

Sights of China: Markers of Otherness in Polish and Serbian Travel Writings (1842-1949)

Tomasz Ewertowski¹

I. Travellers and sights – introduction

Travelling, sightseeing, and providing accounts of travel impressions are inextricably linked, even if connections between them are not straightforward. Let us start with a few examples demonstrating the intricate relations between what a traveller sees and writes about it. Milutin Velimirović (1893-1973) was a Serbian doctor and writer who ended up due to the turmoil of the First World War in East Asia, and later wrote two travel books on his experience in China, Japan, and Mongolia.² He explored a seemingly unimpressive river: “Banks are low and one would say that it is one dirty, muddy puddle.”³ However, what

¹ Shanghai International Studies University, China; Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland.

² Velimirović’s writings were placed by a Serbian sinologist Radosav Pušić among the most important pages written in Serbian about China – R. Pušić, ed., *Podnebesko carstvo. Srbi o Kini 1725-1940 (putopisi i članci)* [Heavenly Kingdom. Serbs on China 1725-1940 (travelogues and articles)] (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2006), 130. Velimirović’s biography and family connection present a very interesting story. His elder brother, Borisav Velimirović (1880–1944), worked for many years in East Asia and it was he who helped Milutin to find employment in China. Milutin’s niece, Borisav’s daughter Ljalja Velimirović (1912–1943), also published travelogues about China. For more information on the Velimirović family, see G. Antić, *Velimirovići. Književna baština* [The Velimirovićs: Literary Heritage] (Andrijevica: Stupovi, 1996). About Milutin himself and his writings, see L. Rajković, “Milutin Velimirović,” *Razvitak* 21:1 (1981): 70–78; X. Jin, “Opis Kineza u putopisu Milutina Velimirovića ‘Kroz Kinu’” [A description of the Chinese in Milutin Velimirović’s travelogue ‘Through China’], in *Ljubomir Nenadović i srpska putopisna tradicija* [Ljubomir Nenadović and Serbian travel writing tradition] (Priština: Filološki fakultet, 1995), 159–62.

³ M. Velimirović, *Kroz Kinu: putopis* [Through China: A Travelogue] (Beograd: S. B. Cvijanović, 1930), 42. All translations into English are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Translations were made to ensure coherence in meaning for non-Serbian and non-Polish speaking readers. I have sought to provide exact translations; however, these

the traveller saw was combined with what he knew about this river, so overall his description is far more elaborate:

So, this famous Yellow River will not impress you with anything (besides a bridge). But still it is horrible, and still it is a source of wealth and misery for the whole of North China. Deceptive, dangerous, whimsical, but fruitful and generous as the Nile.⁴

Therefore a dirty, muddy puddle is in fact a crucial a watercourse for the wellbeing of a vast part of the country. A few pages later, Velimirović's account goes even further, as he describes how, on the banks of the river, he was overwhelmed by strange feelings, thinking how for thousands of years the wind had blown the sands, transforming the sea into a plain through which the river was now flowing.

Let us consider another example. Marian Walentynowicz (1896-1967), a Polish artist, architect, and passionate traveller, visited China in the 1930s. This is how he described a location inside the Temple of Heaven complex in Beijing: "(...) a round, flat, triple platform, made of impeccable marble."⁵ A marble platform would have been quite impressive, but its full significance was introduced by Walentynowicz later, when he explained that it was the Altar of Heaven, which was considered the centre of the Earth, followed by a description of imperial rituals. As in Velimirović's case, knowledge about an observed object changes its meaning for the traveller, making his impressions much more profound and his writing more exciting. The praise of the altar's simple form and its ritual significance leads to a general conclusion on Chinese civilization: "It requires a really perfect culture to dress what is most holy in such a perfectly simple form. (...) With all my European culture, I humble myself before this modest, white marble carved terrace."⁶

cannot be acknowledged as proper literary translations. The original says: "Obale niske, i pre bi čovek rekao da je to jedna kaljava, razmuđena bara."

⁴ Velimirović, *Kroz Kinu* [Through China: A Travelogue], 42. "Dakle, ničim (sem mostom) neće vas poraziti ili oduševiti ta čuvena Žuta Reka. Pa ipak je ona strašna, ipak je ona izvor bogastva i nesreće cele severne Kine. Varliva, opasna, ćudljiva, nestalna, ali plodonosna i izdašna kao Nil!"

⁵ M. Walentynowicz, "U stóp Oltarza Nieba" [At the Foot of the Altar of Heaven], *Tydzien Literacki Polski Zbrojnej* 17:56 (1938): 3.

⁶ Walentynowicz, "U stóp Oltarza Nieba" [At the Foot of the Altar of Heaven] 3. "Trzeba mieć naprawdę doskonałą kulturę, aby największą świętość ubrać w tak

What can be learnt about travelling, sightseeing and travel writing from these two examples? They can be analysed using a semiotic definition of sight as conceived in the sociology of tourism. According to Dean MacCannell, an object is usually recognised as a sight thanks to previous information about it, the so-called “markers.”⁷ MacCannell understands this term broadly as covering any information concerning a sight, e.g. stories told by others, books and lectures about a particular location, etc. In our examples, the knowledge of the importance of the Yellow River for the Chinese culture allows Velimirović to perceive the “muddy puddle” as an impressive sight, while Walentynowicz sees the simple marble platform as the centre of ritual activities. MacCannell’s idea was magnified by Jonathan Culler, who emphasised the interchangeability of both the signifier (marker) and the signified (sight).⁸ A sight can itself become a marker, that is, a signifier of something else. For Walentynowicz, the Altar of Heaven is a signifier of the greatness and sophistication of Chinese civilisation.

In the context of sightseeing, two sociologists of tourism, John Urry and Jonas Larsen, emphasised the socio-cultural frames of “ways of seeing”: “People gaze upon the world through a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires, and expectations, framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education.”⁹ This point can be illustrated with the example of a dragon. Sculptures, reliefs and paintings of dragons were of course often described by travellers, who referred to them as if to “an imperial emblem,”¹⁰ “a symbol of the yellow race,”¹¹ “a national emblem

doskonałe prostą formę. (...) Z całą swą europejską kulturą korzę się przed tym skromnym, w białym marmurze wykutym tarasem (...).”

⁷ D. MacCannell, *The Tourist. A new theory of the leisure class*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 110.

⁸ J. Culler, “Semiotics of Tourism,” *American Journal of Semiotics* 1:1/2 (1981): 127–40.

⁹ J. Urry and J. Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2011), 2. Culler’s as well as Urry and Larsen’s usage of MacCannell’s concept was criticised by Raymond W.K. Lau for treating sights constituting signs as a fairly common phenomenon, when in reality it only happens in some special cases (R.W.K. Lau, “Tourist sights as semiotic signs: A Critical Commentary,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 38:2 (2011): 711–14). However, from my perspective, Culler, Urry and Larsen’s are to the point when stating that seeing sights as signs is fairly common, so I have adapted their perspective in this paper.

¹⁰ M. Rajčević, *Na Dalekom Istoku* [In the Far East] (Beograd: Štamparija “Đura Jakšić,” 1930), 99.

¹¹ O. Subotić, *Iz žutog carstva* [From the Yellow Kingdom] (Novi Sad: Natošević, 1921), 59.

of China.”¹² In these examples, a sculpture or an image was described as a dragon and signified some political or socio-cultural entity: Qing Empire, China, yellow race. There were, however, very different accounts of this mythical creature written by Catholic missionaries. Władysław Michał Zaleski (1852-1925), the Apostolic Delegate for the East Indies,¹³ visited Chinese temples and houses in Rangoon and Singapore during a trip to Southeast Asia in 1897. He did not simply write about sculptures but claimed that a devil in the shape of a horrible dragon reigned over the altars.¹⁴ The background of the traveller, who was a representative of a Catholic institution, led to him perceive the dragon as a devil and signifier of abominable paganism. A similar description of dragons can be found in a travelogue by another Polish Catholic missionary, a Franciscan friar named Paulin Wilczyński (1881-1989), who was active in Northeast China in the 1920s. During one of his trips in the Shandong province, he noticed many sculptures of, according to his writing, “snakes.”¹⁵ He asked his companions, experienced missionaries, what they meant (referring to MacCannell, we can call this looking for “a marker”). He got the answer that China is still in the hands of the infernal dragon and this is a symbol of its rule.

II. Objectives and scope

A previous part of the article introduced how a semiotic approach to tourism describes processes happening between travelling, sightseeing and travel writing. Concepts provided by MacCannell, Culler, Urry and

¹² B. Grąbczewski, *Podróże po Azji Środkowej* [Travels in Central Asia], 3rd ed. (Warszawa: PWN, 2010), 80.

¹³ Zaleski, hailing from an aristocratic Polish family, was a high-ranking Catholic church official. He stayed in India for 30 years, serving as the Apostolic Delegate for the East Indies in the years 1892–1916, and in this period he also made trips to Southeast Asia and China. On Zaleski’s life and writings, see the biography by Witold Malej Ks. *W.M. Zaleski: delegat apostolski Indii Wschodniej, arcybiskup Teb, Patriarcha Antiochii* [W.M. Zaleski: Apostolic Delegate to the East Indies, the Archbishop of Thebes, the Patriarch of Antioch.] (Rzym: 1965) and an article by George Lerski (“Polish Prince of the Church in South Asia,” *The Polish Review* 4 (1984): 57-69).

¹⁴ W.M. Zaleski, *Podróże po Indo-Chinach r. 1897 i 1898* [A Journey to Indo-China in 1897 and 1898] (Kraków: nakł. aut., 1898), 23, 48.

¹⁵ P. Wilczyński, “Z misyj franciszkańskich. (Z wrażeń podróży O. Paulina Wilczyńskiego do Pekinu)” [From the Franciscan missions. Father Paulin Wilczyński’s impressions from his trip to Beijing], *Dziennik III Zakonu Ś. O. N. Franciszka Serafickiego* 4–7 (1927): 288.

Larsen help formalise an attitude which is common to research on travel writing in the last few decades, namely the presumption that a travelogue presents a place visited in an “imaginary” way, so broadly speaking it depends more on the cultural background of the traveller than on reality itself.¹⁶ Of course we could not fall into what Vladimir Gvozden calls “textual illusion”¹⁷ and negate all links between the reality and the texts; actually among studies on travel writing about China there are brilliant examples of works which analyse a discourse on China as an interaction between “observed reality, the persona of the observer, and the trope of representation.”¹⁸ This paper refers to methodological assumptions that have just been introduced, but the objective is of course less extensive due to space constraints. On the basis of selected examples from Polish and Serbian travel writings from the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, I would like to show how certain items, which were perceived as typically Chinese, became signifiers of various interpretations of “Chineseness.” This study is linked with my earlier research on the image of China in Polish and Serbian travelogues from the 18th to the mid-20th century; however, the attempt here is to provide a more elaborate treatment of the texts I have mentioned earlier, as well as taking a first look at material I have not previously analysed.¹⁹ The timespan of this study (1842-1949, i.e. from

¹⁶ See examples of seminal studies: E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003); M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁷ V. Gvozden, *Jovan Dučić putopisac: ogled iz imagologije* [Jovan Dučić the Travel Writer. A Study in Imagology] (Novi Sad: Svetovi, 2003), 30.

¹⁸ S.C. Fritzsche, *Narrating China: Western Travelers in the Middle Kingdom after the Opium War* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1995), 3. For inspiring works on travel writing about China, not only about Western travellers, see also N.R. Clifford, *“A Truthful Impression of the Country”: British and American Travel Writing in China, 1880-1949* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); D. Kerr and J. Kuehn, eds., *A Century of Travels in China. Critical Essays on Travel Writing from the 1840s to the 1940s* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010); S.S. Thurin, *Victorian Travelers and the Opening of China, 1842-1907* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999); J. Fogel, *The Literature of Travel in the Japanese Rediscovery of China. 1862-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); X. Tian, *Visionary Journeys. Travel Writings from Early Medieval and Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

¹⁹ Cf. T. Ewertowski, *Images of China in Polish and Serbian Travel Writings (1720-1949)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020)

the “opening up” of China after the first Opium War until the establishment of the People’s Republic of China) is determined by the fact that in the aforesaid period there is already quite a significant number of travelogues about China. The Middle Kingdom was to some extent becoming familiar to European readers, even though it was still to remain an exotic destination. It was not an unknown country, as Paul French points out, as since the 1820s, and especially in the period 1900-1949, China was “a big story” for the Western audience and there was a proliferation of texts about the Chinese.²⁰ However, it was a place that embodied the exotic and otherness. Those features make it very interesting to analyse how travellers perceived sights that were known to them from a textual tradition but were nevertheless identified as foreign and exotic.

III. Sights

1. Rickshaw

How did travellers react to and describe one of the most common means of transportation in East Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, namely the rickshaw? We can start with an example not from China but from the then French colony of Indochina. In describing his stay in Saigon, the aforementioned Walentynowicz wrote: “Sometimes, with a quiet and rhythmic tapping of bare heels, a light trolley on spoke wheels with tires, passes by.”²¹ A description of the physical appearance is followed by an explanation of it being “a local droshky.”²² A rickshaw is perceived as something typical, local, and East Asian, but is simultaneously made familiar to readers by a comparison with a vehicle common in Central and Eastern Europe. There is also a comical dimension; Walentynowicz remarks that because a rickshaw has just one seat, couples who want to go on a date need to rent two vehicles and while spending time together they are forced to

²⁰ P. French, *Through the Looking Glass. China's Foreign Journalists from Opium Wars to Mao* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 11.

²¹ M. Walentynowicz, “W niemądrym Saigonie” [In reckless Saigon], *Tydzień Literacki Polski Zbrojnej* (Warszawa, March 27, 1938), 2. “Czasem z cichym, a rytmicznym kłapaniem bosych pięt przemyka lekki wózek na szprychowych kolach, zaopatrzonych w dętki.”

²² M. Walentynowicz, “W niemądrym Saigonie” [In reckless Saigon]. „miejskowa doróżka.”

hang in the air between two carts (Walentyłowicz's article was accompanied by his cartoon drawing showing a couple hugging while being carried on two rickshaws). Here, a vehicle is a sign of the humorously described strangeness of a foreign land; however, much more common was seeing rickshaws as a sign of social inequality and exploitation. Jovan Milanković (1869-1936), a Serbian diplomat who visited China on diplomatic duties during the First World War and immediately after it,²³ called rickshaws "a shame for humanity."²⁴ Tadeusz Meissner (1902-1966), the first mate on the Polish sailing ship, *Dar Pomorza*, which called in at Shanghai and Hong Kong during a trip around the world in the 1930s, wrote about poverty among the Chinese population in contrast to the great wealth of the international settlements, giving a description of a rickshaw as part of a discourse on inequality. After commenting on misery in Chinese quarters, he wrote: "A rickshaw makes an equally unpleasant impression, a human-animal, carrying another human, maybe also an animal, alas less noble."²⁵

It can be pointed out that the authors' background, especially the length of their stays in China and familiarity with East Asian conditions, influenced the meaning they gave to rickshaws. Milutin Velimirović described how he became accustomed to it and looked at rickshaws as part of the system: "Of course, after some time spent in China, you look at these unhappy people a little differently and more realistically. The earlier avoidance, the feeling of being ashamed of oneself, the sentimental-melancholy thinking – are all gone. One sits in a very comfortable cart, calmly thinking, that in doing so he is giving someone a chance to earn money."²⁶ Witold Urbanowicz (1908-1996), a Polish fighter pilot who joined the American Air Force in China during the

²³ On Milanković's biography, see V. Golubović, "Uspomene iz Sibira Jovana Milankovića" [Jovan Milanković's Memoirs from Siberia], *Ruski almanah* 19 (2014): 176–81.

²⁴ J. D. Milanković, *Uspomene iz Sibira 1918-1919 i put okeanom u domovinu 1920* [Memories from Siberia 1918-1919 and the ocean trip to the homeland 1920] (Beograd: Vreme, 1926), 111. "Jedan sram za humanitet."

²⁵ T. W. Meissner, *Dookola svijata na "Darze Pomorza" (1934-1935)* [Around the World on "Dar Pomorza" (1934-1935)], 2nd ed. (Katowice: KOS, 2006), 126.

²⁶ Velimirović, *Kroz Kinu: putopis* [Through China: A Travelogue], 74. "Naravno posle izvesnog bavljenja u Kini gledate na te nesrećne ljude malo drukčije i stvarnije. Ranije izbegavanja, stid od samog sebe, sentimentalno-melanholična razmišljanja – prošla su. Čovek seda u vrlo udobna kolica, umiren mišlju, da time ipak daje nekome zaradu."

Second World War²⁷ and wrote a very interesting book about his Chinese experience, commented that there were no other means of transportation and added that if he would apply his humanistic principles, these people would not have earned any money and might have died of hunger.²⁸ For these authors, rickshaws are still a sign of poverty and overpopulation, albeit rational and legitimate means of transportation.

2. Braids

Up until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912, Chinese men were obliged to wear long braids as a sign of recognition of the rule of the Manchu dynasty. Men with queues (ponytails) of course attracted the attention of Polish and Serbian travellers in the period when this kind of hairstyle was reserved in Europe only for women. This custom was well-known in Europe, so authors usually did not express any surprise²⁹ but described it as one of the characteristic traits of Chinese appearance. Milan Jovanović (1834-1896), a Serbian doctor and writer who worked during 1878-1882 as a ship's doctor on Austrian Lloyd steamers sailing to East Asia,³⁰ gave a depiction of braids within a long, ethnographic-like

²⁷ About Urbanowicz's biography, see W. Krajewski, *Witold Urbanowicz – legenda polskich skrzydeł* [Witold Urbanowicz – A legend of Polish wings] (Warszawa: ZP Grupa, 2008). On his Chinese experience, see E. Kajdański, *Długi cień wielkiego muru: jak Polacy odkrywali Chiny* [The long shadow of the Great Wall. How Poles were discovering China] (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2005); W. Odyniec and J. Włodarski, "Polski lotnik w Chinach w 1943 roku" [A Polish pilot in China in 1943], in *Początki wiedzy o Chinach w Polsce* [Beginnings of the Knowledge about China in Poland], ed. Irena Kadulka and Józef Włodarski (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2008), 135–42.

²⁸ W. Urbanowicz, *Latające Tygrysy* [Flying tigers] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1983), 221.

²⁹ There are, however, exceptions. A Franciscan missionary, Gerard Piotrowski (1885–1969), who arrived in China as a young man in 1911 and stayed there for a few decades, claimed in his memoirs that he felt very surprised when he saw men with braids at his arrival in Shanghai: G. Piotrowski, *Wspomnienia misjonarza o Chinach czyli zwyczaje i obyczaje Chińczyków spostrzeżone i zanotowane przez autora w związku z jego pracą misjonarską w Chinach od 1911 do 1949 roku* [Memoirs of a missionary about China: or, customs and traditions of the Chinese observed and noted by the author during his missionary work in China from 1911 to 1949] (Pulaski, Wisconsin: The Franciscan Printery, 1956), 12.

³⁰ On Jovanović's biography and writings, see a biographical book by Snežana S. Veljković, *Gospodin koji nije znao sanskrit* [A gentleman who did not know Sanscrit] (Beograd: Laguna, 2016) and biographical articles: I. Tartalja, "Jedan zaboravljen majstor srpske proze iz perioda ranog realizma" [One forgotten master of Serbian prose from a period of early realism], *Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dane, Zbornik radova* 13:2 (1984):

portrayal of Chinese traders visiting the ship. In a detailed way, he described how their heads were shaved, with only a long queue going down to the waist and from there it was extended with a silk cord down to the calves.³¹ This description reflects an ethnographic and didactic tendency in Jovanović's travelogue; he wanted to picture faraway lands and in this way make them available to the Serbian public. We can contrast him with two Polish travellers who also visited the Chinese coast in the 1880s, namely Julian Falat (1853-1929) and Hugo Zapalowicz (1852-1917). Falat, a famous Polish painter, made a trip around the world in 1885.³² He also treated queues as a typical element of Chinese appearance but mentioned them in the context of leisurely activities of Singaporean society, namely cricket and tennis. He commented that with their braids, the Chinese looked very funny during games.³³ Hairstyle not only signified Chinese otherness, but the whole situation can be seen as an example of an attitude described by Homi Bhabha using the concept of mimicry. The Chinese imitate the colonial masters of Singapore by playing Western sports, but their queues made them look funny, "almost the same, but not quite."³⁴

129–36; G. Maksimović, "Putopisna proza Milana Jovanovića Morskog" [Milan Jovanović Morski's travel writing], *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik* 56:3 (2008): 623–38. On Chinese topics in Jovanović's work, see T. Ewertowski, "Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit? Relations between Europe and China in the travelogue 'Tamo amo po istoku' of Milan Jovanović," in *Boym et cetera*, ed. Aleksander W. Mikołajczak, Monika Miazek-Męczynska, and Rafał Dymczyk (Poznań: Humanistic and Interdisciplinary Research Group AMU, 2015), 190–202; T. Ewertowski, "The Image of the Chinese in the Southeast Asian Contact Zone. National Comparisons in the Travelogues of Milan Jovanović and Władysław Michał Zaleski," *Imagologia i komparatystyka* [Imagology and Comparative Literature] 6 (2016): 40–57.

³¹ M. Jovanović, *Tamo amo po istoku. Sveska druga* [Here and there on the East. The Second Book] (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1895), 164.

³² On Falat's trip and its influence on his paintings, see J. Malinowski, "Podróż Juliana Falata do Chin i Japonii w 1885" [Julian Falat's travel to China and Japan in 1885], in *Orient w kulturze polskiej. Materiały z sesji jubileuszowej z okazji 25-lecia Muzeum Azji i Pacyfiku w Warszawie 15-16 października 1998* [Orient in the Polish Culture. Proceeding of the jubilee session on the 25th anniversary of the Museum of Asia and Pacific in Warsaw, October 15-16 1998] (Warszawa: Dialog, 2000), 75–84.

³³ J. Falat, *Pamiętniki* [Memoirs], ed. Anna Lubasiowa (Katowice: Śląski Instytut Naukowy, 1987), 118.

³⁴ H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 122.

In the case of Hugo Zapałowicz, an Austro-Hungarian Pole, who was a natural scientist and military man and who travelled around the world a few years after Falat (1888-1890), a description of the Chinese hairstyle is also a sign of otherness, but of most significance is not actually the sight itself but the writer's own reaction to it. Zapałowicz wrote that once on a ship a Chinese man was standing next to him and his long braid was reaching towards the traveller's side, so he really wanted to take it into his hands to observe it carefully. However, because of knowledge acquired from "markers," Zapałowicz knew that it would be very offensive.³⁵ This experience and its write-up is conditioned for the most part by two factors – on the one hand, an almost erotic fascination with the otherness embodied in the braid, and on the other by knowledge and social norms.

For Milorad Rajčević (1890-1964), a Serbian traveller who in the first half of the 20th century journeyed all around the world including a trip around Asia in 1910-1911,³⁶ the queue was an element of Chinese fashion: "Men are also with a braid. It is a decoration for them. What for our old people was a moustache is a braid for the Chinese."³⁷ While in examples from Falat's and Zapałowicz's travelogues the sight of a braid appeared in the context of certain specific situations and in Jovanović's travelogue his ethnographic description was still associated with a specific group of people (traders visiting the ship), Rajčević made it part of his general characterisation of the Chinese. It has been noted by researchers that Rajčević was a rather simple-minded traveller, whose narrative is focused on adventures and is fast-paced and is thus often lacking any "culturological" depth.³⁸ It is also visible in the way he described Chinese hairstyle, giving superficial characteristics and a shallow analogy with his home culture.

The examples analysed above show how queues were seen as a typical element of Chinese appearance and how they marked Chinese otherness.

³⁵ H. Zapałowicz, *Jedna z podróży na okolo Ziemi. Tom II* [One of Trips around the World. Vol. II] (Lwów: Księgarnia Gubrynowicza i Schmidta, 1899), 159.

³⁶ On Rajčević's biography, see Nada Savković: "Putovanje – životna opcija Milorada Rajčevića" [Travel – Milorad Rajčević's life option], *Filolog* 17 (2018): 514–30.

³⁷ Rajčević, *Na Dalekom Istoku* [In the Far East], 121. "I ljudi su s perčinom. To im je ukras. Što je za naše stare bio brk, to je za njih perčin."

³⁸ V. Gvozden, *Srpska putopisna kultura 1914–1940. Studija o bronotopičnosti susreta* [Serbian Travel Writing Culture 1914-1940: A Study in the Chronotope of a Meeting] (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2011), 83, 89.

However, these instances also show how widespread knowledge about China, which conditioned the perception of sights, was shallow and stereotypical. Because the custom of wearing braids was well known, writers from our corpus were not surprised despite the fact that this practice was very different from European conventions. Travellers described braids as a curiosity and a sign of Chineseness but were nevertheless familiar despite being exotic. However, notwithstanding this familiarity, very seldom did travellers mention the historical background of queues and their political significance. It is worth noting that one of the writers who described queues as a sign of Manchu political domination over China was a diplomat named Konstanty Symonolewicz (1884-1959), who was an experienced “China hand.” He wrote two books and a number of articles inspired by his stay in China from 1912 to 1930.³⁹ He described how one of his servants cut off his braid to show his revolutionary, anti-Manchu attitude,⁴⁰ and also gave a compelling description of a street scene in Beijing in the wake of the revolution when revolutionaries were cutting off people’s braids while one old lady sat on the ground saying that she would not get up until her son’s braid grew again.⁴¹ Symonolewicz’s great familiarity with Chinese affairs made him aware that this common sight of braids was not simply an object of funny curiosity or fashion.

3. Chinese characters

One of the sights that most suggestively embodied the otherness of East Asian civilisation was its orthographic system. Most travellers who wrote about the Middle Kingdom made some remarks about Chinese written characters, even if they were totally unable to actually read them and had either non-existent or very limited knowledge of the Chinese language. From this perspective, comments about the Chinese system of orthography were usually a juxtaposition of three factors: travellers’

³⁹ For general information about Symonolewicz, see Kajdański, *Długi cień wielkiego muru*, 323–40; *Konstanty Symonolewicz – orientalista, dyplomata, opiekun Polonii Mandżurskiej* [Konstanty Symonolewicz – an orientalist, a diplomat, and a protector of the Manchurian Polish diaspora], ed. A. Winiarz (Szczecin: Książnica Pomorska im. Stanisława Staszica w Szczecinie, 2012).

⁴⁰ K. Symonolewicz, *Moi Chińczycy. 18 lat w Chinach* [My Chinese. 18 years in China] (Warszawa: Biblioteka Polska, 1938), 29.

⁴¹ Symonolewicz, *Moi Chińczycy*, 59.

feelings aroused by visual impressions, knowledge provided by markers, and some personal opinions about Chinese civilisation in general.

Stefan Bryła (1886-1943), an outstanding Polish engineer and architect, wrote a travelogue about his 1912 trip to East Asia, in which he related in a lighthearted and humorous way various situations encountered by a tourist in exotic countries, in addition to a number of Eurocentric statements full of self-confidence. This attitude is also visible in his description of Chinese characters. In his account of a trip through the streets of Beijing, the architect recounted a collection of typical sights – houses, shops, rickshaws, people with long braids – and included among those “weird daubs of Chinese letters.”⁴² The same attitude towards Chinese writing is also visible in Bryła’s travelogue from America, where he wrote that characters in New York’s Chinatown were like strangely twisted giant spiders.⁴³ The Chinese orthographic system is seen as typical of local sights, albeit depreciated as something weird and strange.

In Bryła’s account, a negative attitude towards Chinese orthography is expressed in a selection of metaphors and reveals personal feeling without intellectual content. However, sometimes characters were seen in a negative light for more reflective reasons, such as in the 19th and early 20th century when it was common to perceive China as a stagnant, conservative country, a Herderian “mummy of an ancient civilization,” and sometimes alleged backwardness was attributed to Chinese characters.⁴⁴ Among the travellers in our corpus, this statement was uttered by Milorad Rajčević. He claimed that the Chinese language was made of words with one syllable, and for every syllable a special character is required, so a lot of time and effort is needed to learn how to read and write. For that reason, the Chinese could not easily obtain education and hence the country’s backwardness.⁴⁵

⁴² S. Bryła, *Daleki Wschód* [The Far East] (Lwów: Księgarnia Naukowa, 1923), 133. “bohomyzy chińskich liter dziwaczne.”

⁴³ S. Bryła, *Ameryka* [America] (Lwów: Wydawnictwo Polskie, 1921), 78.

⁴⁴ H. Saussy, “Impressions de China; or, How to Translate from a Nonexistent Original,” in *Sinographies. Writing China*, ed. Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven G. Yao (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 67–68; G. Blue, “China and Western social thought in the modern period,” in *China and Historical Capitalism*, ed. Gregory Blue and Timothy Brook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 74.

⁴⁵ Rajčević, *Na Dalekome Istoku* [In the Far East], 134.

In the examples analysed above, othering is combined with disdain. But let's look at instances where othering and fascination are combined. There were travellers who described Chinese characters as signs of Chinese otherness, even though they attributed positive values to them. One such case is remarks from a travelogue by Mieczysław Jankowski, a Polish soldier who took part in the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War and later wrote a book about his experience in Manchuria. He related how he observed "the art of Chinese writing" and emphasised that the word "art" is fully deserved.⁴⁶ He also gave a detailed paragraph-long description of writing with a brush and ink. So while Bryła's impression associated characters with ugliness, Jankowski linked them with art and sophistication. This traveller, again thanks to "markers" and in a way similar to Rajčević, also referred to the huge number of characters and the difficulties in mastering them. However, for him it signified not backwardness but learning and wisdom.

Milutin Velimirović's description of Chinese characters is also an example of exoticism and fascination with otherness. This traveller visited the Temple of Confucius in Beijing and observed tablets with descriptions, allegedly 3000 years old. His remarks expressed enthralment with unknown and exotic writings: "I look at those stony, eternal books, with small hieroglyphs, and while I would like to read a text from at least a single tablet and elucidate the mystery of hieroglyphs, unfortunately, among numerous signs only sometimes do I find very rare acquaintances: mi, taj, ce or fu."⁴⁷ Just as Zapalowicz wanted to touch a braid, Velimirović wanted to read and understand characters. In both cases, a sight becomes a marker of exoticism. In Velimirović's case, writings also represent the ancient and mysterious heritage of the Middle Kingdom.

IV. Conclusion

This article has presented a number of examples of how certain items seen as typical of China acquired an additional meaning in a travel

⁴⁶ M. Jankowski, *Mandżurja. Wrażenia i wspomnienia* [Manchuria. Impressions and Memoirs] (Warszawa: Skł. gl. w "Księgarni Polskiej," 1909), 63.

⁴⁷ Velimirović, *Kroź Kinu: putopis* [Through China: A Travelogue], 150. "Gledam na te kamene večite knjige, sa sitnim jeroglifima i mnogo bih želeo da bar sa jedne ploče pročitam tekst i rasvetlim misteriju jeroglifa, ali na žalost, od svijiu mnogobrojnih znakova, tek po negde nailazim na vrlo retke poznanike: mi, taj, ce ili fu..."

narrative depending on the author and his/her background. Nonetheless, a statement to the effect that travel writing presents an imaginary reality depending on the writer's socio-cultural background is but one of a number of factors to be taken into account during the investigation of travelogues and is not a conclusion. It is very important to analyse in detail which aspects of writers' experience, knowledge and sensibility influenced their specific way of portraying the observed reality. Of course, such research would require a much more detailed study than this one, still, we can already observe, for instance, the significance of a writer's Catholic missionary background (Zaleski and Wilczyński on dragons), how Eurocentric convictions of a writer purporting superior Western technical knowledge led to disdain for foreign aesthetics (Bryła on characters), and how a fast-paced narrative by an uneducated traveller sank into shallow observations (Rajčević on braids). However, what could well be the most important insight from our short investigation is China's twofold nature as a place that is familiar yet radically other. On the one hand, the Middle Kingdom was familiar because travellers easily identified certain items as Chinese. The authors described seeing rickshaws because they knew that such vehicles were typical and potential readers would have expected them to appear in a narrative about China. However, despite this sense of familiarity, the description tended to emphasise the sights' otherness, for while braids or characters were relatively known, they served as signs of otherness without due references to their social and political significance.

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