The choice of European objects instead of those produced locally does not result from the acceptance of the presence of the foreigners and their influence on China, but from the limited availability of those goods, allowing for the representatives of higher social classes, who are wealthy enough to obtain them, to nourish a sense of superiority. By the same token, this becomes an important index of social stratification.

²⁴ Waław Sieroszewski, *Zamorski diabeł*, pp. 200–201.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 156.

limiting of contacts between the boy and Lień.²⁶ The specific position of the characters, who, on the one hand, are victims of the West and, on the other, prove skilful at using the situation for their own benefit, stimulates Brzeski to change his views, as he gradually discerns new aspects of the picture so carefully cultivated by the Europeans.

However, Wań's attitude, based on deeply opportunistic intentions, is an exception. The Chinese and the Europeans alike believe they are two opposing groups fighting for domination or at least for the right to autonomy. Besides the domains of business and religious missions, representatives of both groups form enclaves; they do not participate in the other group's feasts or parties, and they do not enter into romantic relationships. Therefore, Janek's choice, although understandable for the factory workers from the economic point of view and acceptable as a means to obtain skills necessary to do business, was treated with some suspicion, because too close integration with a foreign, weaker culture constitutes a degradation for a European.

In the meantime, being in contact with the Chinese and sharing their life becomes for Janek not only a chance to broaden horizons, but also to question his earlier convictions. His unique perspective makes it possible for him to maintain distance from the programme of “civilising” China promoted by factory owners, because he does not see the alleged positive impact of the Europeans on the development of China that would justify the attitude of superiority adopted by the people of the West. It is precisely the contact with the autochthones and the study of their history and culture that lead him to the key conclusions constituting the message of the novel:

He learned what immense efforts, what a struggle with nature and aggressive neighbours brought the Chinese to achieve the high level of culture and customs that he observed among this whole race. Brzeski understood that such a nation could not give up self-perfection or progress, but it has taken a different path towards them than the Europeans and follows it in slow, little steps, but in its entire enormous volume.²⁷

In this horizon of thought, progress is no longer a neutral category – its understanding begins to be culturally determined and may even, in specific cases, become subject to instrumentalisation. From this perspective, Brzeski's advantage would consist not in perceiving either of the cultures as superior to the other, but in seeing the value of pluralism, which is, however, possible – as the ending will show – only upon the condition of maintaining each culture's autonomy. Although Sieroszewski does not show it in a direct manner, Brzeski's attitude may result to some degree from his identity as a member of a nation that has been deprived of its own statehood. Even though for the Chinese people Janek is just another representative of the colonising culture, he himself, belonging to a nation dominated, among others, by the Russian Empire, could more easily identify with the nation experiencing foreign expansion than with the colonisers' mentality of his “kinsmen”.

²⁶ Ibidem, pp. 166–170.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 191.

At the same time, in consequence of such an attitude, Brzeski's status becomes somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, immersion in the Chinese culture, realised not only on the level of language and history, but also in the purely physical dimension, by wearing local clothing, constitutes a necessary condition of his development. However, this approach contributes to his isolation from the Europeans. On the other hand, none of his efforts can prevent the Chinese from perceiving him as a foreign element – one of the “overseas devils”, who will be at best abused, at worst – rejected immediately. This leads to the boy's internal conflict, and the only solution will be to escape.

Private and systemic tragedy. Variants of ending

We need to point out that two versions of *Zamorski diabeł* used to function almost in parallel, each with a different ending. Although in both variants, Brzeski – and, with him, the project of a closer relationship between China and the West – is doomed to failure, the essence of the conflict and the ultimate cause of this defeat are outlined in a different way.

The initial intention was to place the conflict above all on the private level. In the press edition, the key obstacle for Brzeski was the feeling of love that began to grow between him and Lień. Although the girl, after her father's disappearance, sees the young Pole as her benefactor, Brzeski shuts out the possibility of getting involved with the Chinese girl – partly due to the expected resistance from the Western environment, partly because he would find it difficult to accept the fruit of this relationship, no matter whether their future children were brought up as Chinese or as Europeans. However, his lack of response to the infatuated girl's advances and to her proposal of conceiving a child with her leads Lień to commit suicide and Brzeski to escape out of fear that the Chinese would seek revenge.²⁸ This resolution of the novel's conflict agrees with the pattern of presenting Asian women in Sieroszewski's writing. As Ida Sadowska indicates, he describes those women mainly as young, devoted to tradition, honourable and noble.²⁹ In consequence, Lień is characterised above all in the context of her relationship with Brzeski and her role should be regarded as subservient to the development of the protagonist's consciousness. The heroine is also clearly exoticised, as her attractiveness is strongly correlated with her foreignness.

However, already in the first book edition, Sieroszewski does not pay much attention to Janek and Lień's relationship and presents Brzeski's departure as a necessary escape

²⁸ Cf. Waław Sieroszewski, *Jang-hun-tsy. Powieść*, in: *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1901, no. 52, pp. 1022–1023.

²⁹ See: Ida Sadowska, “Mit kobiety egzotycznej w literaturze Młodej Polski – inspiracje azjatyckie i daleko-wschodnie”, in: eadem, *Wśród swoich i wśród obcych. Wawława Sieroszewskiego portret wielokrotny*, ed. Grażyna Legutko, Kielce: Instytut Filologii Polskiej Akademii Świętokrzyskiej im. Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach 2007, p. 122.

from the Boxers' attack on the factory. Thus, it is not merely a consequence of personal youthful mistakes, but his conflict of identity is inscribed in the current political context³⁰ (not only by reference to the events in China, but also through the suggestive allegory of the Russian 1905 Revolution, which could now be mentioned, because the Tsarist censorship has been eased in the post-revolutionary period). The Yihequan society, whose name is literally translated as “Righteous and Harmonious Fists” (hence the nickname “Boxers” given by the Europeans), represented mainly anti-feudal and anti-dynastic views, yet from the very beginning, it manifested tendencies to oppose foreigners and the Christian religion. Members of this movement were recruited above all from the peasant milieu, but there were also soldiers and the urban poor among them. Their activity found fertile ground because of the circumstances: the crisis within the ruling dynasty in China, the increasingly intense interventions of Western countries in the Chinese internal politics and economy (and the economic crisis resulting from those actions), the natural disasters and finally the awakening of national consciousness among the Chinese.³¹ The Boxer Rebellion constituted an important topic in the Polish press at the beginning of the 20th century. This might have resulted – as Józef Bachórz indicates – above all, from the involvement of the three partitioners of Poland in the fight with the Boxers, which meant that Polish men who were enlisted in the partitioners' armies took part in those riots. The manner of presenting the events in each magazine depended on its adopted worldview. The conservative press mostly described violent attacks by the Chinese and the damage they caused, in order to instil fear in the readers and, in consequence, to convince them to reject the purposes of the uprising. Whereas socialist periodicals and Aleksander Świętochowski's *Prawda* [Truth] sought to unmask the colonialist desires of European political powers and opposed the exploitation of the resources and the people of China conducted by those countries.³²

Sieroszewski chose a similar direction (he even published in *Prawda* a short story dedicated to that event, entitled “Uang-Ming-Tse”, later incorporated under the title “Bokser” [Boxer] in the collection *Powieści chińskie* [Chinese Stories]). In *Zamorski diabeł*, the author presents the events from the perspective of a man from the West, but deprived of agency. For the Boxers, Brzeski is merely a representative of the hateful group of “overseas devils” exploiting the Chinese resources and thereby contributing to the downfall of China. Paradoxically, this makes it possible to present the protagonist in a slightly more positive light – as a young idealist, whose actions cannot bridge the yawning cultural gap between the two groups.

³⁰ See also: Mariusz Kulik, “Obraz powstania bokserów w twórczości Wacława Sieroszewskiego”, in: *Wacław Sieroszewski. Zesłaniec – etnograf – literat – polityk*, eds. Antoni Kuczyński, Mirosław Marczyk, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Katedry Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego 2011, pp. 167–173.

³¹ See: Witold Rodziński, *Historia Chin*, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1992, pp. 512–514.

³² See: Józef Bachórz, “*Prawda* Aleksandra Świętochowskiego o chińskim powstaniu bokserów”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków*, pp. 351–352.

In this version, the role of Lień is also significantly modified. She helps Brzeski escape, opposing in a way her own culture. The girl's affection for Janek and her gratitude for the help he had granted to her family after Wań's disappearance made it impossible for her to side with the Boxers. Yet, the decision to help Brzeski is not tantamount to accepting the possibility of cultural integration of the East with the West. This is best revealed in her final speech, which also expresses the message of the novel:

Run away and... in your own country, the happy country... remember sometimes the poor black-haired Lień!... But do not come back, never come back!... People born to live in their motherland... We suffer from foreigners when they're evil and we suffer double when they're good... After all, there's no way you could become a Chinese?!? So why have you come here?³³

Thus, the girl shuts out the possibility of a peaceful co-existence of both cultures side by side, because friendly relations would require either of the sides to renounce its own identity. As a result, the project proves to be utopian, and both Brzeski and Lień are well aware of it. It is worth noting, however, that the new ending contributes to the autonomization of the heroine's position in the plot. She is no longer a mere trophy for Brzeski, reduced to sheer beauty and exotic femininity, but a subject capable of expressing her own opinion and defending the integrity of her nation.

However, in the next edition, Sieroszewski returned to the first ending, perhaps, as Aleksandra Kijak suggests, with the intention to avoid the literalness of the anti-colonial message. According to the researcher, the episodes of the Boxers' attack, the escape of Brzeski and his companions, and finally the above-quoted message spoken by Lień are artificial, due to their purely technical character, and in consequence, they diminish the artistic value of the text.³⁴ Yet, the modification of the original ending may also be perceived as an attempt to give the Chinese people greater autonomy by the intermediary of Lień, and thus to level the balance of power between them and the people of the West. The conclusions drawn by Brzeski, concerning the necessity to respect the different pace and direction of progress in China and in Europe, find clear confirmation in the words of the girl, who thereby also gains autonomy as a person.

Conclusion

None of the characters of *Zamorski diabeł* believes it would be possible for the Chinese and the Western world to coexist on the same territory – neither Brzeski, nor the members of the expedition and tea factory workers, nor Wań-Siń-Li or his family. In Sieroszewski's system, the side-by-side presence of representatives of two

³³ Waław Sieroszewski, *Zamorski diabeł*, p. 244.

³⁴ See: Aleksandra Kijak, *Odkrywca innej Syberii*, pp. 85–86.

so very different cultures can only result in a fight for domination, not only in terms of technological level, but also of cultural superiority. The isolation of the two civilisations, stemming from the conviction that everyone should live in their motherland, constitutes for the author the only possible solution in those specific historical circumstances. This pessimistic conclusion of *Zamorski diabeł* is the outcome of an analysis of the political situation of China at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries and is based on the reflection on the development of colonialism. A scenario in which representatives of two so radically disparate cultural systems could live side by side assumes mutual respect, which is impossible without mutual cognition. This, however, would require not only to relinquish the expansion plans, but also to redefine the concepts used to create the image of cultural superiority of the West, above all, the concepts of progress and civilisation, which underpin the European culture. Such a redefinition of identity was at that time a sheer impossibility, hence the firm attitude expressed through the figure of Lień in the second version of the novel's ending.

Nonetheless, we should not forget that this presentation of relations between the East and the West and such a clear-cut disapproval of the colonialist pursuits constitute not only a revaluation of the epoch's discourse, but also an evolution of Sieroszewski's views. In the Yakut times, as Jegor P. Antonow indicates, the writer

adopted [...] the attitude of a civilised observer – a European living among autochthonic Yakutian communities, which had achieved neither the level of a written culture, nor a sense of national identity. Thus, he contributed to the creation of the universal idea of a speechless Asia, which in its development had not yet achieved the level of self-cognition.³⁵

We could, therefore, venture the hypothesis – somewhat against the message of the novel – that paradoxically, in *Zamorski diabeł*, it was precisely the lack of direct contact with the Chinese culture that resulted in the author's adoption of a different perspective – one in which the worlds of the East and the West, although they cannot become partners, are no doubt equal and deserve mutual respect – albeit shown from a distance.

References

Antonow Jegor P. [Антонов Егор Петрович], “Poglądy Wacława Sieroszewskiego w perspektywie dyskursu kolonialnego”, trans. Veronika Belayeva, Ivan Peshkov, in: *Wacław Sieroszewski. Zesłaniec – etnograf – literat – polityk*, eds. Antoni Kuczyński, Mirosław Marczyk, Wrocław:

³⁵ Jegor P. Antonow, “Poglądy Wacława Sieroszewskiego w perspektywie dyskursu kolonialnego”, trans. Veronika Belayeva, Ivan Peshkov, in: *Wacław Sieroszewski. Zesłaniec – etnograf – literat – polityk*, eds. Antoni Kuczyński, Mirosław Marczyk, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Katedry Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego 2011, p. 380.

- Wydawnictwo Katedry Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego 2011, pp. 377–382.
- Bachórz Józef, “Prawda Aleksandra Świętochowskiego o chińskim powstaniu bokserów”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków. Księga jubileuszowa z okazji 60-lecia nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Chińską Republiką Ludową*, eds. Józef Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marcelli Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 349–358.
- Bociański Norbert, “Chiny w XIX i na początku XX wieku. Zarys sytuacji politycznej i społecznej”, *Przegląd Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Społeczny* 2014, no. 1, pp. 4–20.
- Cichoń Anna, “W kręgu zagadnień literatury kolonialnej – *W pustyni i w puszczy* Henryka Sienkiewicza”, *Er(r)go. Teoria – Literatura* 2004, no. 8, pp. 91–108.
- Data Jan, “O Chinach i Chińczykach w juvenaliach i kronikach Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Chiny w oczach Polaków. Księga jubileuszowa z okazji 60-lecia nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Chińską Republiką Ludową*, eds. Józef Włodarski, Kamil Zeidler, Marcelli Burdelski, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 359–366.
- Grzegorzczak Piotr, “Źródło Powieści chińskich Wacława Sieroszewskiego”, *Ruch Literacki* 1929, no. 9, pp. 273–275.
- Kempf Zdzisław, *Orientalizm Wacława Sieroszewskiego. Wątki japońskie*, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1982.
- Kijak Aleksandra, *Odkrywcą innej Syberii i Dalekiego Wschodu. O prozie Wacława Sieroszewskiego*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2010.
- Kulik Mariusz, “Obraz powstania bokserów w twórczości Wacława Sieroszewskiego”, in: *Wacław Sieroszewski. Zesłaniec – etnograf – literat – polityk*, eds. Antoni Kuczyński, Mirosław Marczyk, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Katedry Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego 2011, pp. 167–173.
- Mazan Bogdan, “Z obrazów Chin i Chińczyków w piśmiennictwie polskim drugiej połowy XIX wieku. ‘Chińskie cienie’ w *Lalce* Bolesława Prusa”, in: *Pozytywizm i negatywizm. My i wy po stu latach*, eds. Bogdan Mazan, Słownia Tynecka-Makowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteka Mateusz Poradecki 2005, pp. 317–407.
- Oleksiuk Marlena, *Korea w twórczości Wacława Sieroszewskiego*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG 2022.
- Rodziński Witold, *Historia Chin*, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1992.
- Sadowska Ida, “Mit kobiety egzotycznej w literaturze Młodej Polski – inspiracje azjatyckie i daleko-wschodnie”, in: eadem, *Wśród swoich i wśród obcych. Wacława Sieroszewskiego portret wielokrotny*, ed. Grażyna Legutko, Kielce: Instytut Filologii Polskiej Akademii Świętokrzyskiej im. Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach 2007, pp. 115–124.
- Sieroszewski Andrzej, *Wacława Sieroszewskiego żywot niespokojny*, published from the manuscript, elaborated and supplemented by Andrzej Z. Makowiecki, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Iskry 2015.
- Sieroszewski Wacław, *A Flight from Siberia*, trans.: s.n., London: Hutchinson 1909.
- Sieroszewski Wacław, *Dwanaście lat w kraju Jakutów*, Warsaw: Fr. Karpiński 1900.
- Sieroszewski Wacław, *Jang-hun-tsy. Powieść*, published in instalments: *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1901, nos. 27–52.
- Sieroszewski Wacław, *Na kresach lasów*, Lviv: Wydawnictwo Polskie 1920.
- Sieroszewski Wacław, *Ucieczka*, Warsaw: Biblioteka Polska 1923.
- Sieroszewski Wacław, *Zamorski diabeł. Powieść*, Kraków: Spółka Nakładowa “Książka” 1909.
- Uljasz Adrian, “Syberia i Daleki Wschód w oczach polskiego pisarza. Wacław Sieroszewski (1858–1945)”, *Przegląd Nauk Historycznych* 2012, A. XI, no. 1, pp. 137–153.

Was Tadeusz Miciński Familiar with Taoism? On *The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China*¹

Agnieszka Agata Jastrzębska
University of Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: agnieszka.a.jastrzebska@uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0001-7250-7829

Abstract

This article aims to examine how elements of Taoist philosophy are incorporated into Tadeusz Miciński's one-act drama *The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China*. Despite culturally syncretic references to Eastern philosophical systems, the author rarely referred to Chinese traditions of thought in his works. Published posthumously from a manuscript, the ballad is therefore original in the context of Miciński's *oeuvre*, both in terms of these references and its dramatic construction. It is interesting to note that the drama was written around 1910, the year when the Polish translation of the *Daodejing* book was published under the title *Tao czyli Droga niebios czyli Doktryna najwyższego rozumu: (Lao-Tse i jego nauka)* [Tao or the Path of Heaven or the Doctrine of the Supreme Reason: (Lao Tzu and His Teachings)]. Taoism is one of many aspects of this work, which constitutes a reflection on the condition of the artist and provides evidence of Tadeusz Miciński's exploration of Chinese religious-philosophical systems.

Keywords

Tadeusz Miciński, Taoism, Polish-Chinese literary relations, modernist drama, artist

Among traces of Tadeusz Miciński's interest in Eastern traditions, direct references to the culture and philosophy of China are scarce. Confucianism and Taoism, the most important philosophical-religious systems of the Middle Kingdom, are brought to the

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: "Czy Tadeusz Miciński znał taoizm? O *Romansie Siedmiu Braci Śpiących w Chinach*", *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 110–119, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.7>.

fore neither in his major literary works nor in his philosophical-religious writings. Teresa Wróblewska, the author of the critical edition of the writer's dramatic works,² indicates in her commentary to *The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China* that direct references to China are manifested only in a few of Miciński's works. We can see them, for example, in the title of the prose poem *Historia dwojga kochanków i Pani Hoan-Tho. Z chińskich porcelan i księgi: KIM VÂN KIÊU TÂN TRUYEN* [The History of Two Lovers and Mrs. Hoan-Tho. From Chinese Porcelain and the Book: KIM VÂN KIÊU TÂN TRUYEN],³ originally published in 1901 in the *Chimera* magazine, but its content results rather from the writer's interests in the Vietnamese literature. The researcher also mentions an unpublished Chinese poem, the existence of which is known from Miciński's correspondence with Miriam⁴ in 1904,⁵ and the prose poem *Z motywów Dalekiego Wschodu* [From Far Eastern Motifs],⁶ stylised to resemble a Chinese tale. Wróblewska concludes that *The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China* has equally little to do with that Far Eastern country:

Indeed, it is manifested only in one word in the title, in the figure of the Chinese Princess from the Poet's tale, in several motifs of imagery, literary ornamentation and in the overall exotic-oriental atmosphere in which this story is steeped. Yet the principal topic of this one-act play, its dramaturgy, problematics, scenery, plot – have nothing to do with the oriental cultural tradition.⁷

The researcher, drawing conclusions from the author's biography, dates the composition of the play to around 1910, that is, after the publication of *Nietota*, which met with unfavourable reception. Wróblewska contends that the protagonist of *The Ballad*, i.e., the Poet put in a psychiatric hospital, is the *porte-parole* of Miciński, who was rejected by society and the critics. Hence, the play would be a commentary on the author's own condition. According to the scholars researching Miciński's work, the construction of the play is markedly original in the context of both his own writing and the works of the epoch. Sławomir Sobieraj, among others, points to the innovative poetics of *The Ballad*.⁸ This is due to the choice of a psychiatric hospital as the place of action and the use of auto-thematic formula by introducing the dramaturgical construction of "theatre within the theatre". This work is also a pre-surrealist grotesque⁹

² Tadeusz Miciński, *Noc; Noc rabinowa; Kijomori; Książ Patiomkin; Wrogowie duchów; Romans Siedmiu Braci Śpiących w Chinach*, ed. Teresa Wróblewska, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1996.

³ Idem, *Poematy prozą*, ed. Wojciech Gutowski, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1985.

⁴ Miriam – a pseudonym of Zenon Przesmycki (trans. note).

⁵ See: Teresa Wróblewska, "Nota wydawcy: Romans Siedmiu Braci Śpiących w Chinach", in: *Noc; Noc rabinowa*, p. 563: "[...] written but not published Chinese poem, the existence of which is known to us from Miciński's letter to Miriam of 6 September [1944]".

⁶ Tadeusz Miciński, *Poematy prozą*, pp. 179–183.

⁷ Teresa Wróblewska, "Nota wydawcy", pp. 563–564.

⁸ Sławomir Sobieraj, *Alchemia wyobraźni. Rezonans twórczości Tadeusza Micińskiego w poezji międzywojennej*, Siedlce: Wydawnictwo Akademii Podlaskiej 2002, p. 7.

⁹ See: Teresa Wróblewska, "Post scriptum do *Romansu siedmiu braci śpiących w Chinach*", *Dialog* 1968, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 151–152.

and as such it appears in scholarly reflection as an example of the relationship between Miciński's work and Witkacy.

Most of the studies concerning the influence of Eastern traditions of thought on Miciński are dedicated above all to Japan and India. Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska indicated two different currents of Japanese inspiration for Miciński: "decadent [...], but also – the revivalist patriotic current".¹⁰ The first one refers to the creation of a specific atmosphere in the novels, which was related to the author's profound knowledge not only of the Japanese aesthetics, but also of the Japanese legends. Whereas the other can be spotted in Miciński's journalistic texts, in the form of reflections on the national spirituality. Erazm Kuźma, in his description of the myth of the synthesis of the West and the East, advanced a thesis that Miciński's work tends towards the latter current. He referred, among others, to the motifs suggesting that "the source of true Christianity is India, not the West, nor even the Middle East".¹¹ Marcin Bajko, in turn, in his book *Sny niezwykle o Polsce i o Europie* [Peculiar Dreams of Poland and Europe], interprets those proportions quite reversely.¹² He also writes about Miciński's cosmopolitical thinking that goes beyond the frames of Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism.

Miciński's dream was that the border cordons between individual countries would be abolished or at least that their free crossing would be facilitated. The world, the entire globe of the Earth, belongs to man, seems to be claiming the writer. A European has the right to his heritage, that is, to the culture of ancient India, just as a contemporary Hindu, Chinese or Japanese man has the right to make use of the achievements of the European civilisation.¹³

We need to underline here that Miciński's interest in other cultural systems was inextricably linked to thinking about the Polish cause. Katarzyna Fazan, in her analysis of the play *Kijomori*, points both to the use of the poetics of Japanese drama and the discussion of Polish issues. At the same time, the researcher contends that this work

proves that the completion of a sort of ritual related to the Japanese fashion is, in a way, developed in a historiosophical reflection on the history of humanity in general, on the past and the future of the world.¹⁴

¹⁰ Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, "Inspiracje japońskie w literaturze Młodej Polski. Rekonesans", in: eadem, *Somnambulicy, dekadenci, herosi. Studia i eseje o literaturze Młodej Polski*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1985, p. 76.

¹¹ Erazm Kuźma, *Mit Orientu i kultury Zachodu w literaturze XIX i XX wieku*, Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Szczecinie 1980, p. 189.

¹² Marcin Bajko, *Sny niezwykle o Polsce i o Europie. Diagnoza kultury w pismach Tadeusza Micińskiego u progu pierwszej wojny światowej*, Kraków–Nowy Wiśnicz: Collegium Columbinum 2015.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 256.

¹⁴ Katarzyna Fazan, "Nie-byt w wypożyczonym kimonie", in: *Poezja Tadeusza Micińskiego. Interpretacje*, eds. Anna Czabanowska-Wróbel, Paweł Próchniak, Marian Stala, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka 2004, pp. 418–419.

The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries brought a renaissance of interest in the counterculture, that is, in the phenomena that do not fit within the dominant paradigm. In the religious sphere, this concerned the exploration of theosophical and esoteric systems, Buddhism, occultism, etc.¹⁵ Wojciech Gutowski underscores that Miciński did not create his own system of thought and the chief value of his writing “consists in a totally exceptional effort of a literary creation of new ‘cultural models’”.¹⁶ The multilayered syncretism of Miciński’s works is

a religious phenomenon (esoteric concepts of global, syncretic religion), a cultural symbiosis of diverse traditions (the combination of his native, Proto-Slavic culture with the Mediterranean patrimony and the heritage of the East), intertextual passions (a world of interrelatedness and continuity of literary tradition) and a syncretism of genre.¹⁷

This syncretism resulted from the author’s knowledge of many systems of thought, which he incorporated in an original manner based on his studies in the fields of esotericism, various philosophical systems and occultism. We could, therefore, venture the hypothesis that it was not fortuitous that Miciński linked *The Ballad* to China, nor is the appearance of the notion of Dao in the play accidental.

The fundamental work of the Taoist philosophical-religious system is Laozi’s book *Tao Te Ching* (also spelled *Daodejing*), the title of which has been translated in a variety of ways (e.g., *The Classic of the Way and its Power*, *The Book of the Way and of Virtue*, *The Classic Book of Integrity and the Way*). In Polish, it first appeared in print in 1910, in Józef Jankowski’s translation from German, and it was entitled *Tao czyli Droga niebios czyli Doktryna najwyższego rozumu: (Lao-Tse i jego nauka)* [Tao or the Path of Heaven or the Doctrine of the Supreme Reason: (Lao Tzu and His Teachings)].¹⁸ Earlier, in 1902, Jankowski translated the collection *Skarbczyk poezji chińskiej* [A Small Treasury of Chinese Poetry].¹⁹ Jankowski’s activity was extremely interesting – he was a writer, journalist and translator, one of the founders and the president of Hoene-Wroński Messianic Institute in Warsaw.²⁰ He translated a dozen works by Hoene-Wroński and propagated the writings of the mystic and occultist Paul Sédir, whose numerous works he translated from French. He was himself an expert

¹⁵ See: Wojciech Gutowski, *W poszukiwaniu życia nowego. Mit a światopogląd w twórczości Tadeusza Micińskiego*, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1980.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 156.

¹⁷ Cecylia Suszka, “W poszukiwaniu utraconej jedni. O synkryzmie kulturowo-religijnym w twórczości Tadeusza Micińskiego”, *Ruch Literacki* 2001, fasc. 2, p. 165.

¹⁸ Laozi, *Tao czyli Droga niebios czyli Doktryna najwyższego rozumu: (Lao-Tse i jego nauka)*, trans. and introd. Józef Jankowski, Warsaw: Tow. Akc. S. Orgelbranda Synów, Księgarnia Edwarda Wendego 1910.

¹⁹ Józef Jankowski, *Skarbczyk poezji chińskiej*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Romana Kreczmera 1902.

²⁰ Wiesława Albrecht-Szymanowska, “Jankowski Józef”, in: *Dawni pisarze polscy od początków piśmiennictwa do Młodej Polski. Przewodnik biograficzny i bibliograficzny*, vol. 2, eds. Roman Loth et al., Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne 2001, pp. 26–27.

in those topics and published, among others, *Nowości okultyzmu* [Occultic Novelties] (importantly – in 1911) or the esoteric *Historie niezwykle* [Extraordinary Stories] (1928). He exchanged correspondence with Henryk Sienkiewicz and, concurrently, with Wincenty Lutosławski. Therefore, it is highly probable that due to common interests and time coincidences, Miciński also knew Jankowski's work and had a chance to peruse Laozi's book in his translation.

In *The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China*, the syncretism concerns structural and thematic elements – cultures, time orders, locations, style, and poetics of the text. This endows the work with a phantasmagorical quality and, as we shall see, harbours the potential of ambiguity.

The presence of the Chinese Princess who is related to Dao as the only Chinese character in the play, may arouse some resistance. From the perspective of the feminist literary criticism, the function of this heroine as the protagonist's guide (which, by the way, constitutes a recurrent plot scheme in this author's works)²¹ is linked to the writer's phallogocentric optic, his tendency to orientalise and to create figures of women as "subordinated otherness", even if some experts of his works put forward the thesis of a feminocentric optic of his writings.²² The Chinese Princess's role in the dramatic action, partly justified by Taoist philosophy, renders this question even more complicated. However, it needs to be highlighted that in line with Miciński's creative principle of syncretism, Taoism is not presented here in a uniform, systemically coherent way.

The dramatic action begins when a new patient, the Poet, is brought to the insane asylum.²³ The doctor believes his condition is related to the afflictions known from the lives of great writers, such as Torquato Tasso, Jonathan Swift, Nikolai Gogol or Juliusz Słowacki. Since this character is constructed after the neoromantic model of a misunderstood artist, who, in line with the theory of psychological evolution of outstanding individuals, sees and feels more,²⁴ he stands out also among the patients. They welcome him with the following phrase: "The rascal is mocking us. He has fished up for us out of the sea a poisonous scorpion, instead of an electric fish",²⁵ which is a reaction to a branch of flowering plane-tree and a travelling bag which the character carried with him; at the same time, this utterance proves that reality has a different referentiality for them. More importantly, they attribute to the newcomer a different

²¹ See, e.g., Aleksandra Klim, "Od nimfomanki do kobiety metafizycznie fatalnej. Obraz płci pięknej w twórczości Tadeusza Micińskiego", in: *"Gorsza" kobieta. Dyskursy inności, samotności, szaleństwa*, eds. Daria Adamowicz, Yulia Anisimovets, Olga Taranek, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Sutoris 2008, pp. 91–99.

²² See: Wojciech Gutowski, "Walkiria-pszczoła – kobieta jako figura pełni. Feminocentryzm Tadeusza Micińskiego", *Ruch Literacki* 2016, A. LVII, fasc. 1(334), pp. 3–27.

²³ "Insane asylum" corresponds to the poet's original expression in the play – "dom wariatów".

²⁴ See: Andrzej Makowiecki, "'Norma to głupota, degeneracja zaś to geniusz'", in: *Obraz głupca i szaleńca w kulturach słowiańskich*, eds. Andrzej Makowiecki, Teresa Dąbek-Wirgowa, Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski – Wydział Polonistyki i Instytut Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych 1996.

²⁵ Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci Śpiących w Chinach*, in: idem, *Noc; Noc rabinowa*, p. 260.

status: “He looks like God ashamed of a botched creation”,²⁶ “A destroyer he is, I have recognised him by his silent step, when he crept in among us to extinguish our sun”.²⁷ As the plot develops, the Poet begins to arrange the hospital’s space into a theatre and encourages other patients to get involved. Concurrently, he will pass through consecutive stages of metaphysical initiation, and the story he tells will become for him a path of spiritual transformation. The spectacle, with a title identical to that of the play, is the Poet’s tale about his own experience. The rest of the patients will participate in the performance, which will become a kind of *theatrum mundi*. Defined as “a bunch of people whose ideas have been withdrawn from the market”,²⁸ they will personify Józef Hoene-Wroński or Róża Luksemburg. The spacetime of the play spans the entire human spirit, reaching from the Palaeolithic to the contemporary era. The work can certainly be interpreted with the use of Jung’s analytical psychology – this is a well-established method, frequently applied by researchers of Miciński’s writings.²⁹

The Poet constructs his tale based on a legend that functions in different versions in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. What they have in common is the presence of knights falling asleep for several hundred years. The most popular location of the cave is Ephesus; among other possible places, there are the environs of Amman in Jordan and Turpan in China. In *The Ballad*, the legendary story takes place in China, in a Hindu cottage in the middle of a stony desert. The Hindu cottage can be explained by Miciński’s conviction that India was the cradle of the Proto-Slavic culture. The writer postulated the need to reach for the sources of the Polish soul, and, at the same time, to open up to Western Europe and discover the traditions of the East. In one of the chambers, the knights are sleeping, and in the middle, on an altar with an enormous mirror, lies the vigilant Chinese Princess. She holds in her hands a small looking glass, the surface of which shows a strangely changeable reflection – for instance, it is covered with mist in the shape of asphodels. The woman will become the Poet’s guiding anima on his transgressive way.³⁰ The presence of the Chinese Princess, “wise as if Tao himself moulded her forehead in the highest state of inspiration”,³¹ is the sign of entering the Taoist path, although, in line with his principle of syncretism, Miciński links the notion of Tao to the personal God Yahweh. This may be a form of rebellion against God and an attempt to seek him in a different system of thought.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 261.

²⁷ Ibidem. In his works, Tadeusz Miciński developed the concept of identifying the Christ with Lucifer; see, e.g., Jarosław Ławski, *Wypobraznia lucyferyczna*, Białystok: Instytut Filologii Polskiej Filii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1995.

²⁸ Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci*, p. 263.

²⁹ See, e.g., Roma Kwiecień, “Bolesław Miciński i psychoanaliza”, *Teksty Drugie* 1998, no. 1–2, pp. 85–108; Małgorzata Kunysz, Mirosław Piróg, “Wąska ścieżka między przeciwieństwami. Carl Gustav Jung i taoizm”, *Hermaion* 2022, no. 6, pp. 95–104.

³⁰ The typology of characters is presented by Wojciech Gutowski in: idem, *W poszukiwaniu życia nowego*.

³¹ Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci*, p. 264.

The Princess commands the Poet to remove the youngest of the knights and to take his place. When the Poet joins the circle, he begins to experience diverse hallucinations. The immense silence, in which he can hear the heartbeat of the sleeping men, turns into synesthetic visions. At the same time, the hero focuses his gaze on the eyes of the Chinese Princess. Katarzyna Fazan points to the fact that “each of the knights symbolises a different stage of personal transformation, and waking up is identified with the true awakening of a consciousness that is ready to participate in the oneness”,³² which the researcher links to Buddhism.

Tao, also spelled in the phonetic form Dao, does not have one single meaning and cannot be grasped in a concise definition:

Originally meaning “road,” it came to mean “way” in general and “method”. It was also used to mean “to point out the road,” and thus “to tell.” And it came to have the sense of “course of conduct,” and “principles” in a moral sense, and was used by various philosophers to designate their doctrines.³³

Dao penetrates everything, it is “the beginning of Heaven and Earth, which represent the framework of the whole natural world”.³⁴ Dao is everywhere, in every particle of the world, it is the Great Oneness. In Miciński’s literary concept, all knights are asleep due to their “nostalgia for another being”,³⁵ and in this way they constitute unity, they become essentially the same. Beginning with the eldest, the Princess transforms them into various phenomena. By use of her looking glass, she changes them into different beings: in dust and bones, in a cloud in the process of transforming into a block of ice, in pure weariness resting in the floor’s funnel. The processual change of those objects is indeed interesting. Miciński expresses it with an imperfect active adjectival participle – he uses the lexeme „bryłowaciejącej” (literally “turning into a solid block”), with which he describes the process of the cloud’s transformation into ice. It is at the same time an artifact and an action that is currently taking place, similarly to Dao, which can be interpreted both as a noun and as a verb. In the first chapter of *Daodejing*, Laozi speaks of the impossibility of giving a linguistic description of the fundamental Taoist notion: “The Tao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Tao”.³⁶ The Poet’s tale, containing some bizarre elements, immersed in oneiric illogicality, is an attempt to describe the experience of contact with the eternal Dao that cannot be grasped in language. Wang Bi, an interpreter of Laozi’s book, thus comments on this fact:

³² Katarzyna Fazan, “Nie-byt w wypożyczonym kimonie”, p. 396.

³³ Herrlee Glessner Creel, “On the Opening Words of the *Lao-Tzu*”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 1983, no. 10, p. 302.

³⁴ JeeLoo Liu, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: From Ancient Philosophy to Chinese Buddhism*, Malden–Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2006, p. 133.

³⁵ Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci*, p. 264.

³⁶ On the numerous possibilities of translating this phrase, see: Herrlee Glessner Creel, “On the Opening Words of the *Lao-Tzu*”. Large number of possible English translations are listed here: *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching (175+ Translations of Chapter 1)*, Bureau of Public Secrets, <https://www.bopsecrets.org/gateway/passages/tao-te-ching.htm> (trans. note).

The Dao that can be named and the name that can be given point (zhi) to the reality (shi) or to the form (xing). Neither of them is eternal. Therefore, Dao cannot be expressed in language and [no] name can [in this case] be given.³⁷

Concurrently, the impossibility of describing the process of initiation is related to the modernist issue of the ineffability of language. The weirdness and confusion of meaning is used to disturb the habitual relation between *signifié* and *signifiant*, while associations from various cultural fields demonstrate the large scale of possibilities hidden in the conventionalised sign by virtue of the shared subsurface consciousness. The Chinese Princess shatters the individual sense of independence of one's being, perhaps pointing to the ontological identity of being as a whole. Upon his entrance into the hospital, the Poet's attribute is the mirror of things unthought, that is, those things that cannot be thought over. The basic function of a mirror is to reflect an image, which is a corporeal sign of presence. This, however, collapses in the spectacle organised by the Poet. The last transformation concerns the narrator of the tale:

The Princess came to me at last and held the looking glass over me, and I felt I developed wings so vast that they ripped these walls and this roof, and took you on their feathers like light frost – you – who are mankind.³⁸

Thus, the hero embodies the extreme Romantic individualism inherited from Immanuel Kant's philosophy, completes the process of transformation that Konrad desired to achieve in the Great Improvisation,³⁹ enters into a new quality of existence. This implies solitude and madness. The Poet creates Eternal Silence, in which he abides in the stony desert with the Chinese Princess and the last semblance of reality. This transformation cannot be interpreted as a fully completed Taoist passage into the oneness of being. The hero retains a strong ego, convinced of his own greatness; once he achieved creative perfection, he was lost to the world. After this vision, he remained alone with the Chinese Princess on an open balcony in the midst of endless desert, while "the youngest, the last semblance of reality was lying silently on the edge".⁴⁰ Meanwhile, in the reality of the psychiatric hospital, his condition worsened to the point that he was put into a straitjacket and committed suicide on its braces. There is a dissonance here between the outcome of his life and the Taoist path of cognition, which leads to the sense of integration with the impalpable, eternal, love-emanating reality, which the Poet never came to experience.

Above all, it is the figure of the Princess that is most closely related to China and Taoism. The scholars indicate that in the beginnings of this philosophical-religious

³⁷ Laozi, *Księga dao i de z komentarzami Wang Bi*, trans. Anna Iwona Wójcik, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2006, p. 26.

³⁸ Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci*, p. 265.

³⁹ See: Adam Mickiewicz, *Forefather's Eve*, Book III, Sc. 2.

⁴⁰ Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci*, p. 265.

system, the woman held a prominent place. It was under the influence of the patriarchally oriented Confucianism that women began to be controlled and exploited both sexually and socially.⁴¹ However, there were once Taoist currents, such as neidan alchemy, in which the woman played a special role. The sinologists Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, in the introduction to their book *Women in Daoism*, explain that

cosmologically Daoism sees women as expressions of the pure cosmic force of yin, necessary for the working of the universe, equal and for some schools even superior to yang. Daoism also links the Dao itself, the force of creation at the foundation of the cosmos, to the female and describes it as the mother of all beings. Within the religion there is a widespread attitude of veneration and respect for the feminine, honoring the cosmic connection as well as the productive and nurturing nature of women.⁴²

Moreover, in Taoism, women are offered the possibility to practise self-cultivation and to choose the path of development as a nun or a priestess. The researchers distinguished five most important female roles across the ages:

(1) The female as mother, the life-giver and nurturing power of the universe – in ancient Daoism, expressed in the philosophy of the *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue, ca. 350 B.C.E.) as well as in Daoist mother goddesses.

(2) Women as representatives of the cosmic force of yin, complementary to the male or yang, reflecting both the universal presence of yin and its expression in sexuality and fertility – in Han-dynasty longevity practices and among early Daoist communities of the second century C.E.

(3) Women as divine teachers and bestowers of esoteric revelations, empowering adepts through instruction and direct interaction – in the Highest Clarity or Purity (Shangqing) movement of the fourth century.

(4) Women as possessors of supernatural connections, healing powers, and shamanic techniques, leading to the emergence of powerful priests, founders, and matriarchs – in the high middle ages and well into the late imperial period (Tang through Ming).

(5) The female body as the seat of essential ingredients and processes of spiritual transformation, understood in the terms of inner alchemy – in the late imperial and modern periods.⁴³

In ancient beliefs, women were deities or deities spoke through them, they served as counsellors to emperors and developed methods of maintaining health and wellbeing. The Princess fulfils the above roles, but the Taoist motivation of this character is not complete, because she constitutes a projection of the protagonist.

In Taoism and Eastern philosophies, cognition does not lead to control over reality, it is not oriented towards such knowledge and is not limited to discursive, scholarly methods of study. Eastern philosophies relate cognition to feeling, they are deprived of the subject's desire to dominate the world. To a large extent, Miciński's works, not only *The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China*, should be read intuitively. In line with the adopted creative premise, syncretism consists of applying elements so as

⁴¹ Catherine Despeux, Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism*, Cambridge: Three Pines Press 2003, p. 3.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 1.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 6.

to disturb uniformity and logical consequences. This is also the effect of incorporating Eastern philosophies. Moreover, Tao and consciousness may be perceived in a similar way – both elude definition and both are understood as the cause of all meanings and contents. Such clear familiarity with Eastern philosophies and their conscious application allows us to conclude that in *The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China*, Miciński's use of Taoism was neither unwitting nor accidental.

References

- Albrecht-Szymanowska Wiesława, "Jankowski Józef", in: *Dawni pisarze polscy od początków piśmiennictwa do Młodej Polski. Przewodnik biograficzny i bibliograficzny*, vol. 2, eds. Roman Loth et al., Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne 2001, pp. 26–27.
- Bajko Marcin, *Sny niezwykle o Polsce i o Europie. Diagnoza kultury w pismach Tadeusza Micińskiego u progu pierwszej wojny światowej*, Kraków-Nowy Wiśnicz: Collegium Columbinum 2015.
- Creel Herrlee Glessner, "On the Opening Words of the *Lao-Tzu*", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 1983, no. 10, pp. 299–329.
- Despeux Catherine, Kohn Livia, *Women in Daoism*, Cambridge: Three Pines Press 2003.
- Fazan Katarzyna, "Nie-byt w wypożyczonym kimonie", in: *Poezja Tadeusza Micińskiego. Interpretacje*, eds. Anna Czabanowska-Wróbel, Paweł Próchniak, Marian Stala, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka 2004, pp. 393–420.
- Gutowski Wojciech, *W poszukiwaniu życia nowego. Mit a światopogląd w twórczości Tadeusza Micińskiego*, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1980.
- Gutowski Wojciech, "Walkiria-pszczoła – kobieta jako figura pełni. Feminocentryzm Tadeusza Micińskiego", *Ruch Literacki* 2016, A. LVII, fasc. 1(334), pp. 3–27.
- Klim Aleksandra, "Od nimfomanki do kobiety metafizycznie fatalnej. Obraz płci pięknej w twórczości Tadeusza Micińskiego", in: *„Gorsza” kobieta. Dyskursy inności, samotności, szaleństwa*, eds. Daria Adamowicz, Yulia Anisimovets, Olga Taranek, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Sutoris 2008, pp. 91–99.
- Kunysz Małgorzata, Piróg Mirosław, "Wąska ścieżka między przeciwieństwami. Carl Gustav Jung i taoizm", *Hermaion* 2022, no. 6, pp. 95–104.
- Kuźma Erazm, *Mit Orientu i kultury Zachodu w literaturze XIX i XX wieku*, Szczecin: Wydawnictwa Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Szczecinie 1980.
- Kwiecień Roma, "Bolesław Miciński i psychoanaliza", *Teksty Drugie* 1998, no. 1–2, pp. 85–108.
- Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching (175+ Translations of Chapter 1)*, Bureau of Public Secrets, <https://www.bopsecrets.org/gateway/passages/tao-te-ching.htm>.
- Laozi, *Tao czyli Droga niebios czyli Doktryna najwyższego rozumu: (Lao-Tse i jego nauka)*, trans. and introd. Józef Jankowski, Warsaw: Tow. Akc. S. Orgelbranda Synów, Księgarnia Edwarda Wendego 1910.
- Laozi, *Księga dao i de z komentarzami Wang Bi*, trans. Anna Iwona Wójcik, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2006.
- Jankowski Józef, *Skarbczyk poezji chińskiej*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Romana Kreczmera 1902.
- Liu JeeLoo, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: From Ancient Philosophy to Chinese Buddhism*, Malden-Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2006.

- Ławski Jarosław, *Wyobraźnia lucyferyczna*, Białystok: Instytut Filologii Polskiej Filii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1995.
- Makowiecki Andrzej, “‘Norma to głupota, degeneracja zaś to geniusz’”, in: *Obraz głupca i szaleńca w kulturach słowiańskich*, eds. Andrzej Makowiecki, Teresa Dąbek-Wirgowa, Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski – Wydział Polonistyki i Instytut Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych 1996.
- Miciński Tadeusz, *Noc; Noc rabinowa; Kijomori; Książ Piatomkin; Wrogowie duchów; Romans Siedmiu Braci Śpiących w Chinach*, ed. Teresa Wróblewska, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1996.
- Miciński Tadeusz, *Poematy prozą*, ed. Wojciech Gutowski, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1985.
- Podraza-Kwiatkowska Maria, “Inspiracje japońskie w literaturze Młodej Polski. Rekonesans”, in: eadem, *Somnambulicy, dekadenci, herosi. Studia i eseje o literaturze Młodej Polski*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1985, pp. 174–205.
- Suszka Cecylia, “W poszukiwaniu utraconej jedni. O synkretyzmie kulturowo-religijnym w twórczości Tadeusza Micińskiego”, *Ruch Literacki* 2001, fasc. 2, pp. 165–182.
- Sobieraj Sławomir, *Alchemia wyobraźni. Rezonans twórczości Tadeusza Micińskiego w poezji międzywojennej*, Siedlce: Wydawnictwo Akademii Podlaskiej 2002.
- Wróblewska Teresa, “Post scriptum do *Romansu siedmiu braci śpiących w Chinach*”, *Dialog* 1968, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 151–152.

What Can Be Seen from Manchuria? Polish Community on the World Map According to the Polish Press for Children and Youth in Harbin (1919–1937)¹

Zofia Satkowska

University of Warsaw, Poland

e-mail: z.satkowska@uw.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-0099-5875

Abstract

The article concerns the Polish-language press for children and youth published in the years 1919–1937 in Harbin, Manchuria. It aims to trace the Polish emigrants' ideas – especially those reflected by the young generation in the press – regarding their community's national identity and its place on the world map of countries and nations. The article discusses the subjects of raising children in Polish tradition in a multicultural city in Asia, the developing relations between the colony and the homeland and, finally, the project of patriotism promoted by some young Poles in order to take advantage of their place of residence for the sake of their country.

Keywords

Harbin, Polish colony in Manchuria, Polish press, press for children and youth

Kazimierz Grochowski, the author of one of the most significant studies documenting the life of the Polish colony in Manchuria, claimed that local magazines were “the only source for the history of Polish community in the distant Asian lands, and that our [Polish – suppl. by ZS] cultural work among those multitudes of tribes and nations found its, albeit feeble, reflection only in those magazines”.² The presence

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: “Co widać z Mandżurii? Polska wspólnota na mapie świata według polonijnej prasy dla dzieci i młodzieży w Harbinie (1919–1937)”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 120–132, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.8>.

² Kazimierz Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*, Harbin in China: s.n. 1928, p. 78.

of the Polish community in Harbin dates back to 1898,³ and the Polish press was published there from 1917 to 1949.⁴ And indeed, in spite of their often unstable nature, in spite of all the technical, formal and substantive weaknesses, the magazines that have been preserved to this day constitute a valuable testimony of the life of the Polish community in Manchuria (not only its cultural life mentioned by Grochowski) and of the attempts to organise it and give it a certain orientation. Even though this phenomenon has already been partially described and subjected to scholarly reflection, little attention has been given so far to its specific aspect concerning non-adult readers or readers who are only entering into adulthood – children and youth (including college youth, who were older and took active part in the Harbinian press). Despite the internal heterogeneity of this group of readers, and the consecutive differences in the profiles, content and form of the magazines addressed to them, the aim of the present article is to read all those magazines as very specific source texts, also because of the role that was sometimes ascribed to the young generation for the future of the Polish colony.

The Polish history of Harbin – a city gathering the Polish community in Manchuria at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, the centre of this community's social and cultural life – began in 1898, the year when the first Poles, employed at the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, came to live there. Over several decades, the Polish colony developed a rich social and cultural life. Harbin was at that time a multinational city, subject to Chinese, Russian and then also Japanese influences. Its history was marked by various political and social conflicts, including armed conflicts in the neighbouring countries – the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian-Japanese War in 1904–1905 or the Chinese-Japanese conflicts. It was within that complex and changeable network of social and political relations that the Polish community in Harbin had to function. The press it published, as the platform of its social life, was an instrument of unification of the Polish community in Manchuria and a means to maintain contact with the compatriots in the Polish lands. Today, those magazines help researchers investigate the transformations of that community's self-image and, due to Harbin's specific location and social-political situation, they also constitute a source of information about the relationships of its inhabitants with the representatives of other nations and with their compatriots living in different parts of the world, as well as about their attitude to the territory they inhabited. In other words, we can learn from those magazines about the foundations of that community's identity, about its

³ After the repatriation conducted in 1949, 450 Poles stayed in Harbin and then progressively left the city. See: Jerzy Czajewski, [Introduction], in: *Polacy w Mandżurii – Poles in Manchuria (1897–1949)* [exhibition catalogue], Szczecin: Archives of Modern Records, with the cooperation of Agencja Wydawnicza Egros 2015, p. 36. On the history of Poles in Harbin, see, inter alia: ibidem, pp. 3–39; Kim Yong Deog, *Kolonia polska w Mandżurii 1897–1949*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Promocji Powiatu, Miasta i Gminy PROMO 2001; Marian Kałuski, *Polacy w Chinach*, Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax 2001, pp. 37–207.

⁴ See: Adam Winiarz, "Bibliografia prasy polskiej na Dalekim Wschodzie w latach 1917–1949", *Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej* 1986, A. 25, no. 1, pp. 125–135.

ideas concerning the place it held on the map of the world at a unique moment for the Poles of regained independence and the beginning of statehood. The press addressed to children and youth is a particular document, a testimony of ideas that were only being formed: passed on to children or consciously chosen by them, in the case of youth who actively participated in creating the magazine's content and made their own choices of what to read. We need to bear in mind that in most cases the Polish press for children and youth in Manchuria was not published independently: it was supplemented to other magazines or included as a separate section (hence, it depended, to some degree, on the editorial board's orientation), or was a short-lived enterprise – therefore, more can be said about the projected programmes than about their actual realisations, but even those may lead to interesting observations.

Obviously, the Polish press in Harbin cannot offer a full picture of that community's life, if only for the reason that it does not span the whole period of the Poles' activity on that territory – as mentioned above, it was published in the years 1917–1949; as for the press for children and youth, it was in print only from 1919 to 1937, and that with little regularity, not throughout the whole period (in some years, none of the published titles included any content for children and youth; most of such publications appeared as late as in the 1930s). Moreover, there are two important circumstances related to this time span that should influence our perception of the social significance of the studied texts. Firstly, the readers of those magazines were next generations living in Manchuria, who – at least in some part born far away from homeland – had only an indirect knowledge of their country and could build their national identity only on this knowledge. This modelled the profile of a writer and a reader and enhanced the need to consciously unify the Polish community and to sustain its national identity in the press. Secondly, although the rich social and cultural life of the Polish colony in Harbin is often highlighted, the culmination of its development occurred in the period prior to the publication of most of the magazines discussed here. In 1934, in one of the issues of the local magazine *Daleki Wschód* [The Far East], Stanisław Nernheim, who was describing the history of the colony, enumerated two “blows” received by the Polish community in Harbin. According to him, the first one was the departure of the richer part of Polish inhabitants to the, by then, independent homeland in 1920; the second one was the year 1925 when, in consequence of an agreement between China and the USSR of 1924, only the citizens of these two countries could work for the railway company,⁵ which deprived a large part of the Polish community of their source of income. Most of the press for young readers was published after those crises, at a moment of deterioration of the economic situation of the entire Polish community, which, for Nernheim, resulted in the colony's “downfall”.⁶

⁵ See: Stanisław Nernheim, “Polonia harbińska (zarys historyczny)”, *Daleki Wschód* 1934, no. 7, pp. 3–4.

⁶ See: *ibidem*, p. 5.

Section for children – “extension” of Poland

The above-described specific conditions of life of the Polish community in Harbin created, on the one hand, numerous opportunities for developing international relationships, but on the other, they stimulated the strengthening of relationships between the Poles, who, in consequence, perceived their existence in the East in terms of a fight for identity, to some extent. In these circumstances, strong emphasis was laid on the patriotic upbringing and the formation of identity of the young generation, part of whom never got to know their homeland otherwise than through the tales and memories of elders.

A Harbinian magazine that permanently offered a section for children was *Przegląd* [Review] (published in 1919–1921). Even its subtitle – *Dwutygodnik narodowy literacko-społeczno-ekonomiczny z uwzględnieniem działu dla dzieci* [National Literary-Social-Economic Biweekly with a Section for Youngsters] – underlined the content it offered for the youngest readers. It was not an independent magazine for children, but only a section of a magazine addressed to adults. This section was not always clearly separated (towards the end of the magazine’s publishing, even its name disappeared), but it was relatively extensive, often supplemented with illustrations and – except for several issues – permanently present in the magazine. In the foreword from the editorial board, we read: “We are opening in our magazine a section, the lack of which is most acutely felt by parents – a section for children”,⁷ and then we learn about its goal and its intended form:

[...] in order to make it easier for the parents to bring up their children in pure Polish national traditions, we open this section for children. The section will include tips on children’s upbringing, amusing activities, purely Polish games, songs, nursery rhymes for name’s days, short stories, fairy tales, games with singing, riddles, physical experiments, etc.⁸

The actual content of the section for children corresponded more or less to the above declaration (except for the tips on children’s upbringing and physical experiments, which cannot be found there). As reasons for opening this section and selecting this kind of content, the editorial board indicated the low availability of Polish books, the constant contact of the children of Polish emigrants with children of other nationalities and the naturally resulting adoption of the foreign games and songs as well as the need to instil Polish traditions in the youngest ones (to begin with games, for instance), because:

The national [...] upbringing of children in the parental house is the moral basis, the lynchpin in the life of a future Polish citizen. By unfathomable ways, the culture of the nation penetrates the child’s

⁷ “Od Redakcji”, *Przegląd. Dwutygodnik narodowy literacko-społeczno-ekonomiczny z uwzględnieniem działu dla dzieci* 1919, no. 1, p. 9.

⁸ Ibidem.

soul, becomes a souvenir of his most precious memories, because they are memories of the youth, the treasure of his life.⁹

Thus, this section was supposed to be an aid for the parents in the formation of “pure” Polish identity of children, a substitute for the national environment in which their peers were growing up in the Polish lands. In principle, it did not include any texts familiarising children with the local realia, the local social, political or natural conditions. The content was limited to matters related to Poland, stemming from Poland or created there, or else deemed universal, unrelated to any specific country (for instance, Andersen’s fairy tales). It was symptomatic that texts about Poland or originating from Poland were printed in Manchuria without any additional explanation or information about the Polish nature, traditions, social conditions, etc., even though – let us remind – the little readers had no chance of knowing them from experience. So, the section was not meant to reflect the reality in which the readers lived, but to create it and, thereby, to build their identity and their sense of community. Therefore, it seemed to be an extension of Poland on the Manchurian ground. After all, this was in line with the orientation of the whole magazine announced in its first issue, in which the lack of sufficient contact with the homeland was emphasised and the following declaration was made:

Our purpose is not at all to create here, in the Far East, a magazine intended for a long distance, for many years to come. No! We will continue to release this magazine into the world until the complete liberty of communication with our Country is achieved, until we will be able to draw directly from there, from Poland, our thoughts and spiritual strength.¹⁰

The ideological shape of the magazine does not surprise us too much: meant to educate the young generation in the spirit of patriotism far from homeland, it was somewhat similar to the press in the partitioned Poland that sought to compensate for the lack of statehood and was focused on education and self-education – besides, Kazimierz Grochowski underlined that initially, in Manchuria it was necessary to educate and bring up children in the national spirit exclusively at home, because until 1908, there was no school in Harbin that lectured in Polish.¹¹ Yet, such profiles and purposes of press publication may seem curious in the years 1919–1921, at the time when the Polish state already existed. As the creators of the magazine contended, the contacts with the Second Polish Republic were still impeded. The Polish consulate in Harbin was established as late as in 1920.¹² Therefore, this profile of the magazine’s section may be perceived as a continuation of the fight for national freedom. It was largely understandable and

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ “Do czytelników”, *Przegląd. Dwutygodnik narodowy literacko-społeczno-ekonomiczny z uwzględnieniem działu dla dzieci* 1919, no. 1, p. 3.

¹¹ Kazimierz Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*, pp. 82–83.

¹² See: Jerzy Czajewski, [Introduction], pp. 17–18.

reflected the course of changes in the life of the Poles on that territory. They still felt the unwaning desire to return, they were preparing the youngest ones for that moment. The distant Poland was a bit like the biblical Promised Land, where perhaps their children – born far away from it – would once be given the chance to live. The above-cited Grochowski wryly reproached his countrymen for this tendency:

Such is indeed the psychology of a Pole in a foreign land that he may well have lived somewhere, say at Lake Baikal or at the estuary of the Chang Jiang, for 40 years, and for all those 40 years he is preparing to return to Poland. And even his son, who was born here, and who has seen no other face than that of a slant-eyed Chinese and a Siberian peasant – he is also always preparing to go back to Poland, even though he has no idea what he will be doing there once he arrives.¹³

Criticism of the current model of upbringing and a new programme of patriotism

The remarks in the above quotation were made by Grochowski in the context of his discussion of the Polish press in the Far East – according to him, Polish mentality explains the lack of complete collections of local press in the homes of Polish emigrants in Asia. Yet, he spoke in a similar vein about the school education, which was criticised sometimes for the unconditional reproduction of the national system, the graduates' lack of preparation to function in Asia and the fact that it unnaturally created and sustained the desire to depart to Poland.¹⁴ What used to be a natural desire to return (before Poland regained independence), now sought at all costs – in the new circumstances of the construction of Polish statehood – was sometimes estimated as unfavourable, not only for the returning emigrant, but also for the country. At this unique moment, representatives of the Polish nation in Harbin became, in addition, representatives of the state, and this new role demanded, in a way, a reconstruction of the idea they used to have about their place on the map of the world. Indeed, even though the boundaries of their country appeared on the maps, the Polish community continued to exist also beyond those boundaries. And it is precisely in this context that we can interpret the voices that arose in Manchuria in the 1920s and 1930s, critical of the existing model of education, which directed the young Poles' thoughts only towards the Second Polish Republic. In the above-mentioned article of 1934, Nernheim wrote:

In spite of the considerable sacrifices from the part of the local society, the Government of the Polish Republic, and even the Poles from other emigrant territories – Henryk Sienkiewicz Middle School did not fulfil its most important task, i.e., it did not give the young people it educated any

¹³ Kazimierz Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*, p. 77.

¹⁴ See: Stanisław Nernheim, "Polonia harbińska", pp. 4–5; Jan Jaworski, "Szkolnictwo polskie w Harbinie", *Daleki Wschód* 1934, no. 7, pp. 5–7.

preparation for the struggle for survival in the difficult local conditions. Too rigidly relying on the programme of the Polish schools, it artificially created in the young people the urge to return to their homeland. Boys and girls who graduated from the middle school instinctively recognised that what they had been taught would be of no use for them in the work in the Far East. In the current year, the budget savings resulted in the interruption of the aid that the middle school had been receiving from the country. This hard blow for the Polish school education in Harbin may, however, produce blessed effects in the future. Indeed, it will have to be completely reorganised and adapted to the local conditions and challenges of life.¹⁵

In some respects, his remarks repeat Grochowski's observations from his book of 1928 – only in this case, they concern the methods of educating Polish children in Asia. However, as we may presume, these methods were closely related to the mentality of a Polish emigrant described by Grochowski, which clearly has not changed during the years that elapsed between these two texts. Such remarks, together with certain signals included in the magazines for the youth (created – let us note – by young people who had probably been educated in the criticised spirit and who might be former readers of the section for children in *Przegląd*), can be interpreted as a new programme of patriotism.

Indeed, at first glance, in some of the magazines for the youth published in the 1920s and 1930s, just as it was in the case of the above-described section for children in *Przegląd*, the rhetoric of fight for all that is national and of nostalgia for the homeland still prevailed; the remoteness from the Polish land, the constraint to live abroad and the financial difficulties were highlighted. However, upon closer examination of those texts and after a careful reflection on the profiles and purposes of those magazines, a significant change can be discerned in the manner of conducting this fight, or at least an attempt to reorient it, undertaken by young people who sought to adapt to the life in Manchuria, which they did not learn in the Polish school, and to develop new methods of working for the benefit of the (now independent) homeland. Those magazines, albeit often short-lived and dependent, were nonetheless relatively large in number, which testifies to the need for organising Polish life among the youth.

Even a glance at the titles gives an idea about their character:

- *Harczerz Polski w Azji* [Polish Scout in Asia] – supplement to *Polski Kurier Wieczorny* [Polish Evening Courier], three issues in 1919, publ. Kazimierz Żarski, ed. Wacław Piotrowski;
- *Młoda Myśl. Organ młodzieży polskiej Dalekiego Wschodu* [Young Thought. An Organ of the Polish Youth of the Far East], published in 1923, 1927–1928, publ. Sekcja Zjednoczonych Organizacji Młodzieży Polskiej Dalekiego Wschodu [Section of the United Organisations of the Polish Youth of the Far East], ed. Andrzej Zaleski (from no. 3, 1927);
- *Czuj Duch* [Be Prepared] – scout supplement to *Tygodnik Polski* [Polish Weekly], published in 1932;

¹⁵ Stanisław Nernheim, "Polonia harbińska", pp. 4–5.

- *Harcierz Polski. Dwutygodnik Drużyny Harcerskiej w Harbinie* [Polish Scout. Biweekly of the Harbin Scout Group]¹⁶ – four issues in 1937;
- *Biuletyn Polskiego Koła Akademickiego Badania Chin. Dodatek orientalny do "Tygodnika Polskiego"* [Bulletin of the Polish Academic Club for the Study on China. Oriental Supplement to *Polish Weekly*], twelve issues in 1930, ed. Stanisław Macedoński;
- *Akademik Polski w Chinach* [Polish Scholar in China] – supplement to *Tygodnik Polski* [Polish Weekly] published 1932–1933 (32 issues altogether), ed. Koło Akademików Polskich w Chinach [Club of Polish Scholars in China];
- *Głos Studenta* [Student's Voice] – supplement to *Listy Harbińskie / Daleki Wschód* [Harbinian Letters / The Far East], an organ of Polskie Koło Studenckie w Harbinie [Polish Student Club in Harbin], published 1932–1933.¹⁷

As can be seen, it was mainly organisations that stood behind the magazines for the youth. Interestingly, Nernheim saw the hope for the future of the Polish colony in Harbin in the members of one of those organisations. He wrote:

The "Union of Polish Youth" groups those elements on which the future existence of the Colony should be based. The young people gathered there, conscious of the changed conditions, try to orient their efforts in two directions: 1. raising state awareness, 2. adapting to the current economic conditions.¹⁸

These two principles and the programme of a new patriotism may guide us in our reading of the magazines and articles written by and for the youth.

Harbin – an (inter)national meeting place

In the press for the youth, the construction of national identity and of the community of Polish life in Manchuria was no longer based – as it had been in the section for children in *Przegląd* – on texts from Polish culture and on family life, but on the numerous organisations functioning within the Polish community, the large number of which Grochowski explained with "our outstanding individualism" and the "diversity of elements" in the Polish society.¹⁹ Among those organisations, there were several youth and academic groups. Even though Grochowski denied the fact that the multitude of diverse organisations is a sign of the society's heterogeneity,²⁰ the youth magazines

¹⁶ In the original, the name of the city is spelled "Charbin".

¹⁷ This list of magazines, number of issues, years of publication, editors and publishers follows the bibliography elaborated by Adam Winiarz. See: Adam Winiarz, *Bibliografia prasy polskiej*.

¹⁸ Stanisław Nernheim, "Polonia harbińska", p. 4.

¹⁹ See: Kazimierz Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*, p. 73.

²⁰ Ibidem.

clearly show that there was a desire to centralise or unify them. A notable example is provided, for instance, by *Harcierz Polski w Azji*, which speaks about the attempts of centralising the scout organisations in Siberia,²¹ or *Młoda Myśl*: in line with the latter's founding principles, it was supposed to be an organ of the Polish youth of the Far East, combining the three largest youth organisations in Harbin at that time: the scout district, Związek Młodzieży Polskiej [Union of Polish Youth] and Straż Maryi [Guard of Mary].²²

The desire to establish cooperation between Polish organisations sometimes resulted in their special treatment in comparison to other nationalities (although it did not rule out contacts with them). Many groups included "Polish" in their name (e.g., Polish Scouting, Union of Polish Youth). At times, the Poles avoided contact with those compatriots who yielded to the influence of other cultures:

Almost all Polish youth in Harbin withdrew from the non-Polish scouting organisations and it works fervently, with great patriotic zeal, in the Polish Scouting. [...] We have nothing in common with the Russian scouting organisation, which is practically another version of the former "Poteszhnyi" troops.²³

However, this does not mean that relations with representatives of other nations were completely severed. Anna Faryńska, in her article on the scientific and cultural cooperation of Poles (not only the youth, of whom we speak here) with other nations in Harbin, concludes:

The Poles eagerly cooperated with inhabitants of Harbin, which resulted in the creation of numerous initiatives with the aim of gaining knowledge about the history and culture of other countries and nations, both European and Asian. To a large extent, this was the effect of the specific atmosphere of the city, which was a melting pot of nations from all over the world.²⁴

Indeed, there are many examples of cooperation between nations, also in the youth press – much attention is dedicated in the discussed magazines to international contacts, presented as necessary and positive (perhaps except for relations with Germans and Russians). But still – at least in the youth magazines, which, as mentioned above, tried in part to propagate modern thinking about Polish patriotism and the place of a Pole in Asia and in the world – those contacts often had two very characteristic features. Firstly, they would be evoked in the context of representing the Polish state or nation before other

²¹ See: Karol Zaleski, "Organizacja Harcerstwa Polskiego (Skautyzmu Polskiego) w Azji", *Harcierz Polski w Azji* 1919, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 2–3.

²² See: "Od Redakcji", *Młoda Myśl* 1928, no. 1/5, p. 1.

²³ Władysław Byliński, "Polskie drużyny harcerskie w Azji", *Harcierz Polski w Azji* 1919, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 6.

²⁴ Anna Faryńska, "Relacje Polaków z innymi narodowościami w wielokulturowym Harbinie w kontekście współpracy naukowej i kulturalnej", in: *Konstanty Symonolewicz – orientalista, dyplomata, opiekun Polonii Mandżurskiej. Materiały z sympozjum naukowego zorganizowanego w Polczynie-Zdroju 10 czerwca 2010 r.*, ed. Adam Winiarz, Szczecin: Książnica Pomorska im. Stanisława Staszica 2012, p. 78.

nations, secondly, in the context of the broadly understood finding or winning a proper position for Poland on the international stage, even of Polish expansion in Asia. These two features can be included in the changing profile of a patriot. This model of patriotism may be a response to the above-mentioned Grochowski's postulates and the principles listed by Nernheim, and it was promoted by part of the youth writing for the press.

Nation's representation – state's representation – expansion of political power

In *Czuj Duch*, a supplement to *Tygodnik Polski*, we can find quoted excerpts from the speech of Michał Grażyński, the president of the Polish Scouting Association (ZHP), regarding the scouts' activity outside the country. He indicated two principles of the functioning of Polish scouting abroad:

1) to enter the international ground in such a manner that the Polish Scouting Association will play there a role corresponding to its strength and the position of Poland, so that, by contributing the values it developed to the overall achievements of scouting thought, it gives his voice a proper value and gains ears that want to hear it;

2) to win the position it deserves in the scouting family, so that it is a worthy representative of the Polish national colours on that territory and becomes a factor cooperating, within its possibilities, in the strengthening of Polish authority abroad.²⁵

This is an example of one of those texts that pointed to the role of Poles in Asia – to represent their country, already present on the map of Europe, to understand their coexistence with other nations and countries (now – on equal terms, as representatives of independent Poland), to ensure that Poland is present on the international stage and, finally, that it holds the place that has been denied to it for so long. Thus, the idea was to strive for expansion (admittedly, based on cooperation and devoid of hostility). This term, among others, appeared in the Polish youth press in Harbin, not necessarily in the sense of land conquest, but augmenting the economic and political power, winning an influential position in international relations.

In some of the youth magazines – especially in press organs of academic communities – there were also interesting attempts to learn about the culture, history, customs of China and other countries geographically close to Manchuria. Hence, such topics as correct transcription of Chinese characters to Latin alphabet, Chinese music, Chinese New Year's customs, and even Chinese mail post. In my opinion, this interest, which may to some extent confirm the above-mentioned thesis of cultural openness, often had in fact a different, very specific motivation, closely related to the

²⁵ "Walny Zjazd Z. H. P. w Warszawie", *Czuj Duch. Stronica Harcerska*, no. 2, supplement to *Tygodnik Polski* 1932, no. 522, p. 3.

expansionist ambitions of becoming a political power. The establishing of Polskie Koło Krajoznawcze w Chinach przy Związku Młodzieży Polskiej [Polish Club of Local Geography and History in China at the Union of Polish Youth] was explained in the following manner by one of the authors of *Młoda Myśl*: the goal was “to fill the acute gap that has long been felt among our youth, namely the lack of serious interest in the country in which we live [...]”;²⁶ further he added: “The section has been working unwearingly for two years, hoping that in the future, it will yield a whole team of competent persons, who will be serving Poland faithfully and will benefit the Polish colony in China”.²⁷ The object of this curiosity was not knowledge in itself or cultural exchange – the goal was to get to know the country in order to draw concrete benefits for Poland, above all through tightening the Polish-Chinese trade relations. Interestingly, according to the author, the need of such education and cooperation had not been noticed by anyone, except for the youth.²⁸ Thus, he outlined the image of a rather hermetic older generation of Polish emigrants (hence, perhaps, Nernheim’s hope in the youth). The most important concrete topics discussed by the youth were, firstly, the need for economic development through trade cooperation with China and secondly – the interesting theme of predictions concerning the future role of the Far East in the history of the world.

The eyes of the whole world are currently turned towards the Far East, towards the enormous Pacific Basin, covering the gigantic area of over 160 million square kilometres, which harbours innumerable natural treasures and is inhabited by one third of humanity.

The moment is coming when the centre of the world history will move here. We the Poles, as a nation striving for the position of a political power, must take active part in the general expansion, but in order to act – one must know.²⁹

We are this handful of the front guard that should pave the way for further hosts of workers studying the matters of the Far East, because we can know better than anyone else what great significance the Far East has for Poland.

The present events that we are witnessing are but thunderbolts announcing a storm here in the Far East, which nonetheless will pass and the fair weather of nations’ cooperation in the Pacific Basin must follow.³⁰

These geopolitical predictions of the young people constitute a very interesting gesture of relocation of the central point of the map from Europe to Asia where they lived. They suggested that attention should be paid to their role as representatives of

²⁶ G. Sadkowski, “Z życia młodzieży polskiej w Harbinie”, *Młoda Myśl* 1928, no. 1/5, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ See ibidem.

²⁹ B. Michowski, “Słowo wstępne”, *Głos Studenta*, no. 1, p. 1, supplement to *Listy Harbińskie* 1932, no. 6, p. [5].

³⁰ Idem, “Koleżanki i koledzy”, *Głos Studenta*, no. 1, p. 2, supplement to *Listy Harbińskie* 1932, no. 6, p. [6].

the Polish state in that distant outpost, which was underestimated but could be of key importance in the future. They were no longer expressing only hardships related to their situation of emigrants – who were far from the homeland, whose contact with the community was impeded – but also showed the potential of this position, the effects that could result for Poland from a change of perspective that was possible thanks to Harbin.

From nostalgia for the homeland to the expansion of political power

In the 1920s and 1930s, striving for greater political power was not exceptional in the European context, but in the case at hand, it was particularly significant. In Manchuria, the cultivation of Polish identity, which was being strengthened, among others, in the Polish press for children and youth, was constantly perceived in terms of a fight, but one that had evolved. After Poland regained independence, when it established its own sovereign statehood and became aware of it, when it began to maintain contacts between the free country and the distant Polish colony, some young authors in the press sought to transform the nostalgia for the country that a little while ago had not existed into a sense of obligation of a Pole living abroad towards his country. A Pole who represented his nation, and now also his country, had an impact on the formation of the country's image among other nations and also on the augmentation of the country's economic and political power. In this way, Harbin became not only a place of temporary exile, nor merely a space for international, multicultural meetings, but also a distant outpost of the Polish state, a special "observation point", which made it possible to see the world events from a different perspective.

References

The query comprised the following magazines:

Akademik Polski w Chinach – supplement to *Tygodnik Polski* 1932–1933.

Biuletyn Polskiego Koła Akademickiego Badania Chin – supplement to *Tygodnik Polski* 1930.

Czuj Duch – scout supplement to *Tygodnik Polski* 1932.

Głos Studenta – supplement to *Listy Harbińskie / Daleki Wschód* 1932–1933.

Harcierz Polski. Dwutygodnik Drużyny Harcerskiej w Harbinie 1937.

Harcierz Polski w Azji – supplement to *Polski Kurier Wieczorny* 1919.

Młoda Myśl. Organ młodzieży polskiej Dalekiego Wschodu 1923, 1927–1928.

Przegląd. Dwutygodnik narodowy literacko-społeczno-ekonomiczny z uwzględnieniem działu dla diatwy 1919–1921.

Primary literature (press articles)

- Byliński Władysław, "Polskie drużyny harcerskie w Azji", *Harcierz Polski w Azji* 1919, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 5–7.
- "Do czytelników", *Przegląd. Dwutygodnik narodowy literacko-społeczno-ekonomiczny z uwzględnieniem działu dla dziatwy* 1919, no. 1, p. 3.
- Jaworski Jan, "Szkolnictwo polskie w Harbinie", *Daleki Wschód* 1934, no. 7, pp. 5–7.
- Michowski B., "Koleżanki i koledzy", *Głos Studenta*, no. 1, p. 2, supplement to *Listy Harbińskie* 1932, no. 6, p. [6].
- Michowski B., "Słowo wstępne", *Głos Studenta*, no. 1, p. 1, supplement to *Listy Harbińskie* 1932, no. 6, p. [5].
- Nernheim Stanisław, "Polonia harbińska (zarys historyczny)", *Daleki Wschód* 1934, no. 7, pp. 1–5.
- "Od Redakcji", *Młoda Myśl* 1928, no. 1/5, p. 1.
- "Od Redakcji", *Przegląd. Dwutygodnik narodowy literacko-społeczno-ekonomiczny z uwzględnieniem działu dla dziatwy* 1919, no. 1, p. 9.
- Sadkowski G., "Z życia młodzieży polskiej w Harbinie", *Młoda Myśl* 1928, no. 1/5, pp. 1–2.
- "Walny Zjazd Z. H. P. w Warszawie", *Czuj Duch. Stronica Harcerska*, no. 2, supplement to *Tygodnik Polski* 1932, no. 522, p. 3.
- Zaleski Karol, "Organizacja Harcerstwa Polskiego (Skautyizmu Polskiego) w Azji", *Harcierz Polski w Azji* 1919, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 2–3.

Secondary literature

- Czajewski Jerzy, [Introduction], in: *Polacy w Mandżurii – Poles in Manchuria (1897–1949)* [exhibition catalogue], Szczecin: Archives of Modern Records, with the cooperation of Agencja Wydawnicza Egros 2015, pp. 3–39.
- Faryńska Anna, "Relacje Polaków z innymi narodowościami w wielokulturowym Harbinie w kontekście współpracy naukowej i kulturalnej", in: *Konstanty Symonolewicz – orientalista, dyplomata, opiekun Polonii Mandżurskiej. Materiały z sympozjum naukowego zorganizowanego w Polczynie-Zdroju 10 czerwca 2010 r.*, ed. Adam Winiarz, Szczecin: Książnica Pomorska im. Stanisława Staszica 2012, pp. 78–86.
- Grochowski Kazimierz, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*, Harbin in China: s.n. 1928.
- Kałuski Marian, *Polacy w Chinach*, Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax 2001.
- Kim Yong Deog, *Kolonia polska w Mandżurii 1897–1949*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Promocji Powiatu, Miasta i Gminy PROMO 2001.
- Winiarz Adam, "Bibliografia prasy polskiej na Dalekim Wschodzie w latach 1917–1949", *Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej* 1986, A. 25, no. 1, pp. 125–135.

Polish Non-Fiction in China: Discussion and Translations¹

Duan Yue

Beijing Foreign Studies University, China

e-mail: duanyue@bfsu.edu.cn

ORCID: 0009-0001-0232-1575

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present the history of the translation of Polish non-fiction in mainland China from the 1980s to the present. The article divides the translations into three broad categories: anti-fascist literature, exemplified by Tadeusz Borowski and Zofia Nałkowska; reportages, represented by Ryszard Kapuściński; as well as biographies, diaries and correspondence of renowned Polish artists. The paper includes descriptions of the motives behind the publication of these translations, their reception and information about the translators. It notes that most of the Chinese translations of Polish non-fiction were produced under the influence of significant commemorative events or promotional activities organised by official cultural institutions of both countries.

Keywords

Polish literature, non-fiction, reportage, Chinese translation, reception

Non-fiction, as a kind of literature aiming to offer an objective presentation of events, comprises a wide range of genres. In the 20th century, a period of radical changes, it had the special role of a witness to memory. The study of Chinese translations of Polish non-fiction, therefore, constitutes a necessary part of research concerning the Chinese reception of the literature from that Eastern European country.

The history of Chinese translations of Polish literature dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. At first, the translated works were for the most part literary

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: "Polska literatura faktu w Chinach: omówienie i przekłady", *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 133–143, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.9>.

texts;² as for non-fiction, it began to be noticed by the Chinese much later – in the 1980s, when non-fiction was gaining popularity in China. In 1978, with the implementation of the reform politics and opening-up, the “thaw” also spread to the domains of literature and art, resulting in a sudden increase in translations of foreign literature. On this wave, Polish non-fiction was introduced to China in the 1980s and 1990s, mainly by Chinese researchers in the field of Polish studies, outstanding translators, who had graduated from Faculties of Polish Studies in Poland in the 1950s and who chose to translate such genres as reportage, biography, diaries and letters.

Lager literature

The first genre of Polish non-fiction that reached the Chinese readers in a systematised way was “Lager literature”, closely related to World War II and the criticism of fascism. In China, literary works dedicated to this theme are often called “anti-fascist literature”.

China and Poland suffered greatly from the fascist activity during World War II, and the common historical experience of both countries became the driving force for the Chinese translations of Polish Lager literature about the crimes of the Nazis. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the victory in the so-called War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression³ and the ultimate universal victory over fascism, Chinese publishing houses produced many books on that subject, and the Chongqing Press published a 52-volume collection 世界反法西斯文学书系 [World Anti-Fascist Literature, 1992–1994], which includes representative anti-fascist literary works published in the years 1930–1960 in over sixty countries and regions of the world, in the form of novels, poems, plays and non-fiction. The series had a strong translation team of 300 professionals, including eminent contemporary translators of literature from various languages. In the Polish volume, numbered 35, one of the translators, Lin Hongliang (林洪亮), gives in his foreword an introduction to the representative poets, novelists and playwrights of Polish anti-fascist literature as well as to their works. He praises the works of Lager literature that survived the fires of war and indicates that:

Polish Lager literature is a text of significant depth and extensive ideological content, as well as educative and aesthetic values, and it holds an important place in the development of contemporary Polish literature.⁴

² See: Li Yinan, *Recepcja literatury polskiej w Chinach. Wybrane zagadnienia*, doctoral dissertation, University of Silesia in Katowice, Faculty of Philology 2015, pp. 41–42, https://rebus.us.edu.pl/bitstream/20.500.12128/5731/1/Li_Recepcja_literatury_polskiej_w_Chinach.pdf [accessed 4 July 2025].

³ China’s resistance against Japanese aggression began in 1931 and continued for fourteen years, with constant fights in the years 1937–1945.

⁴ Lin Hongliang (林洪亮), 序 [Introduction], in: 世界反法西斯文学书系 [World Anti-Fascist Literature], 波兰卷 [Polish volume] (35), ed. Liu Baiyu (刘白羽), Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe 1992, p. 2. The quotation was first translated from Chinese into Polish by Duan Yue.

Among sixteen works included in that book, there are two short stories translated by Professor Yi Lijun (易丽君): “Profesor Spanner” (“Professor Spanner”) by Zofia Nałkowska and “Proszę państwa do gazu” (“This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen”) by Tadeusz Borowski. From then on, the works of these two writers were eagerly chosen by Chinese translators of Polish Lager literature (and the non-fiction it contains).

The short story “This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen” was translated once again by Professor Yang Deyou (杨德友) in 1995 and published in *Masterpieces Review* (名作欣赏) together with the translator’s commentary entitled *Ludzkość pod wysokim ciśnieniem* [Humanity under High Pressure]. Two years later, translation of Henryk Grynberg’s autobiographical novel *Żydowska wojna* (*The Jewish War*) was published in *World Literature* (世界文学), an important Chinese review dedicated to foreign literature.

In the 21st century, Nałkowska’s and Borowski’s reportages were again published in China. In that time, the form of publication of their work changed – from single works to more complete collections. In 2012, a collection of Borowski’s short stories was published in China, as the only example of Polish literature in the first volume of the series *Blue Eastern Europe*,⁵ and it was published again in 2018. This publication comprises almost all short stories from the collections *Pożegnanie z Marią* (*Farewell to Maria*), *Pewien żołnierz* [A Certain Soldier] and *Kamienny świat* (*The World of Stone*), however, according to the translator, “all of Borowski’s works concern the cold and treacherous ‘world of stone’ in the broad sense of the term – the world of alienation”,⁶ hence the title of the collection 石头世界 [The World of Stone]. In the introduction, the translator, Professor Yang Deyou (杨德友), gives information about Borowski’s life, the themes of his writings and his writing style, highlighting that his works are perhaps short, but their cool-headed descriptions are seething with tension. We need to add that the translator selected and translated also commentaries of three renowned Polish writers and literary critics on the subject of Borowski and his writing, which are placed at the end of the book as a supplement: “Beta – czyli nieszczęśliwy kochanek” (“Beta, the Disappointed Lover”) by Czesław Miłosz;⁷ Jan Kott’s introduction to a collection

⁵ *Blue Eastern Europe* is a large-scale literary series created by Guangdong Huacheng publishing house, the aim of which is to translate and introduce on the Chinese ground the Central and Eastern European literature in a more objective and comprehensive way. The series is intended to comprise almost one hundred works of modern and contemporary literature from that region. Until now, seven volumes were published, and the only example of Polish literature in the first volume of 2012 was Tadeusz Borowski’s collection of short stories.

⁶ Yang Deyou (杨德友), 深不可测之谜——中译本前言 [Unfathomable Mystery – Introduction to Chinese Translation], in: Tadeusz Borowski, 石头世界 [The World of Stone], trans. Yang Deyou, Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe 2018, p. 5. The quotation was first translated from Chinese into Polish by Duan Yue.

⁷ Czesław Miłosz, “Beta, the Disappointed Lover”, in: idem, *The Captive Mind*, trans. Jane Zielonko, New York: Vintage International 1990, pp. 111–134. Polish original: idem, “Beta – czyli nieszczęśliwy kochanek”, in: idem, *Zniewolony umysł*, Paryż: Instytut Literacki 1953, pp. 113–134.

of Borowski's short stories published in English by Penguin Books;⁸ and excerpts from an essay by Tadeusz Drewnowski.⁹ The translation tries to provide Chinese readers with a clear understanding of the literary values and achievements of Borowski's work. Similarly, in 2013, a collection of Borowski's short stories was published in China under the title *Here in Our Auschwitz*. It comprised stories from the collections *Farewell to Maria* and *The World of Stone*, translated from English versions by Wang Xiaodong (王晓东).

In 2015, Zofia Nałkowska's complete collection of short stories entitled *Medaliony* (*Medallions*) was published in China. The translator, Professor Yang Deyou, in his preface and afterword, also provided an in-depth analysis of the authors' writings, referring to the suffering and painful history that connected China and Poland at that time. He praised the composed, self-controlled language style and the excellent writing skills, drawing the reader's attention to the importance of translating this kind of works for maintaining historical memory and for reflecting on the history and the cultivation of peace. In addition, at the end of the book, the translator included a selection of commentaries on *Medallions* by Polish literary critics and writers, elaborated by Jerzy Polanicki, and an excerpt from Kinga Dunin's monograph on the Jewish matter and the antisemitism in Poland as well as their reflection in literature,¹⁰ which enables Chinese readers to better understand the artistic value and the social significance of the work and encourages them to think about the history of Holocaust in a broader historical perspective.

It is worth mentioning that when the film *The Pianist* (2002), based on Władysław Szpilman's memories, won a number of international awards at the beginning of the 21st century, Szpilman's book, translated from English, was published in China in 2004 and then again, by a different publishing house, in 2016. It is clear that film, as one of the most important media promoting literature abroad, also played an important role in the choice of Polish non-fiction for translation into Chinese. Another reportage that drew international attention, Witold Pilecki's reports, was published in China in 2015, based on the English translation *The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery*,¹¹ thus enriching the picture of Polish non-fiction Lager literature in Chinese translation.

Strictly chronologically speaking, in terms of publication order, the above-discussed anti-fascist literature was not the first Polish non-fiction offered to the Chinese readers (it is slightly later than biographies). However, considering the outstanding literary achievements of the translated works and the uniformity of topics, the interest that the

⁸ Jan Kott, *Introduction*, trans. Michael Kandel, in: Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, trans. Barbara Vedder, New York: Penguin Books 1976, pp. 11–26.

⁹ Tadeusz Drewnowski, *Posłowie*, in: Tadeusz Borowski, *Wspomnienia, wiersze, opowiadania*, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1977, pp. 363–378 (excerpts chosen for Chinese translation can be found on pages: 363, 372–378).

¹⁰ Kinga Dunin, "Miejsce Zagłady", in: *Czytając Polskę. Literatura polska po roku 1989 wobec dylematów nowoczesności*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo W.A.B. 2004, pp. 132–152.

¹¹ Witold Pilecki, *The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery*, trans. Jarek Garliński, Los Angeles: Wydawnictwo Aquila Polonica 2012.

Chinese researchers of Polish studies had in Borowski and Nałkowska, or rather in Lager literature, as well as their practice of translating these writers, had a groundbreaking importance for the history of translating and introducing Polish non-fiction to China.

Publication year	Polish title (English title)	Chinese title	Author	Translator
1992	<i>Profesor Spanner</i> (Professor Spanner)	施帕内尔教授	Z. Nałkowska	Yi Lijun (易丽君)
1992	<i>Proszę państwa do gazu</i> (This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen)	请大家到煤气室去	T. Borowski	Yi Lijun
1995	<i>Proszę państwa do gazu</i> (This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen)	女士们先生们, 请进毒气室	T. Borowski	Yang Deyou (杨德友)
1997	<i>Żydowska wojna</i> (The Jewish War)	反犹战争	H. Grynberg	Yang Deyou
2004 (from English)	<i>Pianista</i> (The Pianist)	钢琴师: 二战期间华沙幸存记	W. Szpilman	Liu Shicong (刘士聪), Gu Qinan (谷启楠)
2012 (second edition 2018)	<i>Kamienny świat</i> (The World of Stone)	石头世界	T. Borowski	Yang Deyou
2013 (from English)	<i>U nas w Auschwitzu</i> (Here in Our Auschwitz)	在我们奥斯维辛	T. Borowski	Wang Xiaodong (王晓东)
2015	<i>Medaliony</i> (Medallions)	椭圆浮雕	Z. Nałkowska	Yang Deyou
2015 (from English)	<i>The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery</i>	奥斯维辛集中营的志愿者: 一份来自波兰卧底的报告	W. Pilecki	Huang Yuwen (黄煜文)
2016 (from English)	<i>Pianista</i> (The Pianist)	钢琴师	W. Szpilman	Liu Shicong, Gu Qinan

Reportages on Other Subjects

Henryk Sienkiewicz is one of the most often translated Polish writers in China,¹² with translations into Chinese of *Quo Vadis*, *Krzyżacy* (*The Teutonic Knights*), *Trylogia*

¹² See: Li Yinan (李怡楠), “Recepcja literatury polskiej w Chinach: teoria i dzieje”, *Postscriptum Polonistyczne* 2016, no. 2, p. 179.

(*The Trilogy*) and a collection of short stories as well as his letters from the journey to America,¹³ written in the convention of a travel reportage, published in Chinese in two translations: in 2013 from Polish version and in 2015 from the English one.

Zhang Zhenhui (张振辉), the author of 显克维奇评传 [Biography of Henryk Sienkiewicz] and the Chinese translator of *Quo Vadis* and *The Teutonic Knights*, in his forty-page introduction to the translation of *Listy z podróży do Ameryki* (*Portrait of America: Letters of Henry Sienkiewicz*), describes in minute detail the epoch, in which the reportage was created, the writer's journey, the main themes brought up in the work and its artistic style. The presented image of the North American society of the 1870s and of the life of Chinese emigrants of that time was acknowledged by the translator and by the critics as a text of documentary value.

It is impossible to discuss the genre of reportage without mentioning the name of the world-famous Polish journalist and writer, Ryszard Kapuściński. Only three of his works have been translated into Chinese, but they are all his principal masterpieces: *Podróże z Herodotem* (*Travels with Herodotus*), *Cesarz* (*The Emperor*) and *Imperium* (*Imperium*). In China, Kapuściński is the best-known Polish author of non-fiction, and the Chinese translations of his works received very high ratings on Douban – the most popular Chinese online platform for reviewing books, films, music, etc. They also have the highest number of ratings of all Chinese translations executed directly from Polish that are mentioned in the present article (each of Kapuściński's books was rated by ca. 400–500 users, whereas most of other books discussed here received no more than 200).

The introduction of Kapuściński on the Chinese book market was the result of promotional activities held by official institutions. After his death in 2007, Polish cultural institutions organised a series of events promoting the writer's works, including book fairs in his memory or projects supporting translation of Kapuściński's books into foreign languages. It was thanks to the financial support from the Polish Book Institute that, in 2009, *Travels with Herodotus* were published for the first time in Chinese translation, with a congratulatory text by a former ambassador of Poland to China, Krzysztof Szumski. Wang Zhi (王志), a famous Chinese journalist, wrote an introduction to the book, in which he expressed his great reverence for Kapuściński and high appreciation of the writer's achievements. For Wang Zhi, Kapuściński

is above all an outstanding journalist, whose experience, perspicacious observation, insightful way of thinking and writing, endurance, courage, wisdom, even talent, are the most appropriate explanation of what the profession of a journalist is.¹⁴

¹³ Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Listy z podróży do Ameryki*, Warsaw: PIW 1989; idem, *Portrait of America: Letters of Henry Sienkiewicz*, trans. and ed. Charles Morley, New York: Columbia University Press 1959.

¹⁴ Wang Zhi (王志), 不能克隆的丰碑——代序 [A Monument that Cannot Be Cloned – Foreword], in: Ryszard Kapuściński, 与希罗多德一起旅行 [Travels with Herodotus], trans. Wu Lan (乌兰), Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House 2009, p. 2. The quotation was first translated from Chinese into Polish by Duan Yue.

And Kapuściński's work offers an excellent example of this:

His characteristic style of description and way of thinking contribute to his uniqueness among fellow journalists, while his childlike curiosity and the culture of a true intellect combine in him the authority and the charisma.¹⁵

Even though Chinese press mentioned the controversy related to Kapuściński, aroused in 2010 by Artur Domosławski's book,¹⁶ the writer was, generally speaking, well received. The Chinese readers were impressed by his skill and attracted by the lively mixture of journalism and art within the form of reportage.

At the beginning of the 2020s, prominent Polish reportages continued to be translated into Chinese. The documentary book *Miedzianka. Historia znikania* (*History of a Disappearance: The Story of a Forgotten Polish Town*) by Filip Springer, nominated for several Polish literary awards, was published in Chinese translation in 2021. The collection of essays *Jadąc do Babadag* (*On the Road to Babadag: Travels in the Other Europe*) by Andrzej Stasiuk, a renowned contemporary Polish writer, as reportage in a broad sense of the term, was also published in China in the series *Blue Eastern Europe*. As can be concluded from the commentaries on Douban platform, the beauty and lyricism of the work, the questions it asks about the destination of humanity and the reflections on ancient, forgotten regions attracted and deeply moved Chinese readers. *Dwanaście srok za ogon* (*The Birds They Sang: Birds and People in Life and Art*), an exquisite conjunction of reportage and essay by Stanisław Łubieński, another winner of several prestigious awards in the field of Polish literature, was also translated and published in China in 2023. It was highly appreciated and recommended by many Chinese life scientists and writers.

Publication year	Polish title (English title)	Chinese title	Author	Translator
2009	<i>Podróże z Herodotem</i> (<i>Travels with Herodotus</i>)	与希罗多德一起 旅行	R. Kapuściński	Wu Lan (乌兰)
2011	<i>Cesarz</i> (<i>The Emperor</i>)	皇帝：一个独裁政 权的倾覆	R. Kapuściński	Wu Lan
2013	<i>Listy z podróży do Ameryki</i> (<i>Portrait of America: Letters of Henry Sienkiewicz</i>)	旅美书简	H. Sienkiewicz	Zhang Zhenhui (张振辉)

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 4. The quotation was first translated from Chinese into Polish by Duan Yue.

¹⁶ Artur Domosławski, *Kapuściński non-fiction*, Warsaw: Świat Książki 2010. Published in English as: Artur Domosławski, *Ryszard Kapuściński: A Life*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones, London: Verso 2012.

Publication year	Polish title (English title)	Chinese title	Author	Translator
2015 (from English)	<i>Listy z podróży do Ameryki (Portrait of America: Letters of Henry Sienkiewicz)</i>	旅美书简	H. Sienkiewicz	Wang Haiying (王海颖)
2018	<i>Imperium (Imperium)</i>	帝国：俄罗斯五十年	R. Kapuściński	Wu Lan
2021	<i>Miedzianka. historia znikania (History of a Disappearance: The Story of a Forgotten Polish Town)</i>	消失的小镇：被遗忘的米兹扬卡	F. Springer	Ouyang Jin (欧阳瑾), Liu Yuzhi (刘雨枝)
2023	<i>Jadąc do Babadag (On the Road to Babadag: Travels in the Other Europe)</i>	去往巴巴达格	A. Stasiuk	Gong Lingxi (龚冷兮)
2023	<i>Dwanaście srok za ogon (The Birds They Sang: Birds and People in Life and Art)</i>	抓住十二只喜鹊的尾巴	S. Łubieński	Mao Rui (毛蕊)

Biographies, diaries and correspondence

Biography is an important genre belonging to non-fiction, but few books of this kind written by Polish authors have been translated into Chinese. This does not mean that biographies of eminent Poles, such as Nicolaus Copernicus, Maria Skłodowska-Curie, Fryderyk Chopin, are seldom published in China, on the contrary, many titles of this kind have been printed, but they were not authored by Polish writers. For instance, Zhang Zhenhui, a Polish studies scholar, wrote biographies of Adam Mickiewicz and Władysław Reymont in the Chinese language, with references to a whole range of books published in Poland. However, these are not translations of works by Polish authors, so they will not be taken into account in the present article.

Biographies by Polish authors translated into Chinese concerned mainly world-famous Poles representing various fields of science and art, such as Jan Matejko, Nicolaus Copernicus, Krzysztof Kieślowski or Czesław Miłosz. Copernicus' biography, based on the book *Fromborski samotnik*, was published in China already in 1988. The Polish original constituted a vital bibliographical position for a number of further biographies of Copernicus published in China, and it was published again in 2000, in a new translation. Krzysztof Kieślowski became one of the most famous

Polish film directors among Chinese audience and researchers, due to his deeply humanistic concerns and unique narrative techniques. The Chinese version of the book *Kieślowski on Kieślowski*, translated from English, was very well received in China. When speaking of biographic translations in recent years, we have to mention Miłosz's biography, authored by Andrzej Franaszek, published in China in 2023 with the support of the Polish Book Institute translation programme. No doubt, the translation of this monumental work constitutes for the Chinese an important and instructive source of knowledge about the prominent poet. It is also worth mentioning that in 2023, Stefan Gazeł's autobiography *Zabić, aby żyć* (*To Live and Kill*) also received a donation from the Polish Book Institute for translation into Chinese.

Publication year	Polish title (English title)	Chinese title	Author	Translator
1988	<i>Fromborski samotnik</i> [The Loner from Frombork]	哥白尼传	J. Centkowski	Dong Fusheng (董福生)
1995	<i>Matejko</i> [Matejko]	波兰大画家马特义科	J. Bogucki	Ma Yunliang (马云亮)
2000	<i>Fromborski samotnik</i> [The Loner from Frombork]	哥白尼传	J. Centkowski	Ma Fuyun (马福云)
2003 (from English; second edition in 2011)	<i>O sobie</i> (<i>Kieślowski on Kieślowski</i>)	基耶斯洛夫斯基谈基耶斯洛夫斯基	K. Kieślowski, ed. D. Stok	Shi Lihua (施丽华)
2023	<i>Miłosz. Biografia</i> (<i>Miłosz: A Biography</i>)	米沃什传	A. Franaszek	Wu Lan (乌兰), Li Jiangyi (李江颐), Li Jia (李佳)

If we look, in turn, at the Chinese translations of Polish diaries or letters, these are limited in fact to excerpts from Maria Dąbrowska's and Witold Gombrowicz's diaries and Fryderyk Chopin's correspondence.

In 2000, three works (under Chinese titles *Conversation on the Diaries*, *The First Meeting with Stanisław Stempowski* and *The Husband's Death*), coming from the first of five volumes of Maria Dąbrowska's *Diaries* published by Czytelnik in 1988, were included in the Chinese anthology 世界经典散文新编 [Anthology of the Classics of World Literature Prose], in the volume *Eastern Europe*. In his foreword, the editor commented that Dąbrowska's *Diaries* show the writer's unique style through the descriptions it contains and the sincerely expressed feelings. When she was "describing

her everyday life and painting social images, she was trying to connect individual fate with the future of her homeland”.¹⁷

The astonishing half-century time span of Dąbrowska's diaries has a great significance both for the understanding of the writer's personal experiences and for the research on the transformations of Polish society. This fact was also highlighted by the Chinese translator in the introductory comment to the translation as well as in a related survey article published in 2007 in the scientific review *Journal of European Languages and Cultures* (欧洲语言文化研究). The translator, Professor Yi Lijun, herself an experienced Polish studies scholar in China, presented to Chinese readers a detailed description of the writer's life in the context of social changes taking place in the Polish society, she provided an outline of the key content of the *Diaries*, and even pointed to the controversies around the writer's work in the Polish academic milieu.

Another writer whose diaries have been partially translated into Chinese is Witold Gombrowicz. The thirty-page Chinese translation was published in 2004 in the Chinese journal *World Literature* (世界文学) dedicated to foreign literature.

Publication year	Title	Author	Translator	Publication place
2000	<i>Selected excerpts from Maria Dąbrowska's "Diaries"</i>	M. Dąbrowska	Yi Lijun (易丽君)	世界经典散文新编 (Anthology of the Classics of World Literature Prose), 欧洲卷·东欧 (volume Eastern Europe), Tianjin: Baihua Wenyi Chubanshe 2000, pp. 15–35.
2004	<i>Selected excerpts from Witold Gombrowicz's "Diaries"</i>	W. Gombrowicz	Yi Lijun	World Literature (世界文学) 2004, no. 3, pp. 70–100.

Fryderyk Chopin is undoubtedly one of the most recognisable representatives of Poland in China, and the Chinese audience's love for Chopin's music also contributed to the popularity of literary works concerning his person. The first literary translation appeared already in 1961, when Liao Fushu (廖辅叔) translated into Chinese the monograph about the pianist by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Then, in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, lyrical prose dedicated to Chopin was translated into Chinese. The earliest collection of Chopin's correspondence was published in 1986 and the translation was based on the Polish edition prepared by Bronisław Edward Sydow. In 2010, on the

¹⁷ Feng Zhisheng (冯植生), 导言 [Introduction], in: 世界经典散文新编 [Anthology of the Classics of World Literature Prose], 欧洲卷·东欧 [volume: Eastern Europe], ed. Feng Zhisheng, Tianjin: Baihua Wenyi Chubanshe 2000, p. 7. The quotation was first translated from Chinese into Polish by Duan Yue.

200th anniversary of the musician's birth, *Chopin's correspondence* was published in China, comprising about a hundred of his letters, excerpts from his diaries and several early poems. Moreover, in 2015, Chopin's letters were translated into Chinese based on Henryk Opieński's English edition, which shows the unabated interest of Chinese readers in the Polish composer.

Publication year	Original title	Chinese title	Author	Translator
1986	<i>Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina</i> [Fryderyk Chopin's Correspondence]	肖邦书信选	Fryderyk Chopin (ed. B.E. Sydow)	Yi Bo (亦波)
2010	<i>Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina</i> [Fryderyk Chopin's Correspondence]	肖邦通信集	Fryderyk Chopin	Lin Hongliang (林洪亮)
2015 (from English)	<i>Chopin's Letters</i>	肖邦书信集	Fryderyk Chopin (ed. H. Opieński)	He Xiaobing (何晓兵), Li Haichuan (李海川), Li Qinfei (李沁霏)

The analysis of the history of translating and introducing Polish non-fiction on the Chinese ground leads to the following conclusions. In comparison to translations of Polish poetry and novels, Polish non-fiction began to be translated in China relatively late and in scarce quantities. The subject matter of those works is mainly historical, related to the history of broadly understood development of Eastern and Central Europe, the social changes and the specific events in individual countries. The Lager literature, represented by the works of Tadeusz Borowski and Zofia Nałkowska, reportages (mainly those authored by Ryszard Kapuściński), as well as biographies, diaries and letters of famous Polish artists became the main genres chosen for translation. When it comes to publication possibilities, publishing of translations of Polish non-fiction in China was often supported within the frame of official activities undertaken to promote culture in both countries and to commemorate important events, such as anniversaries related to war or the birth and death of famous authors. At the same time, the support from cultural institutions, especially from the Polish Book Institute, has played an important role in drawing the attention of China to certain canonical works of Polish non-fiction that are worth translating. In literary criticism, the Chinese literary theoreticians sometimes still adopt a traditional approach, which consists in appreciating and highlighting the connections between Polish literature (including non-fiction) and the literature of neighbouring countries and European nations. Finally, Chinese translations of Polish non-fiction are executed in two ways: either directly from Polish into Chinese, or from

English versions. In the case of most of direct translations, their chief advantage is the fact that they are performed by experienced Polish studies scholars, such as Yi Lijun, Yang Deyou, Lin Hongliang, Zhang Zhenhui and other translators mentioned in this article, who for many years have been studying and translating Polish literature, which has enabled them to preserve the original artistic values of the translated works. For the same reason, these translators often adopt the role of critics, trying to provide, in a preface or an afterword, the best possible presentation of the social context of the work, the biography of the writer, artistic features of the text, its scholarly value, and even their own impressions concerning the translation of the work. Those vital introductions are very useful for the popularisation of Chinese non-fiction in China and they favour its positive reception among Chinese readers.

References

Sources in Polish

- Li Yinan (李怡楠), “Recepcja literatury polskiej w Chinach: teoria i dzieje”, *Postscriptum Polonistyczne* 2016, no. 2, pp. 171–185.
- Li Yinan (李怡楠), *Recepcja literatury polskiej w Chinach. Wybrane zagadnienia*, doctoral dissertation, University of Silesia in Katowice, Faculty of Philology 2015, https://rebus.us.edu.pl/bitstream/20.500.12128/5731/1/Li_Recepcja_literatury_polskiej_w_Chinach.pdf [accessed 4 July 2025].

Sources in Chinese

- Lin Hongliang (林洪亮), 序 [Introduction], in: 世界反法西斯文学书系 [World Anti-Fascist Literature], 波兰卷 [Polish volume] (35), ed. Liu Baiyu (刘白羽), Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe 1992, pp. 1–9.
- Yang Deyou (杨德友), 深不可测之谜——中译本前言 [Unfathomable Mystery – Introduction to Chinese Translation], in: Tadeusz Borowski, 石头世界 [The World of Stone], trans. Yang Deyou, Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe 2018, pp. 1–5.
- Wang Zhi (王志), 不能克隆的丰碑——代序 [A Monument That Cannot Be Cloned – Foreword], in: Ryszard Kapuściński, 与希罗多德一起旅行 [Travels with Herodotus], trans. Wu Lan (乌兰), Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House 2009, pp. 1–4.
- Feng Zhisheng (冯植生), 导言 [Introduction], in: 世界经典散文新编 [Anthology of the Classics of World Literature Prose], 欧洲卷·东欧 [volume: *Eastern Europe*], ed. Feng Zhisheng, Tianjin: Baihua Wenyi Chubanshe 2000, pp. 1–12.

Presentation and Analysis of *Xiehouyu* in Literature and as a Linguistic Phenomenon¹

Xie Chuyue

Beijing Foreign Studies University, China

e-mail: soniaxie@bfsu.edu.cn

ORCID: 0009-0004-5097-7079

Abstract

My work is concerned with the topic of *xiehouyu*, a phenomenon specific to the Chinese language, but little known in Poland. I try to present and analyse *xiehouyu* and its use in literature. The paper consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, I describe *xiehouyu* in general. The second chapter analyses the use of *xiehouyu* in Chinese literature. The last chapter offers a summary of the significance of *xiehouyu*. By means of concrete examples and textual analysis, the article aims to help readers grasp the meaning and value of *xiehouyu* and to deepen their understanding of Chinese literary works and the Chinese way of thinking.

Keywords

xiehouyu, Chinese language, Chinese literature

In the present article, I discuss the subject of *xiehouyu*, which is a typical phenomenon of the Chinese language, but it is little known in Poland. I shall present and analyse this linguistic form and its use in literature. The paper consists of three parts. In the first one, I explain what *xiehouyu* is, in the second one, I analyse its application in literature, and in the last one, I summarise the significance of *xiehouyu*. In my method, I present concrete examples, which prove helpful in grasping the meaning and the value of

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: "Przedstawienie i analiza *xiehouyu* w literaturze oraz jako zjawisko językowe", *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 144–158, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.10>.

xiehouyu. In this way, the readers may better understand Chinese literary works and the Chinese way of thinking.

1. Definition and classification of *xiehouyu*

Xiehouyu is a metaphorical enunciation composed of two parts. It is a unique form of expression proper to the Chinese language. The first part is descriptive, followed by the clause providing a solution to the metaphorical phrase. This short, amusing linguistic form is created and used mainly by the Chinese people in everyday practice, but also in literature.

1.1 Definition and structure of *xiehouyu*

The term *xiehouyu* (歇后语, pronunciation: xiē hòu yǔ) refers to a form of colloquial speech of highly literary nature. It is also a kind of characteristic colloquial phrase used in the everyday life of ordinary Chinese people. When we divide the name *xiehouyu*, we see that Xie (歇) literally means ‘to rest’ – here used in its extended meaning, that is, ‘to remove’ certain characters. Hou (后) means ‘after’ and Yu (语) means ‘language, sentence’. So, *xiehouyu* is a sentence after removing certain characters or words. Only some characters are removed, so the listener’s or reader’s task is to guess the omitted part. The speaker or writer often adds an explanation in the second part, thus creating a unique language game relying on a determined interdependence of both clauses.

This is a unique linguistic form. It is a common conviction that a similar kind of idiom does not exist in other languages,² so it is impossible to translate its name. According to linguist John Rohsenow, *xiehouyu* may be translated as “enigmatic folk similes” or “truncated witticisms”.³

Xiehouyu is usually composed of two parts, resembling a riddle and its solution. The first one uses vivid, creative language subtly introducing the metaphor, whereas the second one is a clue that explains the meaning and suggests the solution of the riddle. In order to understand the whole, one has to guess the meaning of the first part, so in terms of linguistic form *xiehouyu* is also perceived as a pun. By custom, the two parts are connected typographically with double em dash, but in practice, especially in literature, we observe greater flexibility and variability of use.

² Gao Lidong (高立东), 歇后语的构成方式及特点 [The Means and Character of Creating *Xiehouyu*], *Social Scientist* (社会科学家) 2006, no. 10, pp. 321–322.

³ Nastazja Stoch, “Distinctive Features of Chinese Proverbs: A Comparative Study of *Suyu* and *Yanyu* and Other Types of *Shuyu*”, *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 2016, vol. 64, no. 9, p. 53.

The original meaning of *xiehouyu* refers to a way of speaking, in which one intentionally omits a word or half of the sentence to demonstrate their sense of humour. Here is one such example:

五六七八九——无事(四)⁴

*Five, six, seven, eight, nine – “four” is missing, so nothing is going on.*⁵

In this *xiehouyu*, “Five, six, seven, eight, nine” constitutes the riddle, and “‘four’ is missing, so nothing is going on” is the answer. Five numbers are listed here, but number four is missing. In Chinese, the pronunciation of the word ‘four’ is similar to the pronunciation of the word meaning ‘affair’ or ‘event’. By way of a pun, the lack of number four means the lack of any affair or event, i.e., nothing is going on.

In consequence of its continuous, long-lasting development, *xiehouyu* is no longer limited to simple omission of characters, but it incorporates elements of language, culture, common people’s life, religion and other sources in order to create complex and varied riddles and answers. In this way, it is more interesting, wittier and more broadly applicable.

1.2 Classification of *xiehouyu*

Xiehouyu has a long history. It draws from a wide range of sources, has many authors and presents no special requirements of the writers. Hence, it is impossible to count the actual number of *xiehouyu*. The *Great Dictionary of Xiehouyu*, edited by Wang Taoyu in 1988, collected 16,000 of them.⁶ However, there are many *xiehouyu* that have not been preserved to this day, and at the same time, new *xiehouyu* continue to be created. Therefore, the ways of classifying such a great number of *xiehouyu* are of key importance. There are two chief types of classification: according to the syntactic structure of the sentence and according to the creation method.

In accordance with the first type of classification, i.e., by the sentence’s syntactic structure, there are three kinds of *xiehouyu*: 1) subject–predicate structure; 2) structure

⁴ Wang Taoyu (王陶宇), Sun Yufen (孙玉芬), 歇后语大辞典 [Great Dictionary of *Xiehouyu*], Chengdu: Sichuan Lexicographical Publishing House 2022, p. 538.

⁵ All *xiehouyu* in this article will first be shown in Chinese characters, then translated into English and explained. Considering the uniqueness of *xiehouyu*, it is difficult to translate them into foreign language. Therefore, I will not focus on the translation. I rather want to concentrate on the analysis of individual *xiehouyu* to make it easier for the reader to understand them. (The English versions of *xiehouyu* are based on Xie Chuyue’s Polish translations – trans. note).

⁶ Liu Xicheng (刘锡诚), 王陶宇编《歇后语大辞典》序 [Introduction to Wang Taoyu’s *Great Dictionary of Xiehouyu*], in: Wang Taoyu (王陶宇), 歇后语大辞典 [Great Dictionary of *Xiehouyu*], Chengdu: Sichuan Cishu Chubanshe (四川辞书出版社) 1988.

without predicate; 3) series of actions. *Xiehouyu* of the first kind has a subject and a predicate, and it is used as an independent or component clause. The following *xiehouyu* can serve as a good example:

猫哭老鼠——假慈悲⁷

A cat wept over the dead mouse – false pity, pretended mercy.

We know that cats feed on mice. If a mouse is dead, the cat is glad, for it gets fed. If a cat is weeping over a dead mouse, this is not sincere sorrow, but false pity and pretended mercy. This *xiehouyu* is used to describe a person who pretends to care about the problems of other people.

Xiehouyu of the second kind has no verb; it usually functions as an element of a sentence, like for example:

盐店的老板——闲人⁸

The owner of a salt shop – an idler

The owner of a salt shop often touches salt, so he himself becomes “salty”. In the Chinese language, ‘salty’ and ‘idle’ have the same pronunciation, so a salty person is someone idle, an idler.

Xiehouyu of the last kind has a more complicated structure in the form of a series of actions, as exemplified here:

骑驴看唱本——走着瞧⁹

To ride a donkey, looking at the script – we’ll see what happens.

If someone is reading a script while riding on a donkey, he is reading it in constant motion. This motion may be understood as moving forward in spatial terms, but also as moving onwards in time and thus seeing what happens in the future. As for “looking”, it may be interpreted literally as looking at the script (reading what comes next), but also as looking at the future situation. 走着瞧 (pronunciation: zǒu zhe qiáo), literally “walking and looking”, may signify seeing what happens in the future, with a sense of certainty that the future will meet the person’s expectations.

The second type of classification is based on the method of creating *xiehouyu*. It comprises three basic kinds: metaphor, logic and pun. Here is an example of *xiehouyu* created by means of a metaphor:

茅坑里的石头——又臭又硬¹⁰

A stone in a latrine – stinking and hard

⁷ Wang Taoyu, Sun Yufen, 歇后语大辞典 [Great Dictionary of *Xiehouyu*], p. 354.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 583.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 407.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 357.

Stones are hard and latrines are stinking, so a stone in a latrine is naturally stinking and hard. In the Chinese language, the word ‘stinking’, apart from referring to an unpleasant smell, may also describe the face of an angry person or someone impetuous who easily gets furious. We say then that such a person has a “stinking” face and a “stinking” temper. As for ‘hard’, it also means ‘stubborn’. Hence, the phrase “a stone in a latrine” is used to describe an impetuous and stubborn person.

Xiehouyu can also be created with the use of logic:

哑巴吃黄连——有苦说不出¹¹

A mute person is eating Huanglian – one cannot speak about suffering.

Huanglian is a plant used in traditional Chinese medicine, known for its bitter taste. From a logical point of view, a person without any disability could complain: “this is very bitter”. But if a mute person is eating this plant, they cannot say it. The bitterness refers here not only to an unpleasant taste, but also symbolises suffering and hardships in life. A mute person who suffers cannot speak about it. This *xiehouyu* describes a person in a difficult situation, which they can neither solve, nor speak about.

Also, *xiehouyu* often use puns. This results from the fact that in the Chinese language, many characters are pronounced in a similar or the same way. Based on those puns, the Chinese created a large number of *xiehouyu*. For example:

外甥打灯笼——照旧(舅)¹²

A nephew holds a lantern – sheds light on the uncle / the same old.

This is a very classic *xiehouyu*. The words ‘nephew’ and ‘uncle’ are semantically closely related, one evokes the other. Therefore, when a nephew holds a lantern, it also sheds light on the uncle. In the Chinese language, ‘to shed light’ and ‘to follow’ are the same word, while ‘uncle’ and ‘old’ have the same pronunciation. Hence, the uncle on whom light is shed means someone who follows the same old ways.

1.3 The origin of *xiehouyu*

Xiehouyu has a long past and complex history of evolution. To this day, scholars have not formulated the final conclusion regarding the origin of *xiehouyu*. In 1984, Tan Yongxiang presented in his *New Treatise on Xiehouyu* a theory of the pluralistic origin of this linguistic form. This is currently the most widely accepted hypothesis. He suggested that there are three main predecessors of *xiehouyu*: figurative language from before the Qin dynasty, ancient stories and descriptions of events, and poems in

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 579.

¹² Ibidem, p. 523.

“Fengren” style (风人体).¹³ Moreover, some *xiehouyu* have been transformed from proverbs or Chengyu.

The figurative language from before the Qin is an ancient rhetoric. In the *Book of Odes*, we find, for example, this sentence: 牂羊坟首,¹⁴ meaning ‘a little sheep with a big head’. It was deemed obvious that only a ram can have a big head, so this phrase expresses an impossible thing. A currently existing *xiehouyu* was formed by the conjunction of the metaphor from this sentence with its literal meaning.

The second source includes ancient stories and events. Those that have been preserved in written form constitute Chengyu, whereas the more colloquial ones, used in speech, have evolved into *xiehouyu*.

The third origin are poems in “Fengren” style. “Fengren” is a genre of ancient folk songs which use puns, for example:

雾露隐芙蓉，见莲不分明。(《子夜歌》)¹⁵

Lotus flowers in mist and dews, they are visible, but not clearly.

Lian, that is lotus, has the same pronunciation as the word signifying the feeling of love. This *xiehouyu* expresses the anxiety of a woman who does not know whether a man loves her or not.

The name *xiehouyu* appeared for the first time in Zheng Qing’s biography from the *Old Book of Tang*, in which it is noted that Zheng Qing was skilled at writing poems with puns. The style of his poetry was known as *xiehou*. With time, *xiehouyu* became popular among the people and its richness was gradually increasing.

In summary, today’s *xiehouyu* are the result of folk knowledge and they do not have a single, specified author. Users constantly create and modify *xiehouyu* in the practice of life. In the processes of dissemination of *xiehouyu*, different variants and interpretations prevail, depending on geographical region, local phraseology and communicated message.

2. *Xiehouyu* in Chinese literature

Although *xiehouyu* is a form of colloquial, spoken language, it is often used in Chinese literature. In this chapter, I shall present the literary application of *xiehouyu*, its role in literature and the influence that literature exerts on *xiehouyu*.

¹³ Tan Yongxiang (谭永祥), 歇后语新论 [New Treatise on *Xiehouyu*], Jinan: Shandong Education Press 1984.

¹⁴ *Shaozhizhua* (苕之华), in: 诗经译注 [Book of Odes with Annotations], part 2: *Lesser Court Hymns* (*Xiaoya*, 小雅), ed. Zhou Zhenfu (周振甫), Beijing: Chinese Publishing House 2002, pp. 391–392.

¹⁵ *Ziye Song* (子夜歌), no. 35, <https://www.chinesepoems.org/poems/ziyege-ziye-1> [accessed 9 July 2025].

2.1 The use of *xiehouyu* in Chinese literature

The early use of *xiehouyu* in literature dates back to the times of the Yuan dynasty, when this form was gradually becoming more popular in plays and novels. However, in most cases, those *xiehouyu* are vague and primitive, because they do not resemble oral enunciations and have no literary value.¹⁶

In the novels from the times of the Ming and the Qing dynasties, the use of *xiehouyu* was more common and more mature. Thanks to its growing sophistication and application by writers, its position in literature significantly increased – it became a literary phenomenon worth researching. It has been proven that the classic masterpiece *A Dream of Red Mansions* (红楼梦) contains 183 *xiehouyu*.¹⁷ The frequency of *xiehouyu* in this novel is very high. In the first eighty chapters, written by Cao Xueqin, *xiehouyu* is used, on average, twice in every chapter.¹⁸ In another famous novel of manners from the Ming dynasty, *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (金瓶梅), there are over 220 *xiehouyu*.¹⁹ In contemporary works, *xiehouyu* remains popular and appreciated by authors. For example, the writer Liu Jiang from Shanxi province, in his work from 1959 entitled 太行风云 [An Age in the Taihang Mountains], which altogether is composed of less than 500,000 words, included 227 *xiehouyu*.²⁰ The novel *The Hurricane* (暴风骤雨), written by Zhou Libo in 1948, also contains many *xiehouyu* of local character.²¹

Xiehouyu in literary works touches upon various topics, including marriage, illness, professional work, religion, seasons of the year, cooking, habits of the animals, agriculture, housekeeping, clothes, conduct, etc. In this way, the writer creates a realistic portrait of ordinary life in the country or in town, with characters representing various professions from the times in which the work was written. For example, in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, we find the following *xiehouyu*:

嫁出去的女儿——泼出去的水²²

A daughter given away in marriage – spilled water

¹⁶ Wang Menglu (王梦璐), 《红楼梦》中歇后语的概念合成分析 [A Conceptual, Synthetic Analysis of *Xiehouyu* in *A Dream of Red Mansions*], *Jianan Literature* (剑南文学) 2011, no. 12, p. 121.

¹⁷ Gao Lidong, 歇后语的构成方式及特点 [The Means and Character of Creating *Xiehouyu*], p. 322.

¹⁸ Ji Wenxiu (冀文秀), 石韞玉而山晖 水怀珠而川媚——《红楼梦》歇后语运用的特点和效用 [The Characteristic and Usefulness of *Xiehouyu* in *A Dream of Red Mansions*], *Yinshan Academic Journal* (阴山学刊) 1995, no. 4, p. 32.

¹⁹ Meng Xianzhang (孟宪章), 谈《金瓶梅》中的歇后语 [Discussion on the *Xiehouyu* in *The Plum in the Golden Vase*], *Journal of Xuzhou Normal University* (徐州师范学院学报) 1990, no. 4, pp. 25–30.

²⁰ Wu Jianying (巫建英), 《太行风云》中歇后语的运用 [The Use of *Xiehouyu* in *An Age in the Taihang Mountains*], *Contemporary Chinese Language* (现代语文) 2009, no. 5, pp. 62–65.

²¹ Feng Qingtang (冯庆堂), 黑土地的芬芳——解读《暴风骤雨》中的文学语言 [Scent of the Black Soil – Interpretation of the Literary Language in *The Hurricane*], *Beauty and Epochs* (美与时代) 2003, no. 5, pp. 74–76.

²² Cao Xueqin (曹雪芹), 红楼梦 [*A Dream of Red Mansions*], Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press 1987, p. 1305.

This *xiehouyu* is related to marriage. In ancient China, which was a patriarchal society, when a daughter got married, she belonged to her husband's family and had no relationship with her kin, just like spilled water cannot be withdrawn.

Even though *xiehouyu* is a permanent structure of discourse, intended for a specific use, some necessary modifications may be introduced that result from the differences in the expressed content. The structure of the sentence changes, but the original meaning remains the same. The aim is to avoid word similarities so that the language is livelier. In literary works, a ready-made *xiehouyu* often appears in its entirety, but it may sometimes be adjusted to various scenes, situations, characters and styles by the use of a half of *xiehouyu* or by splitting it. In the book 醒世姻缘传 [Marriages to Awaken the World] from the Qing dynasty, it is stated that Mrs. Ji rebuked another character by saying that he is like a supervising officer of the armed forces in the Cao region. Here is the complete version of this *xiehouyu*:

曹州兵备——管得宽²³

*A supervising officer of the armed forces in Cao region –
exercising broad control over all affairs*

A supervising officer of armed forces is an ancient Chinese military position. The Cao region borders with three provinces, so the supervising officer of the armed forces of this region is in charge of a vast area. Logically, this *xiehouyu* refers to someone who exercises control over many things and it is used as a metaphor for a person who meddles in other people's affairs. In this case, instead of pronouncing the whole *xiehouyu*, the heroine skips the second half, because the complete form was quoted earlier in the novel. This helps avoid repetitions and makes *xiehouyu* more flexible. Thanks to this modification, which consists in shortening the *xiehouyu*, Mrs. Ji's anger and irritation are better expressed.

2.2 The role of *xiehouyu* in Chinese literature

The role of *xiehouyu* in literary works is threefold: it serves to build characters, to enrich the language style and to make the subject matter more sublime.

First of all, thanks to *xiehouyu*, the characters are more vivid, they become richer. *Xiehouyu* is used in accordance with their identity and personality. The author carefully considers who in his work will have a predilection for this language form and what kind of *xiehouyu* he or she will be choosing. For example, in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the heroine who pronounces the greatest number of *xiehouyu* is Wang Xifeng, which shows not only that, for the author, this character is particularly worth attention, but it also

²³ Xi Zhousheng (西周生, pseud.), 醒世姻缘传 [Marriages to Awaken the World], Shangdong: Qilu Publishing House 1993, p. 627.

makes it possible for the reader to feel her eloquence. As for the way she uses this form of speech, she often omits the explanatory part of *xiehouyu*. She likes parallelisms and uses a lot of *xiehouyu*, one after another, which makes her words short and powerful. As for the content, many of Wang Xifeng's *xiehouyu* are, in comparison to other characters, wittier and more sarcastic, allowing the reader to feel her sharp tongue and lively nature.²⁴ In chapter 68, Wang Xifeng rebukes You Erjie: "You have neither talent, nor eloquence, you're like a bottle gourd with its mouth cut off; all you can do is to be blindly cautious to defend your virtuous reputation".²⁵ The comparison of You Erjie to a bottle gourd comes from this amusing saying:

锯了嘴子的葫芦——没口齿²⁶

A bottle gourd with its mouth cut off – has no eloquence.

The *xiehouyu* is quoted in reverse order. The heroine used the explanatory part first – "has no eloquence", and then the metaphorical one – "like a bottle gourd with its mouth cut off". A bottle gourd is empty inside and it can contain a lot, but without a "mouth", that is without an "opening", it is impossible to take out its contents. Similarly, people who lack eloquence cannot express their deep thoughts. This metaphor reflects Wang Xifeng's ease at speaking. As for the book *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, Pan Jinlian is the heroine who pronounces the greatest number of *xiehouyu*, which in a lively manner describe her envious, cruel and malicious personality.²⁷

Secondly, *xiehouyu* makes a literary work more energetic, precise and succinct. By skillful addition of witty and ironic elements, the flexibility, energy, humour and subtlety of the Chinese language are used to full advantage, without tedious repetitions. This unique linguistic form largely enhances the literary expression of the Chinese language. When abstract notions are set against concrete things in *xiehouyu*, the linguistic expression becomes more vivid in its imagery. In the book 儒林外史 [The Unofficial History of the Scholars], one of the characters, Zhou Jin, lost his job as a teacher and failed at imperial office exams, ending up with no livelihood at the age of sixty. At this time, his brother-in-law persuaded him to start a business together. Although in ancient China, scholars looked at businessmen with disdain, Zhou Jin had no better option in this situation, so he laughed to himself:

瘫子掉在井里——捞起也是坐²⁸

A paralytic falls into a well – he gets pulled out, still he can only sit.

²⁴ Ding Yuzhou (丁煜州), 《红楼梦》中歇后语的运用特点及效果分析 [Analysis of the Characteristic and Usefulness of the Application of *Xiehouyu* in the *A Dream of Red Mansions*], *Tomorrow* (明日风尚) 2022, no. 9, pp. 159–162.

²⁵ Cao Xueqin, 红楼梦 [*A Dream of Red Mansions*], p. 1305.

²⁶ Wang Taoyu, Sun Yufen, 歇后语大辞典 [Great Dictionary of *Xiehouyu*], p. 223.

²⁷ Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng (兰陵笑笑生, pseud.), 金瓶梅 [*The Plum in the Golden Vase*], Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House 2008.

²⁸ Wu Jingzi (吴敬梓), 儒林外史 [The Unofficial History of the Scholars], Tianjin: Tianjin People's Publishing House 2016, p. 18.

A paralytic who falls into a well, even if he gets pulled out from it, still cannot stand on his feet, he can only sit. This *xiehouyu* reflects precisely Zhou Jin's hopeless situation – no matter what choice he makes, nothing good will come out of it. Thus, *xiehouyu* provides a concrete image for his inward reflections.²⁹ Instead of describing the details of his difficult life, the character uses this *xiehouyu* to illustrate his situation and his mood. This makes the language of the novel concise and lively.

Thirdly, *xiehouyu* can be used to enrich the work, thus increasing its rank. *Xiehouyu* is the sum of wisdom of the Chinese society and contains philosophical elements. It reveals the laws of the objective development of nature and endows the work with greater depth. In chapter 26 of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the housemaid Jiahui complains about the unjust salary. In response, her friend Hongyu says:

There's no need to be angry; even if the tent at a farewell banquet is one thousand miles long, there is no banquet that doesn't come to an end. We won't be working here for the rest of our lives, and in a few years we'll all be scattered, so there's no need to be angry.³⁰

The heroine makes use of the following *xiehouyu*:

千里搭帐篷——没有不散的筵席³¹

The tent at a farewell banquet is one thousand miles long – there is no banquet that doesn't come to an end.

At farewell parties, the length of banquet tents is constantly prolonged to avoid the necessary parting. As if increasing the size of tents could postpone the inevitable end. But in fact, even if the banquet takes long and the tents are vast, the moment will always come when all have to finish the celebration, say “goodbye” and part. There is no banquet that does not come to an end. No friends can stay together forever. This *xiehouyu*, which came from the mouth of a housemaid, by revealing some objective principles in the society, gives the reader food for thought and suggests that even if great families in the novel are rich and influential, they will eventually be torn apart.

In addition to the enumerated functions, the use of *xiehouyu* makes the atmosphere of the work livelier and favours a more realistic representation of social life.

2.3 The impact of Chinese literature on the development of *xiehouyu*

Xiehouyu and literature influence one another. *Xiehouyu* is of great importance for literature, and the latter plays a vital role in the development of *xiehouyu*. Before

²⁹ Zhu Nana (朱娜娜), Liu Huiming (刘慧敏), 《儒林外史》歇后语运用特点和修辞效用分析 [Analysis of Features and Rhetorical Usefulness of *Xiehouyu* in *The Unofficial History of the Scholars*], *Appreciating Masterpieces* (名作欣赏) 2016, no. 20, pp. 128–129.

³⁰ Cao Xueqin, 红楼梦 [*A Dream of Red Mansions*], p. 420.

³¹ Wang Taoyu, Sun Yufen, 歇后语大辞典 [Great Dictionary of *Xiehouyu*], p. 410.

xiehouyu began to be incorporated in literary works, this special form of language existed, in fact, only in colloquial speech. Thanks to its increased use in literature, the scope of its application was extended, while its standards and literary qualities were augmented. This contributed to the greater research value of *xiehouyu* and improved its status and worth. *Xiehouyu* in literary works is often treated as an important object of research. Its kinds, uses, modifications in time and other aspects are studied by analysing *xiehouyu* that can be found in literary works.

Moreover, new *xiehouyu* are created in literature. The characteristic classic literary figures and plots become a source of new forms of this kind. *Xiehouyu* are based on commonly known stories, rich in typical character features and cultural meanings, so they become forms of communication, harbouring multiple meanings within the limited space of a sentence.³²

Four classic Chinese novels contain many heroes who were at the origin of a large number of *xiehouyu*. In chapter seven of the book *西游记* (*Journey to the West*), the Monkey King Sun Wukong is so powerful that he can cover the distance of 108,000 miles in one jump, but he cannot jump out of the hand of Buddha Rulai. Rulai flipped his hand, which turned into an immense mountain that crushed the Monkey King. Catching him by Rulai was so easy – he only needed to flip his hand gently. This story lies at the origin of the following *xiehouyu*:

如来佛捉孙大圣——易如反掌³³

Catching the Monkey King by Buddha Rulai – easy, like a gentle flip of the hand.

This *xiehouyu* is used with reference to a person who can easily, without any effort perform a task perceived as difficult.³⁴ Another example comes from the book *三国演义* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*):

周瑜打黄盖——一个愿打，一个愿挨³⁵

Zhou Yu is beating Huang Gai – one willingly beats, one willingly gets beaten.

In the period of the Three Kingdoms, Huang Gai, an old national general of Eastern Wu, received orders to pretend that he had surrendered to Cao Cao. He knew, however, that Cao was very shrewd and would not believe the trick so easily. So, in order to win his confidence, another general of Eastern Wu, Zhou Yu, deliberately beat Huang Gai, who accepted the public punishment and then pretended that he had left his former kingdom out of irritation and now intended to swear loyalty to his earlier enemy.

³² Guo Bing (郭冰), 水浒歇后语探略——兼论水浒的民间接受 [Discussion of *Xiehouyu* in the *Water Margin* and the Popular Reception of the Novel], *Scientific Review of the Harbin Institute of Technology* (哈尔滨工业大学学报社会科学版) 2006, no. 4, pp. 140–144.

³³ Wang Taoyu, Sun Yufen, 歇后语大辞典 [Great Dictionary of *Xiehouyu*], p. 431.

³⁴ Ma Qihong (马启红), 《西游记》中的俗语探析 [A Study on *Suyu* in the *Journey to the West*], *Journal of Xinzhou Normal University* (忻州师范学院学报) 2007, no. 6, pp. 36–40.

³⁵ Wang Taoyu, Sun Yufen, 歇后语大辞典 [Great Dictionary of *Xiehouyu*], p. 633.

In consequence, Cao believed him and did not manage to defend himself against Huang Gai in further battles, which eventually led to his defeat. In this story, Huang Gai is ready to endure the beating and Zhou Yu willingly inflicts the blow. This *xiehouyu* describes a situation when both parties want the same thing, without any coercion. Such *xiehouyu* derived from classic stories are commonly used by the Chinese in everyday life and in many literary works.

3. The significance of *xiehouyu*

In this chapter, I shall analyse the value of *xiehouyu* as a linguistic phenomenon and the importance of conducting research on this form of language.

3.1 The significance of *xiehouyu* as such

Xiehouyu is an important phenomenon in the Chinese language, reflecting the Chinese culture, literature, philosophy and values. It constitutes the kernel of Chinese culture, because it expresses in short phrases its essential characteristics: importance attached to agriculture, belief in deities, cult of spirits and ancestor worship, taboo and its circumventing, attitude to family and marital relationship, etc.

For example, in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, we find this *xiehouyu*:

焦了尾巴梢子——绝后³⁶

Burnt tail – no progeny

A tail is placed at the back of a body, and in Chinese language *hou* (后) may refer both to the position at the back and to progeny. In feudal China, fertility was a matter of tremendous importance, whereas childlessness was perceived as the greatest shame and disrespect for one's parents and ancestors. Particularly high demands concerned female fertility. As a result, the lack of progeny became a linguistic taboo, and pronouncing such words was ill-omened. In verbal communication, it was necessary to use relatively decent euphemisms for the taboo matters. Therefore, one could use this *xiehouyu* to avoid a direct statement about having no children. For this reason, only the first half of *xiehouyu* was used in the novel, because it communicates the message clearly and remains euphemistic.

Xiehouyu show elements of Chinese culture, but they do not always follow unquestioningly its guiding principles. Rather, in ironical or metaphorical way, they present human perception of those norms. Therefore, *xiehouyu* are not stern and

³⁶ Cao Xueqin, 红楼梦 [*A Dream of Red Mansions*], p. 1768.

serious, but demonstrate the sense of humour, the attitude to life and the character of the whole Chinese society.

3.2 The importance of conducting research on *xiehouyu*

At foreign universities, research on *xiehouyu* is still not perceived as an important element of studies dedicated to Chinese language and literature. The reason for this is, inter alia, the difficulty with the appropriate deciphering and translating of *xiehouyu* and with understanding its significance in the everyday life of the Chinese and in the Chinese literature. Nonetheless, *xiehouyu*, which is a unique linguistic phenomenon and a vital element of Chinese culture and literature, deserves attention, appreciation and research conducted by a greater number of linguists. An in-depth analysis of *xiehouyu* allows for a more precise interpretation of a literary work in which this linguistic form plays an important role, because this knowledge helps better understand the personality and social status of literary figures, the background of the story, the events and topics mentioned in the work. *Xiehouyu* helps writers build distinctive, concrete characters, who are based on model personality types, which makes them memorable for the reader: Zhuge Liang's wisdom, Cao Cao's suspiciousness, Lu Zishen's justice – these associations of persons and qualities are also used in everyday life.

Moreover, when studying *xiehouyu*, one learns more about the philosophy, ideas and values cherished by the Chinese, who use this linguistic form to present the principles which they perceive as fundamental. Research on *xiehouyu* will, therefore, allow foreigners to know better the nature of Chinese society by understanding what is important for this nation. In addition, it may contribute to the improvement of intercultural communication and thought exchange.

References

Primary sources

- Cao Xueqin (曹雪芹), *红楼梦* (*A Dream of Red Mansions*), Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press 1987.
- Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng (兰陵笑笑生, pseud.), *金瓶梅* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*), Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House 2008.
- Shaozhizhua* (苕之华), in: *诗经译注* [Book of Odes with Annotations], part 2: *Lesser Court Hymns* (*Xiaoya*, 小雅), ed. Zhou Zhenfu (周振甫), Beijing: Chinese Publishing House 2002, pp. 391–392.
- Wang Taoyu (王陶宇), Sun Yufen (孙玉芬), *歇后语大辞典* [Great Dictionary of *Xiehouyu*], Chengdu: Sichuan Lexicographical Publishing House 2022.
- Wu Jingzi (吴敬梓), *儒林外史* [The Unofficial History of the Scholars], Tianjin: Tianjin People's Publishing House 2016.

Xi Zhousheng (西周生, pseud.), 醒世姻缘传 [Marriages to Awaken the World], Shangdong: Qilu Publishing House 1993.

Ziye Song (子夜歌), no. 35, <https://www.chinesepoems.org/poems/ziyege-ziye-1> [accessed 9 July 2025].

Secondary sources

Chen Xin (陈新), 《金瓶梅》歇后语的修辞特征 [Rhetorical Characteristic of *Xiehouyu* in *The Plum in the Golden Vase*], *Reading and Writing* (阅读与写作) 2004, no. 3, pp. 33–34.

Ding Yuzhou (丁煜州), 《红楼梦》中歇后语的运用特点及效果分析 [Analysis of the Characteristic and Usefulness of the Application of *Xiehouyu* in the *A Dream of Red Mansions*], *Tomorrow* (明日风尚) 2022, no. 9, pp. 159–162.

Feng Qingtang (冯庆堂), 黑土地的芬芳——解读《暴风骤雨》中的文学语言 [Scent of the Black Soil – Interpretation of the Literary Language in *The Hurricane*], *Beauty and Epochs* (美与时代) 2003, no. 5, pp. 74–76.

Gao Lidong (高立东), 歇后语的构成方式及特点 [The Means and Character of Creating *Xiehouyu*], *Social Scientist* (社会科学家) 2006, no. 10, pp. 321–322.

Guo Bing (郭冰), 水浒歇后语探略——兼论水浒的民间接受 [Discussion of *Xiehouyu* in the *Water Margin* and the Popular Reception of the Novel], *Scientific Review of the Harbin Institute of Technology* (哈尔滨工业大学学报社会科学版) 2006, no. 4, pp. 140–144.

Ji Wenxiu (冀文秀), 石韞玉而山晖 水怀珠而川媚——《红楼梦》歇后语运用的特点和效用 [The Characteristic and Usefulness of *Xiehouyu* in *A Dream of Red Mansions*], *Yinshan Academic Journal* (阴山学刊) 1995, no. 4, pp. 32–38.

Liu Xicheng (刘锡诚), 王陶宇编《歇后语大辞典》序 [Introduction to Wang Taoyu's *Great Dictionary of Xiehouyu*], in: Wang Taoyu (王陶宇), 歇后语大辞典 [Great Dictionary of *Xiehouyu*], Chengdu: Sichuan Cishu Chubanshe (四川辞书出版社) 1988.

Ma Chunhua (马春华), 《红楼梦》歇后语体式的篇章功能解析 [Analysis of the Function of a Chapter in *Xiehouyu* Style in *A Dream of Red Mansions*], *Journal of A Dream of Red Mansions* (红楼梦学刊) 2017, no. 5, pp. 290–300.

Ma Qihong (马启红), 《西游记》中的俗语探析 [A Study on *Suyu* in the *Journey to the West*], *Journal of Xinzhou Normal University* (忻州师范学院学报) 2007, no. 6, pp. 36–40.

Meng Xianzhang (孟宪章), 谈《金瓶梅》中的歇后语 [Discussion on the *Xiehouyu* in *The Plum in the Golden Vase*], *Journal of Xuzhou Normal University* (徐州师范学院学报) 1990, no. 4, pp. 25–30.

Stoch Nastazja, “Distinctive Features of Chinese Proverbs: A Comparative Study of *Suyu* and *Yanyu* and Other Types of *Shuyu*”, *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 2016, vol. 64, no. 9, pp. 47–68.

Tan Yongxiang (谭永祥), 歇后语新论 [New Treatise on *Xiehouyu*], Jinan: Shandong Education Press 1984.

Wang Menglu (王梦璐), 《红楼梦》中歇后语的概念合成分析 [A Conceptual, Synthetic Analysis of *Xiehouyu* in *A Dream of Red Mansions*], *Jianan Literature* (剑南文学) 2011, no. 12, pp. 121–122.

Wu Jianying (巫建英), 《太行风云》中歇后语的运用 [The Use of *Xiehouyu* in *An Age in the Taihang Mountains*], *Contemporary Chinese Language* (现代语文) 2009, no. 5, pp. 62–65.

Zhu Nana (朱娜娜), Liu Huiming (刘慧敏), 《儒林外史》歇后语运用特点和修辞效用分析 [Analysis of Features and Rhetorical Usefulness of *Xiehouyu* in *The Unofficial History of the Scholars*], *Appreciating Masterpieces* (名作欣赏) 2016, no. 20, pp. 128–129.

Civilising Children with a Question Mark¹

Olga Dawidowicz-Chymkowska

National Library of Poland, Poland

e-mail: olgachymkowska@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-0164-3414

Keywords

Norbert Elias, children, civilising

Cywilizowanie dzieci? Społeczno-kulturowe badania dzieciństwa w perspektywie teorii Norberta Eliasa [Civilising Children? Social-Cultural Studies on Childhood in the Perspective of Norbert Elias's Theory], a book edited by Marta Rakoczy and Zofia Boni, should primarily be placed within the field of childhood studies, as we can easily guess since it belongs to the series "Dzieci / granice / etnografie" [Children / boundaries / ethnographies] published by the Childhood Studies Interdisciplinary Research Team at the University of Warsaw. The originality of this volume in the series consists in the fact that the book owes its coherence not to a specific problem discussed (such as ADHD, in vitro fertilisation) or a category of collected data, but to a common theoretical approach – in this case, it is Norbert Elias's conception, which is referred to by all authors in the volume.

Such an enterprise may serve various aims. One may concentrate above all on the elaborated scientific material and use the chosen theoretical concept merely as a ready-made set of analytical tools. Someone else may analyse a selected fragment of reality and combine the use of conceptual apparatus with a reflection on the theory itself. On the whole, the first approach definitely dominates in the volume, but the second one is represented by Marta Bucholc's opening article ("Wychowanie dzieci jako motor procesów cywilizacji (i decywilizacji)" [Children Upbringing as a Driving Force of the

¹ This article is a review of the book: *Cywilizowanie dzieci? Społeczno-kulturowe badania dzieciństwa w perspektywie teorii Norberta Eliasa*, eds. Zofia Boni, Marta Rakoczy, Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa 2023. The review was originally published in Polish: "Cywilizowanie ze znakiem zapytania", *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 159–162, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.11>.

Civilising (and Decivilising) Processes]). The author makes use of Elias's conception in order to argue, somewhat perversely, that contemporary relationships between children and adults are ruled both by paedocentrism and paedophobia, understood as two sides of the same coin – mutually contradictory, yet necessarily interrelated. At the same time, Bucholc in an accessible manner defines the place of primary socialisation in Elias's theory and characterises the German scholar's understanding of this issue.

Marta Bucholc's text provides not only a theoretical basis for the rest of the authors (this is tangibly confirmed by the fact that this article as well as other texts by this author dedicated to Elias are explicitly referred to in most of the articles in the book), but it is also a very good introduction to the monograph's topic and allows to discern the element that makes it coherent.

Despite the very large scope of the scientific material elaborated in individual articles – ranging from analyses of schoolbooks for plastic arts education from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, to interviews with volunteers helping the refugees in the third decade of the 21st century – the common feature of all texts is that they are stories about education of young generations, understood as a process taking place within a complicated system of social relations, called "figurations" in Elias's language. This system involves not only the child's closest milieu, but also a broadly understood social environment, including various types of organisations, media, national and international institutions.

The practical application of the very dynamic and flexible nature of Elias's conception, also strongly underlined by Marta Bucholc, seems to be even more crucial for the character of the entire volume. Namely, the German scholar perceives civilisational transformations as a continuous sequence of fragile consensuses, emerging from the clash of contradictory interests of the groups that gain or lose power. This is not necessarily a one-way process, but rather the civilising process, which means, among others, the flattening of differences in power-sharing and the reduction of violence in social life, is accompanied by a reverse movement – the decivilising process.

The authors of texts contained in the book use various methods of grasping the dynamics of social changes. One of them consists in choosing a pivotal moment in history, such as, for example, the creation of a new state invoked by Julia Harasimowicz and Marta Rakoczy (the creation of the Second Polish Republic) and Weronika Parfianowicz (the first years of the Third Polish Republic). For a researcher who remains within the framework of Elias's conception, such periods may be particularly tempting, not only due to the possibility of observing, like in a fast-motion film, the process of creation of new social figurations and the transformation of habits that have become insufficient or inappropriate in the new situation, but also because the actors of those changes are more prone to subject them to intensive reflection, which gives access to a particularly rich scientific material.

Two mutually complementary texts dedicated to educational projects in the Second Polish Republic ("Ćwiczenia z patrzenia i rysowania. Wychowanie estetyczne

w Polsce w latach 1903–1923 jako proces cywilizowania” [Exercises in Looking and Drawing. Aesthetic Education in Poland in the Years 1903–1923 as a Civilising Process] by Julia Harasimowicz and “Pisanie, przymus, wstyd. Alfabetyzacja dzieci jako medium cywilizowania w przedwojennej Polsce” [Writing, Coertion, Shame. Literacy Development in Children as a Civilising Medium in the Pre-War Poland] by Marta Rakoczy) constitute the most optimistic part of the monograph. They speak of a tendency, inscribed in schoolbooks that were written with the aim to help the educated children interiorize certain principles of thought, conduct and bodily self-control, which the authors present as a relatively coherent and in many aspects reasonable project, enhancing the chances of the educated persons to make use of their own internal resources and to actively participate in social and political life. However, it has to be said that the optimistic tone of both articles results, to a large extent, from the fact that the authors focus on the project itself, and take little account of its actual implementation.

The same optimism cannot be found in other articles, investigating the social life of the Third Polish Republic. This reality is presented in much darker colours, and the crucial question underlying all of those texts is based on the doubt whether in the education of children, in various domains of Polish social life, the civilising processes prevail over the decivilising processes, or whether the opposite is true.

Many texts level their accusations at the state. According to the authors, the tendency to intensify violence in social life and to increase social inequalities can be attributed to the activity of the state’s institutions and legal regulations, beginning with the Balcerowicz Plan (“‘Już można – tylko co?’”. *Filipinka* wobec ekonomii moralnej czasów transformacji ustrojowej”) [‘Now You Can – But What Exactly?’”. *Filipinka* on the Moral Economy of the Times of Political Transformation] by Weronika Parfianowicz), through the core curriculum and schoolbooks for sexual education, which excluded from the norm the non-heteronormative persons (“O cywilizowaniu (queerowych) dzieciństw. Notatki na marginesie”) [On Civilising the (Queer) Childhoods. Notes on the Margin] by Maja Brzozowska-Brywczyńska), to the lack of regulations facilitating the implementation of the right for education and, in consequence, the participation in social life of immigrants’ children (“Między obowiązkiem szkolnym a prawem do nauki. Dziecko z doświadczeniem uchodźczym w polskiej szkole A.D. 2021”) [Between Compulsory Schooling and the Right for Education. A Child with Refugee Experience in the Polish School A.D. 2021] by Ada Tymńska).

Experts’ recommendations are also subject to criticism. The authors present further dark sides of various civilising projects. For instance, the measures taken to protect children from violation of their broadly understood boundaries in the sexual sphere led to treating them as fully “innocent” creatures; as a result, early attempts to discover one’s own identity in this sphere are perceived as pathological, especially if this concerns an LGBT sexuality (“O cywilizowaniu (queerowych) dzieciństw...”). Slimming a child, which is meant to establish healthy ways of bodily self-control,

leads to a negative body image and prompts young people to take chaotic corrective measures with detrimental health and social effects (“‘Jak będzie szczupła, to będzie miała łatwiej w życiu’. Uwikłanie procesów cywilizacji, medykalizacji i estetyzacji w kontekście dziecięcej otyłości” [‘If She’s Slim, She’ll Have It Easier in Life’. The Entanglement of Civilising Processes, Medicalisation and Aestheticisation in the Context of Childhood Obesity] by Zofia Boni). The contradictory expectations placed on adoptive parents – who are supposed to create an ordinary family, and at the same time fulfil advanced therapeutic functions – leave them confused and make it harder for them to cope with the real problems they face (“‘Powiedzenie, że jesteśmy troszkę inną rodziną, nie jest niczym złym’. O procesach cywilizowania rodziny w kontekście adopcji w Polsce” [‘There Is Nothing Wrong in Saying That Our Family Is a Bit Different’. On the Processes of Family Civilising in the Context of Adoption in Poland] by Ewa Maciejewska-Mroczek and Anna Witeska-Młynarczyk). Finally, perceiving the youth language as a broken version of the official idiom, associated with prison slang and a risk of perpetuating the erroneous principles in speech and writing, results in overlooking its creative and relationship-forming potential (“‘Frendzia na topie’. Cywilizowanie praktyk językowych współczesnych nastolatków” [‘My Top Bestie’. Civilising the Linguistic Practices of Contemporary Adolescents] by Marta Rakoczy). We may, therefore, draw a general conclusion that the solutions suggested by experts, which are meant to facilitate adaptation in the social world, in practice lead to various exclusions and foster aggressive and self-aggressive behaviours.

The contradictions present in educational models are revealed in a particularly interesting way in those texts that include the point of view of young people themselves (regrettably, their point of view is taken into account relatively rarely, considering the fact that these studies employ, for the most part, childhood studies methodology, in which treating the young investigated individuals as subjects, not objects, is particularly important). The texts where this can be observed (“‘Nie czuję się małym dzieckiem’. O sprawczości dzieci w procesie dorastania z perspektywy procesu cywilizacyjnego” [‘I Don’t Feel Like a Little Kid’. On Children’s Agency in the Process of Growing-Up from the Perspective of the Civilising Process] by Maria Tulisow, “‘Jak będzie szczupła, to będzie miała łatwiej w życiu’...” by Zofia Boni, “‘Już można – tylko co?’...” by Weronika Parfianowicz) demonstrate quite unanimously that the division according to which adults are the civilising agents, and children and youth – the civilised subjects, can no longer be maintained. Each time a voice is given to the youth, it turns out that young people are the ones who act in line with strongly internalised principles – sometimes they radicalise the message coming from adults, sometimes they become its guardians, when the closest environment seems to be failing in this respect, and at times they denounce its extremist and violent nature. It is also clear beyond doubt that adolescence, as a period of intensified sense of shame, may be regarded as particularly important for the civilising process.

Childhood studies have proved to be a field perfectly suited for the adoption of Norbert Elias's perspective, which helped the authors aptly grasp the paradoxes of the process of creation of a new citizen in the contemporary society. The richness of evoked topics turns this book into a compelling read, and the authors' shared perspective gives the impression that the kaleidoscopic sequence of themes ultimately forms a coherent image.

References

Cywilizowanie dzieci? Społeczno-kulturowe badania dzieciństwa w perspektywie teorii Norberta Eliasa, eds. Zofia Boni, Marta Rakoczy, Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa 2023.

Przegląd Humanistyczny
<https://przegladhumanistyczny.pl/>

www.wuw.pl