

## Was Tadeusz Miciński Familiar with Taoism? On *The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China*<sup>1</sup>

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

### Abstract

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

### Keywords

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

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

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fore neither in his major literary works nor in his philosophical-religious writings. Teresa Wróblewska, the author of the critical edition of the writer's dramatic works,<sup>2</sup> indicates in her commentary to *The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China* that direct references to China are manifested only in a few of Miciński's works. We can see them, for example, in the title of the prose poem *Historia dwojga kochanków i Pani Hoan-Tho. Z chińskich porcelan i księgi: KIM VÂN KIËU TÂN TRUYEN* [The History of Two Lovers and Mrs. Hoan-Tho. From Chinese Porcelain and the Book: KIM VÂN KIËU TÂN TRUYEN],<sup>3</sup> originally published in 1901 in the *Chimera* magazine, but its content results rather from the writer's interests in the Vietnamese literature. The researcher also mentions an unpublished Chinese poem, the existence of which is known from Miciński's correspondence with Miriam<sup>4</sup> in 1904,<sup>5</sup> and the prose poem *Z motywów Dalekiego Wschodu* [From Far Eastern Motifs],<sup>6</sup> stylised to resemble a Chinese tale. Wróblewska concludes that *The Ballad of the Seven Sleeping Brothers in China* has equally little to do with that Far Eastern country:

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

The researcher, drawing conclusions from the author's biography, dates the composition of the play to around 1910, that is, after the publication of *Nietota*, which met with unfavourable reception. Wróblewska contends that the protagonist of *The Ballad*, i.e., the Poet put in a psychiatric hospital, is the *porte-parole* of Miciński, who was rejected by society and the critics. Hence, the play would be a commentary on the author's own condition. According to the scholars researching Miciński's work, the construction of the play is markedly original in the context of both his own writing and the works of the epoch. Sławomir Sobieraj, among others, points to the innovative poetics of *The Ballad*.<sup>8</sup> This is due to the choice of a psychiatric hospital as the place of action and the use of auto-thematic formula by introducing the dramaturgical construction of "theatre within the theatre". This work is also a pre-surrealist grotesque<sup>9</sup>

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

<sup>3</sup> Idem, *Poematy prozą*, ed. Wojciech Gutowski, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Miriam – a pseudonym of Zenon Przesmycki (trans. note).

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

<sup>6</sup> Tadeusz Miciński, *Poematy prozą*, pp. 179–183.

<sup>7</sup> Teresa Wróblewska, "Nota wydawcy", pp. 563–564.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 256.

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 156.

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

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

<sup>19</sup> Józef Jankowski, *Skarbczyk poezji chińskiej*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Romana Kreczmera 1902.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 261.

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

<sup>28</sup> Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci*, p. 263.

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

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

<sup>31</sup> Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci*, p. 264.

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

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

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

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

<sup>32</sup> Katarzyna Fazan, “Nie-byt w wypożyczonym kimonie”, p. 396.

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

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

<sup>35</sup> Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci*, p. 264.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>38</sup> Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci*, p. 265.

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

<sup>40</sup> Tadeusz Miciński, *Romans Siedmiu Braci*, p. 265.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 6.

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

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