

Cultural Exchange between China and the West from the Perspective of two Eastern European Travellers

—Travelogues of Milutin Velimirović and Konstanty Symonolewicz

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Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to analyse and interpret relations between China and Europe as portrayed in travelogues written by two Eastern Europeans: “Kroz Kinu” or “Through China” (Velimirović 1930) by the Serbian traveller Milutin Velimirović (1893—1973); and “Moi Chińczycy” or “My Chinese” (Symonolewicz 1938) by the Polish diplomat Konstanty Symonolewicz (1884—1952).

Both authors visited the Far East at a very specific moment in history, i. e. the first half of the 20th century, when China was politically fragmented and was still smarting from lopsided treaties drawn up with other nations. In 1918, the Serbian author stayed in China as a member of Russian-Mongolian trade mission (Pušić 2006, 129-130; Gvozden 2011, 88, 93). Symonolewicz lived in China for more than 18 years, i. e. during 1912—1930 and again for a short period after the Second World War. First, he was a member of the Russian diplomatic corps, and when Poland regained independence after the First World War, he became a Polish consul (Winiarz 2012; Kajdanski 2005, chap. “Stary mandaryn” —Konstanty Symonolewicz). In their writings, Symonolewicz and Velimirović paid attention to their contemporary political situation as well as the great history of China and various issues related to intercultural communication. Their stays in China were conditioned by Russian imperial expansion even though they were not of the Russian nation. The two authors held very specific standpoints partly because they represented Europe, but also because they came from smaller nations that played no part in the European colonial venture. Not surprisingly, Symonolewicz and Velimirović perceived China from a European perspective; still, they were also able to distance themselves from the various prejudices pertaining to such a Euro-centric view. In this paper, their remarks about contacts between China and Europe in the early 20th century will be compared and analysed.

The main concepts of this paper are based on imaginary geography^① and imagology^②. Trav-

① According to the theorist behind this orientation, a description is always an expression of outlook on the world and cultural background of the author. See Said (1977); Kuźma (1980); Bassin (1991).

② Imagology is concerned with the typology of characterizations and attributes, with their currency and with their rhetorical deployment. These characterizations and attributes, to the extent that they lie outside the area of testable reports or statements of fact, we call *imagined*. See Beller and Leerssen (2007).

elogues are treated as tales about meetings between the writer and the world, tales which keep track of real travel through space, time and social hierarchy (Gvozden 2011, 18). This kind of writing is never a simple, neutral description. According to Albert Maier: “(…) travel writing always organizes differences (‘familiar’ vs. ‘unfamiliar’) and highlights either the agreement or the divergence between the familiar and the alien, as the case may be (‘domestication’, vs. ‘alienation’ or ‘exotification’)” (Maier 2007, 446). Analogy, exaggeration and contrast serve by way of structuring not only knowledge about a foreign country, but also the identity and values of the traveller and his “interpretive community”^①. The image of the other also gives a lot of information about the ideas and beliefs of their creators (Todorova 2008; Jezernik 2007; Bracewell and Drace-Francis 2008; Pratt 2011)^②.

In this framework, two questions will be the focus of this paper; first, the two authors’ general views on China; second, their views on European influences in China.

General views on China

In travel literature, “an arrival scene” often has special significance, allowing for the characterization of relations and categories of representation (Pratt 1986). It is also the case with Velimirović’s book, wherein the arrival scene introduces the author’s view on China.

“On one cloudy day in March I was leaving, as a controller of Mongolian Expedition, from Harbin to proper China (…). With great interest and special pleasure I went to this old and mysterious land, land of queues and opium, tea and silk, one of the largest and oldest nations in the world. The land in which existence we might even doubt, because of its remoteness and unfamiliarity. In front of me was a whole separate world, which till recently has not had connections with Europe, and from which Europe has borrowed many things”^③ (Velimirović 1930, 5).

In this description, reverence is mixed with exoticism. The long history of Chinese civilisation and its specific cultural forms are emphasized. Holding something in reverence implies knowledge of it, hence a short enumeration of attributes (silk, tea, queues, opium) refers to

① This term is used after Stanley Fish (Fish 2002).

② A similar approach to another travelogue from China, Milan Jovanović’s *Tamo amo po Istoku*, was used in my article “*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit? Relations between Europe and China in the travelogue Tamo amo po istoku of Milan Jovanović*” (in print).

③ 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 cannot be acknowledged as proper literary translations. The original says: “Jednog sumornog dana meseca marta polazio sam, kao kontrolor Mongolske Ekspedicije, iz Harbina u pravu Kinu (…). Sa velikim interesovanjem i sa naročitim zadovoljstvom, krenuo sam na putu u tu staru i tajanstvenu zemlju, zemlju perčina i opijuma, čaja i svile, zemlju najvećeg i jednog od najstarijih naroda na svetu, u čije smo postojanje gotovo mogli i da posumnjamo, blagodareći strašnoj udaljenosti i nepoznatosti. Predamnom je biočitav zaseban svet, naročita, potpuno odvojena kultura, koja do skora nije imala veza sa Evropom, i od koje je Evropa, došavši u dodir sa njom, pozajmila mnoge stvari”.

the stereotypical image of the Middle Kingdom. However, differences between China and the rest of the world, especially Europe, are visibly marked. Those differences and the separate development of Chinese culture lead to exoticism. Therefore, although China is depicted as an old and famous civilisation, Velimirović also presents himself as an explorer who visits the uncharted territory of a mysterious land. The Serbian author mentions silk, but he also claims that China did not have connections with Europe, ignoring ancient contacts between the Roman Empire and Han Dynasty as well as the whole legacy of the Silk Road (Uhlig 2007), not to mention the early modern period trade relations and the Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty contacts with Europeans (Mungello 2009).

The arrival scene in Symonolewicz's book describes the first meeting between Symonolewicz's family and their servants in Beijing. Personal connections with the Chinese people are emphasized and a general feature of the book, as signified in its title ("My Chinese"). However, in Symonolewicz's travelogue we also find a preface, in which his general views on China are introduced in a discursive way.

"This great territory of 7,111,000 square km—from The Great Wall to Indochina and from the borders of Tibet and Turkistan to the Eastern Seas—is populated by more than 400 million people of one race and one, immemorial and peculiar culture. Nevertheless, this uniformity scarcely helps Westerners understand China. On the contrary, in the world there is no other country which would be a greater riddle for foreigners (...). There are various reasons for it—difficulties in learning the language, especially hieroglyphic Chinese writing; different conditions of living; anarchy, which has prevailed in this country for a long time; extreme principle of "double face" towards foreigners; and, finally, special spiritual traits, typical for Mongoloid race, which are a total and glaring contrast with ours"^① (Symonolewicz 1938, 9).

In general terms, Symonolewicz's presentation of China is similar to Velimirović's—on the one hand, the greatness of the Chinese nation and peculiarity of its "immemorial" culture are stressed; on the other hand, both Polish and Serbian authors claim that China is a *terra incognita* for Europeans. A certain shift in focus should be noted. E. g., in the above quoted paragraph, Symonolewicz distinctively refers to the concept of race, a kind of discourse that appears in his book quite often. In Velimirović's work, this category is mentioned sporadically. What is even more important is that Symonolewicz writes from the perspective of one who has lived in China for 18 years. In contrast, Velimirović spent less than a year there. Nevertheless, both

① Na ogromnej przestrzeni 7.111.000 km kw. — od Wielkiego Muru do Indochin i od granic Tybetu i Turkiestanu do mórz wschodnich — mieści się czterysta kilkadziesiąt milionów ludzi jednej rasy i panuje jedna odwieczna i swoista kultura. Jednolitość ta w najmniejszej jednak mierze nie ułatwia ludziom Zachodu zrozumienia Chin, a odwrotnie — na całym świecie nie ma kraju, który by przedstawiał dla cudzoziemców większą zagadkę (...). składają się na to najróżnorodniejsze przyczyny, a więc — trudność należytego opanowania języka, zwłaszcza zaś hieroglificznego pisma chińskiego, odmienne od naszych warunków życia ludności, anarchia, od dłuższego czasu panująca w kraju, posunięta do krańcowości zasada podwójnego oblicza "wobec cudzoziemców, a wreszcie i specjalne cechy duchowe, właściwe rasie mongolskiej i stanowiące zupełny i rażący kontrast z naszymi".

call attention to the exotic character of Chinese culture, even though the Serbian author writes from the perspective of a traveller who enjoys immersion in an exotic culture even if sometimes this experience is so rich that he is “tired of impressions”^① and beauty (Velimirović 1930, 131), whereas the Polish author writes from the perspective of a resident who has difficulty doing his business because of cultural differences. One of his remarks is very significant: “I’ve gotten older and more experienced and through a pink haze of exoticism I started to see life and people as they [really] were”^② (Symonolewicz 1938, 197).

In both books, the notion “East” plays a significant role. This primary geographical term is used as a descriptive notion as well as an explanatory category for various phenomena. Generally, in the 19th and 20th century the notion “East” was used (and is quite often still used as such) as a buzzword to create a representation of otherness and provide an easy explanation for differences in daily life and culture (e. g. “Why is it like that? Because we are on the East”) (Said 1977; Kuźma 1980). The same could be said about the term “Asia” (Sekiguchi 2008). In using this term, the books of Symonolewicz and Velimirović are not exceptions. In describing China, sometimes they use the term “East” or “Eastern” as a buzzword. A few sentences may serve as examples: “It is a strange juxtaposing of Confucius’ moral philosophy, trader’s cunning and lack of elementary ethics, however, it is really like that and here we touch on the mysteries of the East”^③ (Symonolewicz 1938, 36); “Abruptness of a remark they’ve explained to themselves in an eastern way as a sign of power”^④ (Symonolewicz 1938, 107); “It is east-exotic taste, one of its kind”^⑤ (Velimirović 1930, 88); “[A traveller] sits pensively in a kiosk [a pavilion] and dreams a story of eastern phantasy”^⑥ (Velimirović 1930, 139). The notion “East” could have many meanings and is thus extremely vague. This term does not give real information about the object yet it creates an image of something strange and different from what is European.

To sum up, what has been said about Symonolewicz’s and Velimirović’s general views on the China can be distilled into one sentence: the Middle Kingdom is presented as a majestic and exotic country because of its greatness and ancient history and fascinating cultural differences.

① E. g. “Tired of impressions and walking, I came back to the bridge where a rickshaw was waiting for me (⋯) I don’t know why, but I felt that tomorrow I could not repeat this walk alone. Maybe because of that, everything is different, mystical, and impressions are so strong and a man alone takes them more deeply so in the end he is tired of them”. The original says: Umoran od utisaka i hoda vratio sam se mostu gde me je očekivao rikša (⋯). Ne znam zbog čega, ali osećao sam, da sutra dan, ne bih mogao ponoviti istu šetnju sam. Možda zbog toga, šje sve neobično, mistično, što su utisci i suviše jaki išihćovek u samoći prima dublje, da mu najzad postaje teško od njih (Velimirović 1930, 132). Compare similar statements on p. 137.

② Przybyło mi lat i doświadczenia i przez różową mgłę egzotyki zacząłem widzieć życie i ludzi takimi, jakimi byli w samej rzeczy.

③ Dziwna to mieszanka filozofii moralnej Konfucjusza ze sprytem handlowca i brakiem elementarnej etyki, ale tak jest i właśnie tu dotykamy jednej z zagadek Wschodu.

④ [⋯] ostrość uwagi wytłumaczyli sobie po wschodniemu jako objaw siły”.

⑤ To je istočno-egzotičan ukus, stil svoje vrste.

⑥ zamišljen sedi u nekom kiosku i da sanja priču istočne fantazije.

However, while talking about China's long history, the travellers also introduce a topic for the present time. While emphasizing cultural differences, the authors compare China with Europe. Last but not least, Velimirović's and Symonolewicz's ability to write about China was conditioned by Russian and/or more generally European expansion in China. The general views on China, discussed above, have their complement in the authors' outlook on Chinese-European contacts.

Writers' assessment of contacts between China and Europe

While pondering over Symonolewicz's and Velimirović's assessments of contacts between Europe and the Middle Kingdom, it should be emphasized that they are mostly occupied with the presence of Europeans in China. Velimirović claims that Europe "has borrowed many things" from China, and in this statement he does not think about colonial exploitation but about technological exchange (Velimirović 1930, 5), but in the course of writing his book he does not pay attention to this notion of mutual contacts. According to Symonolewicz's introduction, the Chinese treat Europeans as a "necessary evil", that is, as foreigners who possess technology, money and weapon. "The Chinese know that a foreigner has technological knowledge, and that even for the citizens of "The Land of Heaven" it is hard to do without it; [that a foreigner] has money, which the Chinese always lack, and especially that [a foreigner] has power in the form of a perfectly equipped army, battleships and cannons"^① (Symonolewicz 1938, 9). This formulation is particularly interesting, because it suggests that the Chinese benefited more from the European presence in China than colonial powers did from being present in China. Moreover, both authors hardly mention the historical contacts which took place prior to the opium wars. So, the general vision of relations between China and Europe is presented as that of one-way influence and exploitation. Of course, this is not historically accurate; still, it reflects the political situation and vital European ideology of the first half of the 20th century.

The most curious feature of the writers' assessment of Sino-European interactions is the fact that Symonolewicz and Velimirović are very critical towards "the Europeans" in general even though they describe individuals in different terms. In general, "the Europeans" are presented as violent and greedy exploiters. However, individual Europeans, Symonolewicz's and Velimirović's auto-portraits, are full of compassion and reverence towards China and its people.

Symonolewicz describes the behaviour of Europeans as wilful and disrespectful. The following scene is emblematic:

"One day during my first year in Beijing, I was coming back from horse races in a compa-

^① Chińczyk wie, że cudzoziemiec posiada wiedzę techniczną, bez której obecnie trudno obejść się nawet obywatelowi "Krainy Podniebnej", że ma pieniądze, których Chińczykowi stale brakuje, a zwłaszcza, że rozporządza siłą w postaci doskonale uzbrojonego wojska, pancerników i dział.

ny of a group of young foreigners. There were no free seats in the train which was leaving then. The simplest [solution] would be to wait half an hour for the next train; however, my friends decided on another way. Namely, by using force they entered an official carriage and seated themselves there despite protests from two serious Chinese, apparently higher officials. In the end, the two Chinese left the carriage indignantly and the company rode on to Beijing in a brilliant mood. This trivial yet significant example of lawlessness and lack of basic respect for local regulations made then a very unpleasant impression on me. However, later I became convinced that foreigners always treated the Chinese this way"^① (Symonolewicz 1938, 51).

Interestingly, the author emphasizes that he felt displeased, introducing a contrast here between himself and Europeans in general. As a conclusion to this episode, Symonolewicz writes that later many foreigners had to pay for their arrogance (especially Russians in Manchuria after the October Revolution when extritoriality was abolished). Once again, he singles himself out by giving an example of a situation in which he was praised by the Chinese crowd because he waited in line with everybody else (Symonolewicz 1938, 51-52).

Many examples of such critical attitude towards Europeans' behaviour in China can be found in Velimirović's travelogue. For instance, he presents the Chinese as victims of great powers' rivalry:

"How many Chinese were vanquished by the Russian-Japanese war?! Both the Russians and the Japanese were beating them, seeing in calm dwellers spies and in old people dangerous magicians. They were destroying Chinese temples, burning villages, and driving whole bunches of Chinese by bounding their queues into one knot, while such groups of cut heads were hanging on trees"^② (Velimirović 1930, 15-16).

Velimirović is also deeply moved by inequality in China:

"Even the lowest official—an European—gets a higher salary than the highest Chinese official in the customs bureau. Of course, the Chinese themselves give out the salary, and a white person had to be given a higher salary, as he has to live as a great lord in China. Often, white officials take part in smuggling or take advantage of it, and why should the Chinese like us after

① Pewnego razu. w pierwszym roku pobytu w Pekinie, wracałem z wyścigów w towarzystwie całego grona młodych cudzoziemców i w pociągu, który właśnie odchodził, nie było żadnego wolnego miejsca. Najprościej byłoby poczekać pół godziny do następnego pociągu, ale towarzysze moi zdecydowali inaczej. Mianowicie, przemocą weszli do wagonu służbowego i ulokowali się tam pomimo protestów dwóch poważnych Chińczyków — widocznie wyższych urzędników. W końcu oburzeni Chińczycy opuścili wagon i towarzystwo dojechało u' nim do Pekinu w doskonałych humorach. Drobnym, ale jaskrawym przykładem samowoli i braku elementarnego poszanowania miejscowych przepisów zrobił na mnie wtedy bardzo przykre wrażenie, później jednak przekonałem się, że cudzoziemcy w stosunku do Chińczyków zawsze zachowywali się zupełnie identycznie.

② Koliko je kineza progutao rusko-japanski rat?! Tukli su ih i rusi i japanci, koji su u mimim stanovnicima videlišpijune, a u starcima opasne vrašare. Rušili su kineske hramove, palili sela, teraličitave gomile kineza vezujući svima petine u jedan zajedničkišvor i takve grupe otsečenih glava vešali o staro drveće.

that and many, many other things?”^① (Velimirović 1930, 32).

These quoted words express not only Velimirović's critique of the European presence in China, but also his paradoxical identity. On the one hand, he identifies with his fellow Europeans (a pronoun “us” is used); on the other hand, he condemns the European behaviour in China. The strong disapproval of inequality and Western lawlessness is also present in his description of touristic collecting of souvenirs: “It is not perceived as stealing, because it is done for souvenir and, furthermore, it is taken from the Chinese. But what if a Chinese tries to take even a single flower from some European park”^② (Velimirović 1930, 17). However, Velimirović's condemnation does not prevent him from taking advantage of his position as a European in China, which is especially visible in his STORY ABOUT Hong Kong.

As was stated above, for both writers contacts between China and Europe are reduced to the European presence in China and the one-way influence of Western culture on the Middle Kingdom. Therefore, the last question which should be analysed is the writers' assessment of this influence. Symonolewicz is very critical towards westernization of China, which is clearly evident in his remarks about China's new elite, educated in western style, in his sketch of a modern history of Manchuria.

“(…) Idealistic individuals among them could be counted on the fingers of one hand. The rest of them skim the surface of life, aping superficial traits of foreigners and troubling themselves to familiarize themselves with the meaning of western civilisation. As a matter of fact, they had neither the necessary knowledge nor an adequate leadership; they remained (…) between the sky and the earth, alien both to the Chinese masses and foreigners, thus wasted and useless”^③ (Symonolewicz 1938, 190).

This negative assessment of western-style educated Chinese is supplemented with claims that modernisation in the European way actually destroys Chinese values and customs, for example, honesty in trade:

“Unreliable foreign traders corrupted the Chinese traders, so they have lost a lot from their honesty (…). The Western civilisation, imbuing China more and more, will probably eradicate this custom in the near future. It is a pity that good traits of this interesting nation are dying a-

① I najmanjičinovnik — Evropljanin, — prima veću platu od najvišeg kineskogčinovnika na carinarnici! Na-ravno, platu daju sami kinezi, a belcu se mora dati veća plata, jer on, u Kini, mora da živi kao veliki gospodin. Često belcičinovnici i sami učestvuju ušvercu ili ga iskoriste, i eto, sad zbog toga, i zbog mnogo, mnogo drugih stvari, treba kinezi da nas vole?!

② To se (…) ne smatra za krađu, jer je to radi uspomene, a posle, to se uzima od kineza. A neka proba samo neki kinez da otkine makar jedan cvet u nekom evropskom parku!

③ (…) wśród nich jednostki ideowe można było policzyć na palcach. Resztaślizgała się po powierzchni życia małpując zewnętrzne cechy cudzoziemców i nie zadając sobie fatygi zaznajomienia się z treścią cywilizacji zachodniej. Nie mieli zresztą ani potrzebnej wiedzy, ani odpowiedniego kierownictwa, pozostali więc (…) zawieszani między niebem i ziemią, obcy zarówno masom chińskim, jak i cudzoziemcom, a zatem jałowi i bezużyteczni.

long with superstitions. The bad example is always more contagious than good”^① (Symonolewicz 1938, 47).

It is important to note that criticism towards some aspects of China’s modernisation does not necessarily mean negative attitudes towards western civilisation in general. On the contrary, according to Symonolewicz the technological and cultural achievements of European countries are valuable, but the problem lies in the way they are absorbed by the Middle Kingdom. The Polish writer claims that the Chinese do not for the most part “familiarize themselves with the meaning of Western civilisation”; instead, they only try to superficially acquire European technology and power. This reluctance to embrace foreign cultures is attributed to Chinese conservatism:

“Immemorial culture has armoured its children against all attempts to limit its infallibility. While [looking] through the prism of its outlook [Chinese culture’s] many things could be interesting and necessary in foreign countries, but what is one’s own is closer and more logical”^② (Symonolewicz 1938, 39-40).

Interestingly enough, this critical assessment of one’s possibility to understand other cultures could also be recognized in Symonolewicz’s use of the notion “East”. The Polish author writes about China with love and interest; however, he clearly states that European culture is closer to him and “more logical”, even if he vehemently criticises Europeans’ activities in China and the bad influence of European customs on the Chinese culture. It could be said that Symonolewicz’s implicit conception of civilisation owes much to the 19th century discussions of purity and hybridity (Young 1995) and the Herderian concept of cultural relativism. While writing on international marriages, he twice refers in a very significant way to the East and the West as ‘polar opposites’: “It was two polar opposites—the East and the West”; “the poles remain poles and nothing can be done about it”^③ (Symonolewicz 1938, 93, 97). Symonolewicz is not a chauvinist, he does not share the assumption of European superiority, but simply claims that cultures are relative and differences between them cannot be alleviated. That is why the European influence in China can only bring forth bad fruits. Symonolewicz is in general quite sceptical towards the idea of intercultural communication or the concept which in today’s language could be referred to as transculturalism, i. e. cultures are not perceived as pure holistic essences so that the notion of blurred and overlapping cultural borders is emphasized (Dagnino 2012, 13). In the aforementioned introduction, he clearly states thus: “It is

① “Niesumienni kupcy cudzoziemscy mocno zdeprawowali kupiectwo chińskie i obecnie straciło ono wiele ze swojej uczciwości. (...) Cywilizacja zachodnia, coraz bardziej przenikająca do Chin, prawdopodobnie w niedalekiej przyszłości zupełnie wypieni ten obyczaj. Szkoda jednak, że równocześnie z przesądami giną również i dobre cechy tego ciekawego narodu. Zły przykład bowiem zawsze jest zarazliwszy od dobrego”.

② “Odwieczna kultura dobrze opancerzyła swoje dzieci przeciwko wszelkim zamachom na swoją nieomyślność przez przyzmat jej poglądów za granicą mogło być wiele rzeczy potrzebnych i ciekawych, ale wszystko swoje wydawało się logiczniejsze i bliższe”.

③ “Były to bowiem dwa bieguny — Wschód i Zachód”; “Bieguny pozostają biegunami i nic na to poradzić nie można”.

possible to achieve mental contact with the Chinese but only after long and considerable efforts; furthermore, this contact will be based more on mutual liking rather than real mutual understanding”^① (Symonolewicz 1938, 9). However, he writes about his Chinese friends with a positive tinge and devotes the last pages of his book to his servant Wang, touting him as one example of a real friend: “(…) with a certain measure of good will, even the biggest racial, mental and social differences do not rule out mutual understanding and even friendship”^② (Symonolewicz 1938, 215). So, as it was mentioned above, Symonolewicz thinks differently about cultures than about individuals^③.

Velimirović's outlook on China's modernisation with the use of European knowledge is more positive. Using rhetoric typical of 19th century European nationalism, he writes about the “awakening” of China (Velimirović 1930, 75, 156). For him, individuals who are engaged in this process are patriots and idealists (Velimirović 1930, 127, 156). For the Serbian author, the introduction of European technology and institution will bring great progress to China's economy. He admires the works of Chinese artisans, but at the same time poses a question regarding possible development: “They [are able to] do all this in small stands with their own hands and primitive instruments. And a man asks oneself—what if a school, excellent tools, technology and chemistry were introduced”^④ (Velimirović 1930, 192). He makes also one very interesting point about the European “settlements”, which were in fact occupied territories:

“Foreigners live and enjoy, and the Chinese work and serve. But who knows, their [Chinese] calculations are long and far. After the war [First World War], the German settlement passed into their hands, the Germans left, actually were driven away, and when [the Chinese] were seeing them off, maybe they were thinking that there's bound to be a day of reckoning for the rest of foreigners. And everything that has been created stays in their [Chinese] country”^⑤ (Velimirović 1930, 37-38).

In this sentence, the popular view about the long and ancient history of Chinese culture is

① “Z Chińczykiem moż na dojść do pewnego kontaktu duchowego dopiero po dłu ższym czasie i w wyniku znacznych wysiłków, a w dodatku kontakt ten będzie jednak więcej oparty na wzajemnej sympatii, niż na rzeczywistym obopólnym zrozumieniu”.

② “(…) przy pewnej dozie dobrej woli największe różnice rasowe, umysłowe i społeczne nie wykluczają wzajemnego zrozumienia, a nawet przyjaźni”.

③ Symonolewicz's conviction that The poles remain poles and nothing can be done with it” and its contrast in remarks about Wang resemble famous refrain of Kipling's ballad “The Ballad of East and West”: Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, / Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat; / But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!”.

④ “(…) sve to oni rade u malim niskim dućančićima, i to svojim rukama i primitivnim instrumentima. I nehotice set ovek pita —šta bi tek bilo, kad bi se u sve to unelaškola, savršeni alati, tehnika i hemija!

⑤ “(…) stranci žive i uživaju, a kinezi rade i služe kao hranljiva podloga za tuđince. Samo ko zna, njihovi su računici na veliko, na daleko. Posle rata je nemački setlemenat prešao u njihove ruke, Nemei su otišli upravo oterani su, i kad su ih ispratili, možda su i mislili daće i na ostale doći red? A svešše stvori sve to ostaje u njihovoj zemlji.

used, and implicitly backed by historical knowledge of China's assimilation of conquering nations in the past. Current European presence in the Middle Kingdom could be, according to Velimirović, just a brief chapter in the long history of this nation and it could even be used by the Chinese to modernise their country. Similar to Symonolewicz, Velimirović agrees that the Chinese need European technology and money. However, he does not present it as something crafty (as Symonolewicz does) and he does not criticise those Chinese who acquire European customs. Probably, the most important reason for this discrepancy is the fact that Velimirović did not have to face as many problems as Symonolewicz, who lived in China for 18 years and had to struggle with some corrupted officials wearing European suits. The former writes more from the point of view of a tourist, the latter from that of a diplomat. What is also important is that Symonolewicz was living in Northern China, in Beijing and Manchuria. Velimirović writes about the modernisation of China after his journey to Southern China and he is very excited about lively Guangzhou. However, the different concepts of cultural relativism, which are present in Velimirović's work, should also be taken into account^①. First, with the example of cuisine the principle of relativism and equality is introduced: "Maybe many dishes could be disgusting or at least strange, but also on our own, in Europe, frogs and oysters are eaten, as well as stinky and mouldy, even wormy cheese"^② (Velimirović 1930, 31). Velimirović claims that a lot of things are strange in China, but they are not simply weird and funny, they are also thought-provoking (Velimirović 1930, 40). It would seem that the implicit concept of relations between cultures and civilisations can be described using the aforementioned concept of transculturalism. Emblematic is the following scene:

"We were drinking tea and talking about trade. It was unusual and simply funny that I, a Serb from Pirot (a city in southern Serbia) and medic, sit with an experienced Chinese trader and we talk about trade and business opportunities in Mongolia, where we should go after a few days. And it was in his house somewhere close to Beijing, as a guest and a person to whom he was speaking frankly, using a mixture of languages; at that moment I really wanted somebody to film it so I could see later how I looked like. In the evening, while I was coming home, I seemed to myself unusual and strange"^③ (Velimirović 1930, 152).

In the territories where Velimirović travelled, various cultural and economic influences (Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Mongolian, and so forth) overlapped. Using Pratt's terminolo-

① Compare Gvozden (2011, 229 - 230).

② "Možda bi mnoga jela kod nas izazvala odvratnost ili barućenje, ali i kod nas u Evropi jedužabe i ostrice, smrdljiv i buđav, pa i crvljiv sir".

③ Pili smo nezasađeničaj i razgovarali o trgovini. Bilo mi je neobično i prosto smešno da ja Srbin-piroćanac i medicinar, sedim sa kinezom oprobanim trgovcem i razgovaram o trgovačkim stvarima, o trgovačkim i poslovnim prilikama u Mongoliji kuda za nekoliko dana treba da se krenemo. I to u njegovoj kući negde oko Pekinga, kao gost i ličnost, kojoj on na nekoj mešavini od jezika govori ozbiljno. U tom momentu mnogo samželeo da nas neko snimi, pa da vidim posle kakav sam izgledao. Vraćajući se kući predveće, sam sam se sebičinio neobičan ičudnovat.

gy, such a sphere may be called a contact zone^①, and in such an environment transcultural phenomena might be observed. In our case, the traveller, Velimirović himself, is neither Russian nor Chinese, and definitely not Mongolian; he is Serbian. As the above-quoted words show, the stay in contact zone changes his identity, even in the professional (a medic talks about trade) and linguistic (they speak using a mixture of languages) domains. Velimirović sees that in his own transformation, he is not a simple Serb from Pirot anymore. He himself becomes an example of the meeting of “polar opposites” in Symonolewicz’s writings. Evidently, the concept of culture in his writing is quite different from that in Symonolewicz’s and it could be one of the factors behind the more positive assessment of China’s absorption of European culture in the Serbian author’s book.

However, what is similar in both authors’ thinking is their assessment of China’s future. They both claim that China will avoid the fate of occidentalisation, and that the current situation is only one episode in the long history of China. Velimirović writes:

“(The Chinese nation) is waking up and starting to live and work. It will have a lot of domestic and foreign shocks and problems, but for sure it will not end up like India or Africa. For now, they all work, talk politics, live. Factories are being constructed, railways are being built, modern schools are being set up and the achievements of European science are being adopted”^② (Velimirović 1930, 156).

The Serbian author emphasizes modernising efforts and claims that after all its troubles China will achieve strength and greatness once again. A similar mix of optimism about the general outlook on China’s future with a certain degree of uncertainty in terms of specific events could be found in Symonolewicz’s epilogue:

“My desire was to debunk a recently popular legend about petrification of Chinese spiritual culture and future occidentalisation of the Chinese. From my point of view, it is out of the question. The development of ancient Chinese culture was halted only because of abnormal conditions in the country, but it is only a temporary break. In this development, western influences could play a role in stimulating progress, but it (development) will take place independently

① “Contact zone refers to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. It is also an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. The term ‘contact’ thus foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travellers and ‘travelees,’ not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understanding and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 2011).

② “(Kineska nacija) Sad se budi i počinje daživi i radi. Imaće mnogo trzavica i teškoća i unutra i spolja, ali sigurno neće ga postići sudbina Indije ili Afrike. Za sad svi rade, stvaraju, politiziraju, žive... Niču fabrike, grade seželeznice, dižu se moderneskele i osvajaju se tekovine evropske nauke”.

and in ways that are peculiar to China, which currently are difficult to predict”^① (Symonowicz 1938, 217-218).

Those similar conclusions by both authors also prove that they were acute observers and real enthusiasts. Of course, their travelogues are somewhat ideologically limited (e.g. they both present contacts between Europe and China as having only a one-way influence). But according to Stephan Greenblatt, every cultural practise is structured by and within social forces of constraint (Greenblatt 2006, 146). Thanks to their background and personal qualities, both avoid chauvinism and were able not only to recognize the greatness of China’s past, but also see the seeds of future development even in times of internal struggles that came to characterise China in the 1920s.

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① “Pragnąłem choć w części obalić bardzo ostatnio rozpowszechnioną legendę o skamieniałości chińskiej kultury duchowej i o przyszej okeydentalizacji Chińczyków. Według mnie — mowy o tym być nie może. Rozwój prastarej kultury chińskiej został zahamowany wskutek nienormalnych warunków w kraju, ale jest to tylko przerwa czasowa. Wpływy Zachodu mogą w dalszym procesie tego rozwoju odegrać rolę podniecającego zastrzyku, ale odbywać się on będzie samodzielnie i samoistnie drogami, które obecnie przewidzieć trudno zarówno nam, jak i samym Chińczykom”.

Wiek. Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Szczecinie.

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