

## **Dialogues with Chineseness in the Polish Literature of the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries – Forms of Presence, Ways of Absorbing. Approximations<sup>1</sup>**

*Dawid Maria Osiński*

University of Warsaw, Poland

e-mail: [d.osinski@uw.edu.pl](mailto: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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, dialogue, allusion

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*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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, humanities developed styles of research and possibilities of reading texts (not only those from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers about the world and about the relationship with the Middle Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Images of Chineseness produced by writers in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

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<sup>2</sup> Important diagnoses for conducting research on the stereotype in the press of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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:<sup>3</sup> the synthesising monograph by Li Yanan *Literatura polska w Chinach* [Polish Literature in China] (2017),<sup>4</sup> which meticulously registers all

<sup>3</sup> 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, Słowinia 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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)<sup>5</sup>.

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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> Including such terms as “Chinese” or “Chineseness” in the reflection on Polish literature (especially in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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”<sup>7</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature and culture in the three partitions. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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

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<sup>6</sup> 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).

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

postal communication between Russia and Central Europe was disrupted”<sup>8</sup>). 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.<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>10</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup>-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

<sup>8</sup> 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).

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup>-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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 genology (taking into account the 19<sup>th</sup>-century consciousness and knowledge about the literary theory, and the resulting genre divisions) could be the reflections of an eminent aesthetician and philosopher of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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)<sup>12</sup> reflected upon the Chinese art and culture in a simplified and stereotypical way

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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),<sup>13</sup> and created in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

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

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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.

<sup>13</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup>-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 particulières de ces pays, de la carte générale et des cartes particulières 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).

<sup>14</sup> 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*.<sup>15</sup>

An important referential matrix in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for thinkers, artists and theoreticians of Chinese culture and literature could be the reflection of Lucjan Siemiński 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.<sup>16</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> century that have been asked on the ground of national literatures and cultures.<sup>17</sup>

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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

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<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 188.

<sup>16</sup> Lucjan Siemiński, *Przegląd dziejów literatury powszechnej*, Kraków: published by the author 1855, vol. I, esp. pp. 66–76.

<sup>17</sup> 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 *Przyjaciel Dzieci* [Children's Friend] or *Wieczory Rodzinne* [Family Evenings].

In 1870, one of the issues of *Przyjaciel Dzieci* opened with the article “Bonza kapłan w Chinach” [Bonza, a Priest in China].<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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],<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> Once again, this magazine published

<sup>18</sup> “Bonza kapłan w Chinach”, *Przyjaciel Dzieci* 1870, no. 52, pp. 505–506.

<sup>19</sup> “Kraj amurski”, *Przyjaciel Dzieci* 1870, no. 32, pp. 319–320.

<sup>20</sup> “Chińczycy”, *Przyjaciel Dzieci* 1873, no. 25, pp. 289–292.

<sup>21</sup> “Mieszkania Chińczyków”, *Przyjaciel Dzieci* 1873, no. 39, pp. 462–463.

<sup>22</sup> “Teatr marionetek w Chinach”, *Przyjaciel 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.<sup>23</sup> 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,<sup>24</sup> 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].<sup>25</sup> 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!”<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup> In the same year, a propaedeutic article “Ze wspomnień młodego Chińczyka” [From the Memories of a Young Chinese Boy] was published.<sup>28</sup>

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

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

<sup>24</sup> *Przyjaciół Dzieci* 1880, no. 19, p. 257.

<sup>25</sup> “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.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 22, p. 303.

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

<sup>28</sup> “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 19<sup>th</sup> 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]<sup>29</sup>), in his *Przewodnik do wykładu historii powszechnej* [A Guide to the Lecture on World History] (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1867; 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

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<sup>29</sup> 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,<sup>30</sup> 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”<sup>31</sup>). 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

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

<sup>31</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-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*<sup>32</sup> 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)<sup>33</sup> 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)).<sup>34</sup>

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,

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

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

<sup>34</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 IIIe 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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

<sup>35</sup> 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 Mongoliją 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 nokoło świata*, vol. III: *Pekin, Jeddo, 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.

<sup>36</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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].<sup>37</sup>

A number of irrefutable findings comprehensively identifying the presence of Chinese motifs in the Polish literature of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted from the research conducted by Bogdan Mazan at the University of Łódź.<sup>38</sup> 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

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<sup>37</sup> 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.

<sup>38</sup> 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 Płuciennik, Danuta Szajnert, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2008, pp. 69–103.

of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>39</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> century saw also a fascination with Japan (its art, culture, exoticism, less with its literature) – intensified in the magazine *Wędrowiec*<sup>40</sup> and by the activity of Feliks Manggha Jasiński, and represented in particular by texts published in *Chimera*<sup>41</sup> – 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.<sup>42</sup> In both those monographs, there are (obviously) more Japanese elements and motifs related to the understanding of art (mainly art nouveau)

<sup>39</sup> 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 Stepnik, 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 Kotroch, 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.

<sup>40</sup> 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.

<sup>41</sup> See the doctoral dissertation entitled *Kultura i sztuka japońska w polskiej prasie przelomu wieków (XIX i XX)* [The Japanese Culture and Art in the Polish Press at the Turn of the Century (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup>)] 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.

<sup>42</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 Kasarełło's brilliant book.<sup>43</sup> 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

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<sup>43</sup> Lidia Kasarełło, *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 19<sup>th</sup>-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 Doświadczyńskiego przypadki* (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,<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup>

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

<sup>44</sup> 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 Inklebłot'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 Inklebłot, first encountered in Salamanca. In further volumes the authority of this scholar and master continues to be invoked.

<sup>45</sup> 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.

<sup>46</sup> 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)<sup>47</sup> – 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.<sup>48</sup> 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)<sup>49</sup> 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”.<sup>50</sup> On 8 September, he noted down: “In the evening, I continued reading the H. of Lit. of the Chinese until 11 o’clock”.<sup>51</sup> On 9 September: “In an elegant notebook I am making notes from the H. of Lit. of the Chinese”.<sup>52</sup>

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:

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

<sup>48</sup> See: *ibidem*, p. 282.

<sup>49</sup> 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.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

Poor Tecia 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.<sup>53</sup>

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 4<sup>th</sup>, 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.<sup>54</sup>

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:

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

<sup>54</sup> 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...<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup>

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.<sup>57</sup>

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!...",<sup>58</sup> but they (accidentally) refer to a philosophical

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, p. 297.

<sup>56</sup> Idem, *Szyfowe prace*, p. 58.

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, p. 143.

<sup>58</sup> 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,<sup>59</sup> 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".<sup>60</sup>

Another way of perceiving Chineseness, which is significant because it opens the 20<sup>th</sup> 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!".<sup>61</sup> 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]),<sup>62</sup> is meant to completely detach the conversation from its actual

<sup>59</sup> 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.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

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

<sup>62</sup> 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 Waclaw 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!..."<sup>63</sup> 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

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

<sup>63</sup> Waclaw 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...<sup>64</sup>

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 *Kniaź Piatomkin* [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)<sup>65</sup>, 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

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem, p. 233.

<sup>65</sup> Michał Głowiński, *Mity przebrane. Dionizos, Narcyz, Prometeusz, Marchoń, labirynt*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1994, p. 8.

tripod stands – I need to hide in the shadow of a baobab”.<sup>66</sup> 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...”<sup>67</sup> – says the seducer

<sup>66</sup> 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).

<sup>67</sup> Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Złote runo. Dramat*, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 dandyism<sup>68</sup> 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].<sup>69</sup> 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], *Klaczce króla Mihradzi* [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).

<sup>68</sup> 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 Ichnatowicz, Stefan Ciara, Warsaw: Neriton 2010, pp. 445–465.

<sup>69</sup> 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...<sup>70</sup>

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",<sup>71</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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-19<sup>th</sup>-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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 *Przeгляд 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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, Waclaw Sieroszewski), from the journalistic texts

<sup>70</sup> 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.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 373.

of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Polish Studies at the Beijing Foreign Studies University.<sup>72</sup> 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”.

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

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