

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

Piotr Bordzół

Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland

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

ORCID: 0000-0003-4066-1850

Abstract

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

Keywords

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She also argues that:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² Ibidem, p. 113.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 112.

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

¹⁵ Ibidem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And further:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 107.

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

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

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

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

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

³⁵ See: *ibidem*, pp. 153–156.

³⁶ See: ORK, p. 32.

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

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

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

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

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

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

References

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

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