

FROM ANTIQUITY
TO MODERNITY

STUDIES ON MIDDLE EASTERN
AND ASIAN SOCIETIES

Asia in the Mirror



*Self-Representations, Self-Narratives,
and Perception of the Other*

EDITED BY

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“Asia in the Mirror offers a bold and necessary reframing of Asian studies by situating the continent not as a singular object of knowledge but as a site of intersecting gazes, representations, and epistemic dislocations. Drawing on postcolonial critique, comparative philology, and cultural theory, the volume triangulates self-perception, otherness, and Western reception to interrogate how Asia has been imagined, translated, and contested. In doing so, it provincializes Eurocentric methodologies, foregrounds plural and situated knowledges, and reorients the study of Asia as a dialogic, reflexive, and critically entangled enterprise.”

—**Deven M. Patel**, University of Pennsylvania

As Asia's role in world politics becomes increasingly central, a deeper understanding of the cultural underpinnings of its global entanglements is urgent and overdue. What defines Asia from a cultural perspective? How has Asia represented itself and its diversity to both Asian audiences and different cultures? How has Asia represented other cultures and how, in turn, how has it been presented by them? How have contacts between Asia and other cultures shaped the continent? What is the role of postcolonial and decolonial approaches in enhancing our understanding of Asia and its relationships to other parts of the world in the past and in the present? *Asia in the Mirror* tries to address these questions through a multidisciplinary approach, bringing together scholars in literary studies, philology, and media studies working across multiple languages and cultures.

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General Editor

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Alessandro Achilli, Fiorenzo Iuliano,
Angela Daiana Langone, Emma Lupano, and
Valentina Serra (eds.), with the assistance of
Mittal M. Trivedi

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Emma Lupano, Valentina Serra, and authors

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>List of Tables</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
Asia in the Mirror: An Introduction	xv
<i>Alessandro Achilli, Fiorenzo Iuliano, Angela Daiana Langone, Emma Lupano, and Valentina Serra</i>	

PART I: ASIA AND ITSELF

1	Ancient Mesopotamian Civilization and its Heritage in Modern Iraq. Perceptions and Modern Representations <i>Lucia Avallone and Giuliano Mion</i>	3
2	<i>Bāšā</i> : New Uses of a “Middle Eastern” Term <i>Cristiana Bozza</i>	21
3	Telling Stories of the Communist Party of China: Constructing the Soft Power of Model Cadres <i>Natalia Francesca Riva</i>	39

4	Comparative Analysis of Textual and Visual Contents on Saudi Tourism Instagram Pages <i>Elisa Gugliotta</i>	59
5	Locating Asia in the Russian-Language Poetry of the Fergana School from Uzbekistan: Hamdam Zakirov between the “East” and Europe <i>Alessandro Achilli</i>	85
PART II: ASIA AND THE OTHER		
6	“Otherness” in Classical Chinese Literary Sources: The Animal and the Representation of the “Barbarian” <i>Francesca Puglia</i>	107
7	Who is the Foreigner? Delimiting Boundaries before and after the Encounter with the Greeks in Ancient India <i>Maria Piera Candotti, Alessandro Giudice, and Tiziana Pontillo</i>	125
8	Reconsidering <i>Mahābhārata</i> References to Rome and the Romans <i>Diletta Falqui</i>	153
9	The Chinese Representation of Venice. Ideal and Real Visions in Chinese Sources from the Seventeenth through the Twentieth Century <i>Daniele Beltrame</i>	171
10	Call for Our Saint Jeanne d’Arc: Jeanne d’Arc in Late Qing and Republican China (from the 1910s to the 1940s) <i>Wenxin Jin</i>	189
11	Travel Writing in Modern Sanskrit Literature: London, Paris, and Other Cities in the Mirror of Travel Accounts <i>Lidia Sudyka</i>	205
12	Encounters in West Asia: Perceptions and Self-Representations of Jordan and Saudi Arabia <i>Miriam Al Tawil and Fabian Spitaler</i>	227

13	Representing the Chinese Self and the Foreign Other in China's English-Language Press Editorials <i>Lutgard Lams</i>	245
14	The Literary Movement of Translation in the United Arab Emirates. Some Remarks on the Kalima Project <i>Angela Daiana Langone</i>	261
PART III: ASIA AS THE OTHER		
15	The Morality of Confucius on the European Stage: Between Chinoiserie and the Representation of "the Other" <i>Alessandro Tosco</i>	281
16	<i>Ex Oriente Lux, Ex Occidente Lex</i> : Three Ways to (Mis) understand Japanese Legal Culture <i>Mate Paksy</i>	301
17	"All Things Oriental:" Visions of the Far East in Amy Lowell's Poetry <i>Anna Cadoni</i>	319
18	Yusuf Idris Goes East: Asia as a Mirror for Egypt <i>Cristina Dozio</i>	335
	<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	353
	<i>Index</i>	359

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	The Freedom Monument in Tahrir Square.	13
Figure 1.2	Faeq Hassan, <i>The History of Iraq</i> .	15
Figure 1.3	Muhammad Ghani Hikmat, <i>Saving Iraqi Culture</i> .	16
Figure 4.1	Context error: “dirt” instead of “desert”.	66
Figure 4.2	Context error: “beach” instead of “sandy desert”.	66
Figure 4.3	Object error: “umbrella” falsely detected.	66
Figure 4.4	Object error: “dirt bike” misclassified.	66
Figure 4.5	Keeping model’s focus.	67
Figure 4.6	Keeping caption’s syntax.	68
Figure 4.7	Keeping model’s lexicon.	68
Figure 4.8	Example of model lexicon.	69
Figure 4.9	Clustering of Arabic natural texts.	72
Figure 4.10	K-means clustering on BERT embeddings for image captioning.	75
Figure 4.11	Clustering of natural and generated texts for both languages.	76
Figure 4.12	Clustering of natural and artificial texts of the Arabic page contents.	77

Figure 4.13	Clustering of natural and artificial texts of the English page contents.	77
Figure 10.1	Clément de Fauquembergue, Joan of Arc in the Protocol of the Parliament of Paris, May 10, 1429, manuscript drawing, French National Archive, Paris, < https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Contemporaine_afb_jeanne_d_arc.png >	196
Figure 10.2	<i>Joan of Arc</i> , ca. fifteenth century, miniature, French National Archive, Paris, < https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joan_of_Arc_miniature_graded.jpg >	197
Figure 14.1	Books translated in the Kalima project.	264
Figure 14.2	Source languages.	264
Figure 14.3	Genres.	265
Figure 14.4	The most translated authors.	268

List of Tables

Table 4.1	Numbers of Saudi Arabia Self-Narrative Dataset (SAND).	63
Table 4.2	Error analysis of SAND automatically generated captions.	65
Table 4.3	Example of context and object errors in captioning images from the English page.	66
Table 4.4	Outline of the analysis carried out on SAND.	70
Table 4.5	Results on Natural SAND Texts, both in English and Arabic.	71
Table 4.6	Word Frequencies per Clusters for Natural Texts of Both Languages.	72
Table 4.7	Comparison of Arabic and English combined clustering (Natural Texts + Image Captions) by evaluating Word Frequencies in TF-IDF.	78

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Asia in the Mirror: An Introduction

ALESSANDRO ACHILLI, FIORENZO IULIANO,
ANGELA DAIANA LANGONE, EMMA LUPANO, AND
VALENTINA SERRA

Asia(s), Europe(s), and Our Many Others

In 2008 Gayatri Spivak published a collection of essays under the suggestive—and somehow challenging—title of *Other Asias*. This title, along with the author's foreword, poses several questions about the very object of the book: what is Asia? Why does Spivak insist on the need for a plural noun so as to grasp (at least tentatively) that complex and multifaceted world which for centuries we have generally labeled as Asia? Spivak's book draws on the legacy of postcolonial studies, a field that from the late 1970s onward has reflected on how colonialism shaped the Western knowledge of the so-called third world and globally informed the cultural and political scenario once the former colonial states had obtained their independence. Her book interrogates the position and the role of the humanities with regard to a notion that even postcolonial studies had left untouched: the identity of the continent which, for centuries, has functioned as a rich repository for economies of both commodities and imagination. The very idea of many, contradictory Asias, whose nations and borders cannot even be defined, requires other approaches for its study, probably more imaginative and open to contaminations than the ones that have always been used in the field of humanities.

Spivak points out how bizarre our conventional definition of Asia must look like: Asia is the continent where exotic dreams and fantasies have been cast for centuries. Its extreme borders are, however, occupied by two “absurdities,” she remarks, namely, Israel and Japan: “Japan has stepped into the Asia-Pacific for me. Israel sticks like a thorn in the side of other Asias” (11). A continent consisting of so many countries that hardly bear any resemblance to each other, and whose extreme borders are, rightly or wrongly, perceived as closer to the Global North than to other Asian countries, is still identified as a single, albeit differentiated, signifier. The origins of this signifier must be traced back to the history of empire-building, as Amitav Acharya points out: “Asia in many ways was an invention of colonialism” (Acharya 2010, 32). Such an invention goes back to ancient Greece’s confrontations with its eastern rivals. On the other hand, Prasenjit Duara remarks that between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, alternative, competing ideas of Asia as a more or less unitarian cultural and political space were part of the struggle undertaken by Asian nations against European colonial powers, with intellectuals like Okakura Tenshin, Rabindranath Tagore, and Zhang Taiyan working to advocate the emancipation of Asian culture(s), and foregrounding the unity of Asia as an essential practical and epistemological instrument to achieve this goal (2010, 969).

The investigative process that Spivak develops in her essays originates in the idea of “othering” meant not simply as a synonym for plurality, but as an investment in epistemic discontinuity. This not only implies mobilizing multiple perspectives on that patchwork of countries, languages, and cultures that we still call Asia—in the singular. It also requires us to reflect on the gaps that our apparatuses of knowledge can neither fill nor bridge in their attempt to provide a comprehensive understanding of the whole continent as a single epistemic object. These gaps are quite diverse: many Asias require just as many—and even contrasting or contradictory—approaches and methodologies. Many Asias also require multiple and diversified perspectives that question the supremacy of the Western apparatuses of knowledge and of their ability to provide interpretive and methodological grids for their objects. Finally, many Asias also pose a challenge to the privileged Western eye/I and its claims to universalism. There can no longer be a Western sovereign subject that looks at Asia and tries to provide it with its own rationale. First, because the West itself has discovered its inner contradictions, fractures, and lacerations that prevent any univocal and unidirectional gaze from being exerted upon any presumed object of knowledge. Second, because the numerous Asias that the Western gaze has for centuries tried to merge into one single object have, in turn, gazed upon the observing subject each and every time, questioning its

authority and its alleged universal stance. And finally, because these many Asias have also been looking at each other for centuries, their territories and cultures have continuously come into contact, and their maps have frequently overlapped.

Accordingly, the end of Western epistemic supremacy over the rest of the world has long been debated. In his introduction to the 2004 edition of the volume titled *Europe and Asia Beyond East and West*, Gerard Delanty reasons that the very idea of the West is now inadequate. In his view, “with the spread of Western civilization throughout the world, that civilization has ceased to be Western, but has become globalized” (Delanty 2004, 1). For Delanty, who approached these issues from the point of view of European Studies, “there is an unavoidable recognition that neither self nor other are easily defined” (2), which led him to pursue a kind of research that “addresses the possibility of a European–Asian cosmopolitanism that is not constrained by the dangers of Eurocentric ‘Orientalism’ or anti-European ‘Occidentalism’” (2). Cosmopolitanism, however, risks reproducing the limits of old multiculturalism, implying the existence of a privileged subject of knowledge whose authority is grounded in a well-defined social and cultural background, someone who is usually white and upper-middle class, educated, and who possesses adequate financial and cultural capital.

This book originates from a project conducted at the University of Cagliari and a conference hosted in Cagliari in March 2024. Both the research and the conference intended to explore representations of Self and Other in specific contexts related to different areas of Asia. Our aim was to analyze the cultural, literary, and linguistic manifestations along with the conflicting dynamics occurring in the construction of complex identities, working from three different perspectives: how Asia represents itself, how it narrates the other, and how it is perceived as the Other. In doing so, the essays presented in this book and the project which has facilitated their composition and consolidation into a collective narrative share Delanty’s plea for a new approach to Asia, Europe, and global cultural and political entanglements. Such an approach takes cognizance of both the need for a philologically grounded study of cultures in their national dimension and the transnational outlook that can enable a deeper understanding of their interactions and reciprocal influences. In conducting our project, we were well aware that our roots in European academia cannot but influence our scholarly approaches and our outlooks. While putting Asia at the center of our concerns, we have tried to avoid the risk of essentializing its nature both in the present and in the past. In dealing with these debates, we have thus constantly tried to observe and question our unavoidable familiarity with, and dependence on, Western scholarly methodologies. As Dipesh Chakrabarty states in his seminal work *Provincializing Europe*,

“European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought—which is now everybody’s heritage and which affect us all—may be renewed from and for the margins” (Chakrabarty 2000, 16). The subject matter of this book is accordingly a fertile breeding ground for fostering further reflections in this area.

A way out of the many contradictions we were grappling with while putting together this book was the use of the mirror as the metaphor for our research and, more broadly, for the numerous and conflicting perspectives with which this book aims to engage. For these many reasons we agreed that the mirror was the metaphor that best suited our efforts. The mirror has often functioned as a metaphor for new possible epistemic approaches, and not simply because it supplies a perfect replica of the “real” world. In fact, when we look at ourselves in the mirror, someone else is looming in the reflected image, both observing us in our self-discovery exercise and modifying the reflected picture of ourselves that others may apprehend. The mirror, thus, is the open field in which multiple gazes, coming from different and even distant subjects, converge and cross each other. When Asians look at themselves in the mirror, their reflected images also include other subjects that undermine that very Eurocentrism which for centuries has significantly affected our epistemic practices as both scholars and human beings acting in the world. Thus, the mirror denies the existence of an original Asia: any allegedly pure object of knowledge already finds itself marred by the very gazes that have produced it as an object of knowledge, bearing on its surface the traces of multiple projections, doubts, and inquiries. In *Sade Fourier Loyola*, Roland Barthes refers to the mirror as the instrument that the West has traditionally used to nurture its narcissism and strengthen its power position (Barthes 1976, 138). Yet, as Willard McCarty put it with reference to the use of this device in classical culture, “like metaphor itself, mirroring both identifies and separates” (1989, 162). The mirror, therefore, elicits interpretations but also questions the authority of any such interpretation. It creates connections and foregrounds distance at the same time. However, in line with the identities that they show and duplicate, the meanings and the effects of mirroring should not themselves be essentialized. Focusing on Kierkegaard and Rorty vs. Zhuangzi and Xunzi, two classics of ancient Chinese philosophy, Erin M. Cline has underlined the different meanings of the mirror metaphors in Western and Chinese thought, inviting scholars to avoid forcefully assimilating cultural trends that may reflect contrasting traditions and perspectives. According to Cline (2008, 317–18), while both traditions make use of the mirror as a metaphor, they do so in ways that call for

a heightened awareness of divergences in the sense and connotations that metaphors can acquire and engender.

Accordingly, mirrors reflect our objects of analysis reminding us of their differences and distance and of the technologies of (epistemic) power and sovereignty that have for centuries framed the images of the East that we have elaborated on and idealized as pure and original. This intersection of multiple gazes, we hope, could question the authoritativeness of the Western eye, in which what was once called the “third world” is still sometimes caught as an object of scrutiny. The mirrors that reflect the many Asias of our book, conversely, wish to “reduce the objectifying gaze that reconfirms the sovereignty” of the Western subject, triggering and encouraging “a process that is simultaneously provocative and pedagogical” (Chambers 2017, 92).

The use of the mirror as a metaphor for the relationships between the (Western) eye/I and its more or less objectified (Eastern) other is not new. Among the scholars who have pointed out how misleading such an approach could be, the significant words that Homi Bhabha wrote in the essay “Interrogating Identity” have repeatedly resonated with us at every stage of this project. In fact, Bhabha extensively comments on the position of postmodern thought with regard to the othering of Asia. He argues:

What is profoundly unresolved, even erased, in the discourses of poststructuralism is that *perspective of depth* through which the authenticity of identity comes to be reflected in the glassy metaphors of the mirror and its mimetic or realist narratives. Shifting the frame of identity from the field of vision to the space of writing interrogates the third dimension that gives profundity to the representation of Self and Other—that depth of perspective that cineastes call the forth wall. (Bhabha 1994, 48)

What we can define as the trouble with postcoloniality—whose complicity with poststructuralism Bhabha implicitly denounces—is the erasure of the language of the self. For instance, when I see the image of the Other reflected in the mirror I tend to ignore the context that the frame encasing it is *my* frame, and that the form in which the image of the other is reflected derives from, and still depends on, my epistemic grids. Bhabha’s words encourage us to wonder about this crucial issue: whose mirror are we using to look at the reflected images of Asia or Asias? The awareness that we are inevitably translating what we call the real into our own language is, at the same time, the limit and the strength of the mirror as a metaphor for our epistemic effort. When we look at the numerous Asias we see reflected in the mirror we are also forced to look at the precariousness of our epistemic instruments, and, as a consequence, reminded of the partiality

of any attempt to fully grasp our supposed objects of knowledge. We are thus reminded also of the precariousness of our position as subjects whose knowledge is grounded in the north of the world and in the legacy of European tradition. While we cannot simply reject our situatedness as subjects and pretend that it simply does not matter, we can accept its partiality as an instrument that allows us to appreciate the pluriversal nature of the present world. In fact, a world that is tentatively understood as pluriversal rather than simply—and simplistically—global requires multiple perspectives to address the same objects and even to question and undermine itself. Any inquiry must bear the traces of the provisionality of its conclusions.

The extent to which the many differences at play in the book may be used to contrast Eastern vs. Western is up for debate and has been investigated with caution. What clearly emerges from such conversations is that scholarly metaphors and comparative studies should constantly question their own premises, methodologies, and conclusions. This awareness informs all the chapters of this volume, reminding us of the presence of the other(s)’ gaze in any attempt at self-understanding.

Asia and Itself

In line with the three research questions that have guided us throughout the project, the book is divided into three parts, each of which adopts different points of view to analyze the image of Asia and/or its other(s) in culture, literature, and media. In the first part, titled “Asia and Itself” we explore how Asia has looked at itself, both at the microlevel of single states and (trans-)national cultures and as a continent and a space united by a certain extent of communality. Geographically speaking, this part includes the Arab world, contemporary China, and former-Soviet Central Asia.

“Ancient Mesopotamian Civilization and its Heritage in Modern Iraq. Perceptions and Modern Representations” by **Lucia Avallone** and **Giuliano Mion** questions how Iraq, an Arab country with a long-standing historical tradition of different cultures, perceives itself. Building on Assmann’s notion of collective memory (1992), the authors show how modern Iraqi art and literature have used history to forge a national identity that conceives of Iraq as the direct and natural heir of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations.

In her contribution “Bāšā: New Uses of a ‘Middle Eastern’ Term,” **Cristiana Bozza** analyzes the evolution of the word *bāšā* from an inherited honorific to new

meanings based on interviews with native speakers from the Mashreq countries. The history of this widely diffused term mirrors that of the Middle East over the last few centuries and has been shaped by both self-perception and the perception of the Other(s).

Natalia Francesca Riva's study "Telling Stories of the Communist Party of China: Constructing the Soft Power of Model Cadres" engages with how China represents itself through multiple-platform storytelling that is aimed at fostering internal socio-political stability and national unity. Based on Critical Discourse Studies, her chapter traces the "crafting, recrafting, and circulation of the collective memory" in the discursive construction of model Party cadres by looking at the case of the "Spirit of Jiao Yulu." The investigation shows both the constant need of the Communist Party of China for models that can justify its legitimacy and aggregate consensus, and the Party's commitment to ensuring that consistent themes and messages are spread across the media. By instrumentally using exemplary historical figures as an incarnation of the Party's heroic image—more generally, by telling stories of the CPC—the author argues that the Party builds collective memory that supports its governance and fabricates national identity, while also projecting a positive image of itself internationally.

The chapter titled "Comparative Analysis of Textual and Visual Contents on Saudi Tourism Instagram Pages" by Elisa Gugliotta aims to investigate Saudi Arabia's self-representation in its current tourist promotion policy, focusing on the distinct strategies used to engage both Arab and non-Arab tourists. Through a cluster analysis of social media pages, the author analyzes the communication strategies employed by the Saudi Tourism Authority to show how the country tailors its promotional content to address the different expectations of these two target audiences.

In "Locating Asia in the Russian-Language Poetry of the Fergana School from Uzbekistan: Hamdam Zakirov Between the 'East' and Europe," Alessandro Achilli points out some important theoretical, methodological, and practical issues of Russophone cultures from Central Asia. The chapter focuses on post-Soviet Russophone poetry from Uzbekistan, particularly the so-called Fergana School, whose aim was to make Uzbek culture communicate with Western modernism, while also distancing itself from Russian culture. Even though the poetry of the Fergana School relies on the Russian language and Western literary models, it is rooted in a space that is local and typical. The works of Grigorii Kohelet, Abdulla Khaidar, and Hamdam Zakirov analyzed in this chapter convey/introduce a contradictory image of Central Asia, torn between self-orientalization and the will to overcome its colonial subjugation to Russian and Soviet culture.

Achilli, therefore, reveals the mechanisms of meaning underlying the understanding of the fundamental role of the cultural interaction between Asia and Europe.

Asia and the Other

The second part, titled “Asia and the Other,” questions the many ways in which Asian cultures have dealt with their several others in both the past and the present. With chapters that span a large and diverse set of epochs and places, from ancient China and India to the United Arab Emirates, this is the longest part in the entire volume.

Classical Chinese literary sources are at the center of the analysis in “Otherness’ in classical Chinese literary sources: the animal and the representation of the ‘barbarian’” by **Francesca Puglia**, which explores the oppositional self-identification of the “Chinese” with respect to the peoples at the borders of the heartland of the Zhou 周 world first, and of the Chinese Empire later, after the unification in 221 BC. She observes that cultural diversity—that is, the cultural inferiority of others—is central to the Chinese perception of ethno-racial characteristics and is connected to the dehumanization of the barbarian peoples. But while the non-Han were lowered to a non-human level due to their behavioral and linguistic incompetence, this culture-based distinction fueled the inclusivity of the concept of “Chineseness.” Unlike othering practices based on (un-changeable) ethno-racial characteristics, the cultural changeability of the non-Chinese people makes it possible for the barbarians to become sinicized (and therefore humans) under the influence of the superior Chinese culture. The study also highlights that this interpretation is rooted in cosmological theories, which influenced a strand of anomaly tales, a literary genre that developed in the declining phase of the Han 漢 Dynasty. In these texts, especially in stories of metamorphosis into humans, the animal is often found to metaphorically represent non-sinicized people seeking integration into Chinese territories through cultural refinement.

The chapter “Who is the Foreigner? Delimiting Boundaries Before and After the Encounter with the Greeks in Ancient India” by **Alessandro Giudice**, **Maria Piera Candotti**, and **Tiziana Pontillo** analyzes how the Greeks (and the Indo-Greeks) changed the Indian conception of the foreigner through inclusive strategies. The chapter focuses on the conception of the Greeks as foreigners in the Indian sources subsequent to the expeditions of Alexander the Great and the Indo-Greeks, on the basis of several layers of the *Mahābhārata* and the Dharmasāstric texts. The authors analyze the importance given to the dharmic society

in the construction of the core of the kingdom and how the inclusion of foreigners became an urgent task. The texts analyzed show, on the one hand, a pluralistic vision of the realm in which the sovereign adheres to a different, more ancient, and more universal dharma that allows him to manage both the foreigners within his realm and the relationships with allied kingdoms. On the other hand, in some other, later texts, diversity becomes a moral parameter and its destructive potential in a rigidly regulated society based on the four dharmic classes, and social complexity is relegated to the rank of an impure mixture.

Continuing with another chapter on Indian literature in “Reconsidering *Mahābhārata* references to Rome and the Romans,” **Diletta Falqui** discusses some instances from the *Mahābhārata* that appear to contain the Sanskrit adaptation of the toponym “Rome” and the ethnonym “Romans,” and which may be identified as textual evidence for India’s acquaintance with Roman culture. Indeed, scholars have demonstrated archeological evidence of flourishing trade relations between Rome and India from the first to the fifth century AD, also from the point of view of multicultural implications. However, there has been a notable absence of scholarly interest in the exploration of further textual and philological interpretations of the selected occurrences in the *Mahābhārata*. Falqui’s contribution highlights a topic that may be seen as a corroboration of archeological evidence concerning the way in which Roman contacts were perceived in the ancient Indian textual tradition.

Daniele Beltrame’s contribution “The Chinese Representation of Venice. Ideal and Real Visions in Chinese Sources from the Seventeenth through the Twentieth Century” offers an overview of the stages in the description of ideal and real Venice in Chinese sources, especially literary ones, from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, as a means to summarize China’s view of cultural and geographical otherness. The author identifies five trends in the way Venice is described, which can be linked to the various cultural contacts between China and Europe—missionaries and travelers to China, first, and Chinese writers exploring Europe, later. Due to their poetic atmosphere, the lyrical and picturesque vision of Venice and its Chinese counterparts (Suzhou and other Jiangnan water towns) emerges as the prevailing one even nowadays, especially in official and commercial sources, as well as in spontaneous ones, such as online travelogues. However, the development of a more realistic conception of distant countries and peoples, as well as the desire to re-establish China’s position in the world, have instituted a polemical shift from the vision of Suzhou as “the Venice of China” to the vision of Venice as “the Suzhou of Europe.”

Wenxin Jin’s chapter “Call for Our Saint Jeanne d’Arc: Jeanne d’Arc in Late Qing and Republican China (from the 1910s to the 1940s)” moves from a similar

perspective—China’s vision of the other as a mirror of the self—to analyze the interpretation and appropriation of Jeanne d’Arc in Late Qing and Republican China, in a period of political and social crisis that spans from the 1910s to the 1940s. Through the analysis of the name transliteration (which sinicizes the image of Jeanne with classical Chinese values) and the discussion of a variety of works about the French heroine published by Chinese authors of the time, Jin shows how the introduction of Jeanne d’Arc in China (via Japan) helped to awaken national consciousness and stimulate the people—in particular women—to fight for national liberation, serving as a model when local figures such as Hua Mulan would not suffice. However, despite its political function, the appropriation of Jeanne d’Arc did not help to introduce new, liberating values in the country. Rather than weakening Chinese traditional gender expectations for women and challenging the patriarchal framework, the local representation of the heroine only reinforced existing gender norms.

In her chapter “Travel Writing in Modern Sanskrit Literature: London, Paris, and Other Cities in the Mirror of Travel Accounts,” **Lidia Sudyka** offers a compelling account of modern Sanskrit-language travelogues, focusing on both their rethinking of traditional Sanskrit travel literature, from which they significantly differ albeit with some elements of continuity, and also on the view of the West that emerges in modern Indian writers’ physical and literary approaches to cities such as London and Paris. She analyzes texts written and published between the late eighteenth century and the early 2000s. As Sudyka puts it, unlike earlier Sanskrit literature, modern and contemporary Sanskrit travelogues no longer portray foreign travel as almost exclusively associated with feelings of fear and loneliness. It is now viewed as an opportunity to explore the world and enrich one’s inner self.

The chapter titled “Encounters in West Asia: Perceptions and Self-Representations of Jordan and Saudi Arabia” by **Miriam Al Tawil** and **Fabian Spitaler** investigates self-representation in two Arab countries, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, using compelling data extrapolated through fieldwork in the region. The different strategies these two countries employ to create attractive perceptions for foreign tourists and investors reflect Western narratives in a game of mirrors.

Contemporary China, discourse, and media are the focus of the contribution of **Lutgard Lams**. In “Representing the Chinese Self and the Foreign Other in China’s English-Language Press Editorials,” Lams looks at the Chinese discursive process of Othering targeted at international audiences. In the context of China’s public diplomacy efforts, Lams shows how the Chinese Self is ascribed a positive identity through the attribution of negative features to the Other. The study is based on a mixed-method approach that applies insights from sociology

and communication studies, narratology, and language and discourse studies to investigate the strategies employed by China's English-language press editorials to represent the Chinese Self and the U.S. Other during the first year of President Biden's term in office. The chapter highlights the fact that the consistent use—in both the case study and over time—of oppositional dichotomies and the projection of a hostile Other serve the purpose of legitimizing the Communist Party of China's lasting rule and allows China to take the moral high ground. Therefore, Lams argues, such positional superiority features not only in Orientalist Western discourses, but also in the discourse on the West that is articulated and disseminated through the state media by the Chinese leadership.

“The Literary Movement of Translation in the United Arab Emirates. Some Remarks on the Kalima Project” by **Angela Daiana Langone** focus on the Kalima Translation Project launched by the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage in 2007. Based on the archives and introductions of works translated into Arabic, the author investigates the criteria used to select foreign works, the position of translated literature within the polysystem of the Arab Gulf, and the perception of the other that emerges from them.

Asia as the Other

The third part, titled “Asia as the Other” focuses on the fraught tradition of Western views of Asia, including chapters on seventeenth-century opera, modern legal culture, and American poetry.

The Western perception of Asia, particularly China, is explored in **Alessandro Tosco**'s contribution by focusing on theater during the Enlightenment. The analysis delves into the aestheticizing fashion of *chinoiserie* and “Chinese orphans” on stage that followed the first (partial) translation of a Chinese libretto into a Western language (1735) by the Jesuit missionary Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare (1666–1736). The study investigates how traditional Chinese (i.e., Confucian) values were received in Europe by looking at some of the many European playwrights and librettists such as William Hatchett, Voltaire, and Arthur Murphy who produced adaptations and rewritings of the libretto. Through textual examples and comparisons, the author shows that China was merely used at that time as an exotic backdrop for staging narratives imbued with familiar Western content. The chapter demonstrates that Confucian morality, rather than being approached and understood in its essence and in its context, has often been used as a mere means for Western culture to reflect on itself from a different perspective.

Mate Paksy's contribution “*Ex Oriente Lux, Ex Occidente Lex: Three Ways to (Mis)understand Japanese Legal Culture*” offers a unique perspective within the context of this volume. His chapter, which is based on a deconstruction of the Latin aphorism “*Ex oriente lux, ex occidente lex,*” focuses on Western scholars’ often awkward and partial attempts at understanding and classifying the Japanese legal system. Paksy foregrounds orientalist approaches in Western scholars’ views, discusses the fraught issue of the “Asian” character of Japanese jurisprudence, and stresses the role of unwritten or customary law in Japan, which does not tend to be perceived as law at all by European standards.

In her contribution, which expands the focus to North America, **Anna Cadoni** analyzes visions of the East in Amy Lowell’s poetry. Cadoni shows how Lowell’s engagement with Chinese and Japanese poetry produces an exotic perspective on the representation of the Asian other through a collection of hybrid poetic expressions. This perspective entails both the construction of the Far East as a collection of stereotypes that characterized exoticism in Western poetry and a unique insight into the author’s deployment of Orientalism as a significant tool to oppose what Lowell herself called the “artistic ignorance and gallant self-confidence of America.” In her conclusion, Cadoni stresses how despite her interest for Asian cultures Lowell failed to consistently subvert Western stereotypes of Asia, including gender questions, which remained stuck in orientalist practices and discourses.

Finally, **Cristina Dozio**, in her chapter titled “Yusuf Idris Goes East: Asia as a Mirror for Egypt,” aims to contribute to the study of Arab-Asian encounters by examining the journalistic travelogue *Iktishāf qārra* (Discovering a Continent, 1972) by the famous Egyptian writer Yūsuf Idrīs, written on his return from a trip to India and the Far East. The representation of Asian societies in this work is a mirror for Egypt: Japan in particular is presented as a source of inspiration for the renewal of Egyptian society.

Looking Ahead

The eighteen articles included in this volume address Asian self-perceptions, Asia’s perspectives on its own several “others,” and Western approaches to Asia from different points of view, employing a wide range of methodologies and focusing on diverse and often distant epochs and cultures. We are well aware that our exploration of Asia and its others, engaged in an exchange of gazes and refractions—the many mirrors of cultures, languages, histories, and identities mentioned in the title—is necessarily partial. No single work can account for the

network of encounters, translations, and negotiations that define Asia's relationship with itself and the world, nor do we think of our work as being fully comprehensive. Our efforts have been inspired by the words of a canonic figure in postcolonial thought, whose insights have taken on a new, strategically significant meaning to us. In 1982, the Vietnamese scholar and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha released *Reassemblage*, a film about the daily life of Senegalese people. The movie challenged the presumed objectivity of documentaries, questioning the authority of the narrating subject and disrupting traditional modes of representation. The words that open *Reassemblage*—later included in Minh-ha's 1992 book *Framer Framed*—resonate deeply with the aims of this volume: "I do not intend to speak about. Just speak near by" (Minh-ha 96). The *Asias* reflected within each mirror included in this book attempt to respond to this invitation. Each of the contributors in this volume have spoken "near by" the objects of their investigation, taking care to avoid any appropriation of the voices coming from their fields of inquiry, but constantly looking at, and being reminded of, the frames in which both subjects and objects of investigation are enclosed, if not entrapped.

We wish to conclude by going back once more to Spivak's *Other Asias*, whose insights have proved vital to our research. At the end of the essay that opens the book, while focusing on two important and interrelated questions, namely, those of language and singularities, Spivak mentions Italy:

English is not the only public language on earth. We cannot learn all languages, but we can learn some. As of this writing, I have persuaded at least one Italian translator of Mahasweta Devi's fiction not to translate from my English version but to consult appropriate members of the local Bangladeshi-Italian community. (13)

She is likely referring to the first Italian collection of stories by Mahasweta Devi, the renowned Bangladeshi writer whose work Spivak has translated from Bengali into English and analyzed extensively. The collection she is probably alluding to, *La preda* (The Prey), was published in 2004 and translated from Bengali into Italian by Babli Moitra Saraf and Federica Oddera, under the guidance and supervision of Anna Nadotti, one of the finest translators working in Italy, who edited the whole volume. Though this episode may seem marginal, it carries significant implications. It signals a shift—much as a limited one and, as Spivak suggests, only following her own encouragement—in the perception of Asia in a country like Italy, which has often been considered peripheral and marginal to dominant global political and cultural dynamics. Acknowledging that Italian translators and editors should directly address the original languages, rather than relying on English as an intermediary, is not only a significant step

toward a renewed engagement with Asia and its cultures but also carries ethical and political responsibility toward them. This choice recognizes, on the one hand, that any second-hand, Anglophone-centric approach to knowledge about Asia proves to be inadequate and ideologically pernicious—as it still depends on the hegemony of the global and Anglophone north of the world—but, on the other hand, that access to Asian languages should no longer remain the esoteric privilege of a small academic elite. Our own attempts align with this shift, as we seek to challenge the dominance of anglocentric academic research and outreach by encouraging the engagement with Asian voices, texts, and perspectives from one of the peripheries of the globalized world.

Yet, what is even more prominent is Spivak's insistence on the concept of singularity. Her words have served as a blueprint for our research, as singularity embodies the fragile yet necessary (need for) balance between individual political positions and the broader global framework in which they are situated. She describes singularity as “the repeatable difference that beings share” (13). This concept becomes even more pivotal when Spivak attaches to singularity “the double bind of the call to rational universalism” (13), highlighting the tension between particularities and those structures of thought that wish to impose themselves as universal.

It is within this complex interplay—between singularity and rational universalism, between localized voices and transnational frameworks—that we hope this book will find its space. By bringing together diverse scholarly perspectives, linguistic traditions, and methodological approaches, we aim to embrace the productive tensions that emerge when the Asias we address in the volume are examined through multiple, intersecting perspectives. In doing so, we aspire to create a space that is neither wholly subsumed by the totalizing claims of global discourse nor confined to isolated, self-referential narratives, but that actively engages with the dialogic spirit that shapes the study of Asia in a global context.

As such, this book is not simply an examination of Asia in a global perspective but an exercise in critical reflection on the processes through which knowledge about Asia is produced, contested, and transformed. By interrogating these frames, we wish to foster a pluriversal understanding of Asias—one that hopefully embraces the multiplicities and the contradictions that frame knowledge about Asia in the present time. By bringing together these multiple perspectives, we hope this volume could encourage scholars and readers to keep exploring the nuanced entanglements between Asian voices and between Asia and the rest of the world. Literature, language, and cultural studies offer particularly rich perspectives for such investigations, as they reveal the ways in which identities are

continuously constructed, deconstructed, and reimagined across different temporal and spatial contexts. Through these disciplines, we can better understand how past and present Asias have been framed and how they have sought to resist external interpretations and define and redefine themselves.

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Part One: Asia and Itself

Ancient Mesopotamian Civilization and its Heritage in Modern Iraq.

Perceptions and Modern Representations

LUCIA AVALLONE AND GIULIANO MION

Introduction

The present contribution¹ aims to investigate, within the general framework of the research project housing this book, the multiple possibilities of describing how one of the cultures settled in the Asian continent perceives and narrates itself. In particular, the focus of these pages is on how an Arab country with an extremely long-standing historical tradition of different cultures perceives and narrates itself. The choice fell on contemporary Iraq and the historical period that this contribution deals with is the twentieth century. More precisely, the chosen period begins in the 1950s, continues until Saddam Hussein's regime, and ends in the present day, when some data belonging to the post-Gulf war period will be tackled.

Present-day Iraq is a country that is beginning to find a relative socio-political stability with an economy that is painstakingly, but gradually, recovering after a long stagnation resulting from many years of external and internal conflicts, following first the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88), then the First Gulf War (1990–91), and, finally, the Second Gulf War (2003). The country is multi-confessional, with Sunni

¹ This work is the result of both authors' reflections and research. In the interest of practicality, however, Lucia Avallone is responsible for the second part while Giuliano Mion for the introduction and the conclusions.

and Shia Muslims, Chaldean and Syriac Christians as well as Mandeans, but also Yazidis, Bahai, Zoroastrians, and Jews. This multi-confessionalism goes along with a multi-ethnicity and multilingualism, because the population is composed of a majority of Arabs, but also Turkmen, Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, Shabak, and Circassians. This great complexity of the Iraqi population has been at the root of many sectarian conflicts that have developed as a result of successive wars in recent decades and, in particular, after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime.²

In the Middle Ages, Iraq was the seat of the Abbasid caliphate (750–1258) during which, as stated by Marr (2017, 2), the country “came into its own as the center of a prosperous and expanding empire and an increasingly brilliant civilization that drew on the traditions of its immediate predecessors, the Greeks and Persians, in forming the emerging Arab-Islamic culture.” But it is also worth remembering that many centuries before Islam, during fourth and third millennium BC, Iraq was the cradle of the Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian cultures which succeeded one another, all contributing to shaping its profile over the centuries and continuing until the present day.

The historical complexity of what is known as present-day Iraq coincides with a cultural richness that has rare counterparts, one of which is the case of Egypt that has been investigated by Reid (1997, 2019) retracing how the ancient Egyptian culture influenced the formation of the national identity of modern Egypt, as well as the connection of external intellectual forces, like that of the orientalist and foreign scholars who, after the Napoleonic invasion, influenced the psyche of the Egyptian elites all the way up to the era of Nasser. A similar phenomenon can be found in the case of Iraq, where the ancient Mesopotamian cultures have been used in order to raise awareness about the “golden” ages of the past and, consequently, create a national identity. But the most notable distinction between the Egyptian and Iraqi cases is that the use of the ancient Mesopotamian cultures increases alongside the rise of nationalism, and the acme of this phenomenon is represented by the era of Saddam Hussein. This doesn't mean that the Islamic past is sidelined, but instead one leaves with the understanding that in the ideological and political agenda, the pre-Islamic glories are projected in a sort of natural continuation with the Abbasid culture until modern times, as if there were no dividing lines between the completely different historical periods. Architectural elements, artistic works, monumental arts, and even literature, altogether contributed to regaining the past in order to glorify it and reshape the present according to a sentiment of continuity of the past, as if the flow of time was suspended.

2 For a general overview on the interconnections between ethnicity and conflicts in Iraq, see, for example, Ulack (2015).

In reconstructing the dynamics of identity that led to the valorization of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations in modern Iraq, the observations included in these pages have been inspired by the general theoretical framework of the theory of cultural memory, as proposed by the late German Egyptologist Jan Assmann in a long series of works related to collective memory and the construction of the identity of a community. Assmann's approach is particularly suitable in our case, because his research, for which one could refer mainly to Assmann (1992), is grounded on the study of cultural memory in antiquity primarily focusing on ancient Mesopotamia, Near East, Egypt, and Greece. Assmann's approach represents a sort of refinement and an application of the notion of collective memory that was originally conceived by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the first half of the twentieth century.³ The following is a summary of a couple of concepts related to cultural memory through which we can effortlessly understand the subject matter investigated in this study.

In order to be able to refer to the past, it must have entered as such in the consciousness of a social group, and this process presupposes at least two elements:

- (1) the past must not have disappeared completely, there must be some kind of documentation;
- (2) this documentation consists of testimonies that must exhibit distinctive features when compared to today.

The historical memory of the past events of a social group plays a large role in shaping its collective memory. While this may seem simple and obvious enough, the direct and indirect implications are nonetheless significant. When a social group insists on a specific interpretation of its shared past and strives to cultivate and pass on its memory, it performs an act of cultural memory. And collective memory is created precisely on this act. When a social group insists on a specific interpretation of its shared past and strives to cultivate and pass on its memory, it performs an act of codifying an accepted history. It is this precise act which creates cultural memory. This mechanism develops self-awareness of one's community and, thus, ends up forming the basis of a cultural identity. The social group which practices such an act of cultural memory is considered a community of memory. The opposite of an act of cultural memory is forgetting or removing one's past. This damages the collective memory to the point of compromising it, and in this way, the social group is deprived of the mechanisms that regulate its cultural identity. Its excessive weakening further encourages its assimilation by external forces,

³ See Halbwachs (1925, 1950), which are the works that inspired Jan Assmann.

condemning it to progressive decline. This brief summary gives a quick idea of why acts of cultural memory are so important to build a community of memory. A social group which identifies as a community based on shared memory constructs an image of itself that attenuates internal differences and insists on cohesion around a shared system of values, beliefs, and experiences, while emphasizing the differences between self and the other.

All these elements and dynamics are very relevant for a country that wishes to emphasize its national identity, and we have examples of this from all over the world in different historical periods. In modern Iraq, we find such phenomena over the nearly forty years of rule by the Arab Socialist Baath Party (1968–2003), when the ideology propagated by them (for which see Sassoon 2011) was used to facilitate the internal cohesion and the cultural experiences of the country. The interconnections between ideology and the representation of cultural memory in Iraq have been the subject of a fair number of studies (see Baram 1991); however, these analyses don't go as far as the Gulf War or even the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Therefore, the observation of such phenomena confirms that, in modern Iraq, the past was continuously reorganized according to the frames of reference of the present—memory proceeds in a reconstructive manner, narrating a past to justify its continuity with the present. Moreover, while this can be marked with monumental works or art, literature can also play a part. One of the most notable examples of this is the novel *Zabība wa-l-malik* [Zabība and the King], officially authored by Saddam Hussein and published in 2000. The story is set in the time of ancient Babylon and deals with the love between a girl, Zabība, and a king. In this plot, the splendors of the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations serve as a backdrop that magnifies the country's greatness, and the relationship between the two protagonists is nothing but a metaphor of contemporary Iraq being threatened by the United States and the Western countries. As we are going to see in the following paragraphs, monumental and fine arts also played crucial roles in the construction of this sense of identity. But can these phenomena be considered acts of resistance to the external pressure?

Origins and Development of Modern Art in Iraq: A Historical Overview

In order to more fully comprehend the contribution of fine arts to the evolution of a modern Iraqi identity rooted in the rich history of its civilizations, we

will examine the origins and developments of these arts in the twentieth century. The arts of painting and sculpture have in fact a relatively recent history in Iraq, with the first significant examples of production emerging during the early years of World War II. Nevertheless, by the 1920s an interest in fine arts and crafts was clearly evident, as attested by an exhibition held at the Suq Ukadh Festival of Poetry in 1922 and the erection of the first public monument in Baghdad dedicated to the British General Frederick Stanley Maude⁴ in 1923. As Shabout (2009, 25–6) posits, a significant shift in conceptualizing the commitment of the artists emerged during the early 1930s, as art began to be regarded as a profession. This marked a rupture with previous artistic practices, paving the way for the advent of modern art in Iraq.

An important art exhibition was held at the Industrial and Agricultural Fair in Baghdad in 1931, with the participation of teachers and talented students, and three years after its inauguration (1936) the Music Institute in Baghdad was expanded to include sections for visual arts and drama. In the same years several artists undertook studies abroad in Europe, remaining there until the outbreak of World War II when they were compelled to return to Baghdad. During the war period the Institute of Fine Arts was founded (1941), with Faiq Hasan (1914–92) as its director. At that time Iraqi artists had the opportunity to become acquainted with Polish artists stationing in the country with British military forces. A strong bond was formed between Polish and Iraqi artists to such an extent that the modern art pioneer Atta Sabri (1913–1987) called them “brothers in art.”

During the war years, artists trained in Europe, especially in Paris, frequented Baghdad’s cafés, both giving and participating in lectures, as well as presenting their works in exhibitions organized there and in other Arab countries such as Lebanon and Egypt (Lenssen 2024, 92). A more modern approach thus pushed Iraqi artists to engage in experimentation and search for a national artistic identity and a plurality of individual artistic identities. In 1941, the Art Friends Society [*ġam‘iyyat ašdiqā’ al-fann*] was established as the first art association registered at the Ministry of Interior in Iraq.⁵ On November 14, of that year, the Society held its inaugural exhibition of artistic works. Young Iraqi artists, including Jawad Salim (1919–61) and Faiq Hasan, were encouraged to depart from the

4 This statue celebrated Maude as the liberator of Iraq from Ottoman domination, but it was dismantled in 1958, following the dissolution of the Iraqi monarchy, as an act of erasing a historical record associated with the domination of external forces.

5 The group included painters, sculptors, architects, and representatives of other arts. Among them were Akram Shukri, Faiq Hasan, Jawad Salim, Atta Sabri, Issa Hanna, Hafidh al-Drubi, Abdel Qadir al-Rassam, and Haj Muhammad Salim (see al-Khamis 2001, 22).

academic approach of their predecessors and embrace an art that transcended the naturalistic, realistic representation of reality, to penetrate “beyond objects and phenomena to seek their true essence,” employing styles such as Cubism and Expressionism (al-Khamis 2001, 22–3).

In the aftermath of World War II, the Iraqi government continued to provide financial and logistical support to artists within the country, as well as facilitating their participation in cultural missions to Europe and international exhibitions. Significant examples include the Cairo International Exhibition (1947), the exhibition at the UNESCO Conference in Beirut (1948), and the exhibition of Arab artists in Rome (1953).

The 1950s represent a pivotal moment in the development of fine arts and their crucial role in shaping the distinctive features of modern Iraqi identity. This was due to factors already mentioned, including the government’s support for artists, the emergence of cultural institutions and events, and the wartime climate of openness to foreigners. As Jawad Salim observes, “during the four-year period when Paris and Europe ceased to make beautiful work,” Baghdad continued to work, despite the difficulties (Lenssen 2024, 113).

It is noteworthy that several important cultural institutions were established prior to the Second World War, among them the Salam Library (1920), the Baghdad Antiquities Museum (1926), the Public Library (1929), and the Institute of Fine Arts (1939). Subsequently, the Baghdad Symphony Orchestra (1944) was founded, followed by the Popular Theatre Company and the Baghdad Film Studio in the post-conflict era. Within this dynamic setting, in a decade which also culminated in the overthrowing of the monarchy and the establishment of the Iraqi Republic (1958), the country saw the establishment of some key institutions such as the Modern Theatre Company (1953), the first TV broadcasts (1956), the Iraqi Artists Society, which was led by the architect Muhammad Makiya (1914–2015), and the University of Baghdad (1957). Several art and literature magazines also emerged, such as *al-Ṣibā* [Youth], launched by Nizar Salim (1925–82) in the late 1930s, and *ʿAštārūt* [Astarte],⁶ in the early 1940s, by Jamil Hamudi (1924–2003) which were both handwritten productions. It is significant that the title of the latter publication refers to one of the names used in ancient Mesopotamian civilizations for the female deities of rebirth and regeneration. The same artists also founded two other journals: *al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth* [The Modern Thought] in the

6 Only two issues of this magazine have survived, and they bear witness to its usual content: comments on art trends, articles on cultural phenomena, reviews of local exhibitions, sections on gallery containing examples of works (Lenssen 2024, 107).

mid-1940s, headed by Jamil Hamudi⁷; *al-Waqt al-Dā'i* [The Wasted Time] in 1946, headed by Nizar Salim (Alsaden 2018, 175–6). The latter was established in collaboration with al-Waq Waq Café,⁸ which served as a meeting place for artists and writers concerned with the status of art and literature and committed to ideas of political and cultural revolutionism. Despite its relatively brief existence, the café made a substantial impact on the formation of a contemporary Iraqi cultural identity (Caiani 2013, 38–41).

Within this context of rich cultural initiatives, the testimony of the Iraqi writer Naim Kattan, an exile in Canada, is worthy of consideration. In his recollection of the years spent in Iraq after World War II, he mentions collaborating with writers and artists such as Nizar Salim, Khalid al-Rahhal and Samir al-Shaikli, and describes meetings in Baghdad cafés during which they discussed the creation of a new Iraqi culture, beginning with the recognition of the country's cultural greatness and importance. This culture was to be promoted across borders and disseminated through an Iraqi magazine. It was thus that the avant-garde magazine *al-Fikr al-Ḥadīṭ* came into being (Joudar 2020, 178–9).

At the same time, artists who had been trained in European schools and later had held positions in Iraqi cultural institutions,⁹ gathered mainly in three groups: (1) the Société Primitive,¹⁰ led by Faiq Hasan, who abandoned the practice of studio painting in favor of painting *en plein air*; (2) the Baghdad Group of Modern Art,¹¹ founded by Jawad Salim and Shakir Hasan al-Said, whose intent was “to reassert national self-esteem and help build a distinctive Iraqi identity” through

7 He is considered a pioneer of the “Arabic Hurufiyya” artistic school and was later the founder of the magazine *Ishtar—Revue internationale pour une compréhension meilleure entre l’Orient et l’Occident* (1958).

8 At the time, Baghdad was home to numerous cafés where intellectuals gathered, fostering a vibrant cultural phenomenon known as “café culture.” They included al-Waq Waq Café, the Swiss Café, the Brazilian Café, Yasin Café, Shatt al-Arab Café, al-Baladiyya Café, the Parliament Café, al-Mu’aqqadin Café, al-Shabandar Café, al-Zahawi Café, and Hassan Ajami Café.

9 For example, Jawad Salim spent a year studying in Florence (1938–39) and a year in Paris (1939–40), and later he resided in London between 1946 and 1948. On his return to Iraq, he headed the sculpture department at the Institute of Fine Arts (1949) and also worked at the Iraqi Museum on the restoration of artifacts and statues from the Assyrian and Sumerian periods.

10 The group was subsequently renamed the *Ġamā’at al-ruwwād* [Pioneers’ Group] and comprised artists such as: Ismail al-Shaikly, Issa Hanna, Zaid Salih, Mahmud Sabri, Jawad Salim, and Lorna Salim.

11 The group was known in Arabic as *Ġamā’at Baġdād li-l-fann al-ḥadīṭ* and included Lorna Salim, Nizar Salim, Naziha Salim, Faraj Abbu, Rasul Alwan, Fadhil Abbas, Muhammad al-Husni, Khalil al-Ward, Abd al-Rahman al-Gailani, Khalid al-Rahhal, Muhammad Ghani Hikmat, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, and Shakir Hasan al-Said (al-Khamis 2021, 24).

the art (al-Khamis 2001, 24); and (3) the Impressionist Group gathered around the figure of Hafiz Drubi (1914–91).

As nuclei of ardent groups, their [artists'] work arouses constant argument, often violent controversies about "humanism," "social responsibility," "Iraqi-ism," apart from the larger over-all question of tradition. (Jabra 1961, 7)

Established in 1943 around the concept of original (*bidā'i*), intuitive art, the Société Primitive held the first exhibition in December of 1950. At that time, the group also changed its name to *Ġamā'at al-ruwwād*, and the call for a more active role of the artist in society, initially proposed by one of the founders, the painter Mahmud Sabri (1927–2012), also gained importance. Another significant contribution to the discourse on art was made by Jawad Salim. He promoted the concept of *istilhām al-turāt* [heritage inspiration], whereby inspiration from the ancient heritage, combined with a commitment to renewal, could be exploited in a way that would lead to the realization of a contemporary aesthetic (Shabout 2020).

In fact, in the 1950s, modern visual arts benefited from a surge in popularity, with a renewed interest in primitive art, daily life, folklore, and last but not least, the heritage of ancient Iraq, revisited with the aim of expressing modern life and thought in society. In particular, the Baghdad Group for Modern Art constituted the most considerable driving force behind the genesis of a national modern art movement. In fact, the cosmopolitan spirit that had previously dominated the Société Primitive gave way to a new vision of art represented by the Baghdad Group for Modern Art and its new style that was to become emblematic of Iraqi art and identified distinctly as Iraqi. The first group of artists was not concerned with achieving a style other than the Western one, although the content of the paintings often had local vistas as its subject. The latter group, on the other hand, proposed new forms of representation. As Jabra argues: "they called for a historical consciousness that would make of the whole of Babylonian and Arab tradition the matrix from which their style should emerge" (Jabra 1988, 167–8).

The 1958 coup d'état that brought an end to the Hashemite monarchy paved the way for a series of additional coups, in 1963 and 1968, that resulted in the ascendancy of the Baath Party, which remained in power until 2003. During this period, there was a transition from art which aimed to express the artist's vision of autonomy within the context of a national agenda to art that was confined to a specific space and served the interests of the regime in glorifying the spirit of sacrifice for the nation. In fact, the artists who were active during the Baath regime took part in the project of building an Iraqi art school, received commissions for

large-scale art works, were recruited to positions in the Ministry of Culture, and participated in exhibitions organized by public institutions.

From the early 1950s until the 1980s, a substantial number of artists drew inspiration from the themes of ancient Mesopotamia, receiving favorable reviews in the press and specialist periodicals. To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the 1968 coup d'état, the General Institution for Archaeology at Iraq's National Museum held an exhibition of modern art, with the aim of fostering "the deep continuity between artistic creation of pre-historic eras, the Islamic era, and our [Iraqi] modern artists" (Baram 1990, 71).

The establishment of the Iraqi Artist Society in 1956 as a forum for the presentation of works by artists affiliated with collectives or engaged in independent practice proved to be a pivotal initiative in the advancement of the fine arts. This is evidenced by the considerable number of artists' contributions and the Society's exhibitions, such as those held at the Mansur Club (1956–58) or at the Royal Olympic Club in Adhamiyya (Gupta, Takesh 2021, 69). The remarkable success of the Mansur Club exhibitions signified a novel approach to the dissemination of art in modern Iraq, prompting a discourse on the pursuit of quality art and a meaningful engagement with the public (Alsaden 2018, 168).

The Revolution of 1958 thus marked the advent of a new era, one characterized by a renewed sense of optimism and an aspiration for a fresh start. This was reflected in the arts, as artists sought to express their ideas through artworks that often-enjoyed patronage from the regime and reflected emerging social ideals.

Culture, as defined in the report of the Eighth Regional Congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, was part of the development strategy of the Party and therefore, of the Iraqi government (El-Basri 1980, p. 12). Writers, artists, intellectuals and journalists were to be attracted to the Revolution, in order to help spreading its goals (Arab Ba'th Socialist Party 1974, p. 256). Cultural centers were opened abroad, in London and Paris for instance. The Iraqi Cultural Center in London was especially proactive: besides numerous exhibitions, it issued a lavish periodical, *Ur*, dedicated to the arts and literature, edited by the renowned artist Dhia Azzawi. In 1976, an exhibition of contemporary Iraqi art was shown in Paris, at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (*Art irakien contemporain*, 1976). (Naef 2012, 477–8)

It is worth mentioning that only a few years before the revolution, the artistic innovations that were maturing within the different groups of artists also led to the formulation of manifestos, such as the ones developed by the Baghdad Group for Modern Art in 1951 and 1955. These were closely linked to the theoretical perspective on art that emerged during the Baathist period, which emphasized the

significance of national identity within the context of Iraq's extensive history of civilizations spanning millennia. These manifestos put the emphasis on the local character, which was later termed the "heritage character" (Naef 2012, 477). The following is an excerpt from the 1951 Manifesto:

We thus announce today the beginning of a new school of painting, which derives its source from the civilization of the contemporary age, with all the styles and schools of plastic art that have emerged from it, and from the unique character of Eastern civilization. In this way, we will honor the stronghold of the Iraqi art of painting that collapsed after the school of Yahya al-Wasiti, the Mesopotamian school of thirteenth century AD. And in this way we reconnect the continuity that has been broken since the fall of Baghdad at the hands of the Mongols. [...] We, the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, hereby declare the birth of a new school of art for the sake of our civilization, and for the sake of universal civilization.¹²

In relation to the 1955 Manifesto formulated by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, the well-known Palestinian writer and artist refugee in Iraq, the concept of belonging to a nation with a rich history with origins dating back to ancient civilizations was also highlighted. Moreover, the use of innovative techniques for portraying the lives of individuals and incorporating local motifs was promoted. It was a matter of interpreting the present while simultaneously drawing upon the tools and concepts of the past (Jabra 1988, 167–8). The group was described as including painters and sculptors, distinguished by their individual styles and conscious of their intellectual and stylistic links with the wider world of art beyond Iraq. It was their contemporary perspective that would result in the emergence of new forms in Iraqi art and a distinctive identity (Salim 1977, 102).

The Baghdad Modern Art Group was not a conventional school; rather, it was a movement that was trained in Europe or by European artists. The thematic and stylistic influences of this group derived from Eastern sources (Streichorts 1958, 20). It provided a forum for experimentation in painting and sculpture, with Jawad Salim representing the pivotal figure around which the group coalesced. Salim's contributions were not limited to his own works, but also included ideas about art in general. In his volume devoted to modern Iraqi painting, Nizar Salim (1977, 103) cites Arnold Hottinger's assertion that the original work of Jawad Salim constituted a point of confluence and equilibrium between modern art

12 The excerpt is drawn from "Bayān Ġamā'at Baġdād li-l-Fann al-Ĥadīth al-Awwal," published in *al-Adīb* 10, 7 (July 1951): 52, translated from Arabic by Dina El Husseiney and published in Lenssen, Rogers, and Shabout 2018.

and ancient oriental traditions. His oeuvre and his conceptualization of art for Hottinger respond to the question he poses at the commencement of his essay on the artist: “How might one maintain an individual sense of self in the context of modern life? This question encompasses many of the challenges currently facing the Middle East. What is the significance of this assertion?” (Hottinger 1964, 61). For Hottinger (1964, 64), Jawad Salim

was one of the rare artists capable of mastering two domains together, that of modern art and that of Oriental art. He was able to bring them together, to create a living synthesis, and from it an original work which, if it represents a new world for the East, is no less the Eastern world itself.

Like many other artists he participated in a season of large-scale state-commissioned artworks. In fact, he was responsible for the decoration of a public monument that still marks the landscape of Baghdad today: *The Freedom Monument* [*Naṣb al-Ḥurriyya*], the wall structure which was designed by the architect Rifat Jadirji.



Figure 1.1: The Freedom Monument in Tahrir Square.

The monument symbolically narrates the Revolution and is composed of a series of images to be read from right to left like the Arabic script. In a modernist style that evokes the technique of a Mesopotamian bas-relief, Jawad Salim

represents both the struggle for freedom and historical legacy. In order to facilitate a deeper understanding of the monument's meanings, we have highlighted some of the symbols occurring in the sculptures crafted in bronze and bearing specific messages:

- The ethnic, cultural, and social composition of the population represented through the depiction of Arabs and minorities as peasants in Sumerian and Assyrian dress.
- The rebellion against the domination of the monarchy and foreign control represented by a wild, unruly horse that has thrown off its rider.
- The ox, an element often present in ancient Iraqi imagery, which symbolizes strength, fertility and wealth.
- The image of martyrdom which has been a pivotal theme in Iraqi Muslim tradition and is also a symbol of suffering shared with Christians.
- Two Iraqi women symbolizing the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, with a young girl representing their tributaries.
- A woman bearing a torch who signifies freedom, in accordance with the ancient Greek style.
- The ancient Mesopotamian symbol of the sun disk, which indicates the return of light after darkness.

These motifs demonstrate the artist's historical perspective, which encompasses both the present and the past. The significance of the work extends beyond the political and cultural context in which it was created. Jawad Salim's modernity also transcends the fact that the monument was associated with the regimes in power during the Baathist era and the rule of Saddam Hussein. Even today, it continues to convey messages that speak to the whole of humanity.

Two additional monuments were commissioned by the Prime Minister, Abd al-Karim Qasim, to commemorate the 1958 Revolution: *The Post-Revolution Mural* by Faiq Hasan and *The Monument to the Unknown Soldier* by Rifat Jadiri. The latter was dismantled and replaced with a new monument by Khalid al-Rahhal in 1983, during Saddam's regime.

Furthermore, Faiq Hasan was tasked with painting historical panels, including *The Battle of Qadisiyya* (636 AD, between the First Caliphate and the Sassanid Empire), which has not survived to this day, and *The History of Iraq*, where the artist depicted three historical phases that are considered to be the roots of modern Iraq: the Sumerian, the Assyrian, and the early Islamic.



Figure 1.2: Faeq Hassan, *The History of Iraq*.

In portraying this triptych, the artist employed artistic conventions and stylistic elements typical of the referenced periods. These include Sumerian and Assyrian bas-reliefs, which were imbued with a sense of vitality and realism through the artist's painting technique, as well as Persian miniature art.

The oeuvre of another artist, the celebrated sculptor Khalid al-Rahhal, one of the most prominent figures in Baathist art, exemplifies a form of creativity intimately intertwined with the history of Iraq. Among his works is *The Monument of the Journey* [*Naṣb al-Masīra*], located in the square in front of the Iraqi National Museum, representing the Baath Party as a ship on which three human figures are traveling (the monument was dismantled in 2005 as part of a de-Baathification campaign). One of the figures is a boy looking toward the museum, symbolizing the historical and cultural roots of his country. The ship is adorned with a series of bronze decorations that evoke motifs from ancient Mesopotamia, including a bull standing over a fallen warrior, a lion hunting a deer, and the goddess Ishtar. Al-Rahhal was also commissioned to paint *The Hanging Gardens of Ancient Babylon* and was the author of the marble group *Mother and Son*. In the 1980s, under the rule of Saddam Hussein, he was appointed to create the much-discussed *Swords of Qadisiyya* (also known as *The Victory Arch*), two huge twin arches consisting of swords held by the hands and forearms that reproduce the ones of the Iraqi president.

It is worth noting that the link with history, both in terms of a revolutionary present and a promising future scenario, is also firmly established with the Islamic

Golden Age. Indeed, among the monuments of al-Rahhal, the bronze bust of the Abbasid Caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansur, who founded the Round City of Baghdad in the eighth century, is of particular significance (the monument was partially destroyed by a bomb blast in 2003 and completely dismantled in 2005). In 1972 the statues of the poet Abu Nuwas and the medieval artist Yahya al-Wasit were created by Ismail Fattah al-Turk, who would create the iconic Martyr's Monument in 1983.

To cite a few more important examples of works of art that place the distant Mesopotamian past in continuity with modern Iraq, the two panels commissioned by the Sheraton Hotel in Baghdad from Hafidh al-Drubi depict one life in Hatra and the other in Babylon. In the mid-1970s, Muhammad Ghani Hikmat created a marble and bronze group entitled *A Child, a Mother, and Hammurabi's Stele*, which refers to the great Babylonian lawgiver (the Hammurabi's code inscriptions on the stele are in Arabic). The same sculptor is also responsible for monuments situated in public places in Baghdad that recall several medieval themes (historical or fictional) and feature, for instance, the figures of *Shahrazad and Shahrayar* (1971) and *Kahramana*, the wife of Ali Baba (1971), as well as the Abbasid poet *al-Mutanabbi* (1977) and *The Fisherman and the Genie* (1982). In more recent times, he created the monument entitled *Saving Iraqi Culture* (2010), which represents a five-armed



Figure 1.3: Muhammad Ghani Hikmat, *Saving Iraqi Culture*.

giant rescuing a metaphorical broken cylinder bearing the cuneiform inscription “here writing began” and symbolizing the culture that is at risk of being destroyed.

In the decades preceding the 2003 invasion, there was a notable shift in the role of public monuments in defining a national identity that was increasingly aligned with the state ideology. Some minor artistic expressions, such as posters and stamps, reflected this, coinciding with the cult of the commander-in-chief, President Saddam Hussein. In this context, it is unsurprising that Hussein was also portrayed in association with Nebuchadnezzar, even in the garb of an ancient warrior and alongside Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, the Muslim commander who opposed the European crusades (like Saddam, al-Ayyubi was a native of Tikrit).

Conclusions

In the first pages of the present contribution, one of the pivotal questions consisted in determining whether the artistic phenomena that have been considered within these pages could be interpreted, in the frame of Iraqi nationalist ideology, as acts of resistance to external pressures. Giving a definitive and unique answer is incontestably hard, but it seems quite obvious that the efforts in shaping a national artistic canon can be interpreted as a tool used for accelerating the dynamics of identity and otherness.

The word “canon,” here, may sound strong, but it is not used randomly. In Assmann’s approach, in fact, the formation of a canon, or “canonization,” is mainly intended in the sense of the process of collection of texts belonging to the past that form a sort of syllabus of cultural knowledge. Aside from the literary domain, a canon, intended here in a wider sense, represents a model of behavior for the community of memory and it turns out as one of the most influential strategies for the transmission of cultural memory.

As happened in similar cases, in Iraq too, the production and transmission of non-contemporaneity contributed to the formation of that cultural memory. The cases of both *The Freedom Monument* and *The Victory Arch* are undoubtedly emblematic, because they consist of examples of monumental art that can excellently show the intersections between different historical periods and that crystallize in the present the demonstration that are ideally interconnectible.

The first one embodies the link between the “antiquity” and the “golden age” of the Islamic civilization, that is, between ancient Mesopotamia and the Arab culture: the rhetorical device consists in the representation of an event from contemporary history, the so-called Qasim’s revolution, through both

Assyro-Babylonian themes and the readability of the image according to the directionality of the Arabic scripts.

The second celebrates the transition from the Sasanian empire to the Islamic age, a monument that alludes to the famous ancient battle of Qadisiyya: the rhetorical device here consists in the theme of the swords, to which the Islamic tradition, starting from the famous Prophet's sword (the so-called *Dū l-fiqār*), attributes the symbolism of religious and military power, but also in the choice of the site and the location, next to the Museum of Gifts to the President and the performing art center.

As we have seen, this general artistic attitude, which was reflected not only in monumental art but more broadly in all creative expressions of painting and sculpture, was an integral part of the ideology and politics of Baath which, over the years, favored and foraged those artists who made ancient Mesopotamia their source of inspiration. The demonstration occurs clearly in many documents, as we have seen for example in the 1951 Manifesto, which announced without mincing words, we could say almost messianically, a new artistic movement "for the sake of the civilization." And here we find a partial answer to our pivotal question, as the manifesto evokes the notion of civilization and the urgent need of its preservation.

These phenomena can be easily viewed as acts that contribute to build a cultural memory and permit shaping a national identity that conceives modern (Baathist) Iraq as a natural and evident result of all the previous historical periods. History is not re-written but is bent according to the needs and requirements of national(-ist) politics.

When looking at all these artistic expressions, the one-dimensionality of existence seems to be suppressed and life acquires a sort of twofold temporality, namely a life flowing in two coexisting different times, which persist through all stages of national evolution.

This twofold temporality is usually a prerogative of religions, in which it is not crucial to recognize that some celebrated remote episodes are truly historical or merely mythical, but it is important to entrench them in the consciousness of the believers and to make them relive cyclically in the social practices of the present, especially when implementing rituals. Instead, in our case this temporality doesn't depend on religious aspects and remote episodes don't relive cyclically in rituals, as the Baathist atmosphere had imposed a secular mentality, and ancient episodes revived through their static crystallization in creative works.

The everyday was nothing but the continuation of a past that the ideology of national identity wanted to persist.

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Bāšā: New Uses of a “Middle Eastern” Term

CRISTIANA BOZZA

Introduction

The word “pasha” belongs to the Persian, Turkish, and Arabic linguistic and cultural dimensions and, in recent centuries, has crossed all the regions of the Middle East, not only the Arabic-speaking ones. In Arabic, the cognate form *bāšā* entered the lexicon—both classical/standard and dialectal—through long-lasting contact with Ottoman Turkish, spreading beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire. The state of the art shows that, as a Turkism, that is, an inherited honorific¹ used to address high-ranking people like military officials or governors, *bāšā* is receding in the Arabic language. However, it is a fact that in some regions of the Arab world, *bāšā* continues to be widely used by common people, acquiring new meanings and conveying other functions, even those not related to the original honorific ones.² This study aims to contribute to a better understanding

1 The term “honorific” refers here to a title or word used to indicate the social status of certain people or to convey respect for the addressee. In this sense, honorifics correlate with titles of address which, in turn, are commonly used as honorifics—both absolutely and relationally, in Levinson’s terms (1983, 90f.)—as shown, for example, by Farghal and Shakir (1994).

2 Of course, there are cognates of “pasha” in other languages, more or less associated with the direct Ottoman Empire and rule. For instance, *pascià* in Italian is found commonly used in figurative expressions alluding that someone lives a life of luxury and comfort, is waited on hand and foot (*vivere*

of such non-honorific usages of *bāšā* across Arabic to present some preliminary results on the subject. More specifically, we investigate the current status of *bāšā* within the Arabic spoken varieties of the Middle East by exploring its existing and emerging uses in some of those regions that were formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, namely Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. My hypothesis is that although *bāšā* is of Turkish origin, it should be considered today as an Arabism—at least to a certain extent, as we will see—and, more generally, that a renewal of what we could call a “Middle Eastern” term is taking place.

I would like to provide some introductory remarks on terminology, data, and methodology for this study. For the sake of consistency with the purposes of this study, the term “Middle East[ern]” is used here to designate the region stretching from Egypt in the West to Iran in the East, and from Turkey in the North to the Arabian Peninsula in the South.³ I have used both secondary data and primary data. Secondary data was drawn from the relevant literature and dictionaries; no substantial data was found in other traditional sources like handbooks and grammars.⁴ Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with native speakers, both male and female, aged 18–60 years, from Egypt and the aforementioned Levantine countries. The sample selected for this study consists of a total of 100 participants: 20 Egyptian Arabic speakers, 20 Palestinian Arabic speakers, 20 Syrian Arabic speakers, 20 Lebanese Arabic speakers, and 20 Jordanian Arabic

come un pascià “to live like a pasha”), or that someone lives in “blissful idleness,” expecting everyone to serve him (*fare il pascià* “to be a pasha”); see “pascia,” Treccani, accessed April 2024, <<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/pascia/>>. It would be interesting to extend this research in the future to include other languages with similar forms; however, this goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

- 3 This is in line, for example, with Cleveland and Bunton (2018, xiii), who referred to it as “the central Middle East.” On the other hand, a number of scholars define “Middle East” more broadly, including, for example, the area extending “from the original coastlands of the Persian Gulf to a broad region stretching from the Black Sea to equatorial Africa and from the northwest frontier of India to the Atlantic” (Lewis 1994, 3); see also, among others, Campanini (2020), and Gelvin (2020). Moreover—as pointed out by all these authors—the notion “Middle East” is controversial and its conceptualization is not unproblematic, either. I thank the two anonymous reviewers for having highlighted this point.
- 4 The sources consulted include Prokosch (1991) and its supplement Ababneh and Prokosch (1997), Farghal and Shakir (1994), and Al-Khatib (2003) for Jordanian Arabic. Butros (1973) on Palestinian and Jordanian, and the Palestinian-German dictionary by Seeger (2022). For Syrian Arabic, the dictionary by Barthélemy (1935) based on Aleppo, Damascus, Lebanon, and Jerusalem; and the works by Saussey (1929), and Halasi-Kun (1973). For Egyptian Arabic: the Arabic-English dictionary by Spiro (1895); the fundamental Arabic-English dictionary by Badawi and Hinds (1986); the seminal, comprehensive work on terms of address in Egyptian Arabic that includes data on Arabic in general by Parkinson ([1985] 2015); and other relevant studies such as Prokosch (1983), Rosenbaum (1998), Samha et al. (2023). Also, we referred to Parkinson (2009), who provides an overview on terms of address in Arabic, and to the recent work by Rocchi (2022) on the Ottoman Turkish loanwords in Egyptian and Syro-Lebanese-Palestinian Arabic.

speakers. For the purpose of this study, the corpus has been divided into two data sets: Egyptian Arabic and the remaining varieties grouped as Levantine Arabic. All examples and excerpts from primary data sources are transcribed in the original, that is, Arabic, script. In the following sections, I briefly discuss the evolution of the term *bāšā* in a broad Arabic context and then focus on contemporary Egyptian Arabic where *bāšā* is particularly productive. Afterward, I discuss the results to address why *bāšā* survived in Arabic, and how it has been developing over the years. Finally, I briefly examine the perception of the Other(s) and the Self as it concerns *bāšā* in the history of Arabic.

The Evolution of *bāšā* in the Arabic Context: An Overview

The term *bāšā* originated etymologically from the Persian *pād-šāh* “emperor, sovereign, monarch, king”⁵ and, like most Turkish loans, came into Arabic during the Ottoman period—dating back to the ninth century and lasting about 400 years—because of the contacts with Turkic languages. These contacts “were particularly close in Egypt from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries during the reign of the Mamluk sultans, who were mainly Kipchak Turks” (Procházka 2004, 191).

As with many other Turkisms in Arabic, *bāšā* was originally a technical term of Ottoman civil, political, and military bureaucracy belonging to the basic semantic domains characterizing the Arabic-Turkish loans, which are: administration, law, and government; army and war; private life and society (for example, crafts and tools, house and household, dress, and food and dishes). The fact that 75 percent of all Turkish loans in Arabic fall into these particular categories is not surprising, given the centuries-long exposure under Ottoman rule influencing everyday life (see Procházka 2004, 192–3; 2009, 592–3).

Specifically, *bāšā* was the highest official title of honor in the Ottoman Empire, bestowed by the Sultan, and in some regions, it was also given to high-ranking people such as military commanders and generals and high civil officials and functionaries like governors. In Egypt, for instance, during the time of the monarchy, it was a title given as an honor by the king. In such original honorific use, *bāšā*

5 See Deny (1995). See also Stachowski (1998), specifically devoted to the New Persian loanwords in Ottoman Turkish (I owe this bibliographical suggestion to Professor Lidia Sudyka, personal conversation in March 2024), and Rocchi (2017), which supplements this work with addenda to entries already recorded by Stachowski, including those related to “pasha.”

follows the proper name, for example, Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha (1769–1849), considered the father of modern Egypt.⁶

The Decline as a Turkism

As previously mentioned, *bāšā* as a proper honorific is receding in Arabic in both classical/standard and dialectal contexts. Similarly to other civil and military titles such as *bēy*, it remained in use for a certain time in some Arab countries well after their independence in the aftermath of the First World War. Predictably, the fall of the Ottoman Empire led to a rapid decrease in the use of Turkisms, primarily honorific titles, so that most of them became obsolete. This resulted from the interruption of the Arabic/Turkish direct language contacts, the Arabization of the official language, and the generally negative perception of the Ottoman era, as pointed out by Procházka, who also observed that the decline of the old Ottoman Turkish titles is “particularly symptomatic of the quantitative and semantic decay of Turkish loanwords in Arabic” (Procházka 2009, 592).

Moreover, in a recent study devoted to this issue and focused precisely on Arabic-speaking countries that have undergone Turkish ruling (including those at issue here), Alnajadat argues that a remarkable further decline and use of fewer Turkish loanwords in Arabic has been taking place over the last few decades. Along with the negative perception and attitude toward the Ottoman language and culture, he identifies two other factors directly related to this recent phenomenon. The first factor is the linguistic modernization generally observed in the Arab world, reflected in the advance of education, “in social trends of prestige, cultural attitude, and media impact” (Alnajadat 2015, 16–17). These dynamics of modernization lead “absolutely to abandon some of the archaic—seemingly unfavorable—expressions, including some Arabic-Turkish loanwords, as they are felt to characterize the speaker’s identity as illiterate or immoderate” (Alnajadat 2015, 24). The second factor accelerating the decline of such items in daily use is the older generation dying out, which interrupts the intergenerational transfer of language and intimates the abandonment of classical and archaic usage, including some Turkish loanwords, usually marked and maintained by elders. In fact,

6 See, for example, Nallino (1939, 97). The same holds for the constructions involving the vocative particle *yā*. Here, in compound terms of address—that is, those that include a title, which in this case is a borrowed Turkish term, and a name—the word order (which usually is *vocative particle + title + name*) is *vocative particle + name + title*, for example, *yā ‘Aḥmad bāšā* “Mr. Ahmad”; see Parkinson (2009, 467).

“the young generation prefers to use more prestigious, modernized, and standard forms even in dialectal and informal speech” (Alnajadat 2015, 17).

The Survival of the Honorific-Related Usage

Despite the general trend toward decline, some Arabic-Turkish loanwords have survived and are still in use in present-day Arabic varieties, either as “remnants” of the obsolete honorific use or as polite forms of address. Some of these forms belong to the same semantic domain as *bāšā* and have evolved specifically into terms of respect: *šawiš* “sergeant,”⁷ *bēh* “bey” (usually spelled *bek* ~ *bēk*), *hānim* “madame,” *ʾafandim* “sir,” *ʾušta* ~ *ʾuštā* “boss.” These forms—alongside other Arab words and expressions of polite address like (*yā*) *muʾallim* “(oh) teacher, boss,” *yā bā* “oh father,” *ʾabūna* “[our] father,” *yā šēh* “oh sheikh,” *yā ḥājj* “oh pilgrim,” etc.—may also be used with an ironic connotation in some regions.⁸

As for the specific case of *bāšā*, with respect to the Arabic varieties under investigation, my review of secondary sources has shown that such honorific-related usages are found only occasionally in Levantine Arabic. Here, variants of *bāšā* have survived mainly as polite forms of address and are almost limited to formal contexts; in Jordanian Arabic, for instance, *bāšā* is still used to address serving and retired high military officers. On the other hand, *bāšā* is especially productive in Egypt, where, although titles were abolished after the 1952 revolution (which led to the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic), it has continued to be used primarily as a common term of high respect for all types of addressees, both polite and sarcastic. Then, unlike other pre-revolutionary terms such as *ʾafandim*, but similarly to others like *bēh*, *bāšā* has maintained its popularity, becoming appropriate for new contexts. Hence, *bāšā* came to be a general form of respect and courtesy, used in a more neutral/polite way, particularly in certain professional settings (for example, to address bosses, police officers, and other authorities) and even to express both formal and intimate forms of polite respect, for instance, when addressing men or women to indicate familiarity (“old chap”). Furthermore, *bāšā* is sometimes used to tease or flatter someone, for example, customers or a woman in a flirtatious way (“how pretty”); in a joking and sarcastic way, for example, among friends in jest or to address one’s children

7 The cognate in Tunisian Arabic *šawiš* is pronounced slightly differently. I am grateful to Professor Giuliano Mion (personal conversation in June 2024) for this information and for his comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

8 See Parkinson (2009, 470), Procházka (2009, 592–3), Shvitiel (2009, 660–1), and the references therein.

in a playful way; to indicate a supercilious person; to show endearment to young boys; to address foreigners. This is, in short, what emerged from the secondary sources, particularly from the seminal study on forms of address in Egyptian Arabic dating back to the 1980s by Parkinson ([1985] 2015, 170f.). Parkinson also highlighted that, formally, the singular form is often combined with—and placed after—the first name. In the few cases found, the plural form *bāšāwāt* (created by adding the Arabic inflectional suffix *-āt*) is limited to groups of young men. Both singular and plural forms may be preceded by the vocative particle *ya(a)-*. Within the sample he examined, Parkinson noticed that *bāšā* is slightly more common in older and middle-aged speakers compared to younger speakers and among those of the middle class; it is also used indiscriminately for almost any type of addressee. Additionally, in contemporary Egyptian Arabic, *bāšā* is found to be used in literature, both prose and drama (Rosenbaum 1998), as well as in movies and TV series. In this regard, in their very recent study devoted to the audiovisual translation, specifically to the subtitling of address forms from Colloquial Egyptian into English in TV series, Samha et al. (2023) remark that items like *bāšā* are culture-bound expressions that are often difficult to translate.

To sum up, secondary data mostly documented the honorific-related usages of *bāšā* and its variants, highlighting that they are used mainly in formal and polite contexts, sometimes in familiar and friendly settings, only in the case of Egyptian Arabic. In the next section, I provide a preliminary account of usages for *bāšā* that have not been analyzed before and that we consider to be a reflection of recent developments, especially involving contemporary Egyptian Arabic.

***bāšā* in Contemporary Egyptian Arabic**

Formally, this study confirms the conclusions reached by Parkinson ([1985] 2015): *bāšā* either occurs alone or in frequent collocation with the vocative particle *ya(a)-*, which I also noticed is often shortened to *a-*; so we have: *ya bāšā* (يا باشا) ~ *a-bāšā* (باشا) ~ *bāšā* (باشا). There were no instances of feminine forms, and the plural only appears in the crystallized expression *ya bāšāwāt*, which is used rarely and limited to groups of men. However, unlike Parkinson, I observed the emergence of a discourse-marking usage of *bāšā* alongside the already known honorific-related usage.

My findings on the honorific-related usage of *bāšā* are consistent with previous research. In fact, *bāšā* is essentially a form of address mainly used as a sign of respect for important people, especially in professional contexts (“sir,” “boss,” “chief,” “director”), as well as a common expression of courtesy or politeness

toward unknown people (“sir,” “mister”) or known people like friends, where it denotes familiarity (“my dear friend,” “brother,” etc.), and even ironically or as a joke (see example 1a, b). In addition, *bāšā* may be used in a more sarcastic or polemic way toward a person who thinks himself/herself superior to others (“to be snob/pretentious/haughty/arrogant...”) as shown by example 2a, b.

1. a. از يك يا باشا؟
“How are you, buddy/brother/my friend/*Pasha* [playful]?”
b. قولي، يا باشا
“Tell me, sir/man/brother...”
2. a. عاملي باشا
“He treats me poorly/with arrogance/with conceit.” (lit. “He’s being a *pasha* with me.”)
b. فاكِر نفسه باشا
“He thinks no end of himself/He thinks he is everybody.” (lit. “He thinks he is a *pasha*.”)

Where it specifically concerns the discourse-marking usage, *bāšā* acts as an “attention-getting device” and is used in a more neutral way, conveying the abstract value of calling the addressee’s attention.⁹ Here, *bāšā* may be paraphrased as “(hey) man/buddy/brother/you... [heed me/listen to me/pay attention to what I’m going to tell you]” where the focus is more on the action of drawing the addressee’s attention rather than on the (type of) addressee itself and the register (formal or informal) or courtesy (or lack thereof) being conveyed. As an attention-getting device, *bāšā* is common in spontaneous interactions and can replace other similar expressions like *ya mi’allim*, *ya ḥūyā*, *ya ḥabībī*, *ya ‘azīzī* (lit. “oh master,” “oh brother,” “oh my love,” “oh my dear,” respectively), including other Turkish-based discourse markers such as *bēy* and also some recent borrowings like *prīnz* (< English “prince”). Moreover, it is sometimes used for addressing girls—not only to tease or flatter them but to call their attention—or even to call someone whose name you do not remember. In this usage, *bāšā* expectedly occurs sentence-initially and may be optionally preceded by the vocative particle (*y*)*a*, unlike in its use as a form of address, where instead it is found almost

9 I refer to the classification of macro-/micro-functions of discourse markers as highlighted in Bazzanella (2006, 456–7), echoed, among others, by Sansò (2020). See also Ghezzi (2014), Molinelli (2017 and 2018), and Bozza (2020). As remarked by these authors, the distinction of functions is not to be intended as discrete, and sometimes the macro-function of a given discourse marker is difficult to identify since the different values it expresses may overlap.

exclusively with *ya*. Example (3), a conversation between friends, demonstrates the discourse-marking usage of *bāšā*:

3. A— *إننا فين؟ يعني*
 “Where are you? I mean...”
 B— *باشا ثواني واجيلك*
 “[Buddy, listen to me/look], two seconds and I’m coming in.”

That of attention-getting belongs to the interactional functions of discourse markers in that it focuses on the context of interaction and on the relationship between the interlocutors (see Bazzanella 2006, 456). Another interactional function that may be performed by *bāšā* is that of “turn-taking,” which can be seen within the same example, where (3B) uses *bāšā* to take the turn and for interrupting his interlocutor in order to answer a question.

As I said, unlike the address form *bāšā*, discourse marker *bāšā* does not have a particular semantic connotation related to politeness. In this regard, we found another usage of *bāšā*, which, however, seems to be limited to youngsters, especially boys, in interactions among peers that apparently are less constrained by social norms. Here, *bāšā* is used as an expression of impoliteness to insult or offend someone (you are “pretentious,” “arrogant,” and also “hypocrite,” “fake,” “corrupt”), even for calling someone’s attention discourteously (“hey you arrogant [heed me/listen to me...]”); conversely, it may be used to give importance to someone (“you are great”).¹⁰ Example (4) illustrates this double reading:

4. *والله إننا باشا*
 “By God, you are arrogant/you are the man!”

The latter usage is clearly closely related to that explained in example (2), and both are very likely a further development of the well-known sarcastic honorific meaning.

As a matter of fact, the use of *bāšā* as a form of address could also be considered a discourse-marking one, specifically as an instance of “hedges and boosters” that are interactional discourse markers which work as social and politeness strategies. It is worth noting in this respect that although not explicitly stated, the discourse-marking status of Egyptian—in particular, and Arabic in general—terms

¹⁰ This is not surprising since in Arabic “[t]erms of abuse are used seriously, in anger, but also quite commonly among friends, with almost the opposite meaning (something like ‘you are really a close friend’)” (Parkinson 2009, 471); see also Parkinson ([1985] 2015).

of address clearly emerges from Parkinson ([1985] 2015). In Chapter 3, the author points out that at the syntactic level, terms of address mainly occur at the beginning of a sentence and particularly when they are the first part of an utterance or discourse, they are needed to draw the attention of the addressee. At the pragmatic level, while not grammatically required, these forms play an important role in speech acts, in the “mechanics” of conversations, and in the speaker-addressee relationship as well. Parkinson indirectly highlighted some prototypical features of discourse markers: syntactic and semantic optionality, communicative obligatoriness, and the correlation between position and discourse-pragmatic functions and uses.¹¹ Another common feature of discourse markers is multifunctionality or polyfunctionality, which implies that a given discourse marker may convey more than one function simultaneously, that is, within the same context (*bāšā* in example 3) and in different contexts (the different functions of *bāšā* in examples 1–4). Ultimately, we can argue that in contemporary Egyptian Arabic, (*ya*) *bāšā* is a multifunctional discourse marker which, depending on the context, may perform the functions of courtesy-marking, attention-getting, and turn-taking, which may even overlap.

With regard to the situations in which *bāšā* occurs, unlike secondary data, my data show that in Egyptian Arabic, (*ya*) *bāšā* is widely used in informal settings between familiar people or strangers, and it is frequently used in face-to-face conversations as well as computer-mediated communication. Although used mostly by males, it could also be used by and for females. The significant variable in this study is age: speakers aged from 18 to 35 years tend to use *bāšā* as a discourse marker more than speakers above 36 years of age, who tend to use it more commonly as a polite form of address. To this extent, the results are compatible with data by Parkinson ([1985] 2015, 170f.), who observed that the address form was slightly more common in older and middle-aged, middle social class speakers. On the other hand, I also found that the discourse marker (*ya*) *bāšā* has become a part of the everyday lexicon of Egyptian Arabic, mostly used by young speakers, and where the class variable is apparently relevant to certain groups (see the following discussion).

As for the other Middle Eastern varieties of Arabic under investigation, this study corroborates previous data found in the secondary sources overall, confirming that it is used only sometimes as an address form and never as a discourse marker. When it appears in the rare informal instance, *bāšā* is used to give

¹¹ For a review of the main features of discourse markers, see Sansò (2020, Chapter 1), and also Bozza (2020, Chapter 1).

importance to someone or to flatter or beg someone. It may be used ironically for joking or to tease someone, but not in a discourteous address. On the other hand, one important finding emerges from Levantine Arabic data that is related once again to the variable of age and evidences the perception that the other Middle Eastern Arabic speakers I interviewed have of the Egyptian (*ya*) *bāšā*. In the comparison of the data from young speakers (aged 18–35 years old) and from adult speakers (aged older than 36 years), I found that in the vast majority of speakers in these dialects are basically acquainted with both uses of *bāšā*, that is, the honorific-related usage and the discourse-marking usage, and are aware of the fact that the former is obsolete, whereas the latter is in use especially in Egyptian Arabic. Specifically, young speakers tend to give these forms an Egyptian origin and perceive (*ya*) *bāšā* as an Egyptian-like expression. In this regard, an important data point is related to younger speakers aged from 18 to 25 years: practically all of them claim to use (*ya*) *bāšā* sometimes in informal communication between friends and frequently to socialize with their Egyptian peers. In particular, (*ya*) *bāšā* is used ironically to tease Egyptians or to imitate them, even to make a good impression when meeting or talking to Egyptians. For some of the younger speakers (between 18 and 25 years of age), to sound Egyptian or to imitate the Egyptian dialect conveys what they consider to be a “cool attitude” in their discourse. On the other hand, adult speakers who tend to give *bāšā* a Turkish origin, first consider the honorific use of *bāšā*, which they claim is in decline. As for the Egyptian (*ya*) *bāšā*, which they claim to use infrequently, they pointed out that in the last decades it spread through the immigration of Egyptian workers in their countries as well as the circulation of Egyptian movies and TV series.

To conclude, my findings appear to be consistent with the crosslinguistic data attesting that the speaker’s age is one of the main factors that have a greater impact on the use of discourse markers, and that particularly younger speakers, especially teenagers, are the ones primarily responsible for the spread of such dynamics. Moreover, this study would seem to highlight another crosslinguistic tendency whereby discourse markers are among the items that are most highly susceptible to transfer in situations of language (in this case, dialect) contact (see Sansò 2020, 81f.).

Discussion

Based on this fresh analysis on *bāšā* in the spoken varieties of the Middle East, two main questions arise: (1) Why has *bāšā* survived in Arabic? That is, why has

it undergone a counter-trend compared to the majority of Turkisms in Arabic which, by contrast, have been declining? (2) How has *bāšā* developed in Arabic?

With respect to the first question, the first thing we should take into account is that the Arabic language, in general, is particularly rich in forms of address—and this apparently makes it particularly prone to implement new ones in its lexicon—primarily because of the importance of politeness in its cultural and social dimension which is, moreover, strictly related to the religious sphere. As remarked by Shvitiel (2009, 658), politeness in Arabic “is one of the highly praised qualities of man and is regarded as a vital ingredient in the “relationship” between God and man. [...] in Arab society, politeness is no doubt an essential ingredient in daily contact and relationships between human beings.” Accordingly, in the Arabic system of cultural and social norms, practices, customs, and etiquette, the use of polite address forms is key. And although the terms of address vary from dialect to dialect, they all “appear to share the basic syntax of their use and the idea of their importance, their frequent use, and their extendability beyond their basic meaning” (Parkinson 2009, 471). Moreover, among these politeness strategies, the terms of respect play a central role in Arabic, especially in formal settings to the extent that “[t]hey must be considered the core of the address form system, being used on a daily basis to establish and mark formal relationships” (Parkinson 2009, 470). In addition, the use of honorific terms of formality may be exaggerated in that Arabic speakers may use two or even three honorifics in certain contexts, for example, *sa’ādat al-bāšā* “His Excellency Pasha” (see Samha et al. 2023, 3).

Another point to consider in understanding the survival of *bāšā* in Arabic is the change of status from formal to informal. Together with a general decrease in the use of Turkisms mentioned earlier, the fall of the Ottoman Empire led to a “universal tendency to a lowering of social status in titles” (Procházka 2009, 593). As a consequence of this “quantitative and semantic decay” of Turkisms, some of the old Ottoman Turkish honorifics have continued to be used as terms of respect “applied to menial jobs or positions or used with ironic or even pejorative connotations” (Procházka 2009, 592). Furthermore, in Egyptian Arabic, the 1952 revolution entailed a general downward drift of terms of address which involved particularly those of Turkish origin (Parkinson [1985] 2015, 221–2), implying the devaluation in the status of such forms (often replaced by others considered more “respectable”) as well as the creation of new ones that has been fostered also by the intensive use of such items in everyday communication (Rosenbaum 1998, 100). This resulted in an increase in the frequency of use of terms of address so that for Egyptian Arabic speakers, the appropriate “normal” or “expected” use of a specific term plays a

significant role, and “it would be breaking a rule not to use them quite regularly” (Parkinson [1985] 2015, 41). Over time, the overuse of address forms regardless of the social status of the addressee, together with the repetitiveness and redundancy typical of Egyptian Arabic (Samha et al. 2023, 11), in the case of *bāšā* implied, in my view, a further semantic-pragmatic expansion to a broadening of the contexts of uses in which it may occur (see the following discussion).

This leads us to the second question: how has *bāšā* developed and how is it developing in the Arabic context? My assumption is that *bāšā* developed by following a change that consists of three stages: *bāšā-Turkish honorific title* > *bāšā-Arabic polite form of address* > *bāšā-Egyptian discourse marker*. In the first stage, *bāšā* entered the Arabic lexicon via contact with Ottoman Turkish and preserved its original meaning with the related specific and restricted uses and functions: it was limited to addressing certain high-ranking men, being used as an honorific title in highly formal settings, and could be paraphrased as “Pasha (Chief).” In this first stage of contact, as with many other Turkish loanwords, the original form was integrated into Arabic with phonological changes, hence *paša/paša* > *bāšā*. Moreover, *bāšā* underwent a semantic reduction, acquiring the most specific meaning of the original form, that is, the honorific one. This shift from a polysemantic Turkish word to a monosemantic Arabic word is quite frequent in honorary titles such as *paša*, *bey*, *ağa*, *çavuş*, reflexes of which are either obsolete or used ironically (Procházka 2004, 196–7).

In the second stage, *bāšā* became an integral part of Arabic language structure and literature as a polite form of address, acquiring the identity of Arabic so that it is perceived as a word original to Arabic. It belongs to those loanwords from Turkish that “have acquired a formal property like Arabic vocabulary and are being used by most of the Arab speech community. So they are firmly used and undistinguished from Arabic terms. They can be standard in particular contexts. [That is to say they] became loanwords in Arabic dialects adopted and definitely used as originally stemmed from Arabic sources” (Alnajadat 2015, 23–4). *Bāšā* has come to belong to the “relatively stable core of Turkish borrowings (many of them neither phonologically nor semantically recognized by Arabic speakers as being of Turkish origin)” (Procházka 2009, 594). Here, *bāšā* is very close to the original meaning but exhibits broader uses and functions due to a semantic expansion: it is used to address more generally important and respectable men or even women as a sign of respect, but also as a sarcastic honorific and can be paraphrased as “Sir/Mister,” “Mrs./Madame/Lady” even ironically. At this stage, *bāšā* began to be used with increasing frequency even in informal settings in that it underwent the above-mentioned devaluation, which implies the metaphorical

extension of the earned terms of respect to those who have not earned them (for example, the use of such terms by common people like salesmen or drivers to address speakers who do not “deserve” them) and the acquisition of new negative meanings when used in friendly and familiar settings as well. See Parkinson ([1985] 2015, 221–2), according to whom this devaluation would have led to the attrition and decline of such terms. Instead, we argue that a renewal of *bāšā* is taking place, which most likely has been occurring in recent decades and which specifically involves Egyptian Arabic.

This coincides with the third stage of development where Egyptian (*ya*) *bāšā* further evolves into a more neutral discourse marker, that is, an attention-getting device, and apparently even into a noun/adjective that may have positive or pejorative-negative connotations (this latter is limited to a social group of young males); it can be paraphrased as “hey you/sir/man/buddy/brother/pretty girl... [listen to me]” or “you are [insult or offense/flattery].” At the current stage, *bāšā* is undergoing a further semantic-pragmatic expansion which entails, on the one hand, a semantic generalization from “addressing politely and/or formally someone” to a more abstract value of “addressing (even impolitely) someone in order to draw his/her attention”; and on the other hand, a pragmatic expansion, becoming multifunctional and suitable for multiple and varied contexts of use.

At the end of the previous section, I hinted that *bāšā* correlates to the variable of age. In fact, discourse markers exhibit, in the words of Molinelli (2017 and 2018), “different sensitivity to sociolinguistic variation and change.” In this light, we can argue that *bāšā* is especially sensitive to age and to some extent also to a certain social context. With respect to the sensitivity to diachronic change in these works, Molinelli interestingly points out inter alia that forms associated with interactional functions are more tied to changing social rules and discourse traditions and are more “ephemeral” in that they may change frequently due to wear and tear and may be frequently replaced by other forms as well. As an interactional discourse marker, *bāšā* appears to be sensitive to language change to the extent that its usages reflect the changing social rules, for example, in the case of former Turkish title first in the adoption and then in the lowering in social status. Furthermore, it mirrors the Arabic discourse tradition, primarily the importance of politeness, the role of address forms and their overuse, and the repetitiveness and redundancy typical of Egyptian Arabic. Lastly, *bāšā* might be ephemeral and possibly replaced by other forms even in the present by its correlates *ya mi'allim*, *ya ḥūyā*, *ya ḥabībī*, etc. (see earlier discussion).

In addition, where it concerns the development of discourse markers, Sansò (2020, 78–9) crucially remarks that one of the factors responsible for the (rapid)

obsolescence of such forms, especially those with interactional functions, is politeness. This implies that politeness markers (including formal terms of address like *bāšā*) may over time devaluate and acquire different, even opposite, values of impoliteness. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, these forms may develop from a strategy of positive politeness into a strategy of negative politeness. This also seems to be the case for Egyptian Arabic *bāšā*, which was already used politely and ironically in the past and is now used—although seemingly limited to a particular group of young speakers—as a term of abuse.

Conclusions

These findings are to be regarded as tentative and certainly deserve further investigation, also in the frame of research on discourse markers, a field that has been explored in Arabic linguistics and dialectology only within the last few years. It would lead, for example, to reconsider previous accounts and descriptions of certain linguistic items or usages in light of the current trends in linguistic research. This chapter is intended to be a modest contribution in this direction.

Nonetheless, on the other hand, this study evidences an important trend in the recent evolution of *bāšā*: a renewal of such a “Middle Eastern” term is taking place toward a more Arabic connotation by acquiring a specific Egyptian fashion. Hence, today *bāšā* should be considered an Arabism or better, an Egyptianism which particularly belongs to the second lexical category of Egyptian Arabic identified by Badawi and Hinds in their seminal dictionary, that is the *non-Arabic* one (vs. *Arabic*), and specifically to “items apparently specific to Egypt and without Arabic counterparts and not identifiable as relatively modern foreign borrowings” (Badawi and Hinds 1986, x).

A point that is worth stressing is that the history of *bāšā* mirrors that of the region of the Middle East over the last centuries and has been shaped in some respects by the perception of the Other(s). First, by the perception of the Ottoman Turkish Other and the attitude of Arabic speakers toward the Ottoman era; and in the case of the Egyptian Arabic speakers, toward the subsequent monarchy too. When positive, such perception resulted in the adoption of the honorific *bāšā* and its preservation as well; when negative, it led to the lowering of social status and consequent abandonment as an honorific title and to the emergence of ironic-sarcastic usages as well. Second, the history of *bāšā* has been fashioned also by the perception by the non-Egyptian Other to the extent that at the recent stage of its development, the status of *bāšā* as an Egyptian Arabic term is influenced

directly by the use of Egyptian speakers and also indirectly through the perception of other Arabic non-Egyptian speakers. In particular, nowadays, the use of (*ya*) *bāšā* among the young generations seems to reinforce the link between *bāšā* and Egyptian identity and the attitude inside and outside Egypt.¹² As one young informant I interviewed said: *و يعرفون . . . الجزائر . . . المغرب، المغرب، الجزائر . . . و يعرفون*: “When I meet people from Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, etc., and they realize that I am Egyptian, the first word they say is *bāšāaaaaa*.”

Another aspect of the evolution of *bāšā* to be highlighted is related to the self-representation and narration of events by young Egyptians during the Arab Spring. Here, *bāšā* is found in slogans, satirical cartoons, etc., of young protesters to refer to policemen who symbolize corrupt authority to be denounced and opposed. Once again, the usage of *bāšā* is paradigmatic of the change in modern Egyptian society: from the devaluation of the title after overthrowing the monarchy in 1952 to a renewed anti-government sentiment, *bāšā* reflects the relationship between the population—especially the young generation—and the political leadership by expressing ironic-sarcastic and also satirical, critical, and confrontational stances and attitudes.

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¹² This would also be fostered by the fact that Egyptian Arabic, together with some other Levantine Arabic dialects, has long been perceived as one of the most prestigious and innovative varieties among Arabs. In fact, Egypt has historically had a significant cultural influence in the Arab world, and in recent decades, also through cinema and TV series, so that Egyptian Arabic is “the most widely understood form of regional Arabic” (Badawi and Hinds 1986, viii). On the other hand, it should not be underestimated that nowadays, we are witnessing a loss of centrality of Egyptian prestige at several levels, which could impact the central role of Egyptian Arabic in the Arabic-speaking world. I am indebted to Professor Angela Daiana Langone (personal conversation in March 2024) for this remark.

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Telling Stories of the Communist Party of China: Constructing the Soft Power of Model Cadres¹

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Since ascending as General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and President of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2012–2013, Xi Jinping 习近平 has emphasized the need to “tell China's story well” [讲好中国故事 *jiang hao Zhongguo gushi*] to develop soft power and discourse power. Frequently featured in scholarly and official media analyses, Xi's concept of “China's story” includes “the story of the CPC” [中国共产党的故事 *Zhongguo Gongchandang de gushi*] (Xu 2020). This chapter investigates the interplay between the CPC's promotion of strategic historical narratives of its authority and the effort to enhance China's cultural strength, confidence, and appeal, both domestically and internationally. To do so, it takes a discursive approach to the analysis of soft power dynamics, focusing on the narrative construction of Party model cadre Jiao Yulu 焦裕禄 (1922–1964), considering it as a manifestation of “hero discourse” in its evolving historical, political, and institutional contexts. Exploring the instrumental use of exemplary historical figures as an incarnation of the Party's heroic image, the analysis builds on the three narrative shifts in the representation of “the Jiao Yulu Spirit” [焦裕禄精神 *Jiao Yulu jingshen*] in the *People's Daily* [人民日报 *Renmin ribao*] between 1966 and 2014 as identified by Chen and Sun

1 For the sake of convenience, the names of the events have only been provided in English.

(2016), expanding it with the examination of the *crafting* and *recrafting* of mainstream narratives of Jiao’s legacy across time and platforms. Specifically, contents drawn from official channels reporting Xi’s stories about Jiao are qualitatively analyzed, including Party- and State-affiliated news outlets, posts on the China state-controlled Facebook page *Xi’s Moments*, and translated materials designed for external propaganda, such as the volumes *Narrating China’s Governance: Stories in Xi Jinping’s Speeches* and *The Governance of China*.

“Telling Stories of the CPC Well”: Theoretical Underpinnings

The traditional study of China’s soft power, based on American political scientist Joseph Nye’s theory, has faced criticism for its limitations.² Choosing a resource-based conceptualization of soft power, scholars have focused on the PRC’s efforts to develop instruments to improve its global standing through significant investments and strategic initiatives. The media have been found to play an active role in building attraction, both as a soft power resource and as channels for its projection. However, Chinese soft power goes beyond projecting influence internationally as it is equally concerned with fostering internal cohesion among the Chinese people, cultivating a unified and harmonious national identity, and reinforcing the legitimacy of the CPC. A discursive approach to Chinese soft power, based on the analysis of strategic narratives, can help counter the understatement of this dual approach, balancing out the sole attention to the PRC’s attempts to exercise external influence.

A Discursive Approach to Soft Power: Strategic Narratives

Roselle et al. (2014, 71) emphasize that “strategic narrative is soft power in the twenty-first century.” This idea fuels studies hypothesizing a “discursive turn” in the discipline of International Relations (IR) and adding “intentionality” to narratives (Lams 2018, 388). Narratives, intended as “frameworks constructed to allow people to make sense of the world, policies, events, and interactions” (Roselle 2010, 6), are strategic because they tell “stories produced by political actors to achieve a desired purpose or intention” (Boc 2015, 537). Examining storytelling in IR, Hagström and Gustafsson (2019, 390) define “narrative power” as

² For an overview of the extensive literature on China’s soft power see Riva (2023).

the effect of “a story about concrete events and protagonists, which captures and exemplifies experiences that people can relate to and empathize with.” It is “the capacity of actors to produce effects by disseminating strategic narratives” or “the capacity of narratives to enable and constrain actors” (400). Similarly, Mattern (2005, 586) examines narratives in IR through the lens of “representational force” which she describes as “a form of power that operates through the structure of a speaker’s narrative representation of ‘reality.’” This chapter views soft power as the “power politics of identity” (611) and posits that narrative power and representational force—both used to interpret the implications of attraction in world politics—can be understood as forms of influence employed by the Chinese Party-State to cultivate appeal at home. This argument is based on the firm control exercised by the Chinese leadership on soft power strategies and the interplay of internal and external dimensions—with the former being a priority—in the official discourse defining these strategies. Taking the launch of the slogan “telling China’s story well” as an example, Xi Jinping linked “cultural soft power” [文化软实力 *wenhua ruanshili*] to “discourse power” [话语权 *huayuquan*]¹—that is, the “power” or “right” to speak exerted to shape a positive national image (Zhang 2012, 56)—and identified crucial areas for making China a “socialist cultural great power” [社会主义文化强国 *shehuizhuyi wenhua qianguo*]: working on cultural soft power resources, propagating contemporary Chinese values, showcasing Chinese culture, and enhancing international discourse power (Renmin ribao 2014). Besides closely connecting soft power and the media through discourse power, these directives confirm that to reinforce China’s cultural attraction, the Chinese leadership considers working on the channels functional to projecting soft power (e.g., building an external discourse system) and defining the messages to be spread both at home and abroad equally important: *stories* of a well-governed and civilized Eastern great power with a profound history, unity of diverse ethnic groups, and a harmonious and prosperous culture (Renmin ribao 2014). Party propaganda has thus been “re-Oriented” (Perry 2017), emphasizing the *Chineseness* of the stories to be told. Consequently, narratives can be said to act as strategic messages cumulatively constituting “China’s story” to be communicated to both internal and external audiences (Lams 2018). In a similar way, storytelling involves crafting political messages infused with emotional value (Miranda 2020).

These considerations form the heart of an increasing number of studies (e.g., Pan et al. 2020; Tang 2023a, 2023b; Xin 2020) advocating a discursive approach to analyzing China’s soft power, shedding light on how attraction works in terms of generation and circulation of positive meanings favorable to the Chinese leadership’s pursued objectives domestically and internationally. The focus is on the

discursive strategies and practices—that is, “*forms* of discursive construction, namely *how* a story is told” (Pan et al. 2020, 58)—employed in the intellectual and political discourses as well as in cultural products and news or entertainment media. Following the idea that soft power—and consequently discourse power—can be considered “a narrative- and linguistic-based phenomenon” (Solomon 2014, 724), it appears worthwhile to examine how stories are *crafted*, *recrafted*, and *circulated* in the PRC’s discourse system with the aim of defining China’s identity and communicating it to both national and international audiences. This will show how, by means of positive and persuasive narratives, discourse is a mechanism for shaping perceptions and drawing people in by making China appealing in political, cultural, and ideological terms.

Equally important to rebalance the attention on China’s “charm offensive” (Kurlantzick 2007) abroad is considering the impact of the Internet and the new media on the PRC’s contemporary discourse system. Nowadays, Party- and State-owned media exploit crossmedia storytelling—that is, the combination of different media channels—and convergence strategies to amplify the dissemination of their content, thereby advancing political and ideological objectives. This possibility is offered by the digital era, which allows stories to multiply and circulate more freely. Savina (2021) describes this process as a flow of “liquid” practices and “diffuse” tales characterizing what he defines as the “hall of mirrors” of the Chinese discourse system, a space where messages—both official and non-official—radiate, collide, and merge, notwithstanding the CPC’s tight control over communication. The line between internal and external propaganda is equally blurred, reflecting a unified communication approach with diverse audiences.

Nonetheless, the new media production strategies and cultural consumption patterns have not erased the consistency with which the center maintains discursive supremacy, making official, or “mainstream” [主流 *zhuliu*], narratives still worth exploring, provided that the dynamic media landscape in which they exist is borne in mind. Indeed, thanks to the cyberspace, the central propaganda apparatus creatively refracts official narratives, reaching national and international audiences (Lupano 2018). Hence, the CPC’s ideological goals are cohesively reinforced, boosting China’s soft power and discourse power.

The [Hi]Story of the CPC

According to the Deputy Secretary General of Xinhua News Agency Xu Shanna 徐姗姗, “the core of ‘China’s story’ is the ‘story of the CPC’, and the key to

telling this story well is properly explaining why the CPC ‘can’ [rule]” (Xu 2020). Here, “can” [能 *neng*] significantly shows how portraying a competent image is an intrinsic element of the CPC’s politics. The Chinese Party-State has always considered historiography and historical narratives essential to legitimize its rule and ensure its survival. Nowadays, the refinement of institutional tools designed to cultivate awareness of the past among the people has expanded the significance of memory in Chinese public life (Miranda and Giunipero 2024, 6). Historical representations are no longer a unique prerogative of historiography and propaganda but also ingredients of commercial activities contributing to the promotion of new narratives of past and recent history through memory policies, literature, art, mass media, and social media (6, 10). Stories regarding the CPC, as Xu (2020) explains, should scientifically demonstrate that the Party was chosen by history as China’s leader because of its political wisdom and care for the people, establishing it as an example for political parties in developing countries and a guide for the world.

In Chinese academic literature, “telling the CPC’s story well” is described as a strategic endeavor requiring a variety of increasingly sophisticated methods. First, scholars highlight the abundance of stories accumulated over one hundred years of CPC’s history testifying to the Party’s ability to operate (Liu 2022; Qiu 2023). Spreading these stories is necessary to “pass on the red genes” by “telling facts, images, emotions, and reasons” (Liu 2022, 38). Thus, shaping the domestic and international image of CPC’s members in order to “create a credible, lovable, and respectable image of the CPC” does not only operate on a logical level by “convincing people with facts,” but also on an emotional one, “infecting people with feelings” (Qiu 2023, 6).

Secondly, the Chinese intellectual discourse suggests that telling the CPC’s story well helps avenge the feeling of having been humiliated by foreign imperialism deeply felt by the country over the course of its history. Xi himself views “history as a mirror to build the future” [以史为鉴、开创未来 *yi shi wei jian kaichuang weilai*] (Renmin ribao 2021), distinguishing between the “correct” perspective and the “wrong tendencies of thought” promoted by “hostile forces” inside and outside China (Zhang 2017). As Liu (2022, 33–5) puts it, too often has China “been scolded” because the CPC’s story “of seeking happiness for the Chinese people, the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and harmony for the world” has been wrongly told. Similarly, Zheng (2023, 9) highlights how in Xi’s New Era, enhancing the international image of the CPC is inevitable to “respond to international voices vilifying” the Party and “face the hegemony of the Western discourse.” The goal is to shape a global narrative fairly portraying the CPC as the

people's servant, an innovative vanguard, the courageous backbone of the nation, and a great party open to the whole world (Zheng 2023, 3).

Third, the discussion leads back to soft power: once the right to speak in the international community is gained, it will be easier to enhance the influence of Chinese culture (Liu 2022, 33). Indeed, according to Yan and Ma (2024, 10), the CPC's international image is a "soft strength" playing a "hard role" in the promotion of Chinese-style modernization: once the CPC's story is told well, the world will certainly see the Party's commitment to the happiness of the people and the progress of mankind.

This brief overview points to how telling the CPC's story well is perceived as a type of *not-so-soft discursive power* functioning in a similar way to narrative power (Hagström and Gustafsson 2019) and representational force (Mattern 2005). With narrative power comes narrative resistance, involving "the dissemination of 'counter-narratives', or 'small' stories that seek to resist and challenge 'bigger' stories, or master narratives" (Hagström and Gustafsson 2019, 389). Thus, from the perspective of the Chinese leadership, the hegemony of the Western discourse on the CPC must be countered by turning the CPC's "small" story into a leading one. Liu (2022, 33) sees this as a cause-effect relationship: the CPC is the largest party in the world, and, deservingly, "big should be big."

The Jiao Yulu Spirit

In the online multilingual database *Keywords to Understand China* [中国关键词 *Zhongguo guanjian ci*], Jiao Yulu's "spirit" [精神 *jingshen*] appears among the constituents of the "Spirit of the Chinese Nation" [中国精神 *Zhongguo jingshen*], alongside better known examples such as Lei Feng 雷锋 (1940–1962), Zhang Side 张思德 (1915–1944), and Norman Bethune (1890–1939). Jiao's inclusion in the database is worth exploring in light of the emphasis placed by Xi Jinping on "taking heroes and role models as examples" [以英雄模范为榜样 *yi yingxiong mofan wei bangyang*] to build a strong China (Xinhua 2024). This has been a key principle of contemporary Chinese politics and nowadays constitutes a strategic move to exploit the past for the present need of unifying and mobilizing the nation in the New Era (Chang 2024). During Maoism, ordinary yet exceptional individuals (soldiers, workers, farmers, teachers, students, government officers, etc.) embodying values and ideals of the CPC were elevated as examples [榜样 *bangyang*] or models [模范 *mofan*] to provide guidance and reinforce loyalty to the socialist cause and social cohesion. Today, the *bangyang* concept includes

scientists, athletes, frontline workers, and even celebrities, demonstrating the CPC's evolving strategy to maintain ideological influence and foster collective identity in Chinese society.

As the Chinese official media report, Xi often tells Jiao's story, warmly recalling when he first learned the model official's good deeds on February 7, 1966, on the verge of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). His middle school politics teacher tearfully read the *People's Daily* newsletter “A Model County Party Secretary—Jiao Yulu” [县委书记的榜样——焦裕禄 *Xianwei shuji de bangyang—Jiao Yulu*] to the class³ and Xi recounts how “the Jiao Yulu Spirit” took root in his heart: “I was especially deeply shocked when I heard that Comrade Jiao Yulu still persisted in his work during later-stage liver cancer, with a stick pressed against the liver area. The other end of the stick made a big hole in the right side of the chair...” (People's Daily Department of Commentary 2020, 56). Xi's praises of Jiao as a responsible model official for other cadres to revere can be extensively found in posts appearing on the Facebook page *Xi's Moments* with the hashtags #StoriessharedbyXi, #JiaoYulu, #QuotesfromXi, #StoriesofCPCmembers, #CPCcentenary, and others, at important historical moments, including the 100th anniversary of Jiao's birth on August 16, 2022, commemorations of his death on May 14, or the celebration of the CPC's centenary. Videos featuring Xi visiting Jiao's memorial hall in Lankao County in Henan Province—where Jiao worked—on March 17, 2014, during his campaign to end poverty in the countryside, or talking to the students at China University of Political Science and Law on May 3, 2017, complement his quotes comparing “the Jiao Yulu Spirit” to a beacon always guiding him forward (Xi's Moments 2024).

Who is Jiao Yulu?

As stated by Laughlin (2002, 256), Jiao is “depicted as a county Party secretary who literally worked himself to death in an effort to transform a disaster area that had been relying entirely on government aid into a paradise of socialist productivity.” Nevertheless, as Murong Xuecun (2014) points out, Jiao's narrative as a national hero dates back to 1966, when state-media journalists conducted research on the cadre in Lankao, making it hard “to decipher fact from party fiction” in regard to his life. The volume *Narrating China's Governance: Stories in Xi Jinping's Speeches*, published by the *People's Daily* editorial team in Chinese in

3 The text is analyzed in Zhejiang ribao (2014) and Laughlin (2002, 255–62).

2017 and in English in 2020, reports Xi's speech on Jiao at the enlarged meeting of the Standing Committee of the Lankao County Party Committee of Henan Province on March 18, 2014, followed by a commentary providing details about the cadre: born in Shandong province to a poor family of farmers in August 1922, he volunteered as a militiaman after the Japanese were defeated in 1945, to then join the CPC in 1946 (People's Daily Department of Commentary 2020, 55). In 1948, he followed a work team to the south and in 1962, during the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), was transferred to Lankao to be the County Party Secretary and help improve the impoverished area afflicted by the “three serious threats”: waterlogging, sandstorm, and soil salinization (People's Daily Department of Commentary 2020, 55).

State-run China Global Television Network (CGTN) news channel overdramatizes the reasons why Jiao is loved: he served the people wholeheartedly, pursued his goals of researching the harsh local environment and mobilizing the residents to plant saline soil-resistant paulownia trees despite having liver cancer, and did not care about money nor did he restrain from overwork until the illness killed him in 1964 (at the age of 42) (CGTN 2018; Hu 2021). Jiao's legacy, the narrative continues, has been so inspirational for the following generations that thanks to the use of paulownia wood in Lankao's major activity of manufacturing musical instruments, the county overcame poverty, being consequently removed from the list of impoverished counties and made into a model for green development (CGTN 2018; Hu 2021). The “Spirit of the Party” is thus crystallized in Jiao's voluntarism, attachment to the land and people, and unwillingness to let his illness win: even when bedridden, he wished for his ashes to be sprinkled on those sand dunes in Lankao still stubbornly refusing to be controlled (Laughlin 2002, 262).

The Discursive Construction of Jiao's Legacy Across Time and Platforms

As Connerton (1989, 1) notes, “control of a society's memory largely conditions the hierarchy of power.” Inspired by Connerton's ideas that “our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past” and “that our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order” (3), Chen and Sun (2016) analyze the discursive construction of the collective memory of “the Jiao Yulu Spirit” based on *People's Daily* reports between 1966 and 2014. They identify three narrative changes in the national discourse corresponding to the periods with the highest number of related articles published by

the CPC's mouthpiece: 1966–1968, 1989–2008, and 2009–2014. Providing a useful framework for interpreting the discursive construction of “good cadre Jiao Yulu” in the half a century between the Cultural Revolution and Xi's rise to power, these shifts serve as a basis for discussing further developments in the representation of Jiao's image.

Between 1966 and 1968, “the Jiao Yulu Spirit” was constructed as both “the revolutionary spirit of rising to the challenge” [迎难而上的革命精神 *ying nan er shang de geming jingshen*] and the image of a good student of Chairman Mao (Chen and Sun 2016, 2–4). The report “A Model County Party Secretary—Jiao Yulu” portrayed cadre Jiao as “a real socialist saint moulded in the image of Mao” (Laughlin 2002, 256), while the *People's Daily* carried the editorial “Learn from Comrade Jiao Yulu—Good Student of Comrade Mao Zedong” [向毛泽东同志的好学生焦裕禄学习 *Xiang Mao Zedong tongzhi de hao xuesheng Jiao Yulu xuexi*], launching a campaign engaging all cadres and CPC members in the study of Jiao's revolutionary spirit (Li and Lok 1995, 186–7). Party officials were encouraged to emulate Jiao by assessing local conditions carefully, engaging directly in work, and practicing effective leadership, while motivating the people to overcome difficulties. Jiao's commitment, pragmatism, and entrepreneurial spirit were central merits in the construction of his image and various characteristics were emphasized depending on political needs. Chen and Sun (2016, 4) highlight the success of this campaign arguing that the PRC's economic achievements in early 1966 were due to nationwide efforts inspired by “the Jiao Yulu Spirit.” However, they also note that the official narrative portrayed this spirit as synonymous with “doing exactly what Chairman Mao said,” which, in their view, contradicts Jiao's authentic character (4–5).

Jiao's legacy was revived after the Cultural Revolution and the early 1990s saw the launch of a campaign encouraging people to emulate the hardworking role model (Sorace 2016, 49). Chen and Sun (2016, 6) identify a second surge of interest in “the Jiao Yulu Spirit” from 1989 to 2008, the period between the Tiananmen protests (1989) and the intensification of the Reform and Opening-Up policy—that is, the economic reforms guided by Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 in the 1980s. The *People's Daily* published numerous editorials urging Party officials to follow the “Jiao Yulu-style good cadre” model and Jiao's “good hardworking style” [艰苦奋斗的优良作风 *jianku fendou de youliang zuofeng*] was positioned alongside other icon “spirits” such as that of Lei Feng, aiming to reinforce self-reliance and nationalism as a defense against foreign threats (Chen and Sun 2016, 6). In this regard, Barmé (1999, 107–108) notes that Lei symbolized selflessness and austerity for society as a whole, while in response to rising corruption among Party cadres, Jiao was allegedly an exemplar of Communist values for officials,

resulting in the reshaping of his image as a role model demonstrating the CPC's incorruptibility and reconciling the masses with the Party.

Novels, TV dramas, films, and plays featuring Jiao became increasingly popular, with a notable example being the 1990 biopic about his late career, which was both a box office success and a source of public inspiration. Media reports indicate that the film not only brought fame to the actor playing Jiao, but also allowed the cast to experience “spiritual sublimation” during production, while moving many viewers to tears (Yi 2009). Among those influenced could have been the rural film projectionist Guo Jianhua, who has reportedly shown movies to villagers in Xiangfu (Kaifeng, Henan) since 1976. Her story, tellingly highlighted together with other tales featuring inspiring women by the All-China Women's Federation during the 20th CPC National Congress, presents the biopic as the film which influenced her the most as it emphasizes Jiao's love for peasants (Fan 2021). Guo's career is celebrated as a success demonstrating the impact of following heroes like Jiao: stimulated by the film, she pursued and fulfilled her dream of becoming a distinguished Party member by devoting her life to educating farmers through cinema (Fan 2021).

The socio-political climate of the 1990s made Jiao an ideal role model for Xi Jinping, who saw in his example the value of pragmatism and hands-on leadership. Xi's admiration for Jiao is evident in official narratives, such as the stories posted on the Facebook page *Xi's Moments*, which portray Xi as a leader who, like Jiao, is “down-to-earth” and dedicated to solving problems through research and direct engagement, so much so that with the aim of eliminating poverty he conducted “over fifty inspections and research studies on poverty alleviation” including “visits to all fourteen regions with the highest concentration of extreme poverty” (Xi's Moments 2023a). Xi's emphasis on practical skills and intellectual development is also rooted in his early career, for example in his 1982 talent scouting program in Zhengding county (Hebei), when he invited experts from across China to discover and foster innovators, transforming the area under his leadership as secretary of the Party committee into a testing ground for progressive initiatives (Xinhua 2021).

Xi's esteem for Jiao is reflected in his literary tribute, the classical-style poem titled “Jiao Yulu: In Memoriam—To the Tune of *Niannujiao*” [念奴娇·追思焦裕禄 *Niannujiao-zhuisi Jiao Yulu*]. Inspired by the article “People Yearn for the Return of Jiao Yulu” [人民呼唤焦裕禄 *Renmin hubuan Jiao Yulu*], which he read on the night of July 15, 1990, while serving as secretary of the Fuzhou municipal committee of the CPC, the poem was then published on the front page of the

Fuzhou Evening News (Cai 2014; Gao 2014).⁴ He later recited it at the meeting with Lankao county officials during his visit to Jiao's memorial hall in 2014, further linking his leadership style to the role model (Xi's Moments 2023b). Xi's poem now circulates across various official media channels (e.g., the English website of the PRC Ministry on Foreign Affairs, the *China Daily*, the Facebook page *Xi's Moments*) and constitutes an example of the intertwining of narratives targeting domestic and international audiences discussed in this chapter in relation to China's discursive system. In October 2015, a student of Chinese at a British Confucius Institute recited Xi's poem at the UK Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms Annual Conference attended by Xi. Reporting on the event, the *China Daily* highlighted Xi's appreciation for the performance in perfect Putonghua as well as the student's admiration for Jiao and his belief that "both President Xi and Jiao Yulu are dedicated to serving the people" (China Daily 2021). In the newspaper's view, Xi's mission to revive Jiao's spirit is aligned with the broader goal of realizing the Chinese dream of a happier life for the people (China Daily 2021). The story also appears on the Facebook page *Xi's Moments* with the hashtag #XiDiplomacy, framing it as a symbol of China-UK relations (Xi's Moments 2022).

Chen and Sun's framework identifies Jiao's "sentiment of a public servant honestly pursuing public affairs" [廉洁奉公的公仆情怀 *lianjie fengong de gongpu qinghuai*] as the narrative change characterizing his image in the timespan 2009–14 (Chen and Sun 2016, 7–8). In those years, Xi took three research trips to Lankao (April 2009, March 2014, and May 2014) feeling "moved and educated" every time (Xinhua 2014). This culminated in the official definition and promotion of Jiao's legacy as the "good public servant" [人民的好公仆 *renmin de hao gongpu*] and "example to all Party members" (全党的榜样 *quan Dang de banyang*), with his spirit of affection for the people, hard work, pragmatism, courage, and devotion being elevated to the status of a "red line" [红线 *hong xian*]—a metaphor for "correct thought"—to be constantly followed to "build up spiritual strength" [强大精神力量 *qiangda jingshen lilian*] (Xuexi xiaozu 2015).

Since 2014, officials have been urged to "sweat corruption out" (Xinhua 2014) and the revival of "the Jiao Yulu Spirit" appears to have shifted toward emphasizing values such as frugality, integrity, and commitment to the welfare of the people. Promoting accountability through Jiao's legacy aligns with Xi's ongoing anti-corruption campaign and the CPC's broader ideological objective to restore

4 The poem in Chinese and English can be found on the website China Heritage (n.d.).

public trust in the government. This is visible in videos of Xi admiring Jiao's personal mementos, such as his worn-out shoes and clothes, as well as in the volume *Narrating China's Governance*, where Xi's 2014 speech about Jiao's work ethics is included in the section "Stories of Morals: 'Governing the Country After Cultivating One's Moral Character and Managing the Family's Affairs Well.'" The focus of the excerpt is on "Party discipline" [党纪党规 *Dang ji Dang gui*]: Jiao's "Ten Never-Dos for Officials" [干部十不准 *Ganbu shi bu zhun*] and an anecdote about how he punished his own son for accepting a bribe are brought as examples of honesty and self-discipline (People's Daily Department of Commentary 2020, 55). Similarly, Xi's speeches mentioning Jiao included in *The Governance of China* [习近平谈治国理政 *Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng*] show how his image is discursively constructed to promote "discipline and rules" [纪律和规矩 *jilü he guiju*].⁵ For instance, during a meeting at the Central Party School on January 12, 2015,⁶ Xi explained how to emulate Jiao: "be loyal to the Party, be of service to the people, be aware of responsibilities, and be strict with discipline" [心中有党、心中有民、心中有责、心中有戒 *xin Zhong you Dang, xin Zhong you min, xin Zhong you ze, xin Zhong you jie*], while taking "clean governance and self-discipline" [廉洁自律 *lianjie zilü*] as principles for Communists in official positions (Xi 2017, 154, 161–2). In a speech on December 12, 2016, he praised Jiao alongside other model Party secretaries, such as Gu Wenchang 谷文昌 (1915–1981) and Yang Shanzhou 杨善洲 (1927–2010), as "self-disciplined and law-abiding" [遵纪守法 *zunji shoufa*] officials promoting a family culture with a healthy lifestyle impacting not only their own households, but the whole Party and government (Xi 2017, 385).⁷ In Xi's view, by strictly following a code of discipline and rules [严守纪律和规矩 *yanshou jilü he guiju*], cadres can avoid making mistakes (Xi 2017, 212). They should reflect on themselves [反省自己 *fanxing ziji*] and learn from the past [以殷为鉴 *yi ying wei jian*] to meet the standards for Party members embodied by "exemplary" [英雄模范 *yingxiong mofan*] officials devoted to the cause, such

5 *The Governance of China* was selected for this study as a significant example of political translation. Published simultaneously in Chinese and English, the multi-volume series aims to consolidate domestic consensus, while informing foreign readers and giving China a voice in international politics (Zappone 2021, 89–90). The present analysis considers vol. II and III, which reference Jiao.

6 The Chinese texts reported here are drawn from the Chinese editions of *The Governance of China*. The citations refer to the English volumes. This speech is contained in vol. II and is titled "Be a Good County Party Secretary" (做焦裕禄式的县委书记 *Zuo Jiao Yulu shi de xian wei shuji*).

7 "Family Values, Family Education and Family Tradition" (注重家庭, 注重家教, 注重家风 *Zhuzhong jiating, zhuzhong jiajiao, zhuzhong jiafeng*), *The Governance of China*, vol. II.

as Jiao Yulu, Zhang Side, Norman Bethune, Mai Xiande 麦贤得 (1945–), and Zhang Fuqing 张富清 (1925–2022) (Xi 2017, 212; Xi 2020, 630).⁸

Xi's speeches cover various themes, including his "people-oriented thought," exemplified by his efforts to eradicate poverty and establish a clean government. Historical figures such as Zhuge Liang 诸葛亮 (181–234), Sima Guang 司马光 (1019–1086), and Zhang Boxing 张伯行 (1652–1725), in addition to those mentioned before, are invoked to emphasize responsibility for the people's hardships and incorruptibility. The case study on Jiao's evolving image is particularly significant because it draws a parallel between narrative shifts and Xi's career, showing how past heroes are used for present-day political priorities. Narratives highlight how Xi, similarly to Jiao, conducted extensive field investigations in Zhengding and Ningde (Fujian), bringing innovation to the former and lifting the latter out of poverty. And, like Jiao, Xi promotes honesty and diligence against a poor work style which would cause the CPC to lose the people's support.

Concluding Remarks

Retracing the *crafting*, *recrafting*, and *circulation* of the collective memory of Jiao Yulu in the national discourse and the crossmedia storytelling of his image up to the present has highlighted how the Chinese Party-State makes use of models to symbolically justify its legitimacy, nurture consensus, and unite the nation. This requires a fluid dissemination of *stories* to enhance the "spreadability" and impact of top-down narratives across multiple platforms and ensure the resonance of consistent themes and messages with both domestic and global audiences. As demonstrated by the examples discussed earlier, historical and cultural symbols supporting the CPC's moral and political authority adapt to the specific needs of the time in which they are promoted. Thus, if done effectively, "telling stories of the CPC" can generate a type of *not-so-soft discursive power* with the fundamental aim to foster a collective memory reinforcing, in the first place, the PRC's national identity, political continuity, and social stability, while simultaneously projecting a positive international image for the Party. In other words, the CPC's *storytelling* can be viewed as a heterogenous propaganda operation under what

8 "Meet the Standards for Party Members" [用共产党员的标准严格要求自己 *Yong Gongchandangyuan de biaozhun yange yaoqiu ziji*], Xi's speech delivered on August 13, 2017 at a Party branch meeting in his capacity as an individual Party member, reported in *The Governance of China*, vol. II, and "Remain True to Our Original Aspiration and Founding Mission—An Ongoing Campaign" [持续推动全党不忘初心、牢记使命 *Chixu tuidong quan Dang bu wang chuxin, laoji shiming*], January 8, 2020, reported in *The Governance of China*, vol. III.

Perry (2017, 29) defines as “cultural governance,” meaning “the deployment of symbolic resources as an instrument of political authority.”

The case study on the narrative of “Party model cadre Jiao Yulu” has exemplified these dynamics contributing to the understanding of the notion of *storytelling* in the Chinese context and showing how a discursive approach to the analysis of Chinese soft power and discourse power can reveal the internal dimension of building attraction as a means to strengthen national unity and socio-political stability. The inclusion of “the Jiao Yulu Spirit” in the online reference tool *Keywords to Understand China* is significant as the Party- and State-affiliated multilingual platform is a product of publicity translation aiming to play a crucial role in amplifying China’s voice globally by reaching political, media, academic, and diplomatic institutions worldwide (China.org.cn 2014). Nevertheless, the analysis has shown how the definition of Jiao’s legacy as that of a “model county Party secretary” [县委书记的榜样 *xianwei shuji de bangyang*], a “good official of the Party” [党的好干部 *Dang de hao ganbu*], and a “good servant of the people” [人民的好公仆 *renmin de hao gongpu*] (China.org.cn 2020) is just the tip of the iceberg in the evolution of representing a hero in the national discourse. Through Jiao’s case, this chapter has only touched upon the investigation of the official construction of the “hero discourse” in the PRC and scratched the surface of the relation between the storytelling of model Party cadres and the enhancement of China’s soft power. For instance, to measure the effectiveness of Jiao’s example, it would be advisable to explore the reception of editorial and media products portraying his story, such as the 2015 volume *Becoming a Jiao Yulu-style County Party Chief* [做焦裕禄式的县委书记 *Zuo Jiao Yulu shi de xian wei shuji*] or the 30-episode historical TV drama *Jiao Yulu* 焦裕禄 (2012), of which the former is based on Xi’s speeches and reportedly became a “guide on how to be a good county boss” (Gan 2015). In this sense, this study’s findings are limited and could be corroborated by future research addressing the ideological and practical impact of the “stories of the CPC” or other hero stories on Party cadres and the larger Chinese society.

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Comparative Analysis of Textual and Visual Contents on Saudi Tourism Instagram Pages

ELISA GUGLIOTTA

Introduction

In tourism studies, research has increasingly prioritized the representation of a destination's image. This representation plays a crucial role in influencing the decision of tourists to visit, their purchasing behaviors, and their overall satisfaction (Yoon and Yoo 2023). Numerous studies have analyzed the formation, evolution, and impact of a destination's image on tourist behavior, primarily focusing on the concept of "destination image" (DI) (e.g., Frías et al. 2008; Josiassen et al. 2016). From the literature review, Molinillo et al. (2018) highlight that DI is a complex, relative, multi-faceted, and dynamic concept, representing the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that individuals have about a destination. Chaulagain et al. (2019) describe a country's image as the collection of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs about a specific nation. This comprehensive image integrates various components, including history, politics, economy, culture, traditions, and technology. Another pertinent concept is that of national stereotypes and the perception of the nation (Palau-Saumell et al. 2016). Historically, traditional media have been fundamental in shaping destination images (Govers et al. 2007; Madzík et al. 2023). Despite being shaped by indirect experiences, these media representations form the initial

perception of the audience, thus influencing their decision-making process in selecting potential destinations (Yoon and Yoo 2023).

Social media platforms are crucial for shaping and disseminating a country's tourism narrative. By integrating texts, images, videos, and interactive features, they enable multifaceted communication strategies to engage a global audience. As social media evolves, understanding its multimodal capabilities is essential for advancing research and enhancing tourism communication. Instagram effectively markets contemporary tourism concepts and cultural experiences (Sharpley 2018; Mele et al. 2021).

In recent years, extensive research has focused on the approach of Saudi Arabia (SA) to tourism. SA's Vision 2030¹ plays a pivotal role in this domain, aiming to diversify the economy by reducing the country's dependence on oil. As part of this vision, the government has implemented numerous initiatives to develop the tourism sector, including the introduction of tourist visas and the promotion of cultural heritage sites. The goal is to attract millions of visitors annually, contributing to economic growth and creating job opportunities for the local population (Khan and Khan 2020).

With the recent opening of the country to international visitors, there is growing interest in understanding SA's perspectives (Al-Gasawneh 2020), policies (Naseem 2021), and opinions regarding this emerging industry (Khizindar 2012; Mansour 2019). These studies have explored various aspects, including political strategies for promoting Saudi tourism, local attitudes toward tourism, and the depiction of SA as a tourist destination.

Analyzing, understanding, and measuring the projected image is an essential step for any marketing professional and crucial for every marketing initiative. Pre-existing ideas, along with existing knowledge and occasional misconceptions, influence visitor perceptions and biases during their visits. Previous studies, such as Said (1978) have addressed preconceived views toward the Arab world. In particular, Al Mahadin and Burns (2007) focused on the ways in which tourism is promoted in Arab countries, highlighting its negative impact when it is strongly focused on the experience of otherness.

The primary objective of this work is to examine SA's self-representation in its current tourism promotion policy. The study is corpus-based and relies on data-driven analysis, specifically aiming to reveal the communication strategies used on two Instagram pages associated with Saudi tourism, one targeting an

1 "Homepage" Saudi Vision 2030, <<https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/>>.

Arabic-speaking audience and the other targeting an English-speaking audience. Given the multimodal nature of communication on these Instagram pages, we considered both visual data, consisting of the images in the posts, and textual data, which includes the natural texts associated with images or videos posted by the Saudi Tourism Authority (STA).² Videos were not included, except for their initial screen, as managing this type of data would have made the study much more complex at this initial stage due to the numerous elements involved, such as textual, audio, and visual contents. To analyze the visual contents, we employed image captioning with deep learning techniques and cluster analysis to identify asymmetries in the thematic pattern-distributions of the two social media pages. Clustering was chosen for these preliminary analyses because it was considered a useful method for observing and getting to know the data, while image captioning allowed us to systematically generate descriptions of the visual content. This approach aimed to ensure objective and reproducible results. For thematic analyses, we decided to adopt word frequency, besides cluster exploration, first performing separate analyses for natural and automatically generated texts and then combining the two in a joint examination.

Concerning clustering techniques, these play a crucial role in organizing textual data based on content similarity, thereby facilitating efficient information retrieval and management by grouping similar items together based on their attributes or features. Enhanced algorithms, like K-means (Jain 2010), have been instrumental in clustering Arabic search results by leveraging recurrent keywords to label clusters, thereby enhancing direct content identification (Alsuheim et al. 2021). Spectral clustering (Shinnou and Sasaki 2008) is considered to present several advantages in comparison with K-means, especially with non-linear data (Chang et al. 2010). Techniques, such as Term Frequency Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF) have proven effective in document classification (Manning 2008), offering weighted insights into the significance of words within documents and further enhancing the utility of clustering in capturing important text features for classification (Setiawan et al. 2022; Al-Obaydy et al. 2022). Although TF-IDF has limitations, such as the lack of distribution information within and between categories, it remains

² The images used in this study have been sourced from the Instagram page of the Saudi Tourism Authority, the government agency responsible for promoting tourism in Saudi Arabia, and are protected by copyright. These images have been utilized exclusively for research purposes, with no commercial intent, and have been processed in strict compliance with the Terms and Conditions of the STA. The author duly acknowledges the Saudi Tourism Authority as the original source of the images and fully respects its intellectual property rights.

a valuable tool for classifying texts (Xiang 2022). To enhance clustering accuracy, particularly in contexts requiring nuanced understanding and categorization of textual data, semantic representation techniques such as word embeddings can be used to capture relationships between words (Basha et al. 2023). Word embeddings are representations of words in a multi-dimensional space, where semantically similar words are located next to each other. The best-known techniques for generating embeddings are Word2Vec (Church 2017), GloVe (Pennington et al. 2014), and FastText (Joulin et al. 2016). Similar to word embeddings, sentence embeddings capture the meaning of sentences. Models such as the Bidirectional Encoder from Representations (BERT) introduced by Vaswani et al. (2017), or the family of the Generative Pretrained Transformer (GPT) firstly released by Radford et al. (2018) and various encoding-decoding architectures generate sentence embeddings that can be used for tasks such as text classification.

Since the dataset on which this study is based does not offer a huge amount of data, we performed image captioning as a data augmentation strategy. In fact, recent advancements in this procedure have transformed the landscape of multi-modal data analysis. In particular, the integration of transformer architectures, such as Vision Transformer (ViT) (Han et al. 2023), have propelled image captioning systems toward higher levels of accuracy and adaptability (Herdade et al. 2019).

To evaluate the efficacy of clustering, metrics like the Silhouette Score, Davies-Bouldin Index, and Caliński-Harabasz Index provide comprehensive insights into cluster quality. The Silhouette Score (Rousseeuw 1987) gauges the cohesion within clusters and the separation between them, offering a nuanced view of clustering effectiveness. The Davies-Bouldin Index (Davies and Bouldin 1979) measures cluster similarity and dissimilarity, particularly beneficial for assessing compactness and separation in smaller datasets. Meanwhile, the Caliński-Harabasz Index analyses the dispersion of clusters relative to their internal cohesion, providing a robust measure of cluster structure and quality based on variance analysis (Caliński and Harabasz 1974).

In conclusion, for image captioning we adopted a ViT architecture combined with GPT-2 (Radford et al. 2019) released by Kumar (2022). This operation was carried out with three primary objectives: to increase the quantity of data available for our analyses; to translate visual communication into text, thereby facilitating comparative analyses of images and texts; and finally, to test the efficacy of the model on images from the Arab world. In order to organize our data in clusters, we first generated words/sentence representation by testing both TF-IDF and BERT. Second, we performed clustering by testing two different algorithms, K-means and Spectral.

Corpus Building

The data upon which this study is based is collected in Saudi Arabia Self-Narrative Dataset (SAND).³ As observed in Table 4.1, SAND comprises 249 posts, with 122 originating from the Arabic-language page of the Saudi Tourism Authority and 127 from its corresponding English-language page. SAND includes both the text and images of the posts it encompasses. The posts were collected from SA Instagram pages over a period covering the first six months of 2024.

Table 4.1: Numbers of Saudi Arabia Self-Narrative Dataset (SAND)

	<i>Posts</i>	<i>Original Texts (tokens)</i>	<i>Valid. Captions (tokens)</i>
<i>Arabic page</i>	122	14.339	3.917
<i>English page</i>	127	17.969	4.088
TOTAL	249	32.308	8.005

SAND has been enriched with layers of information generated during the analyses. The first one pertains to automatically generated English captions for each image. As discussed in the following paragraph, image captions were manually validated and corrected, thus, the level of information under the header *Valid. Captions (tokens)* in Table 4.1 concerns the manually corrected captions. As explained in the next paragraph, we performed an error analyses of image captioning by categorizing the errors (information also included in SAND). The third level of analyses performed consists of the pre-processed text of posts and their translation into English, for the Arabic posts. Finally, we performed cluster analyses, taking into account both naturally and automatically generated texts, by combining them into a unique pre-processed string.

Image Captioning of SAND

In order to generate captions for the images gathered in SAND, we exploited the Vision Transformer-base model ViT-GPT2 (Kumar 2022), which is available on the Hugging Face Transformers library.⁴ Its components are pretrained on the task of generating captions from images on the Common Object in Context

³ SAND Corpus is available at: <https://github.com/eligugliotta/SAND>.

⁴ ViT-GPT model is available at: <https://huggingface.co/nlpconnect/vit-gpt2-image-captioning>.

(COCO 2017) dataset (Lin et al. 2014). Indeed, ViT models employ a self-attention mechanism inspired by the transformer architecture, enabling them to capture long-range dependencies in images by attending to different parts of the input image. However, the model also has some limitations, for example, it may not accurately describe some complex or abstract concepts that are difficult to represent visually, such as emotions. Moreover, it may have difficulty generating captions for images containing multiple objects or scenes. We left open, for future research, the possibility to test different models by pre-training them on datasets collecting images from the Arab world (such as Turath, released by Kiyasseh and El-Bouri 2022). However, since the image captioning was not the main goal of this project, we proceeded with the manual validation of the generated captions. Indeed, we consider it useful for future work to analyze the error produced during this task.

Captioning Manual Validation and Error Analyses. We discuss the model accuracy and the classification of errors performed (Table 4.2), in order to understand the main reasons behind them.

Concerning the categorization, we mainly considered the following categories of errors inspired by the work of Sharma and Tan (2019):

1. *Object:* The caption mentions an object that is not present in the image;
2. *Attribution:* The caption inaccurately describes an attribute (color, size, position);
3. *Action:* The caption is wrong in describing an action;
4. *Relation:* The caption misrepresents the relation between objects in the image;
5. *Context:* The caption fails to capture the broader context of the image;
6. *Specificity:* The caption is either too generic or too specific compared to the image.

Considering the limitations of ViT-GPT (discussed in the previous section), we decided to produce an error classification taking into account these limitations and this corresponds to the header “Text” in Table 4.2. In fact, SAND images in some case (30 occurrences) present overlapping planes with text superimposed on the images. We noticed that the model does indeed present difficulties in this case, and we did not attribute the captioning error to other factors.

Table 4.2: Error analysis of SAND automatically generated captions

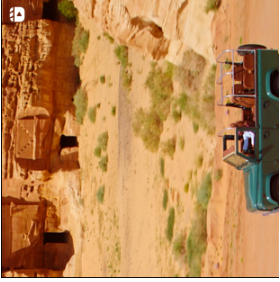

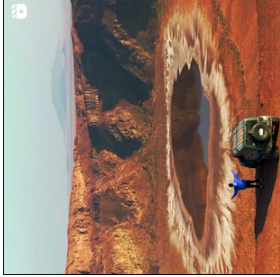
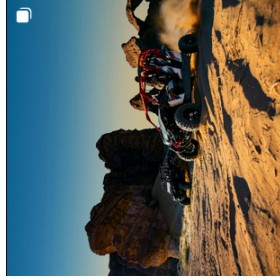
	<i>Correct Caption</i>	<i>Error Classification (Total number of errors: 153 = 61.4%)</i>						
		<i>Text</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Attribu- tion</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Relation</i>	<i>Con- text</i>	<i>Specificity</i>
<i>Arabic posts (122)</i>	46 (37%)	13	33	7	4	1	16	2
<i>English posts (127)</i>	50 (39.3%)	17	28	4	0	0	19	9
TOTAL (249)	96 (38.5%)	30	61	11	4	1	35	11

By observing Table 4.2 we can outline some considerations. First of all, both languages show a similar considerable number of errors for a total of 61.5%. The majority of these errors are classified as mistakes in object recognitions (61 errors in total for both languages) and context understanding (35 errors in total), also, in these cases, there are not significant differences in the provenance of the images, either in the English or the Arabic page. However, as can be observed by the examples provided in Table 4.3 for objects and context errors of images from the English page, the subjects of the pictures are often typical elements of SA for both Instagram pages.

These error analyses revealed us that there are specific areas where the model needs improvement, especially in handling elements from the Arab world and providing accurate context description. Addressing these challenges, by training image captioning models on SAND, once extended in its size, would provide specific samples of Arab world images by enhancing the completeness of automatically generated captions. With this future-oriented approach we followed a specific methodology for the validation and manual correction process of automatically generated captions. In fact, to ensure corrections that did not introduce excessive complexity or noise, such as inconsistencies to the model used, we took into consideration the following steps:

1. Identifying the focus of the model's attention, that is, if there are multiple elements or actions in the photo but the model described only one of

Table 4.3: Example of context and object errors in captioning images from the English page

Error Classification	Context	Context	Object	Object
Automatic Caption	A truck that is sitting in the dirt	A sandy beach with a bunch of rocks on it	A person standing in the sand with an umbrella	A number of people riding on top of a dirt bike
Caption Correction	A truck in the desert	A sandy desert with a bunch of rocks on it	A person standing in the sand with a jeep in front of a lake	A number of people riding quads in the desert
Images from the English Instagram page				
	Figure 4.1: Context error: “dirt” instead of “desert”.	Figure 4.2: Context error: “beach” instead of “sandy desert”.	Figure 4.3: Object error: “umbrella” falsely detected.	Figure 4.4: Object error: “dirt bike” misclassified.

those, we opted to maintain the model's focus. An example is provided in Figure 4.5.



Figure 4.5: Keeping Model's Focus

Generated content: “a man riding a wave on top of a surfboard.”

Manual correction: “a child on a raft and two people jumping.”

In this case we kept the model's focus on the human beings, while correcting the fact that is not only a “man” but “two people” and not “riding” but “jumping.” We defined the information of “a child on a raft” considering the importance of this information, and the fact that it may have been mistaken for the surfboard. In any case, there is no mention of the dolphins.

2. Keeping the sentence structure with its syntactic components, unless it was necessary to remove one. The latter option was any case preferred to the addition of new elements. Figure 4.6 shows an example of such a case.

Generated content: “a painting on a wall of a man in a suit.”

Manual correction: “a painting on a wall.”

In this case, the model added a detail completely absent in the image, that is “of a man in a suit.” For this reason, instead of trying to understand the origin of this mistake, we have simply removed the information.

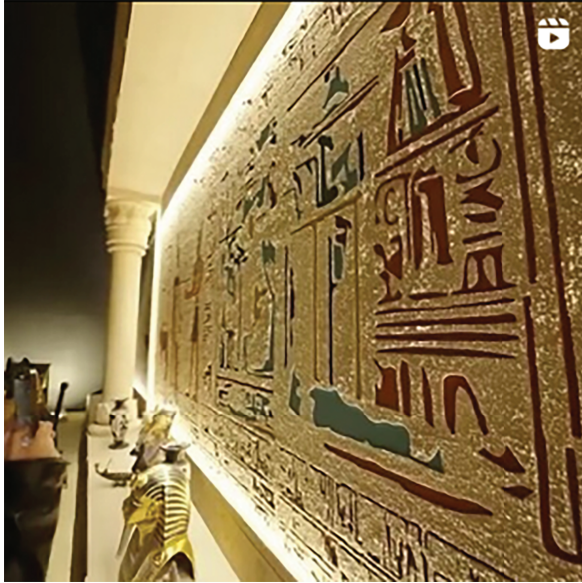


Figure 4.6: Keeping Caption's Syntax

3. Preserving the lexicon used by the model as much as possible. An example is shown in Figure 4.7.



Figure 4.7: Keeping Model's Lexicon

Generated content: “a man and woman standing in front of a Christmas tree.”

Manual correction: “a man and woman standing in front of a lit up building.”

We used the phrasal verb “lit up,” since it was used by the model in the caption: “a lit up clock on a night sky,” provided to describe the image reported in Figure 4.8.



Figure 4.8: Example of Model Lexicon

Analyses

The methodological procedure adopted and the tools used for the various steps are summarized in Table 4.4.

As can be observed in Table 4.4, our analyses focused on identifying an appropriate algorithm for clustering SAND natural data. We conducted two tests for the vector representation of the data in TF-IDF and using BERT (Analysis 1a), and we tested two clustering algorithms: K-means and Spectral (Analysis 1b). Regarding the evaluation metrics for the quality of the clusters obtained (c) for all the three analyses, we employed the Silhouette Score, the Davies-Bouldin and Caliński-Harabasz Indexes. Before proceeding with the discussion of the results

Table 4.4: Outline of the analysis carried out on SAND

	<i>Analysis 1</i> On natural texts (Arabic and English posts)	<i>Analysis 2</i> On automatically generated texts (Arabic and English captions)	<i>Analysis 3</i> On both natural and automatically generated texts
			Arabic natural texts translation into English (Python Google Translator) + manual correction
a. Embeddings	TF-IDF and BERT	BERT	BERT
b. Clustering	K-means and Spectral	K-means	K-means
c. Evaluation of Cluster Quality	Evaluation metrics for clustering: Silhouette Score, Davies-Bouldin Index and Caliński-Harabasz Index	Evaluation metrics for clustering: Silhouette Score, Davies-Bouldin Index and Caliński-Harabasz Index	Evaluation metrics for clustering: Silhouette Score, Davies-Bouldin Index and Caliński-Harabasz Index
Word Frequency Analyses for Each Cluster	10 most frequent words per cluster		TF-IDF analyses on clusters

from the first phase of natural text analysis in Arabic and English, we note that the data pre-processing phase involved the removal of stopwords, punctuation, hashtags, symbols, and emoticons,⁵ as well as a lemmatization phase (using the *WordNet* module from Natural Language Toolkit).

The first row of Table 4.5 shows the results of the TF-IDF matrix calculation for the word representations (with English above and Arabic below), on which the K-means clustering was applied to divide the textual data into clusters. In the

⁵ For the Arabic natural texts the Python library *Arabic-Stopwords* 0.4.3 has been employed.

Table 4.5: Results on Natural SAND Texts, both in English and Arabic

<i>Embeddings</i> + <i>Clustering</i>	<i>Language</i>	Silhouette Score	Davies-Bouldin Index	Caliński-Harabasz Index
TF-IDF + K-means	<i>English</i>	0.01	6.50	2.57
	<i>Arabic</i>	0.01	5.61	2.28
BERT + K-means	<i>English</i>	0.06	3.07	8.85
	<i>Arabic</i>	0.07	2.66	12.71
BERT + Spectral	<i>English</i>	0.06	3.18	8.49
	<i>Arabic</i>	0.04	2.86	10.70

second row of the table, it can be seen that the same clustering process was carried out for both languages on BERT embeddings in order to compare the K-means clustering based on these two different vector representations of SAND. In the third row of the table, we finally see the results of the Spectral clustering based on BERT embeddings.

Indeed, it can be observed that when comparing the K-means performed on the TF-IDF and BERT, the latter yields better results (in bold in the table). Specifically, the Silhouette on K-means based on BERT embeddings (0.06 for English, 0.07 for Arabic) is higher than that based on TF-IDF (0.01 for English, 0.01 for Arabic), indicating that the clusters based on BERT embeddings are more defined compared to those created with TF-IDF. Although the Silhouette of K-means clustering on BERT embeddings is the best on our data, it is not a high score, considering that the Silhouette values range from 1 to 0, where 1 indicates well-defined clustering and 0 indicates poorly defined cluster boundaries. However, the positive values indicate that there is no overlap between the clusters. In fact, Figure 4.9, which shows the K-means clustering based on the natural Arabic texts represented through BERT, displays three non-overlapping but rather sparse clusters. Regarding the Davies-Bouldin Index, the lowest values obtained with it are again those of K-means clustering based on BERT embeddings (3.07 for English and 2.66 for Arabic).⁶ The same observations can be made by looking at the results of the Caliński-Harabasz Index. The best score obtained with this evaluation metric is, again, on the Arabic-language data (12.71), represented through BERT and clustered with K-means, indicating that these clusters are better defined and more compact compared to the others.

6 The Elbow method has been employed at the first iteration to identify the optimal K-value.

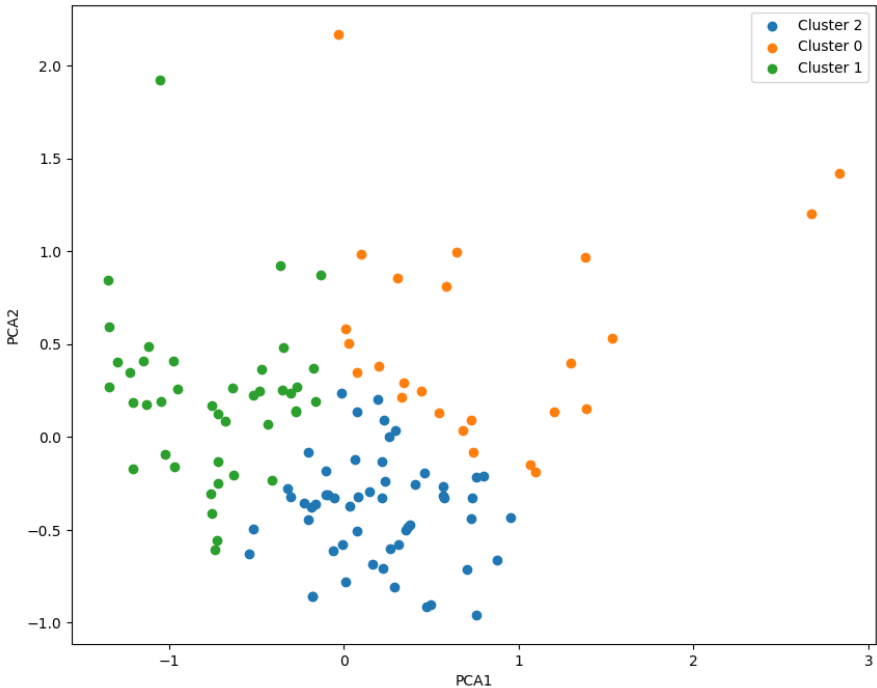


Figure 4.9: Clustering of Arabic Natural Texts

To observe the contents of the clusters, we chose the algorithm that reported the best results, extracting the most frequent words for each of the three clusters identified by the K-means clustering for both English and Arabic natural texts. The results are reported in Table 4.6. For Arabic words, translations into English are also provided in the table.

Table 4.6: Word Frequencies per Clusters for Natural Texts of Both Languages

<i>Clustering of English Natural Texts</i>		<i>Clustering of Arabic Natural Texts</i>		
		<i>Cluster 0</i>		
saudi	33	روح	<i>Spirit</i> ⁹	34
al ⁷	15	السعودية	<i>Saudi Arabia</i>	19
alula ⁸	14	يروح	<i>Come back</i>	17

7 This is the romanized Arabic article. It was not removed along with the other stopwords because stopwords were removed separately for each language (Arabic or English) based on language-specific lists.

8 al-'Ulā is an ancient oasis city located in the Hejaz, a very important region in the history of Islam.

9 Semantic disambiguation of this word, as well as others, was resolved by observing the word in context.

world	13	عبر	<i>through</i>	13
visit	13	موقع	<i>website/location</i>	12
jeddah	12	احجز	<i>book /reserve</i>	11
riyadh	11	موسم	<i>Season</i>	8
may	10	جدة	<i>Jeddah</i>	7
heritage	9	الرياض	<i>Riyadh</i>	6
one	8	العالم	<i>The world</i>	6

Cluster 1

saudi	14	السعودية	<i>Saudi Arabia</i>	51
alula	14	روح	<i>Spirit</i>	28
trip	13	شتاء	<i>Winter</i>	23
landscape	10	موسم	<i>Season</i>	18
mountain	9	الرياض	<i>Riyadh</i>	17
experience	8	عبر	<i>Through</i>	14
adventure	8	موقع	<i>Website/Location</i>	13
world	8	للمزيد	<i>For more information</i>	11
unique	8	الدرعية	<i>al-Diri'yyah</i> ¹⁰	11
desert	7	استمتعوا	<i>Enjoy (plural command)</i>	9

Cluster 2

saudi	11	روح	<i>Spirit</i>	75
world	7	السعودية	<i>Saudi Arabia</i>	49
beauty	7	موقع	<i>Website/Location</i>	36
delicious	6	عبر	<i>Through</i>	35
one	6	بروح	<i>Come back</i>	33
destination	6	الرياض	<i>Riyadh</i>	32
natural	6	موسم	<i>Season</i>	25
beautiful	5	بوليفارد	<i>Boulevard</i> ¹¹	23
explore	5	للمزيد	<i>For more information</i>	18
wonder	5	استمتعوا	<i>Enjoy (plural command)</i>	16

In Table 4.6, concerning the word frequencies in English clustering, Cluster 0 appears to focus significantly on SA as a tourism destination associated with heritage sites. Cluster 1 emphasizes adventurous experiences and natural attractions, while Cluster 2 highlights the beauty and natural allure of SA. Regarding Arabic

¹⁰ This a historical town in Saudi Arabia.

¹¹ Boulevard Riyadh City is an amusement park.

clustering, Cluster 0, similar to its English counterpart, revolves around terms related to SA as a cultural heritage destination. Cluster 1 suggests a focus on seasonal attractions and local destinations, whereas Cluster 2 seems to highlight lifestyle and leisure aspects. Overall, both English and Arabic clusters consistently reflect themes of Saudi adventures, natural beauty, and cultural heritage. However, Arabic clusters appear to place greater emphasis on specific locations and seasonal aspects compared to English clusters, which concentrate more broadly on experiences and natural attractions.

Nevertheless, we remind that the cluster definition was non-optimal (Table 4.5). To improve thematic clustering, we investigated the clustering of image captions with the aim of using this data to enhance the clustering of contents collected by the two websites.

Where it concerns manual captioning, it should be noted that the corrected captions are in English for images from both Arabic and English pages.

The captions also underwent pre-processing and lemmatization phases. The results of the metrics for K-means clustering of all the images (from both pages together) are as follows: Silhouette Score: 0.07; Davies-Bouldin Index: 3.16; Caliński-Harabasz Index: 23.81.

Considering the nearly doubled value of the Caliński-Harabasz index compared to the scores obtained from the texts (English: 8.85, Arabic: 12.71), the images exhibit fairly distinct and cohesive clusters.¹² The same observation can be made by examining the cluster plot shown in Figure 4.10. After evaluating this result, we considered valid the hypothesis of using captions as reinforcement data for natural texts. To this end, we combined the two levels of pre-processed and lemmatized data of both natural and caption texts into a single text, and we repeated this experiment. Natural texts from the latter site were translated into English in order to conduct these analyses automatically. The evaluation scores for this clustering are as follows—Silhouette Score: 0.07; Davies-Bouldin Index: 2.90; Caliński-Harabasz Index: 20.62. As can be seen, the evaluation shows a slightly less defined clustering compared to the previous experiment on captions alone. This suggests that the textual data may introduce some noise to the data globality. On the other hand, captions reinforce natural texts. In fact,

¹² This result cannot be attributed to an increased amount of data due to the fact that caption clustering was on Arabic and English captions combined, which, combined together, consist of only 8,005 tokens. While, the total number of tokens for Arabic natural texts is 14,339, and that of the English texts is 17,969 (Table 1).

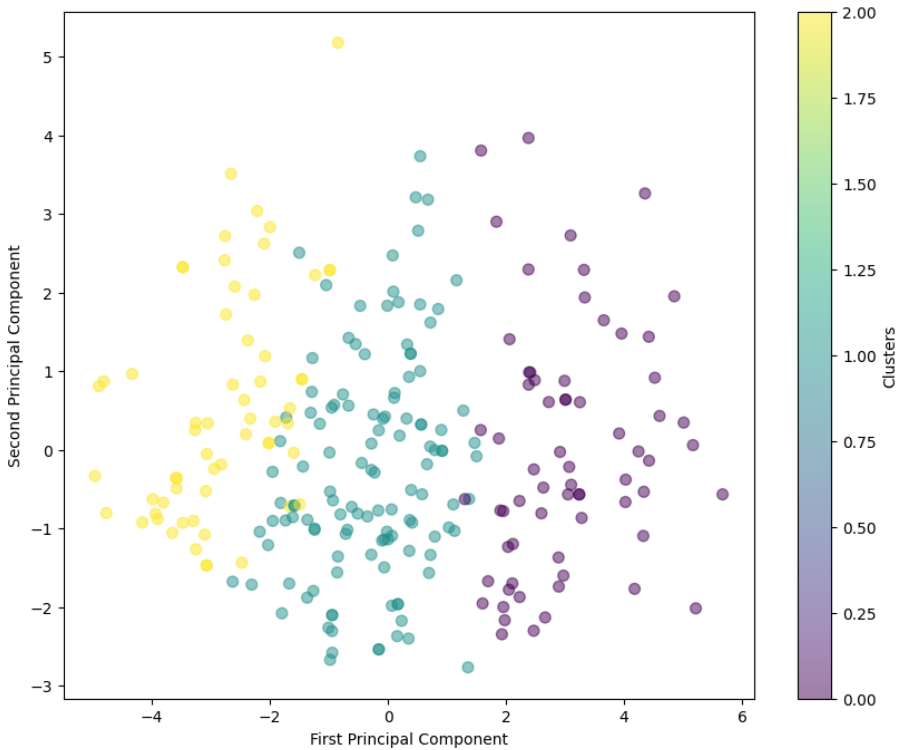


Figure 4.10: K-means clustering on BERT embeddings for image captioning.

although the clustering for the natural texts was performed separately for the two languages and is therefore not directly comparable with these results, considering the best Calinski-Harabasz score for the clustering of the Arabic natural texts (12.71)¹³ and the same index score for the texts and captions combined (2.90), the captions seem to have significantly reinforced the clustering in terms of coherence and internal structure. Figure 4.11 indeed shows much defined clusters, compared to Figure 4.10.

Once this reinforcing effect was confirmed, we finally conducted combined analyses of natural and automatically generated texts in a separated manner for the two pages.

¹³ It is important to note that the Calinski-Harabasz Index specifically indicates the internal dispersion/compactness of the cluster, in addition to the separation between them.

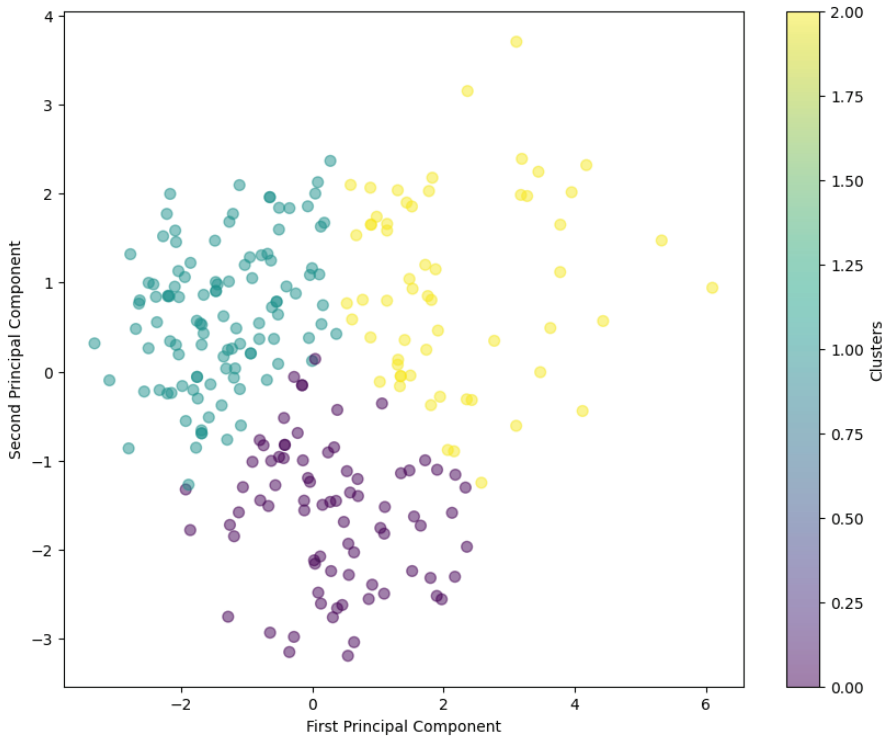


Figure 4.11: Clustering of natural and generated texts for both languages.

In Figure 4.12, we present the clustering distribution representation for the Arabic texts, and in Figure 4.13, we present the same for the English page contents. As can be observed, the clusters identified are three. For comparative purposes, word frequency analysis of the cluster contents was performed using TF-IDF for each data type (English page/Arabic page). The results are reported in Table 4.7.

Concerning the contents of the Instagram page in Arabic, Table 4.7 shows that Cluster 0 focuses on experiential seasonal events in SA (“season,” “experience” appear only in this cluster). Cluster 1 instead, points toward an emphasis on modern arts and contemporary activities (“art,” “man,” “contemporary,” “formula,” where the latter is a reference to the Formula1 races). The words of Cluster 2 seem to reflect invitations to enjoy shared experiences (e.g., “world,” “people,” “moment”).

Regarding the clustering of data coming from the English page, Cluster 0 distinguishes itself for the prominence of the word “woman,” which is also present in both Cluster 1 and Cluster 2, while being completely absent in Arabic clusters,

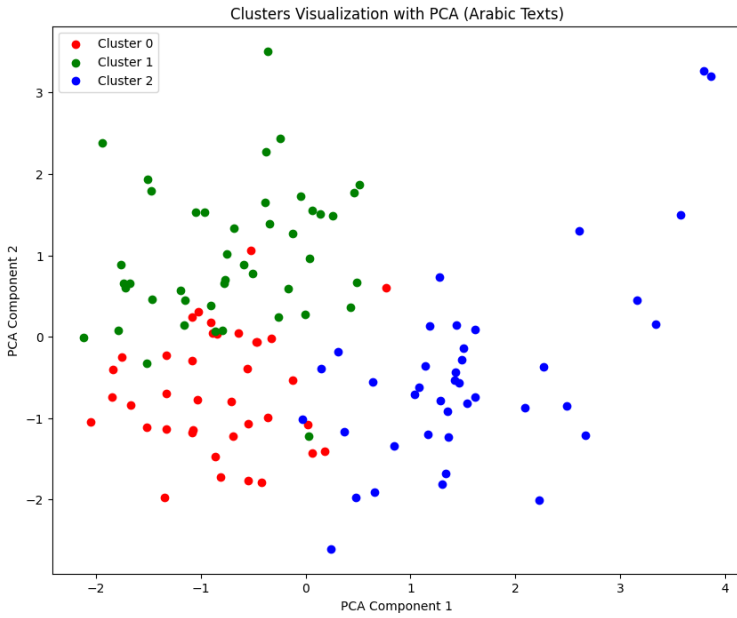


Figure 4.12: Clustering of natural and artificial texts of the Arabic page contents.

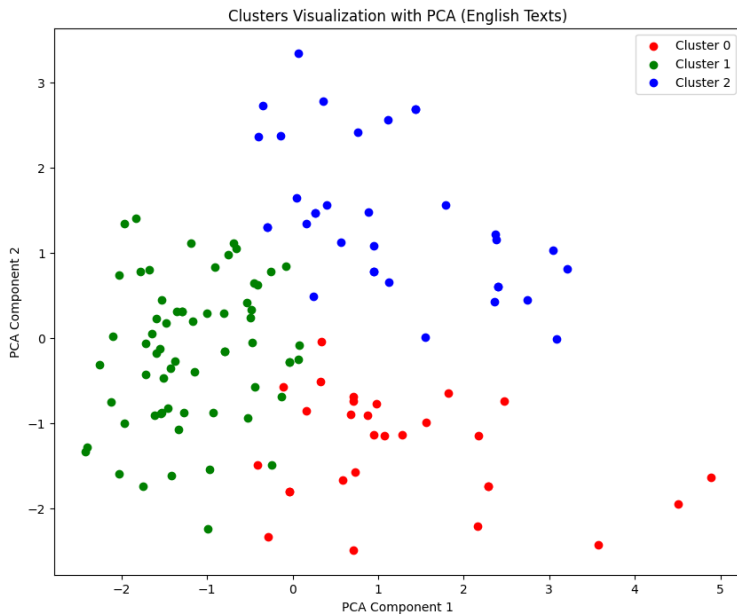


Figure 4.13: Clustering of natural and artificial texts of the English page contents.

Table 4.7: Comparison of Arabic and English combined clustering (Natural Texts + Image Captions) by evaluating Word Frequencies in TF-IDF

	<i>Cluster 0</i>		<i>Cluster 1</i>		<i>Cluster 2</i>	
<i>Arabic</i>	saudi	11.9	saudi	6.9	live	7.8
<i>Natural Texts</i>	spirit	10.7	spirit	5.9	standing	7.7
<i>Translated</i>	arabia	9.9	enjoy	5.3	enjoy	7.7
<i>into English</i>	enjoy	8.5	riyadh	5.3	world	6.4
<i>+ English</i>	season	8.2	art	5.2	people	4.6
<i>Captions</i>	riyadh	7.8	man	5.0	management	4.5
<i>for Arabic</i>	experience	7.8	formula	4.9	discover	4.3
<i>Instagram</i>	world	7.6	arabia	4.9	night	3.9
<i>Images</i>	website	6.2	diriyah	4.2	moment	3.9
	bolivard	6.0	contemporary	4.1	bolivard	3.4
<i>English Nat-</i>	woman	6.8	rock	11.5	saudi	10.7
<i>ural Data</i>	saudi	5.4	water	10.7	visit	6.0
<i>+ English</i>	sitting	5.0	mountain	10.7	people	5.7
<i>Captions</i>	blue	4.3	alula	10.6	jeddah	5.5
<i>for English</i>	destination	4.0	desert	9.9	al	5.3
<i>Instagram</i>	standing	3.9	saudi	9.7	woman	5.3
<i>Images</i>	palm	3.6	trip	8.8	riyadh	5.3
	tree	3.5	woman	8.7	standing	5.2
	man	3.4	world	8.6	world	5.1
	delicious	3.3	landscape	7.8	alula	4.6

where, instead, the word “man” is appearing at the Arabic Cluster 1 with a score of 5, and in English Cluster 0 with a score of 3.4. Continuing the description of English Cluster 0, we can also observe the prominence of natural (“palm,” “tree”), scenic (“blue”) and sensorial (“delicious”) elements. The analyses revealed that the English Cluster 1 is more focused on natural elements than the English Cluster 0, such as “rock,” “water,” “mountains,” “desert,” etc. Finally, English Cluster 2 seems to be aligned with the focus of Arabic Cluster 2, by presenting mentions of locations (such as “jeddah” and “riyadh”) and words related to social aspects (e.g., “people,” “woman,” “world”). By observing both cluster contents (Arabic page/English page), we can conclude that Arabic and English clusters are generally aligned, but they present some differences, notably on gender representation and the kind of proposed attractions. In the case of Arabic data, the attractions are more related to town activities, while for the English clusters they are focused on natural landscapes.

In general, the cluster analyses of the contents of the two Instagram pages revealed some tendencies according to the two different targets.

The contents aimed at the Arabic-speaking audience seem to highlight specific events and attractions of urban Saudi life (Cluster 0). There is a noticeable attempt to position Saudi Arabia as a modern cultural center (Cluster 1), creating a sense of cohesive community (Cluster 2).

In contrast, the contents aimed at the English-speaking audience show elements that evoke sensory experiences (Cluster 0) and immersion in natural (Cluster 1) as well as historical and social environments (Cluster 2). These differences can be interpreted as strategic responses to the expectations associated with the respective target audiences toward SA. The proposed dichotomy of urban activities versus natural experiences is easily identifiable in this perspective. A particularly notable finding is the overrepresentation of “woman” for the English-speaking audience. This can be seen as an effort to challenge and reframe preconceptions about the role of women in Saudi society. The aim may be to reassure the international audience about the country’s commitment to inclusivity.

Conclusion

This study provides a preliminary examination of the content of two Instagram pages of the Saudi Ministry of Tourism in order to investigate Saudi self-representation within its tourism promotion policies, focusing on the distinct strategies used to engage Arab and non-Arab tourists. By analyzing the communication strategies employed by the Authority, we observed how the country tailors its promotional content to address the expectations of these two target audiences. The Authority’s use of separate social media pages for Arab and non-Arab tourists, each featuring tailored visual and textual content, underscores the significance of differentiated marketing approaches.

Our analysis employed quantitative and qualitative techniques for image captioning and cluster analysis, which allowed for an objective examination of the themes and narratives presented in the data. This methodological approach has proven effective in highlighting the potential benefits of training models on images of the Arab world, for more accurate and relevant image captioning. Furthermore, the potential of clustering, even with limited data, demonstrates how the use of efficient embeddings can identify significant patterns within social media contents. The adopted methodology, which considers the multimodal nature of social communication, offered a preliminary understanding of communication

dynamics behind the two Instagram pages considered, by evidencing some tendencies, such as a different gender representation among the two pages.

Limitations. Despite promising first results, the study had to adhere to the small size of the dataset analyzed and a smaller set of clustering models than ideal. Additionally, we did not focus on pre-training captioning models on data representing the Arab world. These limitations suggest the need for even further research.

In conclusion, despite some limitations, the results obtained are promising while indicating the path for methodological improvements. First of all, we consider essential to increase the amount of data, possibly by exploiting other related datasets, and test additional captioning models. We would like also to test different clustering and topic models.

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Locating Asia in the Russian-Language Poetry of the Fergana School from Uzbekistan: Hamdam Zakirov between the “East” and Europe

ALESSANDRO ACHILLI

Looking at Central Asian Cultures After 2022

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its occupation of swaths of Ukrainian territories in 2022, which despite its dramatic scale should first of all be seen as a mere continuation of the war that Russia started in 2014, laid bare a number of problems in the way research and teaching in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies have predominantly been approached and conducted so far. The epistemological crisis engendered by Russia's all-out aggression has confronted scholars with the necessity of reflecting more deeply on the role of postcolonial and decolonial methodologies in the study of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian cultures. Many specialists deem this rethinking as crucial for the survival and the moral integrity of the discipline in the aftermath of the events in 2022 (Johnson 2022). To be sure, the dominance of Russian over the other Slavic languages, which are frequently referred to as “minor,” is arguably the most contentious issue at stake, but even within the field of Russian-language literature and culture the situation is far from being methodologically up to date and able to aptly satisfy the need to understand and describe the challenges of the post-2022 era. One could also add

that it was precisely the scholarly inertia that dominated Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies that explains why most scholars and analysts were unprepared to deal with Russia's neo-imperial endeavors and its cultural underpinnings and consequences.

Traditionally, all texts written in the Russian language have been viewed as pertaining to Russian culture and conveyed to the general public as such, regardless of the origin and cultural orientation of their authors, who may hail from a number of countries and continents, may use other languages alongside Russian, and may not perceive themselves as Russians or as part of the Russian national project. From the perspective of Asian Studies, this ongoing rethinking raises a series of questions that I will briefly attempt to pinpoint in the first part of my article. In the second part, I will focus on contemporary Russian-language poetry from authors linked to the city of Fergana in southeast Uzbekistan with the aim of understanding what image of Asia and of their relationship to it can be observed in their texts, with a focus on the poetry of Hamdam Zakirov.

In a 2001 article published in *PMLA*, tellingly titled "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique," David Chioni Moore lamented the dearth of postcolonial inquiries authored by scholars in Slavic Studies. Moore argued "how extraordinarily postcolonial the societies of the former Soviet regions are, and, second, how extraordinarily little attention is paid to this fact" (Moore 2001, 114). Over the last fifteen years, postcolonial and decolonial trends in the study of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian cultures have made great progress in comparison to the early 2000s (see, among others, Chernetsky 2007; Smola and Uffelman 2016; Koplatazde 2019; Tlostanova 2019 for a decolonial critique of postcolonial studies), but a more nuanced approach to Russian-language texts as not necessarily part of Russian culture, or the culture of Russia from imperial times to the post-Soviet Russian Federation, is still a work in progress.

In the unpublished dissertation that she defended at UCLA in 2013, Naomi Caffee proposed the concept of Russophobia, which in her words

refers to the widespread and variegated uses of the Russian language outside of the customary boundaries of ethnicity and nation. Using the designations of Anglophone, Francophone, and Sinophone literature as a model, I propose Russophone literature as an accurate and necessary classification for works that are too often dismissed as peripheral, or at best, awkwardly shoehorned into the existing Russian canon. I further argue that Russophone Studies, as a potential field of academic inquiry, would provide the space for understanding realities outside of an imperial center, and identities beyond a traditional understanding of nationality. (Caffee 2013, ii)

The concept of Russophonia may indeed prove very useful in overcoming the traditional, imperial, and colonial idea that all Russian-language texts should be seen as part of an unreflected Russian literary canon.¹ The liberation of Russian-language texts from the constriction of the imperial center and their repositioning in a diverse range of national and transnational traditions and schools might also open new perspectives for the study of Central Asia as an area that still considerably suffers from underrepresentation in both Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, and Asian Studies tout court, especially as far as literature and culture are concerned. Although this kind of approach to non-Russian, Russophone texts is still far away from the mainstream of the subject, some scholars have indeed ventured to explore Russian-language texts from outside of the Russian Federation from this perspective, including texts from Central Asia. In her article on contemporary Kazakhstani writer Iurii Serebrianskii, Nina Friess has argued that:

As a native Russian speaker with a “Slavic” appearance, he is – like many other Kazakhstani of Polish, Ukrainian, Belarussian, and German descent – often taken for Russian, which does not necessarily coincide with his self-perception. Serebrianskii believes that even though his family has lived in Kazakhstan for three generations, “there is nevertheless something Polish that continues to exist” in him, while Russia seems to be “much further away than, for instance, Thailand.” (Friess 2022, 149)

Friess’s example, which symbolically foregrounds the role of both European (Polish) and Asian (Thai) cultures in Serebrianskii’s biography and cultural orientation, shows the many entanglements that Russophone cultures from Central Asia may present to scholars keen on unpacking their complexities.

The study of Russian-language, or Russophone, cultures from Central Asia entails a number of questions pertaining to our understanding of Central Asia in its historical development, as well as to Russian culture itself. Any attempt at analyzing Central Asian cultures will inevitably have to face the issue of Russia’s traditional ambiguous stance toward its geopolitical and cultural identification. Writing on Russia’s traditional balancing between Europe and Asia, historian Alberto Masoero argued that “these variations in the idea of the state expressed the desire to overcome the contrast between East and West, between Europe and Asia” (Masoero 2015, 193). The image of Russia as a two-headed giant rediscovering its dormant “Asian nature”—mostly identifiable with brutality and a thirst

1 On Russophonia as a hermeneutic tool, see also Caffee (2022).

for blood²—awaiting to take revenge on Europe, is widespread in Russian literature and culture, from national poet Aleksandr Pushkin’s political poetry of the 1830s, epitomized by his 1831 poem “Klevetnikam Rossii” [“To the Slanderers of Russia”] to leading symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok in the Revolution years, with his long poem “Skify” [“The Scythians”], as well as in the philosophy of Eurasianism.³ However, the study of the orientation toward Asia in Russian culture, of the frequently stereotypical nature of the Russian cultural image of Asia, and of the way in which Russia has portrayed itself through culture as at least partially Asian should be seen as a separate issue from that of Central Asian cultures, which have experienced the Russian colonial power both politically and culturally since the nineteenth century (see Morrison 2021, 1–5).⁴

The Fergana School

Having pointed out some of the many theoretical, methodological, and genuinely practical issues that arise from the study of Russophone cultures from Central Asia,⁵ I will now move to the second part of my article, in which I will focus on post-Soviet Russophone poetry from Uzbekistan, and, more specifically, on the so-called Fergana School. The Fergana School, which was active as a group in the 1990s, is arguably the most acclaimed Russian-language literary group from Central Asia. Its name derives from Fergana, or Ferghana/Farghona, a city in eastern Uzbekistan whose history combines ancient roots with heavy industrialization in Soviet times. The Fergana Valley, of which the multicultural city of Fergana is the

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- 2 See also Madina Tlostanova’s witty definition of Russia with regards to its several colonial entanglements: “a subaltern Janus-faced empire marked by imperial difference in relation to the Western capitalist empires of modernity and branding its (post)colonial subjects (like myself) first with a stigma of redoubled colonial difference (meaning the colonized others of the second-rate empire, which is itself intellectually and culturally colonized by the first rate Western capitalist empires of modernity) and today with a difficult positioning of the vanished second world and moreover, its darker colonial side, which is Asian but can hardly join the emerging Asian century in the capacity of its active and legitimate agent, being left out once again from modernity/coloniality and dewesternization and decoloniality alike” (2015, 268).
 - 3 On the fraught concept of “Russian culture” and on Eurasianism see Plotnikov (2024, 791–9).
 - 4 For the debates on the colonial nature of what is known today as Central Asia and the political and social consequences of Russian colonization in the area, see Lewis (2011). On current debates on postcolonial and decolonial theories with regards to their suitability in the Central Asian context(s), see Sharipova, Bissenova, and Burkhanov (2024, 1–18). On the Russian–Central Asian encounter in the nineteenth century and beyond, see Maiorova (2020).
 - 5 For an in-depth, multidisciplinary study of the presence of the Russian language in Uzbekistan and of the many ways in which Uzbekistan has been *told* in Russian, see MacFadyen (2006).

center, has been defined as “the heart of Central Asia” (Starr 2011) and “is divided both linguistically and politically, with parts ruled by three states: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic” (Starr 2011, ix). Just as “nothing about the Ferghana Valley is simple” (Starr 2011, ix), the production of the Fergana School consistently challenges systematization attempts.

As Kevin Platt put it, drawing on work by Kirill Korchagin (2017) and Ilya Kukulín (2002), “the Fergana school appealed to a constructed prehistory of European and American modernist and avant-garde contexts, interwoven with Central Asian cultural traditions from the deep past of Islamic culture, to more recent semiofficial and underground writing of the Soviet era” (Platt 2018, 462). As evident from the work of the late Shamshad Abdullaev (1957–2024), generally referred to as the leader of the group, the main goal of the cultural project of the Fergana School members was to make Uzbek culture communicate with Western modernism. While fascination with the Mediterranean—and Italian literature of the second half of the twentieth century in particular⁶—and English-language popular culture is a manifest feature of their cultural palimpsest, Russian literature appears as something that the Ferganans wanted to distance themselves from, first of all by eschewing references to Russian prose and poetry. The literary production of the Fergana School shows a complex, contradictory image of Asia, one torn between self-orientalization (Korchagin speaks of “self-exoticization,” 2017, 215) and the search for aesthetic strategies to participate in world culture while obliterating the colonial subjugation to Russian and (Russia-led) Soviet culture that was a defining element of much of twentieth-century Uzbek literature.⁷ However, despite their willingness to distance themselves from the Russian literary tradition, many Ferganans have published at least a part of their work in

6 This is a segment of contemporary Western European literature that was unknown to a majority of late Soviet readers, which makes the Ferganans’ enthusiasm for it a rather elitist gesture. Despite the work of a few extremely active translators such as Evgenii Solonovich (b. 1933), contemporary Italian literature was also scarcely available in translation. This points to the Ferganans’ plan to carve out their own cultural space as distinct from the Russian. I owe this idea to Miriam Finkelstein. See a fragment from Abdullaev’s poetic prose “*Drugoi iug*” [“Another South”], in Abdullaev (2020, 78): “Сквозняк струит в помещение запах подметаемой земли, пока мокрой, и свет полощется на стеклах, то есть, неужели ты ничего не почувствуешь, как у Марио Луци,—поток Арно дарит нам ласку, в которую мы уже не верим, и дремлющие во тьме страхи возвращаются ко мне, ребенок против ярких волн и теней традиции.”

[The breeze flows into the room the smell of the swept earth, still wet, and the light shimmers on the panes, that is, don’t you feel anything, like by Mario Luzi,—the flow of the Arno gives us a caress we no longer believe in, and the fears slumbering in the darkness come back to me, a child against the bright waves and shadows of tradition.]

7 On the Soviet “re-education” of Central Asian literati in the second half of the 1920s and the early 1930s, see Baldauf (2015, 190–3).

Russia, making use of the well-organized Russian literary market as a platform for publishing books that do not necessarily fall under the label of “Russian literature,” despite being written in Russian and published in the Russian Federation.⁸

The Fergana School members frequently insist on the importance of the Fergana space for their writing. In their view, the unicity of the Fergana School can be explained through the universal character of their inspiration sources and points of reference, identifiable as a blend of local atmosphere, Russian language, and Western culture. As Fergana School member Grigorii Kohelet (b. 1954)⁹ put it:

На внешнем уровне нас всех объединяет русский язык и русская культура, на ментальном уровне нечто мистическое и своеобразное, отбросившее в сторону все религиозные и националистические предрассудки. Мы парим над вселенной и имя нам рожденные в Фергане. Несомненно, мы все знакомы с русской литературой и поэзией, но, на мой взгляд, на нас больше влиял Запад, местность ферганских окраин, предгорий, горных рек и высокогорных хребтов. Природа нас уводила в туманность медитативного Китая, русская колониальная архитектура Ферганы придавала городу некий привкус романтического Макондо. (Kohelet)

On the outer level, we're all united by the Russian language and Russian culture; on the mental level, it's something mystical and very specific, something that puts aside all religious and nationalist prejudices. We float above the universe and call ourselves born in Fergana. We're obviously familiar with Russian literature and poetry, but in my view it's the West and the outskirts of Fergana, it's its foothills, mountain rivers and ridges that have influenced us the most. Nature took us to the fogginess of pensive China, while the Russian colonial architecture of Fergana endowed the city with a flavor of romantic Macondo.

In Kohelet's view, Fergana's atmosphere can be compared to that of Latin America, with the colonial experience uniting the lands conquered by the Russian empire with the former Spanish possessions in the idealized image of an explicitly romantic literary global South. At the same time, one cannot understand the spirit of the Fergana School outside of the context of the landscape of the Fergana Valley, whose importance is no less crucial than that of Western literary prototypes and shared historical backgrounds with other Souths, symbolizing the union of Asian, European/Western, and transnational elements of both a physical and a cultural nature behind the Ferganans' inspiration and worldview.

8 On the Ferganans' extraterritorial functioning in the context of Russian-language culture, with a focus on Shamshad Abdullaev, see Platt (2021, 235–6).

9 Kohelet was born in Fergana and studied in Tashkent. In 1990, he moved to Israel.

In a 1979 poem by Abdulla Khaidar, pen name of Aleksandr Kuprin,¹⁰ one of the leading names of the Fergana School, the landscape of the Fergana Valley is one with its inhabitants, both marked by silence and a sense of immobility:

О чем молчите,
два старика Шахимардана
на тахте февральской чайханы
в столетних чапанах,
где рукава встречаются,
как два далеких сая?
Быть может, это разговор
молчанья близлежащих гор,
или прозрение Хайяма
вас бросило в немую яму,
и вы молчите точный круг
своих пиал и пальцев рук?
Да нет, наверно, потому молчите,
что не о чем молчать,
и остается вам, как саю:
пока бежит—пока бежать.
(Khaidar)

What are you silent about,
you two old men from Shakhimardan,
on an ottoman of a winter chaykhana
in century-old chapans,
with your sleeves meeting
like two distant brooks?
Perhaps this is the chat
of the silence of two neighboring mountains,
or Khayam’s epiphany
has thrown you in a silent pit
and you shut up the perfect circle
of your *piala* and your fingers?
But maybe you’re silent
for there’s nothing to be silent about,
and like the brook,
there’s only one thing you can do:
it runs as long as it can run.
(Khaidar)

10 Note Kuprin’s “oriental” pen name, the Russified version of an Arabic name meaning lion, which he decided to use instead of the traditional Russian surname that he shares with a major Russian writer of the first half of the twentieth century.

There seems to be no difference between the human sphere and nature, united in their—stereotypically “oriental”—resistance to action and their penchant for silence, in their not being able, or not wanting, to be heard und understood (see Said 1978, 38–9). The only explicit literary reference in the poem is to Omar Khayyam, the great eleventh/twelfth-century Persian intellectual, who here acts as a synecdoche of Asian culture tout court, making the Fergana Valley town of Shakhimardan/Shokhimardon the ideal center of a long-lost Asian ecumene. However, Khayyam’s lasting influence seems to have had possibly negative consequences for the development of the region.¹¹ The lyrical subject depicts silence as a central feature of the Fergana Valley, with the Asian colonial world unable to have its voice heard. The poem also features wordplays and non-standard grammar forms, such as the unusual transitive use of the Russian verb *molchat’* (to be silent, to shut up). Moreover, to be able to express (the silence of) the Asian landscape of Fergana, that is, to break the silence that seems to condemn the Fergana natural and human landscape to invisibility—possibly as a consequence of colonial rule—the Russian language must borrow (Central) Asian words such as *say* (brook) and *piala* (bowl), without which it would be impossible to describe the Asian reality and to speak up for its silent community.

Hamdam Zakirov

One of the leading voices of the Fergana School is that of Hamdam Zakirov, who was born in 1966 in the Fergana region and grew up in Fergana. Between 1994 and 2001 he lived in Moscow. He has been based in Helsinki since 2001. Zakirov, an outspoken critic of the Russian regime, who is also active as a musician, has published two collections of poems in Russian. His second collection came out in 2018 with Moscow-based NLO, arguably Russia’s leading intellectual publishing house with a penchant for highbrow literature and liberal thought. Zakirov’s poetry abounds with mentions of Asia, both in geographical terms and with reference to its languages, cultures, and literary traditions. At the same time, in accordance with the penchant for a *glocal* culture so typical of the Fergana School,¹² the lyrical subject frequently combines Asia and Europe, at the same time searching

11 An analysis of the possible intertextual links between this poem and Khayyam’s poetry is beyond the scope of this contribution. Persian culture was obviously dominant in the region for centuries.

12 “Describing the seamless integration between the local and global; the comprehensive connectedness produced by travel, business, and communications,” Oxford Reference, <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110810105005976>>.

for points of contact and identifying glaring differences. In line with a general tendency of the Fergana School, Zakirov also foregrounds the general incompatibility of the Ferganans’ project with Russian literature:

Тем не менее, у русских и советских авторов мы практически не находили стилистических практик (упомяну все же в виде «положительных» примеров хотя бы Михаила Кузмина, Осипа Манделштама, Андрея Платонова, Константина Вагинова . . .) адекватных тому, что нам казалось близким к оригиналу—тому поэтическому языку, на котором «говорило» окружающее пространство. (Zakirov)

However, in Russian and Soviet authors we basically couldn’t find any style attitudes (if one is to mention some “positive” instances, then at least Mikhail Kuz’min, Andrei Platonov, Konstantin Vaginov...) comparable to what seemed to us akin to the original, that is the poetic language “spoken” by the landscape.

By stressing that the ultimate goal of the Ferganans was to let the landscape speak—similarly to what can be observed in Abdulla Khaidar’s 1978 poem discussed earlier—Zakirov foregrounds the local, Asian character of the reality that is at the center of their literary project. Albeit relying on the Russian language and Western literary models, the production of the Fergana School is Asian in the sense that it is rooted in a space that is local and *typical*. Mentions of places are central to several poems by Zakirov. In a poem titled “Sever, zvezdy” [“North, Stars”], the lyrical subject identifies with an Arab, lamenting the lack of sun and heat that he experiences in winter, when he is far away from a generic “South” that he refers to by mentioning a combination of Armenian (Djivan Gasparyan), Pakistani (Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan), and Algerian (Khaled) musicians. Toward the closing of the poem, after having returned to a space that is clearly identifiable as Central Asian with its typical food and drink (*plov*, *manty*, *sherbet*), the subject identifies with Orpheus, endowed with the task of saving his beloved from the hell of the North:

Где ты?
Ах да, я вспомнил—там, среди снегов,
на севере, который мнится
арабам самым страшным из адовых кругов. Ну что ж,
пусть буду я очередным Орфеем [...]
(Zakirov 2018, 31)

Where are you?
Oh yes, I remember, among those snows,
In the north, that Arabs
Deem the worst of hell circles. Well,
I guess I’ll be just another Orpheus [...]

One of the most explicit poetic treatments of both Asia and its relationship with Europe in Zakirov's poetry is to be found in "Dnevnik: Fergana, 2000 g" ["Diary: Fergana, Year 2000"], a long poem originally published in 2001 in *Orbita*, a Russian-language literary almanac from Latvia edited by the eponymous literary group:

Здесь самая разборчивая речь—
беседа ветра с листьями. Всё остальное—звуки, голоса—
стремится к тишине, подвластное
негласному закону здешней атмосферы.
Даже рупор, динамик, что по старой традиции
разносит бодрые мотивы над парком,
доносится как будто издалека.

[...]

Город всё тот же, хоть неузнаваем:
вместо старых домишек центра—скверы. Что ж, вполне
приличный памятник тому, что в нашей
осталось памяти (где еще быть ему?). А этот,
реальный город стал как будто
доступней, мягче, податливей, как если б
сделан был из воска или пластилина
и ждал бы лишь касания руки, чтоб форму изменить.
Чтоб изменить. Чтоб измениться.

II

Тление под стать жизни—медленно. Потому
можно еще наслаждаться иными прелестями
(покоем и зноем, к примеру), на которых не видно
следов разложения.

[...]

Но город живет, превращаясь возможно в иной город или
в памятник самому себе (так, во всяком случае, видится нам),
и так же ласково солнце, и кроны деревьев
защищают его (по возможности)
от скверны большого мира, простертого там за горами.

[...]

III

Еще пару слов: то, что мы видели—
нравилось нам, смотревшим глазами приезжих.

[...]

Хотелось еще добавить пару слов о высоких деревьях,
словно щит, словно второе небо нависших над городом;
о комфорте, деньгах, интересной работе –
том, что жизнью является и выносит

нас на людные берега европейских рек и озер;
пару слов (как всегда) о солнце, ветре, молчании, но
ни слова о том, как разрывается сердце.
Здравствуй, Фергана.
Прощай, Фергана.
Здравствуй и еще раз прощай.
(Zakirov 2002)

The most comprehensible speech here
is that of the wind with the leaves. Everything else—sounds, voices—
aspires to silence and hinges on
the unsaid law of the local atmosphere.
Even the loudspeaker, that traditionally
broadcasts cheerful motifs through the park,
seems to come from very far away.

[...]

It's the same city, but you won't recognize it:
Squares instead of the old houses. Well,
A very decent monument to a man who
is still very much alive in our memory (where else should he be?). And this,
the real city's become
more accessible, flexible, softer, as if
it were made of wax or plasteline,
just waiting for a hand to touch it, to change its form.
To change. To be changed.

[...]

II

Decaying pretending to live, no rush. That's why
one can still enjoy other beauties
(calmness and heat, for example), that don't show
Any signs of decay.

[...]

But the city keeps living, possibly turning into another
or a monument to itself (or at least that's how we see it),
and the sun is so gentle, and the crowns of the trees
protect it (as far as possible)
from the evil of the big world, over there beyond the mountains.

[...]

III

A couple of words more: we liked
what we saw, looking at it through strangers' eyes.

[...]

I'd like to add a couple of words on the tall trees,

like a shield, a second sky hovering over the city;
 On the comfort, the money, the interesting jobs,
 the things of what life is made of that lead
 us to the crowded banks of European rivers and lakes;
 a couple of words (as always) about the sun, the wind, the silence,
 but not a word about my heart that breaks.
 Hallo, Fergana.
 Farewell, Fergana.
 Hallo and farewell once again.

The lyrical subject describes Fergana from within, acting as a mediator between the voices of the city and his readers. The whole of the poem revolves around the issue of intelligibility and communication. The subject presents himself as unable to understand the *hic et nunc* of the place that he left in the past and is visiting in the present. On the one hand, this might be linked to the topos of the traveler who returns to his native place and finds it so incredibly changed that he cannot recognize it anymore. On the other hand, the impossibility of understanding Fergana as a synecdoche for Asia with all its contradictions, cultural palimpsests, and competing identity projects might be productively approached through the prism of Derrida's idea of *différance* (1968, 73–4), as a never-ending process of sense construction and deconstruction that cannot lead to an ultimate signification. In the first stanza of this long poem, the subject foregrounds the silence of the urban space of Fergana, which in the spirit of Montesquieu he ironically links to local climate. Fergana is not deprived of a voice, or rather of several voices—which may reflect the multicultural character of the city and its region—but these are unintelligible to a foreign ear, with the subject now identifying as other in relation to Asia, presenting himself as an observer from a far-away land. In the concluding lines of the poem, the subject describes his hybridity, his being torn between two worlds, that of Europe, with the material goods, the commodities that Europe is supposed to entail—a Europe that is “an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in clichéd and shorthand forms in some everyday habits of thought,” as Dipesh Chakrabarty put it in *Provincializing Europe* (2001, 4)—and Asia, which is able to break the subject's heart, although he has run out of words to describe his feelings (another topos of Romantic and post-romantic poetry). The profound ambiguity of the gaze of the lyrical subject of this poem, combined with the deceiving simplicity, accessibility of Zakirov's poetic language, leaves little room for clear answers. The past that the lyrical subject idealizes bears traces of its Soviet heritage, but here the past can also refer to the first years of the Uzbek independent state, when the Fergana school was actively involved in the attempt

to create a modern Uzbek culture, one able to nourish itself with a diverse range of Western products, from high modernism in literature and film to pop music.

The crucial question here is that concerning the relationship between the lyrical subject and the Asian space of Fergana. I argue that Homi Bhabha’s reading of Franz Fanon may at least partially explain the relationship between Zakirov’s lyrical subject and his formerly colonized homeland, that is, what Bhabha calls “the idea of man as his alienated image; not Self and Other but the otherness of Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity” (Bhabha 1986, xiv–xv). The subject is alienated from his roots, deprived of the possibility of reconnecting with them. He cannot understand the language(s) of his hometown, which explains why he perceives the sounds of Fergana as leaning toward silence. Most significantly, this is a condition that he shares with most of the outside world, as unable as he has become to understand Fergana, a region and a melting pot of cultures that remain unfathomable to external eyes and ears. However, with the Soviet experience now a thing of the past and Uzbekistan a free country, the subject of Zakirov’s poetry has at least officially freed himself from colonial domination, although the medium of his literary communication, that is the Russian language, is still that of the colonizer, with the poem reaching most of its readership through the mediation of a Russian publisher.

In another poem by Zakirov titled “Tonkaya nit” [“A Thin Thread”], first published in a literary journal in Estonia in 2011, the link between the subject’s motherland and the West, which in “Diary: Fergana” is first indirectly hinted at in terms of the subject’s belonging to it, and then thematized in connection with wealth and commodities, is defined as thin, fragile, but culturally crucial:

Читал сегодня жизнеописание Кавафиса
и тоненькая нитка протянулась
от его дома на Рю Лепсиус до родины моей.
Ах, тоненькая нитка от бухарской ткани,
наверное, парчи, что вдруг нашлась
в его гостиной среди прочих
индийских тканей и ковров персидских...
[...]
И всё ж теперь я знаю точно,
что подарил бы, коль была б возможность:
атласов маргеланских, керамики риштанской, а еще
просил бы я друзей-художников нарисовать портреты
ферганских, наших, узбеков и таджиков,
добавив что-нибудь для антуража, фона
греко-бактрийское— пусть сердце твое эллинское млеет,

пусть память озарится: Мараканда, Александрия Дальняя—
 ах, тоненькая нить материи бухарской домотканой...
 Нас так надолго разлучили с миром
 (и краем Ойкумены нам казались
 границы государства), что теперь
 по крохам собираем мы былую славу,
 по крохам узнаём величье предков—
 по тонким нитям, по обрывкам фраз...
 [...]

(Zakirov 2011)

Today I read Kavafis' biography
 and a thin thread stretched out
 from his home on Rue Lepsius to my homeland.
 A thin thread of Bukhara fabric,
 brocade, perhaps, unexpectedly found
 In his living room among other
 Indian fabrics and Persian carpets...
 [...]

But now I know for sure
 what I'd give as a gift if I had the chance:
 Margilan satin, Rishton pottery and
 I'd ask my artist friends to draw some portraits
 of our Uzbeks and Tajiks from Fergana,
 I'd add something for the atmosphere,
 something Greco-Bactrian—so that your Greek heart will swoon
 and your memory lit up: Maracanda, Alexandria Eskhate—
 a thin thread of home-sewn Bukhara fabric...
 We were cut off from the world for so long
 (we took the borders of the state
 for the boundaries of the Ecumene), and now
 bit by bit we're collecting our past glory,
 bit by bit we're discovering our forebears' greatness—
 by thin threads, by sentence chunks...
 [...]

In a poem deeply marked by elegiac moods, the subject reflects upon the way in which his own native culture, which is depicted as intrinsically, literally Eurasian, was affected by the Soviet colonial power. The subject laments not only the political borders, but also the cultural boundaries imposed by the Soviet Union, which prevented Soviet citizens, intellectuals, and writers from participating in the actual ecumene, that of world culture, by providing them with a fake one,

that of the Soviet, Russian-led mythology.¹³ After the demise of the Soviet Union, postcolonial and, to a lesser extent, decolonial projects have revamped the utopian dream of a culture able to overcome the very Central Asian silence that the subject laments in “Diary. Fergana.” As shown by the mention of Alexander the Great and his Central Asian expeditions, the greatness of the past of that region can be imagined only in connection with its entanglements with the West, with the subject linking himself to the model of Greek poet Constantin Cavafy (Konstantinos Kavafis, 1863–1933), an author whose biography and work embodies the fusion of West and East that played an important role in the modernist mythology and whom Zakirov himself has extensively translated.¹⁴ Fergana and the Mediterranean are united by historical links that significantly predate the colonial conquest of Central Asia by more than two millennia, with the Fergana-valley ancient city of Alexandria Eschate—in what is today Tajikistan—and the old Samarkand and Bukhara proposed as models for post-soviet Fergana. Through the ironic lens of the conditional mood, Zakirov’s lyrical subject is not afraid of foregrounding the kitsch of the self-orientalizing gestures that arise or may arise when a colonized community sets itself the task of rediscovering and showcasing its own former glory through cultural goods perceived as typical, although the boundaries between what is sold as *authenticity* and kitsch may be said to be at the least extremely blurred.¹⁵ The thin-thread metaphor that informs the poem from its title up to its concluding line points to the fundamental role of the Asian East for the European West: the thread that unites the two worlds is made of precious Bukhara brocade, likely pointing to the fundamental contribution to European culture of what became known as the *East*.¹⁶ Drawing on the traditional metaphor of poetry as textile, the identification of fabric and words in the final line seems to allude to the key role of literature in creating and conveying knowledge, while the

13 On the extent to which local cultural activists contributed to and implemented Soviet cultural policies, see Adams (2011). On the history of early Soviet Uzbekistan, see Khalid (2016).

14 Miriam Finkelstein has shared with me her idea that, by translating Cavafy and establishing *his own* Cavafy, Zakirov is in a way going against Joseph Brodsky, the Cavafy translator par excellence of Russian literature, thus establishing a new direct link with European literature without the mediation of a particularly bulky Russian voice.

15 On kitsch as/and *authenticity*, see Dolan (2010); on kitsch and literature see, among others, Calinescu (1976), who deems kitsch as deeply linked to romantic aesthetics.

16 But see also Platt (2021) from the point of view of transnational Russian-language writing: “Abdullaev and his colleagues transformed the furthest peripheries of Soviet geography into a staging area from which to gather together “threads” from even further afield, “weaving them” into a new pattern of radical departures and novel literary forms for Russian writing” (235).

role of the thread in connecting Asia and Europe also foregrounds the symbiotic relationship of the two. Just as Europe is unthinkable without the East, (Central) Asia needs communication with the *West*, a link long denied by the Russian colonial subjugation of what was known as Turkestan. Without each other, they both seem condemned to silence, possibly alluding to the role of Asian cultures in providing the West with access to the classical heritage in the Middle Ages. The nostalgic gesture of the poem, inspired by both an ironically whimsical, perhaps even tragical celebration of the past and the plan of a program of cultural renewal for the future, makes it sound like a specific kind of anticolonial manifesto, one torn between despair and hope.

Conclusions

Both “Diary. Fergana” and “A Thin Thread” thematize anticolonial gestures. They do so by picturing a combination of lyrical times conceived as an alternative to the Russian colonial experience. In “A Thin Thread,” with its vision of a new Central Asian greatness nourished by the glory of a Eurasian past, the image of Asia stands in contrast with the frequent references to the Asian space as one mostly defined by silence, inertia, and immobility that readers often encounter in a number of poetry and prose texts by the Ferganans, like in the poem by Abdulla discussed earlier and in the prose of Shamshad Abdullaev.¹⁷

In his introduction to Zakirov’s 2018 collection, Russian poet Sergei Zavalov (b. 1958) identifies in a specific kind of realism the key to Zakirov’s poetry (2018, 13). Zavalov, a poet with a strong interest in classical literature, points out the deceivingly, seemingly apolitical nature of Zakirov’s writing, which in fact, as the texts discussed earlier have shown, is extremely political in the sense that it reflects on the historical premises of the culture that nurtured and inspired it, foregrounding its diversity and its multiple vectors.

17 This is an immobility that stands in (apparent) contrast to the Ferganans’, and in particular Abdullaev’s, fascination with film and moving images. Once again, I owe this thought to Miriam Finkelstein, to whom I express my gratitude for her comments on a preliminary version of this chapter. I am also grateful to Giulia De Florio for her suggestions. As for immobility by Abdullaev, see an excerpt from his 1990 piece of poetic prose titled “Nepodvizhnaia mestnost” [“A motionless place”], in Abdullaev (2020, 11): “Получалось, мой дорогой, что только в однообразии полных поз они пеклись о брэнной четкости, и городок, словно по жребью, везде прельщала неподвижность” [It appeared, my dear, that it was only in the monotony of full poses that they nurtured a vanishing distinctness, and the town, as if chosen by lot, was everywhere enticed by immobility].

The literary heritage of the Fergana School can be approached from a number of points of view: as a significant chapter of former Soviet Central Asian culture; as an example of recent Russophone, non-Russian writing from Asia; as a defining moment of contemporary Uzbek literature. What clearly emerges from the study of any of these entangled disciplines is the dearth of research on this area, especially as far as literature and culture are concerned, and the need to pay more attention to this large and complex area for a fuller understanding of Asia and its diversity.

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Part Two: Asia and the Other

“Otherness” in Classical Chinese Literary Sources: The Animal and the Representation of the “Barbarian”

FRANCESCA PUGLIA

Introduction

In his essay “On the Metalanguage of a Typological Description of Culture,” Lotman shows how a group of people tend to contrast their own culture of belonging with that of the “other,” which is, inevitably, deemed inferior: “One’s own culture is considered to be the only one. To it is contrasted the ‘lack of culture’ of other groups. Such will be the attitude of the Greek to the barbarian, just as all other types of contrast between the ‘chosen’ group and the profane” (Lotman 1975, 97–123).

This same principle can also be applied to the Chinese people’s perception of themselves vis-a-vis the non-Chinese peoples since ancient times—which is to say even prior to the unification under one empire.¹ Oppositional self-identification of the “Chinese,” that is, the perception of “Chineseness” (the “self”) through a dichotomy with the “other,” is at the heart of the philosophical-political debate in the formative period of Chinese thought; that is, the dichotomy between the

1 The term “Chinese” here is used pragmatically, with reference to the people who lived under the Zhou 周 rule first, and under the various imperial dynasties later, who were known collectively and referred to themselves as the *Hua* 華 (probably originally the name of an earlier tribe) or *Xia* 夏. For an extensive discussion about this terminology, see Wilkinson (2000, 95–6).

peoples at the borders and the heartland of the Zhou 周 world first, and the Chinese Empire later, after the unification in 221 BC. Different thinkers from the Hundred Schools of Thought developed this idea in varying ways across different historical periods but, in principle, it generally favored inclusive conceptions of a “Chinese” (*Hua* 華/*Xia* 夏) identity.

This essay will highlight the relevance attached to cultural differences in terms of inferiority, rather than ethno-racial characteristics, in connection with the dehumanization of the barbarian peoples who, by contrast to the Chinese, are described in animalistic terms. Moreover, it will be observed how the cultural and behavioral distinction between the Chinese and the non-Chinese, but also between man and animal, creates the conditions for the potential inclusivity of the concept of “Chineseness” itself. This “Chineseness” will be shown to be rooted in cosmological theories of constant change and blurred boundaries between things: a metaphysical conception that also influenced the strand of Anomaly Tales, the *zhiguai xiaoshuo* 志怪小說 [Tales of the Strange], which developed in the declining phase of the Han 漢 Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD)—a literary genre where the identification of the stranger with the animal is exacerbated for narrative purposes.

“Chineseness” and “Otherness”: A Cultural Dichotomy

Chinese literary tradition from the Zhou (c. 1046–256 BC) and Han periods is replete with references to foreign peoples with whom the *Xia* often came into contact. Four tribes that were living outside the borders of the *Hua* territories were associated with the four points of the compass and their proper names (*Yi* 夷, *Rong* 戎, *Di* 狄, and *Man* 蠻), as well as the exonyms of other tribes, are routinely translated with the Greek-derived word “barbarian,” despite the absence of a single analog for this word in the classical Chinese language (Di Cosmo, 2002, 95–6). The choice to use the Greek-derived term “barbarian” to refer to the people living beyond the borders of the *Hua* territories is a heuristic one, but it is consistent with the Chinese perception of barbarians that is outlined in this essay: the exonyms used to identify the various non-Chinese tribes originate with a neutral meaning, only to take on pejorative connotations, as happened with the word *barbaros* in Greece (Ugoretz 2016). In contrast, Xiang Shuchen argues, with the aim to reject the use of the word “barbarian” for the non-*Hua* people, that the cultural context in which the word *barbaros* emerges is very different from that of ancient China. The word *barbaros* in ancient Greece is the product of a dualistic metaphysical view that distinguishes the foreigner—categorized as non-human or

animal—from the Greek who is ontologically human in a hierarchically ordered conception of the universe that strongly differs from the fluidity of boundaries that characterizes early China’s cosmological thought (Xiang 2023). These premises are accurate, in the sense that the divide between the *Hua* and the peoples beyond the borders is not a static ontological distinction, but a condition that is malleable since constant change is the drive of existence according to classical Chinese cosmology: boundaries between beings are traversable. Nevertheless, the foreigner, that is one who, living far from Chinese territories, follows different customs and traditions and is not exposed to Chinese cultural influence, is placed on the same status as an animal—in a similar way as the barbarian for the Greek. This further exemplifies the use of the word “barbarian” in this essay to denote the peoples who used to live on the fringes of the *Central States*².

However, the Chinese tradition, which conceives a universe where change is constant and all things influence each other and constantly cross inter-species boundaries, proves to be open to the possibility that a foreigner might rise to the level of humanness of the *Hua*.

The potential inclusiveness of the alien into the *Hua* identity implies two main components in the conceptualization of the barbarian. Firstly, the distinguishing factor between the barbarian and the Chinese was cultural, not racial or ethnic;³ secondly, the differentiation of *Hua* and non-*Hua* people was conceived as based on the changeability of the non-Chinese people, that is the possibility of the barbarians becoming sinicized under the influence of the superior Chinese culture.

2 The term *Zhongguo* 中國 [Central States] itself is antithetically opposed to the places inhabited by barbarians, by the contrast between *zhong* 中 [center] and *wai* 外 [outside]. As Granet points out, the expression *Zhongguo* originally denotes the lordships that anciently united through treaties (Granet 2019, 66). Strassberg argues that the various regions, local cultures, and peoples of early China had not yet evolved a universal conception of themselves as a single Chinese nation except by comparison with surrounding barbarians—a notion that emerges also from the geographic and cartographic representation of *Zhongguo* as surrounded by the four seas and the lands inhabited by strange animals and barbarians, as it is presented for example in the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 [*The Classic of Mountains and Seas*] (Strassberg 2002, 33–4).

3 The cultural foundation of the dichotomy between *Hua* and non-*Hua* is not agreed upon unanimously by scholars. Dikötter claims that the Chinese use of pejorative exonyms in referring to aliens reveals a racial dimension in the distinction between *Hua* and the “other,” arguing for the absence of a proper opposition between culture and race that he identifies as a modern construct (Dikötter 1992). Ugoretz, tracing a line between the exonyms for the peoples on the Chinese border and those for the Eurasians along the Silk Road, argues that the primary motivator for the use of graphic pejoratives in Chinese exonyms for “barbarians” was neither cultural nor ethnic, but rather political (Ugoretz 2016).

The prevailing conception of the dichotomy between *Hua* and barbarians based on cultural differences in the *Chunqiu* 春秋 [Spring and Autumn] (722–481 BC) and *Zhanguo* 戰國 [Warring States] (453–221 BC) periods also permanently influenced the perception of the “other” in the imperial era.⁴ The superiority of the Zhou culture was equated with adherence to ritual norms, and differences between *Hua* and barbarians were rarely attributed to ethnic or biological features, but rather to behavioral ones and therefore modifiable with proper education, as argued by Pines: “Ritual norms were indeed the major delineating line between Self and the Other in pre-imperial China” (Pines 2004, 66). A view of the Chinese-barbarian distinction based on adherence to ritual norms was clearly supported by ritualist thinkers, including Mengzi 孟子 and Xunzi 荀子; Less frequently is the issue addressed in the *Lunyu* 論語 [*The Analects*], in which the idea of having to apply ethical norms equally to both Chinese and barbarians nevertheless emerges. Thinkers who, on the contrary, openly criticized *Ru* 儒 ritualism, however, did not adhere to a racial distinction: for Mozi 墨子, the criterion of evaluation had to be moral rather than ritual.⁵ Underlying the *Ru* conception of the changeability of the barbarian through the influence of the superior *Xia* culture was a shared understanding of human nature as perfectible—this, by extension, also included the nature of non-Chinese people.⁶ A passage in the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 [*The Annals of Master Lü*] argues for the natural disposition and desires of the various people, which include barbarians as well as *Xia* people, as being identical, despite the differences in language, clothing, and traditions:

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- 4 Exceptions to this view are found in Ban Gu’s 班固 (32–92 AD) *Han shu* 漢書 [*Book of Han*], in which he defines the *Yi* and *Di* barbarians as having human faces and hearts of beasts (chapter *Xiongnu chuan xia* 匈奴傳下): they must be treated as strangers since not even proper government can change their disposition. Yuri Pines emphasizes how Ban Gu’s view was a minority (a view in contrast to that of his predecessor Sima Qian 司馬遷, for example) not negligible in his time, but not supported by earlier texts from the *Chunqiu* and *Zhanguo* periods (Pines 2004).
- 5 Pines evidences that those thinkers who questioned the validity of ritual norms rejected the paradigm of the *Xia* superiority altogether, bringing as examples both Mozi and Zhuangzi 莊子, while others sought political and social explanations for the deficient behavior of the barbarians: this is the case of some passages from the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 [*The Annals of Master Lü*] that pour the responsibility for the inferiority of peoples at the borders of the Central States on social disorder (e.g., chapter *Yi shang* 義賞) and lack of political authority (e.g., chapter *Shi jun* 恃君) (Pines 2004).
- 6 In the *Mengzi* 孟子, *Li Lou xia* 離婁下 (8.1), the example of Shun 舜, of the Eastern *Yi*, is brought up showing that under the positive influence of the *Xia* culture, barbarians can be changed and can even aspire to become models of sagacity for the Chinese people. However, in the *Mengzi*, an equally transformative potential is not credited to non-Chinese cultures. *Teng Wen Gong shang* 滕文公上 5.4 chapter reads: “I have heard of the use of *Xia* doctrines to transform the barbarians, yet I have never heard of transformation using barbarians’ doctrines.”

The *Man* and the *Yi* have unintelligible languages, different customs, and opposite practices; their robes, caps, and hats, their buildings, residences, and dwelling places, their boats, carts, tools, and weapons, their voices, colors, tastes are all different, yet in their desires, they are as one.^{7 8}

However perfectible, in the texts of the Eastern Zhou, the non-Chinese are described as subordinate to the exalted Zhou culture that proliferates in the Central States because the non-Chinese are subjected to a different education and thus considered inferior.⁹ Derogatory terms are used to define barbarians and all those people who were born under the Zhou but did not share their ritual system. Mengzi gives the example of Shun 舜, as a person versed in the virtues of benevolence and righteousness, to emphasize that only those who adhere to proper behavior are distinguishable from beasts: “That which distinguishes men from birds and beasts is little, common people cast it away, while the *junzi* (prince) preserves it.”¹⁰

Pines effectively sums up the view of barbarians as equals to animals as a consequence of their lack of propriety, recalling a passage from the *Liji* 禮記 (ch. *Tan Gong xia* 檀弓下) that identifies the way of the barbarians with giving vent to their feelings without restraint: “*Zhanguo* ritualists considered unrestrained expressions of one’s feelings and spontaneity as the hallmark of savagery. Absence of ritual norms was, in their eyes, responsible for the woeful situation of the barbarians on the fringes of human society” (Pines 2004, 67). Another passage from the *Quli shang* 曲禮上 chapter of the *Liji* is highly illustrative of this view and introduces the widespread use of similes between barbarians and animals that is crucial to the remainder of this study—animals differ from the *Hua* people for the same reasons as the barbarians, the lack of appropriate ritual norms:

Parrots can speak, yet they still are flying birds; apes can speak, yet they still are beasts. Now, if men lack rituals, even if they can speak, don’t they share the hearts of birds and beasts? Therefore, when the wise nobles arose, they established rituals to instruct men. To make them acknowledge the distinction between themselves and the birds and the beasts, by possessing rituals.¹¹

7 *Lüshi Chunqiu*, chapter *Wei yu* 為欲, 19.6.

8 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

9 In the opening chapter of the *Xunzi* 荀子 it is stated that at birth the people from the various tribes all cry identically: it is as they grow up that they develop distinctions due to different educational schemes (*Xunzi*, *Quan Xue* 勸學, 1).

10 *Mengzi*, *Li Lou xia* (8.19).

11 *Liji*, chapter *Quli shang*, 10–11.

The association of barbarian tribes with animals is already evident from the derogatory exonyms devised by the Chinese to name them. Two out of the four most used names that designate the barbarians from the four directions (the *Yi*, *Rong*, *Di*, and *Man*) have evolved to include semantophores for animals: “dog” 犛 in the *Di* character; “insect/reptile” 虫 in the *Man*.¹² Legends on the origins of these barbarian tribes envision them as the product of human-animal intercourse, including a canine origin for the *Rong* (犬戎 *Quan Rong*) and the *Man* (allegedly born from the union of a Chinese princess and the dog Panhu 槃瓠).¹³ Furthermore, *Chunqiu* and *Zhanguo* literature is replete with passages in which barbarian peoples are explicitly equated with beasts.¹⁴ One exemplary case among many can be found in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (section *Min gong yuan nian* 閔公元年), in which Guan Zhong 管仲 labels the *Rong* and the *Di* as *chai lang* 豺狼 [jackals and wolves], yearning for a union of all *Xia* peoples against the common enemy: “The *Rong* and the *Di* are jackals and wolves, they cannot restrain themselves. All the *Xia* are close in kin, they cannot abandon each other.”¹⁵

Both barbarians and animals lack ritual norms to control the impulsive emotions of individuals and to establish order in their society. Some physical characteristics, daily-life habits, and skills of non-*Hua* peoples are also accounted for in the texts, pointing out their similarity with the animals: the use of animal skins as clothing, the custom of tattooing the skin among southern tribes to resemble reptile scales, the habit of hunting rather than farming, and their superior ability

12 Mair 1998 notes that the *chong* 虫 semantophore in the character *Man* might have been a Han dynasty addition. Both *Yi* and *Rong* appear already in Shang 商 (c.1600–c.1045 BC) oracle bone inscriptions, while both *Man* and *Di* first appear in Western Zhou 西周 (c.1046–771 BC) bronze inscriptions. Yang Huang (2013) reconstructs the pictographs for all four exonyms: he associates the pictograph for *Yi* to the dead body of a killed enemy, the one for *Man*, to the snake in the lower component of the character, the one for *Rong*, to the idea of warlike people, and the one for *Di*, to people with hounds. According to Ugoretz, during the first encounters between Sinitic and non-Sinitic peoples, the Chinese provided neutral and descriptive exonyms for their neighbors, with no derogatory acceptations. The process which, starting from the Western Zhou, led to the homogenization of the various barbarians associated with the four directions under the generic category of *Yi* also saw the delineation of the “other” as an identity opposed to the Chinese (Ugoretz 2016). Chen Zhi (2004), analyzing the evolution of the opposed concepts of *Xia* and *Yi*, argues that they have formerly been employed to distinguish between the Zhou elite and the non-Zhou people, and later to distinguish between the Central States and the peripheral barbarians in a geographical sense, as well as between Zhou subjects and non-Zhou subjects in a political sense.

13 For textual references to the canine origins of the *Quan Rong*, see: *Shanhai jing*, *Dahuang bei jing* 大荒北經; for textual references to the canine origins of the *Man*, see: *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 [Book of the Later Han], *Nanman Xinan Yi liezhuan* 南蠻西南夷列傳.

14 Pu Muzhou (1999), despite the scarcity of sources, attempts an analysis of the Chinese-barbarian dichotomy in the Shang and Western Zhou periods.

15 *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* 春秋左傳, *Min gong yuan nian*, 256.

in herding and domesticating animals. One further key aspect is the association of the barbarians’ lands with the wild animals that inhabit them. Sterckx argues that the environment was believed to influence the disposition and the behavior of human and non-human animals, inferring a moral affinity between the men and the beasts that live off the same soil and air. This implies that the barbarians living at the extremities of the Central States shared the heart-mind of the wild animals endemic to the same territories: the *Xiongnu* 匈奴 being more accustomed to handling horses in the steppe, the southern *Yue* 越 resembling scaled creatures, such as alligators and snakes (Sterckx 2002, 108; 187–90).

Barbarians were envisioned as less than humans, as beasts, since they lacked ritual propriety. The ritual itself was deemed to keep order by imposing and maintaining divisions, thereby preventing society’s return to chaos: between men and women, ruler and subjects, Chinese and barbarians (Lewis 2006a, 2). Exemplary passages on the crucial importance of separation (*fen* 分) for maintaining social order and for making humans properly human can be found in the *Xunzi*. For example, chapter *Fei xiang* 非相 argues that social divisions (e.g., between father and son, man, and woman), rather than biological characteristics, represent the main distinction between humans and animals.¹⁶ The *Wang zhi* 王制 chapter, in turn, emphasizes how the lack of *Yi* 義 [propriety], by which people are divided and socially organized, results in beasts being inferior to humans.¹⁷

The Inclusivity of “Chineseness”: Cosmological Grounds for Changeability

For the sake of securing order, the land also needed to be regulated by means of division: the separation of the space inhabited by the Chinese from that populated by barbarians and animals also occurred through a process of creating order. The same ordering principle that divides man from woman, ruler from subject, living from dead, has been applied to the division of space, both on a geographical and on a cosmological scale: ancient cosmogonic accounts envisioned the world as emerging from a primeval state of chaos through the separation of opposites (of *yin* and *yang*, sky and earth, etc.), and maintaining clear divisions served to prevent a return to chaos.¹⁸ Several accounts describe Yu 禹 channeling the waters

16 *Xunzi*, *Fei xiang* (53–67).

17 *Xunzi*, *Wang zhi*, 114–37.

18 Cosmogonic accounts that envision the world and the ten thousand things as emerging from a chaotic primeval state through division include, but are not limited to, the *Daodejing* 道德經 [*The*

into rivers to put an end to the Great Flood while dividing the land into fixed units and preparing the soil for agriculture. This, as Lewis details thoroughly, forms a human counterpart to the Chinese cosmogonic stories (Lewis 2006b, 21–48). While ancient cosmogonies unfold the primeval structuring of the universe by means of successive separations of cosmic principles, the mythological narratives on the Flood detail the creation of livable and arable space through the segregation from the wild moors.

References to Yu's ordering of the space are already found in odes and bronze inscriptions from the Zhou dynasty, yet the first full accounts of his accomplishments are found in the *Shangshu* 尚書 [*Venerable Documents*], which details Yu's strategy in opening passages through the mountains to guide the rivers eastward to the sea. In the world modeled by Yu, the royal capital lays in the center, surrounded by concentric zones of lesser civilization, proportional to the distance from the center: in Sterckx words, "the natural world in early China was ordered on spatial rather than species principles" (Sterckx 2002, 122). Two aspects of the taming of the Flood are fundamental to our discourse: firstly, the division of space implied the separation between civilization and wilderness and between humans and animals; secondly, Yu's channeling of water laid out the basis for the development of agriculture. A passage in the *Mengzi*, *Teng Wen Gong xia* (6.14) is illustrative of this human-animal divide:

The *Shu jing* reads: "The flooding waterways alert me." The flooding waterways refer to the deluge. [Yao] appointed Yu to put it to order. Yu dug the soil and guided [the waters] to the sea. He drove away snakes and dragons and settled them in the swamps. The waters proceeded through the land in the Jiang, Huai, Han, and Yellow Rivers. The dangerous obstructions were removed, and the harm of the birds and beasts to people vanished. Only then people obtained level land to dwell on.

Humans can only inhabit the land once the wild animals have been chased away. In agriculture, preparing the land so that humans can learn to cultivate the fields plays a central role in the Great Flood narratives as an element of civilization and it is a recurring motif from the *Shangshu* to the excerpts from the *Mengzi*. In terms of the perception of barbarians by the peoples of the Central States, agriculture implemented by the Chinese is often contrasted with the farming and hunting practices more prevalent across the borders: peoples who live in contact with animals in the same habitat (sharing the same soil and *qi* 氣) are also deemed to be

Classic of the Way and Power] (especially Chapters 25, 40, and 42), the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, the *Wenzi* 文子, the *Liezi* 列子, and Warring States period manuscripts such as the *Chu bo shu* 楚帛書 [*Chu Silk Manuscript*] and the *Fan wu liu xing* 凡物流形 [*All Things Flow into Form*].

of similar nature and morally akin.¹⁹ Some accounts of the Flood myth, however, also directly tackle the issue of the separation of *Hua* and non-*Hua*, connecting it to the expulsion of ferocious beasts. It is the case, for example, of another passage from the *Teng Wen Gong xia* chapter of the *Mengzi* (6.14):

In ancient times, Yu restrained the flooding waters, and the *Tianxia* resulted pacified. Duke Wen of Zhou conquered the eastern *Yi* and the northern *Di*, chased away the wild beasts and the hundred peoples were at peace.

It has been illustrated how, based on mostly ethical and behavioral reasons, pre-imperial and early imperial literature displayed a strong tendency to associate barbarian peoples close to the borders of the Central States with wild animals in general and more specifically with animals that shared the same habitat, thereby forging a notion of the foreigner as the closest in kind to beasts.

The borders of the states in the four directions were each associated with one specific tribe, as they were associated with one specific auspicious beast (*Siling* 四靈), as a result of the gradual spread of correlative cosmology: the *Yi* in the east, the *Man* in the south, the *Rong* in the west, and the *Di* in the north.²⁰ But the perception and description of the foreigner in derogatory terms reminiscent of the animal sphere reveals a conception, as noted, of barbarian peoples as inferior to the *Hua*, primarily for cultural rather than strictly racial, biological, or geographical reasons. This implies that the boundaries between peoples are, in fact, labile and traversable: the foreigners can elevate themselves to the *Hua*—provided an education introducing them to the ethics and rituals of the Central States. The pairing of animals and barbarians arises from the very elusive nature of these ontological boundaries: the ancient and classical conception of the world, based on a cosmogonic tradition that reconnected every being, the *wanwu* 萬物 [ten thousand things], to a single mixed and chaotic origin, avoided the setting of categorical limits between the different kinds of *wu*. The idea of a cosmogonic process based on constant change, advocated in ancient transmitted texts and manuscripts of Daoist and *Huang-Lao* 黃老 origin (see footnote 18) necessarily shaped the way of looking at the natural world. Together with the above-mentioned textual tradition on the re-creation of geographical and social order that arises through the separation of the earth from the waters and of civilization from

19 For further discussion on the topic of the influence of the natural environment on human and animal disposition see Sterckx (2002, 101–8).

20 For a detailed analysis of the evolution of the four exonyms from designating specific tribes to becoming generic names for alien peoples associated with the four points of the compass, see Pu (1999), Ugoretz (2016), and Creel (1970, 197).

wild nature (originally mingled in a single chaotic setting of reality in the stories of Yu taming the Flood), the focus on constant change in early China's cosmological tradition did not foster a drive to create a biological taxonomy of living creatures, and, on the contrary, supported the development of sociological differentiations. This approach facilitated the establishment of indefinite and amorphous lines between the different beings, which can be easily crossed through exchanges between species, instead of defined and biologically based limits. This worldview also involved humans, both the Chinese and other peoples—as well as the various species of non-human animals, inanimate objects, ghosts, and spirits—all seen as integral parts of a whole in constant motion and transformation. This, on the one hand, accounted for the changeability ascribed to the *Yi*, *Man*, *Rong*, and *Di* who, envisioned as nearest in kin to the birds and the beasts through moral cultivation, were deemed to be capable of becoming as human as the *Xia* people; on the other hand, it also implied an understanding of the boundaries between man and animal as likewise crossable: the dividing line that the *Xia* man envisioned between himself and the animal was not so much a biological or taxonomic one, but rather a behavioral one. Sterckx highlights that, in ancient and classical China, the demarcation between the human and animal realms was not perceived to be permanent or constant and animals and humans were viewed as pieces of an organic *continuum* in which natural and moral categories converged (Sterckx 2002, 5–6): not only animals but also the foreign “others” were subjected to predominantly cultural or social classifications. The wise noble is thus distinguished by the capacity to transform the natural world and its creatures—including wild beasts and non-*Hua* peoples—into acculturated beings.²¹ Prior to briefly elucidating the correspondence between animal inclusivity and barbarian inclusivity into the realm of the *Hua*, it is worth pointing out that the transience of boundaries between beings, as evidenced earlier, in Eastern Zhou period writings, will find its maximum literary expression with the emergence of the narrative genre of *zhiguai xiaoshuo*, at the collapse of Han hegemony in the early third century AD: this issue will be briefly discussed in the last section of the present essay.

The following passage, taken from the mid-Han period philosophical treatise entitled *Yangzi fayan* 揚子法言 [*Master Yang's Model Words*], *Wen dao* 問道, deals with the role of the wise noble man in running the state relying on music and

21 The *Bobutong delun* 白虎通德論 [*Virtuous discussions of the White Tiger Hall*], a report from a meeting supposedly held in 79 AD elucidating the relevance of the *xunshou* 巡守, the ruler's inspection tour through the various regions, highlights the transformative and beneficial power of the virtue of the wise ruler, both toward the people from the Central States and those from regions afar.

rituals as a means of restraining people’s negative inclinations—so as to demarcate the distinction between the *Xia* people and beasts and foreigners:

The governance of the *Tianxia* by the wise noble restrains by rituals and music. If there were no rituals and music, people would be like birds and beasts; if rituals and music were different, people would be like the northern barbarians. I have seen Masters scarce in rituals and music, but I have never seen wise nobles scarce in rituals and music. (*Yangzi fayan*, *Wen dao*, 22)

Inclusive “Chineseness” is ascertained by the ability to apprehend moral cultivation, rituals, proper conduct, and music. The wise noble, as pointed out by Sterckx, has a strong obligation to transform what is wild through his moral influence, rather than through physical domination, in the same way the sages of antiquity turned a hunting-and-gathering society into an agricultural community (Sterckx 2002, 7; 93–4). A passage in the *Zi Han* 子罕 chapter of the *Lunyu* is illustrative of the beneficial effect of the influence of a *junzi* among the wild tribes of non-*Hua* peoples: “The master expressed the desire to live among the nine *Yi* barbarians. Someone asked him: ‘They are so vulgar, how could you do it?’ and the master replied: ‘Once the *junzi* lives among them, how could there be any vulgarity?’”²² In particular, music and dance, which originated from the animal sounds and movements, prove to be a means of moral transformation implemented by the *junzi*—to which both barbarians and animals are receptive.²³ The same applies to the moral cultivation of virtues: on the one hand, the foreigner was deemed capable, with proper upbringing, of developing virtuousness; on the other hand, virtuous conduct and rulership were capable of influencing and transforming the natural world—barbarians and animals included. While animals undergo the effects of virtue and music by gathering around the virtuous ruler, on the non-*Hua*, this civilizing influence is manifested by the discarding of their barbaric habits and customs in favor of the Chinese ones, which are recognized as superior: they tie up their hair instead of keeping it loose, abandon animal skins in favor of the more refined robes from the *Xia* tradition, and engage in agriculture.²⁴

22 *Lunyu*, *Zi Han* 9.14, 344–5.

23 Accounts on the origins of music as either based on the cries of a phoenix or linked to the tail of an ox can be found in the *Gu Yue* 古樂 chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* and in the *Tianwen* 天文 chapter of the *Huainanzi*. Discourses on the potential of music to reach not only *Xia* men, but also barbarian peoples, animals, and even spirits, can be found, among others, in the *Shangshu* (chapter *Shun dian* 舜典), in the *Zhouli* 周禮 [*Rites of Zhou*] (chapter *Da si yue* 大司樂), and in the *Guo Yu* 國語 [*Discourses of the States*] (chapter *Jin yu* 晉語).

24 Keeping hair loose was seen as a symbol of passionate feelings and violence and this habit was associated with either barbarians or madmen and ghosts. For this very reason, both men and women

The dichotomy that counterposes the Chinese at the center and the barbarians dwelling at the periphery of the Central States is fundamental for preserving the political order, while also providing a contrastive delineation of what defines the *Hua* as such: not only being born and living in the Central States, but also their civilized and widespread practice of agriculture, and, most importantly, their customs and rites—including dressing and eating properly. Since the boundary line between the *Hua* and the barbarians was traversable, those Chinese who did not observe ritual norms were also perceived to be equal to barbarians—that is, equal to wild animals. Only cultural growth ensures full development into a proper human being.

It has been shown how the dichotomy that has historically set the Chinese and the barbarian against each other has developed on a fundamentally cultural and ritual basis rather than on an ethno-racial basis. This means that the alien was deemed less human than the *Hua*, but not because of an ontological dichotomy, rather, the inferiority of the foreigner was completely based on their lack of exposure to the Chinese culture. In the absence of an ontological distinction between barbarian and Chinese, as well as between human and animal, anyone could have become human if educated in *Hua* customs and rituals. Throughout this essay it was also pointed out that this dichotomous yet dynamic relationship between the Chinese and the aliens was based on cosmological premises. On the one hand, cosmological theories of the Daoist and *Huang-Lao* traditions envision material reality to have emerged from a chaotic *continuum*, through cyclical divisions into opposing and complementary categories. On the other hand, a conception of order, exemplified by the schematic and idealized Great Flood accounts found in texts such as the *Shangshu*, emerges again by separation, with the Central States culturally and hierarchically superior to the external concentric zones of what is referred to as *Tianxia*. It has also been noted that such cosmological foundations underlie not only the culturally and educationally based dichotomy between the Chinese and the barbarian but also the resulting changeability in the status of both groups: if the barbarian changes his customs he can aspire to the status of the Chinese and vice versa, the *Hua* who is not versed in rituals is downgraded to the status of an animal-barbarian or subhuman. Based on the presupposition that

inside the *Hua* society had to bind their hair in preparation for the transition to adulthood rituals. That barbarians used to keep their hair loose was a sign of the fact that they did not adhere to ritual rules. In terms of dressing, the appearance of barbarians in ancient texts is classically associated with tattooed skin (especially with regard to the southern tribes) and animal skins, both symbols of their savage nature. Both clothing and binding the hair marked the transition from a state of savagery to a state of civilization. For a discussion on the role of clothing in defining the person wearing it in the context of ancient China, see: Lewis (2006a, 61–76).

the Chinese political and administrative organization represented the finest form of government, an assumption shared by every people toward their own civilization (Lotman, 1975), the expectation toward foreign peoples was that they would adapt their own customs and habits to those of the Central States believed to be superior. Anyone who did not share or at least adjust to the customs and habits of the Central States was regarded as uncivilized and barbaric, bordering on bestial and monstrous.

The barbarian—uncivilized and disrespectful of the customs and rituals of the Central States—is equated with the animal. This association is possible given that the boundary line between human and animal, as well as that between barbarian and Chinese, is also changeable and traversable since all of the ten thousand things are deemed to have emerged from a single chaotic primeval source. In Derk Bodde’s illustrative words:

The universe, according to this view (i.e., the prevailing Chinese world-view), is a harmoniously functioning organism consisting of multitudinous objects, qualities, and forces which, despite their seeming heterogeneity, are integrated into coherent patterns by being subsumed under one or another of many numerical categories. (Bodde 1959, 351)

As noted by Xiang, Chinese metaphysics influenced the way Confucian-Chinese philosophy understood human nature: exposure to culture is what qualitatively transforms a person into a fully developed human being (Xiang 2023). Those beings who are not subject to the transformative influence of *Hua* culture, whether foreign peoples or beasts, are considered inferior and not human.

As mentioned earlier, the premises behind the perception of foreigners as beasts and the changeability of both animals and barbarians when subjected to the positive and virtuous influence of the *Hua* are shared by the tales of anomalies and of strange events (the *zhiguai xiaoshuo*) that will develop from the Han and the Six Dynasties (220–589 AD) eras on: the dividing lines between living beings are subtle, changeable, and surmountable.

To delve into the specifics of this literary genre goes beyond the scope of this study. Here it suffices to briefly highlight a few issues that are relevant for the purpose of elucidating the evolution of the Chinese-barbarian dichotomy. The *zhiguai xiaoshuo* are accounts, seemingly written for quasi-historical purposes, of anomalous occurrences, often including transformations of a being belonging to one species into another from a different species, births of inter-species creatures, spirits, and ghosts. Cosmological grounds for transformation being possible have been noted: the boundaries between species are undefined and amorphous, rather than biological and fixed. The belief in the transformability and the inherent drive

for change of all things thus represents the cultural substratum on which both the Chinese-barbarian dichotomy, which envisions the barbarian as an animal, and the *zhiguai* narratives are built. Moreover, the genre of *zhiguai* traces its roots to those same cosmographically concerned texts that delineate, in the pre-imperial era, the separation between the civilized world of the *Hua* and the savage world of the peoples at the periphery, such as, for example, the *Shanhai jing*, the *Shangshu*, and the *Mu Tianzi Zhuan* 穆天子傳 [*The Biography of the Son of Heaven, Mu*]. As outlined in detail by Campany, either explicitly, through prefaces to collections, in bibliographical treatises, or implicitly, the authors themselves refer to the cosmographic tradition as a literary precedent and as validation for the very existence of what was considered a minor genre (Campany 1996, 129). In these narratives, as well as in the later genre of the *Chuanqi* 傳奇 [marvelous tales] (that developed from the Tang 唐 dynasty onward, 618–907 AD), the animal, especially in tales of metamorphosis into humans, is often found to metaphorically represent non-*Hua* people seeking integration in Chinese territories, that, through cultural refinement, aim for acceptance.²⁵ Finally, the transformative process involving the stranger who wants to be accepted among the Chinese is the same as that which, within these tales, allows the animal to eventually metamorphose into a well-refined human being: the actual agency for the physical transformation of the animal into a human is most often acquired through longevity; yet, societal inclusion is contingent on acculturation in *Hua* culture by reading classics, learning music, and cultivating Confucian virtues.²⁶

25 The connection between barbarians and animals is common in these narratives—the most striking example being stories of foxes transformed into humans. In these tales, the foxes were associated with surnames that emphasized their barbarian origins: linguistically, such texts played on the complete homophony (syllabic transcription, ending, and tone) between *hu* 胡 [barbarian from the north] and *hu* 狐 [fox], in locutions such as *huchou* 狐臭 [fox smell], which derives from *huchou* 胡臭, denoting the body scent that the Chinese believed was characteristic of foreign people. In fact, foxes were often described as intending to cover their natural, particularly pungent odor with perfumes and spices traditionally sold by merchants of Central Asian origins. Kang describes foxes transformed into humans, becoming members in families of street performers or acrobats (professions characteristic of Central Asia), revealed by a lack of talent in sewing (an indispensable quality for a Chinese woman), and their skills in trade and business were also frequently remarked (Kang 1999, 35–67).

26 There are numerous stories of animals, most often foxes, possessing extraordinary powers, that transform into human beings and devote themselves to the study of books and to cultural cultivation, with the aim of integration among people. However, the animal's effort is not always rewarded and, in some cases, high knowledge is identified as a superhuman characteristic that reveals the nature of the animal, exposing it to risk. An example is the tale 18.421 from Gan Bao's *Soushen ji* 搜神記 in which the true nature of a fox-literate is revealed and the creature killed.

Conclusions

In line with what has also been evidenced for other ancient societies, for instance the Greeks that conceived the word *barbaros*, and in accordance with the findings of Lotman’s typological examination of culture, ancient and classical China developed a dichotomy between what was considered as the “self” and what was considered as the “other” (the foreigner)—and the “other” was consistently regarded as lesser and comparable to the animal. This is why, in classical texts, bordering foreign peoples are described as possessing bestial characteristics and on the verge of monstrosity and depicted as not fully developed human beings.

In this essay, it was pointed out that cosmological theories that postulated the development of the ten thousand things out of a constantly changing *continuum*, and that posited the feasibility of crossing boundaries between species, led to the absence of an ontological distinction on a metaphysical basis between the man belonging to the *Hua* and the alien. The implication of this conception is that the barbarian, just like the animal, does not differ from the Chinese man in an ontological or biological sense. Rather, the *Hua* is distinguished from the barbarian and the animal on a primarily behavioral and educational level. In fact, non-*Hua* people are not versed in proper rituals, do not dress appropriately, do not cultivate fundamental virtues, and do not practice agriculture. Geographical distribution also plays a role in distinguishing the foreigner from the *Hua*, since they inhabit territories peripheral to the Central States and live in close proximity to wildlife.

The absence of a marked ontological distinction between the “self” and the “other,” whether meaning the foreigner or the animal, entails that the barbarian who leaves their territories toward the Central States and exposes themselves to Chinese cultural influence, actively engaging in learning *Hua* rituals, customs, and superior practices, can be assimilated into the *Hua*: that is, they transform from being an animal into a human in the truest sense.

Within the classical texts that pertain to the Chinese philosophical tradition, the divide between the Chinese and the foreigner is outlined as culturally based and the concept of “Chineseness” proves to be inclusive, meaning that the foreigner can become Chinese through education and cultivation of virtues. It has also been shown that the same cosmological theories that determined the inclusiveness of the concept of “Chineseness,” recorded in the Daoist and *Huang-Lao* cosmological writings focused on constant change and on the interaction and traversability of boundaries between beings, also influenced the evolution of the literary genre of the *zhiguai xiaoshuo*, whose spread is marked by the decline of the Han dynasty. Other literary influences common to both the texts outlining the diversity

between *Hua* people and foreigners and the tales of anomaly are the hagiographic and mythological accounts that chronicle the establishment of geographic and social order through the shaping of the territory and the separation of the civilized centrality from the savage periphery—for instance, the accounts on Yu taming the Flood. The fact that the genre of *zhiguai* is rooted in the same literary sources that contributed to the construction of the concept of “otherness” versus “Chineseness” accounts for why a sharp connection between animal protagonists and barbarian peoples is often discernible in tales of strange events. In the *zhiguai* narratives, not only does the animal transforming into a human seek inclusion in the same ways as the foreigner: education, study of the classics, cultivation of Confucian virtues, etc.; the animal is also often described as displaying physical, social, and behavioral characteristics that allow it to be directly and unequivocally associated with the peoples beyond the borders of the *Hua* territories.

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Who is the Foreigner? Delimiting Boundaries Before and After the Encounter with the Greeks*

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1. Introduction: The Role of the Greeks (and Indo-Greeks) in Changing the Indian Conception of the Foreigner

Except for sporadic earlier explorations (such as that of Scylax of Caryanda),¹ the stable contact between Greece and India was established at the end of the fourth century BC after a military event that changed the fate of the then-known world, namely the so-called “Indian Campaign” of Alexander the Great (dated to 327–325 BC), which can be reconstructed thanks to Classical sources. A few main

* All translations are by the authors unless explicitly stated. This paper is the result of a joint research work entirely discussed and shared by the three authors. For the sake of academic prudence, §§ 3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 4 are attributed to Maria Piera Candotti, §§ 1, 2.1.1, 2.1.2, and 2.1.3 to Alessandro Giudice and §§ 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3 and 2.3 to Tiziana Pontillo. In this contribution, the square brackets do not conform to the general usage of this volume; instead, they signify the necessary additions to the English translations from Sanskrit and Gāndhāri.

1 Scylax of Carianda (late sixth to early fifth centuries BC), a native of Caria, was an explorer and geographer in the service of the Achaemenid Darius I (522–486 BC). By order of the latter, at the end of the sixth century (around 519 BC), Scylax set sail along the coast of the Indus River. See Milns (1989, 353–5), Karttunen (1989, 65–8), and Parker (2008, 14–18).

events are recalled here.² This expedition regarded the conquest of the easternmost borders of the Achaemenid empire, represented by the territories of Gandhāra, the Indus Valley, and the Punjab. In 327 BC, Alexander crossed the Hindu Kush (gr. Παροπάμισος), after having suppressed revolts and conspiracies in Bactria and Sogdia and marrying Roxane (daughter of Oxiartes, a Bactrian nobleman). Once he had subjugated the people of the Kabul Valley (situated in present-day Afghanistan), that is, the Aspasiens and Assaceni, Alexander arrived in Gandhāra. Some rulers resisted the Graeco-Macedonian army and were similarly defeated, such as Astes, the Achaemenid satrap (i.e., province governor) of Puṣkalāvātī (gr. Πευκελάωτις, corresponding to present-day Charsadda). Others, however, made diplomatic arrangements with Alexander, as in the case of Āmbhi (called Ταξιλης in Greek sources), the Achaemenid satrap of Taxila (gr. Ταξίλα, in the vicinity of present-day Islamabad). Notably, thanks to the alliance with Āmbhi, Alexander's army defeated Porus—the Indian ruler of the territory between the Hydaspes (present-day Jhelum) and Acesines (present-day Chenab)—and Abisares—the Indian ruler of the hill country between the same rivers—in the so-called Battle of Hydaspes (326 BC). In any case, Alexander's expedition did not venture too far into Indian territory: the Graeco-Macedonian troops left the expedition—perhaps by mutiny—at the Hypasis River (present-day Beas), marked as the easternmost limit of his empire. By 325 BC, after setting forth southward into the lower territories of the Indus River, Alexander and his army returned to the West. In this regard, let us emphasize two points:

- (i) The expedition did not concern the territory of north-central India, the cradle of Brahmanical culture and the “power center” of the Nanda kingdom (c.362–321 BC),³ the core of which was Magadha (seat of Pāṭaliputra, the capital city), but rather the North-West territories, namely those of Gandhāra, the Indus Valley and the Punjab.
- (ii) Alexander's expedition consisted of both military expeditions and diplomatic initiatives. Despite the Campaign's fluctuating events, wartime violence still took place far from the epicenter of Indian power. Therefore, the north-central Indian territories, especially Magadha, did not experience this first wave of Greek conquests.

2 For a precise reconstruction of the historical events of Alexander's Indian Campaign, we refer to Heckel (2006, 1–2, 231–232, 260–261; 2009, 47–52), Musti (2008, 650–4), Samad (2011, 39–41), and Stoneman (2019, 36–79).

3 See Thapar (2002, xiv; 155–6).

Upon Alexander the Great's death (323 BC), his empire was partitioned, and an intense period of struggle between successors (the so-called *Διάδοχοι* in Greek sources) followed, which will not be addressed here. Suffice it to say that, after several vicissitudes, the Northwestern Indian territories conquered by Alexander—together with Arachosia, Gedrosia, and Aria—were bartered in exchange for 500 war elephants (perhaps only 150)⁴ between Seleucus I Nicator and Candragupta Maurya, who sanctioned a political alliance (named the “Treaty of the Indus” by Kosmin)⁵ in c.305–303 BC. Different scholarly views suggest that this was accomplished through a dynastic marriage or the permitted intermarriage between Greeks and Indians in the territories mentioned earlier.⁶ The northern Indian territories only returned to Greek (or rather Indo-Greek) hands in the second century BC when the Indo-Greek expedition of India took place. Again, let us mention a couple of main events.⁷ At the beginning of the second century BC, the Indo-Greek ruler Demetrius I (c.200–180 BC) conquered Gandhāra and neighboring lands, while Menander (c.165/155–130 BC) went further east in his conquests, annexing the territories of Mathurā, Sāketa, and Pañcāla, reaching as far as Pāṭaliputra.

In comparison with Alexander's undertaking, the Indo-Greek expedition struck directly at the core of the Indian territories, reaching Magadha and its capital city, Pāṭaliputra, the center of power that passed to the Śūṅga dynasty in c.185 BC.⁸ This probably explains why, though all Indian sources are silent on the Alexandrian incursion, we have several Indian sources alluding to the Indo-Greek invasion besides the Latin and Greek ones. The first of these, relevant to the present discussion, is a passage found in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, which, while commenting on Vt. 2 *ad* A 3.2.111 (dealing with the imperfect verbal endings), presents some examples that include the Greeks M 2.119 ll. 4-5 *ad* Vt. 2 *ad* A 3.2.111:

aruṇad yavanah śaketam | aruṇad yavano madhyamikām |

The Greek [ruler] (i.e., Menander I) besieged Sāketa. The Greek [ruler] (i.e., Menander I) besieged Madhyamikā.

4 See Tarn (1940, 84–9).

5 See Kosmin (2014, 32–7).

6 For an overview of the scholarly views on the Seleucid-Mauryan alliance, see Giudice (2023).

7 Regarding the Indo-Greeks and their expedition to India (about which scholars have partly diverging opinions), we refer to Tarn (1951, 129–269), Narain (1957, 74–164), Woodcock (1966, 74–127), Samad (2011, 54–64), and Stoneman (2019, 377–84).

8 See Thapar (2002, xiv, 204–208; 2012, 228–247).

The second is the *Yugapurāṇa*,⁹ which recounts *ex post facto* the Indo-Greek expedition as a prophecy. Here is a significant passage (YP 47–8):

tataḥ sāketam ākrāmya pañcālā māthurās tathā |
yavanā yuddhāvīkrāntāḥ prāpsyanti kusumadhvajam || 47 ||

tataḥ puṣpapure prāpte kardame prathite hite |
ākulā viśayāḥ sarve bhaviṣyanti na saṁśayah || 48 ||

Therefore, after invading Sāketa, the Greeks, [who are] brave in battle, as well as Pañcālas and Mathurās, will reach Kusumadhvaḥ (i.e., Pāṭaliputra). Thereafter, having reached Puṣpapura (i.e., Pāṭaliputra) and having established [its] well-known mud [walls], all the territories will be in turmoil—there is no doubt.

This paper aims to analyze the role played by the encounter with the Greeks (especially as regards their expeditions in South Asia) in constructing the perception of fellow countrymen versus foreigners in India. The first part aims to identify the main features constituting the conception of the Greeks as foreigners following the expedition of Alexander the Great (see § 2). Instead, the second part will try to understand the effect of the Indo-Greek conquest on some passages of the *Mahābhārata* and Dharmasāstric texts (see § 3). We have attempted to discern, in such internally complex texts, whether there are any traces of a specific adaptation of the concept of foreigner to the experiences that, as we have also seen in the previous two passages, would so deeply mark the imagination of later generations.

2. Greeks as a Foreign Population with a Precise Geographical Placement in Early Indian Sources

2.1 Greeks in Technical Literature and Epigraphical Sources

2.1.1 *Terminological note.* In Sanskrit sources, as shown earlier, Greeks are denoted by the OIA word-form *yavana-*, a word which occurs 107 times in the *Digital*

9 The *Yugapurāṇa* constitutes one chapter (composed of 115 *ślokas*) of the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa*, a Sanskrit astronomical work attributed to Garga (for which, see Geslani et al. 2017). This short Purāṇic work is a prominent historical source for the Indo-Greek invasion of India, providing an indigenous Indian perspective. The *Yugapurāṇa* has been variously dated by scholars. Mitchiner (1986, 33–40, 81–82), its critical editor, dated it—as well as the entire *Gārgīyajyotiṣa*—to c.25 BC; for other hypotheses of dates, cf. Rocher (1986, 253–4).

Corpus of Sanskrit.¹⁰ This word-form *ad litteram* refers to the Ionians, that is, one of the Hellenic populations of Ancient Greece and only refers to the Greeks by synecdoche. On the other hand, in Prakrit sources, Greeks are referred to through the MIA word-form *yona-* (also *yonaka-*), literally meaning “Ionian” as well. Undoubtedly, one word-form derives from the other, and scholarship has debated which of the two may be earlier. Two main hypotheses exist: 1) OP *yauna-* > MIA *yona-* > OIA *yavana-*; 2) Akk. *yamanu-* (*yawanu-*) > OIA *yavana-* > MIA *yona-*. Both derivations are likely due to political and commercial ties of the Indian subcontinent with Persia and Mesopotamia/Elam. Generally speaking, the most accepted hypothesis among scholars is the former, which predicts the priority of the MIA word-form *yona-* (derived from the OP ethnonym) over OIA *yavana-* and the derivation of the latter from the former.¹¹

2.1.2 *The earliest mention of Greeks in Sanskrit sources.* The first attestation of OIA *yavana-* is recorded in Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (second half of the fourth century BC),¹² in a rule teaching to form the feminine nominal stem *yavanānī-* by applying the feminine affix *ÑiṢ* (= -ī) to a list of the nominal stems including *yavana-* (A 4.1.49) in its variant with the increment *ānUK* (= -ān-): *yavana-* + -ān- + -ī > *yavanānī-*. The output of this feminine nominal stem would literally mean “female Ionian” as the female counterpart of *yavana-* itself. However, it ultimately denotes “Ionian script” (and thus, “Greek script”), based on Kātyāyana in Vt. 3 *ad* A 4.1.49 (M 2.220 l. 18):

yavanāl lipyām ||

[The feminine affix *ÑiṢ* (= -ī) occurs after the nominal stem] *yavana-* to denote the script.

This meaning is also confirmed by Patañjali (M 2.220 l. 19 *ad* Vt. 3 *ad* A 4.1.49):

yavanāl lipyām iti vaktavyam | yavanānī lipiḥ ||

It should be taught: “After the nominal stem *yavana-*, provided that it means the script, [the feminine affix *ÑiṢ* (= -ī) occurs]”: *yavanānī lipiḥ* “Greek script.”

It is impossible to establish definitively that the meaning taught by Kātyāyana is the one conceived in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. Pāṇini originally came from the ancient

¹⁰ See “lemma: yavana(m),” Digital Corpus of Sanskrit, accessed July 10, 2024, <<http://www.sanskrit-linguistics.org/dcs/index.php?contents=lemma&IDWord=74116>>.

¹¹ For an excellent reconstruction of the issue, see Karttunen (2015, 325–37) and the bibliography there cited.

¹² As regards the dating of Pāṇini and the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, see von Hinüber (1990, 34–5), Falk (1993, 303–4; 1994, 326–7).

area of Gandhāra, specifically from Śalātura (located near present-day Chota Lahore),¹³ which was part of a satrapy of the Achaemenid empire at his time. He may have become aware of the OP ethnonym *yauna-* and the coinage of OIA *yavana-* with the intermediary MIA *yona-* which might date back to this period.¹⁴ On the other hand, the reference to Greek script in Kātyāyana (third century BC), later followed by Patañjali (second century BC), appears legitimate since, apart from the fact that Greeks settled in the Northwest after Alexander's expedition, Greek-language inscriptions are also attested in the area,¹⁵ namely at Ai-Khanoum and Kandahar, including the Greek version of the Edicts of Aśoka.¹⁶

2.1.3 *Greeks as Western foreigners in Aśoka's Edicts.* The attestation of the MIA word-form *yona-* dates back to the Edicts of Aśoka,¹⁷ which were composed in the mid-third century BC (c.257–241 BC).¹⁸ In particular, the Greeks have been mentioned in three Major Rock Edicts of Aśoka, namely RE II A, V J and XIII Q.¹⁹ The text is quoted here in the Northwestern version of Shāhbāzgarhi (which, together with that of Mānsehrā, is written in Kharoṣṭhī script and constitutes the earliest instances of the Gāndhārī language).²⁰ The excerpts from these inscriptions²¹ are as follows:

RE II A (version of CKI 2): *sav[r]atra vijite [De]va[naṃ]priyasa Priyadraśisa y[e] ca [a]ṃta yatha [Coḍa] Paṃḍiya Satiyaputro Keraḍaputro Taṃbapaṃṇi Aṃtiyo[k]o nama Yonaraja ye ca aṃṇe tasa Aṃtiyokasa samaṃta rajano savratra Devanaṃpriyasa Priyadraśisa raṇo du[vi] 2 cik[i]sa [kr]i[ta] manuśacikisa (*ca) pa[śuc]ikisa [ca]*

13 See Agrawala (1953, 9–11).

14 See Karttunen (2015, 327).

15 See Karttunen (1989, 55–9).

16 See Rougemont (2012, no. 97–150, 81–4), Mairs (2014, 57–117), Giudice and Capponi (2022).

17 Aśoka, the third emperor of the Maurya dynasty, who reigned between c.268 and 232 BC, certainly needs no introduction. To frame his figure in the history of ancient India, we refer to Thapar (2002, 178–204; 2012).

18 Recent discussions about the composition and dating of the corpus of Aśoka's Edicts are found in Olivelle (2023, 60–84) and Tieken (2023, 23–271), who also provided a new translation (see Olivelle 2023, 277–320; Tieken 2023, 431–60). Previous comprehensive studies on Aśoka's Edicts include Cunningham (1877), Hultzsch (1925), Bloch (1950), Schneider (1978), and Tsukamoto, Kaigen, and Kojika (2010).

19 Olivelle (2023, *ibid.*) assumes that these three edicts (which are undated) were written in or soon after 256 BC.

20 See Salomon (2008).

21 Given the many Prakrit versions of Aśoka's Edicts, we have opted for the Sanskrit variant (when available and unambiguous) to translate the emperor's title and the ethnonyms.

Everywhere in the territories of the Beloved of Gods, [King] Priyadarśin (i.e., Aśoka), and [of those] who [are his] borderers, such as the Coḍas, the Pāṇḍyas, the Satvat prince, the Kerala prince, [those living around] the Tāmraparṇī [river], the Greek king named Antiyoka (i.e., Antiochus II)²² and the other kings bordering this Antiyoka, everywhere two medical treatments were established: the medical treatment for men and the medical treatment for cattle.

RE V J (version of CKI 5): *te savrapraṣaṃdeṣ[u] vapāta dbrammadhithanaye ca dbramavaḍhiya hidasukhaye ca dbramayutasa yonakamboyaḡamdharaṇaṃ raṭhikanam pitinikanam ye va pi aparaṃta*

These (i.e., the Ministers of Dharma: *dhammamahamatra*) are occupied with all religious groups in establishing and promoting the Dharma and for the welfare and happiness of those who are devoted to the Dharma, even among the Greeks, Kāmbojas, and inhabitants of Gandhāra, among the Raṭhikas and the Pitinikas,²³ as well as other western borderers.

RE XIII Q (version of CKI 13): *so ca puna ladho Devanaṃpriyasa iha ca saveṣu ca aṃteṣu [a] ṣaṣu pi yojanaṣa[ṭ]eṣu yatra Aṃtiyoko nama Y[o]naraja paraṃ ca tena Atiyok[e] na cature 4 rajani Turamaye nama Aṃtikini nama Maka nama Alikasudaro nama nica Coḍapaṃḍa ava Ta[m]bapaṃ[ṇi]ya*

And this (i.e., the conquest of spreading the Dharma) has been repeatedly obtained by the Beloved of the Gods (i.e., Aśoka) both here and among all the borderers, even as far as six hundred *yojanas*, where the Greek king Antiyoka (i.e., Antiochus II) [rules], and beyond this Antiyoka, [where other] four [Greek] kings [rule], i.e., [the kings] named Turamaya (i.e., Ptolemy II Philadelphus), Antikini (i.e., Antigonus II Gonatas), Maka (i.e., Magas of Cyrene) and Alikasudara (i.e., Alexander II of Epyrus or, less likely, Alexander of Corinth), [and] southernwards, [where] the Coḍas and Pāṇḍyas [rule], as far as the Tāmraparṇī [river].

An overview of these early epigraphic records shows that in the mid-third century BC, the Greeks are included in the group of borderers (MIA *aṃta*-)²⁴ and, in the case of RE V, specifically Western borderers (MIA *aparaṃta*-) of the Mauryan Empire. Through these edicts, Aśoka decreed that these borderers were to receive medical treatment (RE II) and to be “orthodoxized” by Ministers of Dharma together with other Western people, that is, the Kambojas and the inhabitants

22 To identify this and the other Hellenistic kings mentioned in Aśoka’s edicts see Karttunen (1989, 100; 1997, 266; 2015, 328), Thapar (2012, 51), Kosmin (2014, 56–57), Olivelle (2023, 49–50), and Tieken (2023, 421–4). These kings reigned in the following periods: 261–246 BC for Antiochus II, 282–246 BC for Ptolemy II Philadelphus, 272–239 BC for Antigonus II Gonatas, 276–250 BC for Magas of Cyrene, and 272–255 BC for Alexander of Epirus (alternatively, 252–244 BC for Alexander of Corinth).

23 For the interpretation of the forms *raṭhikanam* and *pitinikanam*, see Bhandarkar (1919, 80 fn. 4) and Hultzsich (1925, 56 fn. 21).

24 In Aśoka’s Edicts, the MIA word-form *aṃta*- generally denotes “people living across the border.” See Tieken (2023, 151).

of Gandhāra (RE V); finally, it is said that these borderers were to be reached by the spread of Dharma (RE XIII). Greeks are treated as foreigners with a definite geographical connotation (i.e., placed on the Western border). However, unlike the *Mahābhārata* and Dharmasāstric texts (see §§ 2.2–3), which are all composed after the Indo-Greek conquest (see § 1), there is no attempt to integrate them into the core of Indian society, instead we witness the practice of engaging with them in fruitful diplomatic relations.

2.2 Two Different Representations of the Greeks as Foreigners in the *Mahābhārata*

2.2.1 *The point on modern scholarship.* In the following paragraphs we will concentrate on the forty-four occurrences of the nominal stem *yavana-* used as an ethnonym in the earliest Sanskrit epic text, that is, the *Mahābhārata*, commonly dated between the end of the pre-Christian era and the beginning of the Christian (see Hildebeitel 2001, 18). Although Klaus Karttunen surveyed these passages back in 2015, our approach is quite different, since it is overtly oriented in a historical-reconstructive sense. Although we are aware of the difficulty inherent in any attempt to distinguish the different layers of the *Mahābhārata* and thus the establishment of a relative chronology of the different sections of the poem, we nonetheless propose here to look for possible traces of a distinction between the conception of the Greeks as foreigners before (cf. § 2) and after (cf. § 3) the Indo-Greek conquest. Indeed, scholars are generally oriented to consider the *Mahābhārata* passages mentioning the *yavanas* as dating back to at least the first or the second century CE. One of these attributions refers for instance to a well-known double śloka, within the context of Sahadeva's military expansion campaigns, where, alongside Antioch and Rome, the city of Yavanas is listed as one of the conquered places.

pāṇḍyānś ca draviḍānś caiva sahitānś coḍrakeralaiḥ |
andhrānś talavanānś caiva kaliṅgān oṣtrakarṇikān ||
antākhīm²⁵ caiva romāṇ ca yavanānāṇ purāṇ tathā |
dūtair eva vaśe cakre karaṇ cainān adāpayat || MBh 2.28.48–49

By means of envoys he (i.e. Sahadeva) brought under his power the country²⁶ of Pāṇḍyas and Draviḍas alongside that of Coḍras and Keralas, as well as the country of Āndhras and

25 As for the *lectio antākhīm*, fruit of an emendation by Edgerton, see Karttunen (2015, 6) and the bibliography quoted there.

26 We are reading the sentence on the basis of *Aṣṭādhyāyī* rule 4.2.81 (*janapade lup*), according to which the denominal derivative affix -á [(áN] taught in A 4.1.83) is zero-replaced (by *LUP*), when

Talavanas, Kaliṅgas and Uṣṭrakarṇikas, as well as Antioch, Rome and the city of Yavanas and made them pay a tribute.

In fact, Brockington (1998, 134) quotes MBh 2.28.49ab as an example of the “considerable number of passages in which incidental allusions indicate a relatively precise date” in the *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, he emphasizes that “there is a reference to Rome and also to Antioch in the *Sabhāparvan*, if the reading proposed by Edgerton is accepted [...] and this implies that the line could not have been composed before the 1st century AD.” Moreover, he returns to the same reference connected to the previous list of ethnonyms, in order to postulate that this passage “does reflect in some way the known trade links of the south with the Roman world attested in the site of Arikameḍu, near Pondicherry, in the first and second centuries AD”²⁷ (Brockington 1998, 201).

Another important datum about the perception of Greeks in the *Mahābhārata*, which has also been given some historical relevance by several scholars, is related to the bizarre birth of the Yavana warriors whose unexpected aim was to defend typically Indian values and, especially, the privileges of Brahmins. At first glance, as Karttunen (2015, 340) notes, this is not a glorious legend but an actual occurrence in both the classical epics. Within one of the most famous stories that tells of a conflict between the two upper classes of priests and rulers, we are told that the Yavanas together with other foreign lineages emanated from the body of the angry cow Nandinī that belonged to the wise Brahmin Vasiṣṭha. In fact, when Nandinī was forcibly captured by King Viśvāmitra and his troops, the animal rebelled, returned to Vasiṣṭha and finally, shining like fire, emitted countless hosts of foreign peoples from her body, all ready to protect her.

asṛjat pahlavān pucchāc chakṛtaḥ śabarān śakān |
mūtrataś cāsṛjac cāpi yavanān krodhamūrchitā ||
puṇḍrān kirātān dramīdān siṃhalān barbarāms tathā |
tathaiiva daradān mlecchān phenataḥ sā sasarja ha || MBh 1.165.35–36

Full of rage, she emitted the Pahlavis from her tail, the Śabaras and the Śakas from the excrement and from her urine she also emitted Yavanas. And from her saliva she emitted

the output meaning is “an inhabited country.” In other words, the plural ethnonym is used in place of the matching choronym: for example, the inhabitants of Kerala are mentioned in place of Kerala itself. This is a well-known ancient Indo-European trend: see for example, Lat. *Persae* used in the sense of the later *Persia*.

²⁷ Brockington (1998, 222; 226) consistently considers the *Rāmāyaṇa* passages mentioning the Yavanas as “a fairly clear indication of the period involved, the first to second centuries AD.”

the Puṇḍras, the Kirātas, the Dramiḍas, the Simhalas as well as the Barbarians,²⁸ and analogously the Mlecchas and the Daradas.²⁹

While commenting on this passage, Brockington (1998, 207) states: “Besides providing an approximate dating for this passage, since the Pahlava, Śakas, and Yavana rulers were politically significant in the northwest around the beginning of the Christian era, their mention is interesting because their role here is to defend brāhmanical values; somewhat similarly the *dharmasāstras* classify them as “degenerate *kṣatriyas*”³⁰ in recognition of their status as rulers.”³¹ Even though the Greeks were plausibly not very proud of such a legend, Karttunen (2015, 341) emphasizes that “From the Indian viewpoint, it perhaps might be argued that such holy origins would have been an honour.” On the other hand, there is no suggestion that the Greeks in the northwest were perceived as hateful and dangerous enemies; on the contrary, since they had acquired a certain power, there was much interest in finding a way to somehow insert them into the Indian social structure.³²

In our opinion, another episode should be included in the same interpretative sense as the phenomenon of peaceful coexistence with the Greeks, which shows the Yavanas as no longer being completely unrelated to the indigenous peoples and where a shared genealogy between Yavanas and the natives is even advanced. This occurs in the context of the story of king Yayāti and his two wives, Devayanī, the daughter of a powerful priest, and Śarmiṣṭhā, the daughter of a king—two women who were always in competition with each other. Yayāti’s first wife gave him two sons, Yadu and Turvasu, while Śarmiṣṭhā bore him three called Druhyu, Anu, and Pūru. Together, these are the names of the five core tribes mentioned in the earliest Vedic sources. The Yavanas descended from Turvasu: thus, Greeks, along with other peoples (even Mlecchas), are included in the same lineage as the native Indian people.

28 In our survey of the terms used to convey the sense of “foreigners” in the *Mahābhārata*, somewhat surprisingly, we also found eleven occurrences of the word *barbara-*, a clear loanword borrowed from the Greek word βάρβαρος. In fact, in the lists of peoples or military surveys and accounts of solemn events of a political or ritual nature, the word *barbara-* appears to have been used when hostile communities are mentioned and there is no real relationship with a historical and geographical datum.

29 Another very close version of this legend occurs in *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.53.18–54.3.

30 See § 3.2; 3.3.

31 See also Brockington (1998, 426).

32 To quote another enlightening reflection by Brockington (1998, 209–10), “Yet the real point is that, though impure in various ways, these groups are acting in support of brāhman values—co-operation rather than exclusion is the rationale for their mention.”

yados tu yādavā jātās turvasor yavanāḥ sutāḥ |
druhyor api sutā bhojā anos tu mlecchajātayaḥ ||
pūros tu pauraḥ vaṃśo yatra jāto 'si pārthiva |
idaṃ varṣasahasrāya rājyaṃ kārayituṃ vaśi || MBh 1.80.26–27

From Yadu the Yadavas were born, from Turvaṣu the Yavanas were begotten, from Druhyu then the Bhojas were begotten and from Anu, the castes of the Mlecchas, but from Puru was born the lineage of the Pūru in which you were born, o lord (Pulastya), to rule this kingdom for a thousand years.

2.2.2 *Greeks as esteemed allied warriors.* Just as we saw in the passages analyzed in the previous paragraph, even in other contexts where *yavanas* are clearly located in northwestern India or in the area beyond its northwestern borders, they seem to be perceived as reliable allies worthy of esteem. Their description, by the way, is not completely fanciful. The ethnonyms most frequently combined with *yavanas* are in fact *śakas* (Iranian Scythians) and *kāambojas* (an ancient Iranian people living West of the Indo-Aryans, mentioned from the Vedic texts onward).³³ Furthermore, a couple of passages (MBh 7.95.13, 36) explicitly mention Yavanas as a part of the group of “foreigners” (*mlecchas*),³⁴ and they are commonly described as horse riders (see MBh 8.35.36) who fight carrying bow and arrows (*śarabāṇāsana-dharā yavanās ca prahāriṇaḥ*—MBh 7.95.12).³⁵ On the other hand, in another passage, they are described as “mounted on elephants.” This seems to suggest that at the time in question this ethnic group had managed to achieve a certain degree of adaptation to the territory.

33 The *yavanas* also occur in the list of the armies allied to the Kaurava party in no less than another nineteen passages, namely in MBh 5.19.21, 5.19.6.7; 6.20.13; 6.4.7.7; 6.71.20; 6.83.10; 7.6.5; 7.10.18; 7.19.7; 7.68.41; 7.95.12; 31; 34; 37; 45; 7.96.1; 7.97.13; 8.31.15; 9.2.18.

34 To the best of our knowledge there are sixty-five occurrences of the word *mlecchā* in the *Mahābhārata*. The term has often been interpreted as if it conveyed the sense of the Greek word βάρβαρος as one speaking unintelligible words. Nevertheless, in our opinion, it simply means “foreigner” in this poem, even though the uncertain etymology leads us in the direction of a linguistic sense deriving from the verb *mlich-* (3rd p. sg. present indicative: *mlecchati*) “to speak indistinctly.” This is, for example, comparable with Greek βλαίσος “bent, distorted,” Lat. *blaesus*, Old Church Slavonic *mlōcati*, Russian *molčáť* “to be silent” from an alleged IE root *melə-k-, *mlāk (see Pokorny 1970, 719; Mayrhofer 1963, 699; 1996, 389). In the *Mahābhārata*, the Mlecchas appear to be located in the Western area of continental India. Moreover, Mlecchas are considered as a sort of hypernym for all foreigners, as witnessed by some of the passages cited here, where Mleccha refers to the whole which is formed by individual foreign peoples. See for example, MBh 7.95.13; 36; 3.186.29.

35 MBh 7.95.13: *śakāḥ kirātā daradā barbarāś tāmrāiptakāḥ | anye ca bahavo mlecchā vividhāyudhapāṇayaḥ | mām evābhimukhāḥ sarve tiṣṭhanti samarāthinaḥ ||* [Śakas, Kirātās, Daradas, Barbarians, Tāmrāiptakas and many other Mlecchas, armed with various weapons, all of them were arrayed in front of me, ready for battle]. See also MBh 7.95.36.

tām astravr̥ṣṭim̐ prahitām̐ dvīpasthair̐ yavanaiḥ smayan |
cicheda niśitair̐ bhallair̐ ardhacandrais̐ ca phalgunah̐ || MBh 8.59.12

By means of his sharp *bhallas*³⁶ and crescents, Phalgunā (i.e., Arjuna) with a smile tore apart the rain of weapons thrown by the Yavanas mounted on elephants.

They are part of the Kaurava army, that is, one of the two parties involved in the great war at the core of the poem.³⁷

trīṇi sādīśabahr̥ṇi duryodhanapurogamāḥ |
śakāḥ kāmbojabāhlikā yavanāḥ pārādās̐ tathā || MBh 7.97.13

Three thousand [warriors] with Duryodhana as their leader, namely Śakas, Kāmbojas and Bāhlikas, Yavanas and Pāradas.

In a sort of comparison between the specific skills of several peoples, Yavanas are even considered “omniscient.”

iṅgitajñās̐ ca magadhāḥ prekṣitajñās̐ ca kosalāḥ |
ardhoktāḥ kurupāñcālāḥ śālvāḥ kṛtsnānuśāsanāḥ |
pārvatīyās̐ ca viśamā yathaiṣa girayas̐ tathā ||
sarvajñā yavanā rājāñ śūrās̐ caiva viśeṣataḥ |
mlecchāḥ svasaṃjñāniyatā nānukta itaro janaḥ || MBh 8.30.79–80

The Magadhas know the signs, and the Kosalas, the glances; the Kuru and the Pāñcāla [speak] by half-words, the Śālva [speak] by whole orders, and the inhabitants of the mountains are as rough as the mountains are; the Yavanas are omniscient, O king, and they are particularly valiant; the foreigners are governed by their own conventions: there are no other people who speaks without words.³⁸

There is also a fear that the potential of the Yavanas as fighters was increased by the magical arts they were attributed, when confronted by another outstanding hero.

vidanty asuramāyāṃ ye sughorā ghoracakṣuṣāḥ |
yavanāḥ pārādās̐ caiva śakās̐ ca sunikāḥ saba ||
 [...]
na te sma śakyāḥ samkhyātum̐ vrātāḥ śatasahasraśāḥ || MBh 7.68.41; 43ab

36 This is a special type of arrow.

37 The latter is an early association that is already found in Aśoka's inscriptions and persists, for example, in the *Majjhima Nikāya* of the Pāli Canon.

38 This is just a tentative rendering of this puzzling hemistich.

And those who, really fearful and of terrible aspect, know the demoniacal magic, the Yavanas, Pāradas, and Śakas, together with the Sunikas [...] those troops by hundreds of thousands could not be enumerated.

In another episode, the glorious Bhīma seems to be especially praised as a warrior, precisely when he fights against the Yavanas³⁹ and he is forced to perform death-defying stunts to avoid their arrows.

tān pratyudgamyā yavanān aśvārohān varārihā |
vicaran vividhān mārḡān ghātayām āsa pothayan || MBh 8.35.36

After advancing to meet the Yavana horsemen, maneuvering along various courses, he who was a slayer of the best enemies,⁴⁰ killed [them] crushing [all].⁴¹

All in all, the picture of the Yavanas that the *Mahābhārata* gives us is a positive one: they are a people who are respected, admired, and feared and with whom a part of the indigenous inhabitants even allied themselves against local enemies.

2.2.3 Greeks as a despised ethnic group. So far, we have only examined verses of the *Mahābhārata* in which Greeks are perceived as valuable allies, but it is well known that in the *Harivaṃśa*, for example, “the story of Kālayavana suggests almost a phobia” about Greeks on the part of its author, “who can hardly therefore be very distant in time from the reality of the threat that they posed to the mathura region” (Brockington 1998, 333). Additionally, the association between the picture in the *Harivaṃśa* of their fearsome horses “which had chests like bulls” and the emphasis (*vṛṣapūrvārdhakāya*- H. 25.11b) on the

39 A victory over the Yavanas is mentioned another two times in the context of the list of leaders invited to Yudhiṣṭhira’s Rājasūya. As a note of glory of a valiant warrior, Kampana’s ability to frighten the Yavanas is mentioned though paretymology (*kampayām āsa yavanān*) in MBh 2.4.20. And the defeat of two Greek kings, Mura and Naraka, is depicted as a great merit of King Bhagadatta in MBh 2.13.13: *muraṃ ca narakaṃ caiva śāsti yo yavanādhipau | aparyantabalo rājā prāṭicyāṃ varuṇo yathā* “who punished the two Greek kings Mura and Naraka and rules in the West like Varuṇa with limitless power” (tr. Van Buitenen 1975, 58).

40 We have translated this compound (also occurring in MBh 7.117.48) as an *upapadasamāsa* that combines the *tatpuruṣa karmadhāraya varāri-* “excellent enemy” with the root-noun *han-* “killer” on the basis of the parallel use of the *upapadasamāsa paravīrahan-* (MBh 7.86.48; 7.90.33) conveying the sense of “killer of hostile heroes”— see also *paravīraghna-* with the same meaning in MBh 7.98.33. Furthermore, the left-hand constituent is not different from ordinary Sanskrit compounds such as *varapurūṣa-* or *varamanusya-*. Nonetheless, for the present purposes of research, the overall sense of the verse would not change even if we understood the compound as a *tatpuruṣa karmadhāraya* combining *vara-* with the *upapadasamāsa arihan-* in the sense of “excellent slayer of enemies.”

41 In MBh 9.2.18, the king of the Kauravas, Dhrtarāṣṭra mentions their alliance to persuade his son Duryodhana to descend into battle, confident in victory.

valor of the Greek horsemen in the *Mahābhārata*⁴² has already been emphasized by Brockington himself (1998, 333). He states that we cannot determine whether Kālayavana and his people are to be identified with the Indo-Greeks or with other later successors who held power in the west and northwest of India. Hildebeitel (1989, 98) assumed that Kālayavana's story takes place in the *Harivaṃśa* as a symbol of the connection between foreigners and unorthodox peoples especially in the area of Mathura. However, the specific mention of this foreign danger fits perfectly into the general framework of those texts that historically played a role in constructing the ideology of the local empire. These were texts that defended the indigenous values, as a barrier to the “barbarian,” who is usually “the impure, unrefined, ill-spoken male” and who “comes not from one direction but from the periphery: the northwest, the south, the east, Lañkā (although Rāvaṇa is a *paṇḍita*), Greece, Iran, Rome, China” (Hildebeitel 1998, 24). And no one can reasonably doubt that such a desire to create a barrier to the foreign invader may have actually arisen from a dreaded danger or from a humiliation that had actually been suffered, such as the defeat inflicted by Menander in the second century BC.

Within the boundaries of this historical-reconstructive line it is extremely hard to overestimate the distance between the two political and cultural matrices that inspired the occurrences analyzed in § 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 and in passages where Yavanas in positions of power are despised and feared as bringers of calamity. Yavanas are listed among the Mlecchas and their hypothetical rule is judged as a case of a dangerous subverted order in humanity. The context consists of a dialogue between the seer Mārkaṇḍeya and the future king Yudhiṣṭhira about the different Aeons (Yuga) which constitute a basic macroscopic unit of measurement based on a cyclic conception of time. The Aeon mentioned in the selected passage is the fourth and last one, the so-called “Kali Yuga.”

[*kalau yuge* 27] *ajapā brāhmaṇās tāta śūdrā japaparāyaṇāḥ |*
viparīte tadā loke pūrvarūpaṃ kṣayasya tat ||
bahavo mleccharājānaḥ pṛthivyāṃ manujādhipa |
mithyānuśāsinaḥ pāpā mṛṣāvādaparāyaṇāḥ ||

āndhrāḥ śakāḥ pulindās ca yavanās ca narādhipāḥ |
kāmbojā auruṅikāḥ śūdrās tathābhīrā narottama || MBh 3.186.28–30

42 See for example, MBh 8.35.36 (quoted earlier), 8.40.108, 8.64.16.

[In the Kali Yuga], the Brahmins will cease to pray, O dear one, and the servants will begin to pray. Then, when the world is turned upside down, this will be the omen of decay: many will be the foreign kings on earth, O lord of men, who rule by deceit, guilty, lying and violent: Āndhras, Śakas, Pulindas and Yavanas as well as *Kāambojas*, *Aurṇikas*, *servants and Ābhiras* will be the lords of men, O excellent man!

In the often-deprecated classification of the several layers of the *Mahābhārata* which was advanced by M. R. Yardi in 1986 on the basis of statistical evaluations of metrics, this prophecy is attributed to the Harivaṃśaka layer. Indeed, it is well-tuned with the Harivaṃśa “phobia” underlined by Brockington, who also noticed that “in the long run, the *mlecchas*’ disregard for brāhmanical values led to their being despised, as seen in various later passages,” among which he also quotes MBh 3.186.29–30. (Brockington 1998, 212) We assume that this important shift in the appraisal of the Yavanas came about when they began to be regarded as a non-negligible part of the ethnic groups permanently settled on Indian territory. In the context of the definition of the so-called “Bhāratavarṣa” in MBh 6.10, the Yavanas are classified as frightful *mlecchajāti-* along with some late newcomers such as the Hūṇas:

yavanās ca sakāmbojā dāruṇā mlecchajātayaḥ |
sakṣaddruhaḥ kuntalās ca hūṇāḥ pāratakaiḥ saba || MBh 6.10.64

And Yavanas, together with the Kāambojas, the frightful⁴³ people of Mleccha origin, Sakṣaddruhas, Kuntalas, and Hūṇas, together with Pāratakas.

2.3 Tracing Boundaries in the North-West

The northwestern area of the Bhāratavarṣa is described earlier as being extremely heterogeneous ethnically and culturally but at the same time it is a place where Brahmanical culture (represented by the social structure of the four *varṇas*) can flourish unhindered. On the other hand, as is well known, the northwestern area was at the core of the early Ṛgvedic culture and even several centuries later it was still included within the range of areas taken into account by Pāṇini’s linguistic description (see Bronkhorst 2021, 3), dating back to the fourth century BC. This inclusion is also in line with *Kauṣītaki-Brahmaṇa* (7.7.36–39) which considers

43 *dāruṇa-* as an attribute of the Mlecchas also occurs in MBh 2.29.15 (*parama-dāruṇa-*) and 3.188.52 (*dāruṇa-*).

the North-West as a traditionally conservative area, where the “best speech” was spoken and where, consequently, people readily went to study (see Cardona 1997, 553–4). It is thus noteworthy that just two centuries later, Patañjali, the most famous commentator on *Pāṇini’s grammar*, identified a culturally homogeneous northern-middle area he called Āryāvarta,⁴⁴ which excluded the North-West, among others. The relevant *Mahābhāṣya* passage is a comment on one of Pāṇini’s compounding rules (A 2.4.10) whose wording employs the genitive plural phrase *śūdrānām aniravasitānām*, literally “members of the servile class not excluded” from the core Dharmic society.⁴⁵

M 1.475 l. 3 *ad* A 2.4.10 = M 3.174 l. 7–8 *ad* A 6.3.109:

kaḥ punar āryāvartaḥ | prāg ādarsāt pratyak kālakavanād dakṣiṇena himavantam uttareṇa pāriyātram |

Which is the land of the Āryas? It is the region to the east of where the Sarasvatī disappears,⁴⁶ west of the Kālaka forest,⁴⁷ south of the Himālaya, and north of the Pāriyātra mountains.

The more recent *Baudhāyana-Dharmasūtra* and *Vasiṣṭha-Dharmasūtra* share Patañjali’s definition with minor changes.⁴⁸ Therefore, this definition is valid until at least the first century of the Common Era. It is arguable that this shift of paradigm was dictated by a determination to at least banish from the orthodox land those areas which were permanently inhabited by peoples considered hostile, that is, a source of danger from foreign attacks or a domain of religious doctrines and cultural ideologies markedly different from those of the Brahmanical

44 As far as the linguistic, ethnic and cultural complexity of the category *ārya-* is concerned, we have adopted Deshpande’s view (1995, 78–79).

45 In the end, the commentators conclude that this term refers to members of the servile class who are allowed to use the vessel of a member of an upper class to eat from, provided they render it pure by means of a specific ritual (see Cardona 1997, 560).

46 In modern-day Rajasthan.

47 This is near modern-day Allahabad.

48 BDhS (mid-first century BC to early first century CE; see Olivelle 2018, 21) 1.2.9: *prāg ādarsāt pratyak kanakhalād dakṣiṇena himavantam udak pāriyātram etad āryāvartam* “The region to the east of where the Sarasvatī disappears, West of the Kanakhala tirtha, south of the Himālaya, north of Pāriyātra mountain is the Āryāvarta.”; VDhS (first century CE; see Olivelle 2018, *ibid.*) 1.8–9: *āryāvartaḥ prāg ādarsāt pratyak kālakavanād udak pāriyātrād dakṣiṇena himavataḥ | uttareṇa ca vindhyasya* “The Āryāvarta is the region to the east of where the Sarasvatī disappears, West of the Kālaka forest, north of Pāriyātra mountain, south of the Himālaya and upper than the Vindhya (range of mountains).”

community.⁴⁹ We will see in the following paragraphs what other strategies were socially implemented to reorder relations in the case of cohabitation within a same area.⁵⁰

3. Inclusive Strategies

From what we have observed thus far it is clear that, while it was possible to describe a homogeneous Āryavarta from the point of view of building a kind of ideal primeval nation, at the same time, it was not easy to apply this model to the complex social and political realities of the subcontinent. In particular, it was difficult to apply the model to the geo-political, social, and cultural complexity of the northwestern kingdoms on which we are focusing. There was, therefore, a need for models and strategies that would help manage this complexity, a challenge which can easily be read between the lines in the passages from the *Mahābhārata* seen thus far.

3.1 The Universality of the Royal Dharma

A first model of inclusiveness is built precisely on the specificity of the warriors' Dharma (*kṣātradharmā*) which, by its intrinsic nature, transcends the limits of the four-class society within which the Brahmins move. Numerous passages within the twelfth book are dedicated to this Dharma. We shall dwell on a well-known one (MBh 12.65),⁵¹ which is part of a rather archaic layering. The episode originates from a question King Māndhātṛ asks Viṣṇu (in the form of Indra) in the context of a discussion on the duties of the warrior-class. Within the frame of the already established doctrine of the *svadharmā*, that is, the Dharma proper to each class and condition, the Dharma of the warriors is described as the most ancient

49 In particular, as regards the region beyond the eastern border, that is, the so-called Greater Magadha area, only the cultural distance has to be taken into account in terms of Bronkhorst (2007).

50 The most famous definition of the *āryāvarta* is probably that contained in the main *dharmā* work in the Sanskrit language, namely the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, dating back to the mid-second century CE (see Olivelle 2018, 24). This is a quite general definition, where the contrast between the land of the Āryas and that of Mlecchas seems to be extremely important. MDhŚ 2.22–23: *ā samudrāt tu vai pūrvād ā samudrāc ca paścimāt | tayor evāntaraṃ giryor āryāvartam vidur budhāḥ || kṛṣṇasāras tu carati mṛgo yatra svabhāvataḥ | sa jñeyo yajñīyo deśo mlecchadeśas tv ataḥ paraḥ ||* “The land between the same mountain ranges extending from the eastern to the Western sea is what the wise call “Āryāvarta”—the region of the Āryas. The natural range of the black buck is to be recognized as the land fit for sacrifice; beyond that is the land of foreigners” (tr. Olivelle 2005, 95).

51 Most recently discussed briefly in Bowles (2018).

(*lokajyeṣṭha*,⁵² *jyeṣṭha*⁵³) eternal and supreme one (*sanātana*,⁵⁴ *śreṣṭha*⁵⁵) inasmuch as its function is to guarantee the respect of the different Dharmas of all the social classes (*cāturvarṇyasthāpanā*).⁵⁶ It thus subsumes all the other Dharmas (*sarvadharma-para*,⁵⁷ *sarvadharmopapanna*, *sarvadharmeṣu dharmāḥ*⁵⁸). In order to describe this challenging task vividly, King Māndhātṛ illustrates the ethnic and social complexity of his kingdom in which members of the four traditional classes coexist with ethnically or geographically identified tribes or peoples.⁵⁹ Then he wonders:

kathaṃ dharmam Careyus te sarve viṣayavāsinaḥ |
madvidhaiśca kathaṃ sthāpyāḥ sarve te dasyujīvinaḥ || MBh 12.65.15

How could all those who live in a given kingdom follow the Dharma? And all these people who live as *dasyus* how should they be controlled/restrained by men like me?

Māndhātṛ thus portrays himself as a universal ruler who, while being an integral part of traditional Indian culture, must also address those foreign populations who are his subjects whom he groups under the generic label of *dasyu*.⁶⁰ Viṣṇu/Indra's solution to the dilemma is based on the identification of a set of moral duties and activities shared by all the members of the society while, at the same time, maintaining an implicit submission of the *dasyus* to the Dharma-structured society, the founding nucleus of the kingdom:

indra uvāca
mātāpitror hi kartavyā śusrūṣā sarvadasyubhiḥ |
ācāryaguruśusrūṣā tathavāśramavāsinaṃ || 17 ||

52 MBh 12.64.29.

53 MBh 12.65.6.

54 MBh 12.64.29.

55 MBh 12.65.1.

56 MBh 12.65.5.

57 MBh 12.64.29.

58 MBh 12.65.1.

59 MBh 12.65.1.

60 As this is not the opportune place to discuss this complex term, we refer to Bowles (2018) for a recent study on the meaning of this term in the *Mahābhārata*. What needs to be emphasized here is the aspect of marginality (social, religious, or geo-political) that characterizes the populations thus identified often “associated with other marginal groups and regions distant from the geographical heart of the epic’s action” (Bowles 2018, 160). It is most probable that *dasyu* is one of the best translations that Sanskrit offers us for the term “foreigner.”

*bhūmipālānām ca śusrūṣā kartavyā sarvadasyubhiḥ |
vedadharmakriyās caiva teṣām dharmo vidhīyate || 18 ||*

*pitṛyajñās tathā kūpāḥ prapās ca śayanāni ca |
dānāni ca yathākālām dvijeṣu dadyur eva te || 19 ||*

*ahimsā satyam akrodho vṛttidāyānupālanam |
bharāṇam putradārāṇām śaucam adroha eva ca || 20 ||*

*dakṣiṇā sarvajyānānām dātavyā bhūtim icchatā |
pākayajñā mahārḥās ca kartavyāḥ sarvadasyubhiḥ || 21 || MBh 12.65.17–21*

Indra said: All the *dasyus* must obey [their] mother and father, just like, among those who live in the [four] stages of life, teachers and masters must be obeyed;⁶¹ and all the *dasyus* must obey the kings (lit. the protectors of earth). Furthermore, the rites of the Vedic Dharma⁶² are taught as their Dharma⁶³ and likewise the rites for the ancestors, the (giving of) wells, cisterns, resting places; and, indeed, they also should give gifts at the due time to the twice-born. Non-violence, truthfulness, self-control, preserving what has been gained through activities and gifts, supporting sons and wives, integrity, and also

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- 61 Here we follow Fitzgerald (2004) who translates *āśrama* as one of the four stages of life and not, as would perhaps be more habitual, as indicating hermitages. The description as “the people who live according to the four stages of existence” may be a way of referring precisely to the domestic population as opposed to foreigners, as can be deduced from a parallel passage in the *Arthasāstra* in which the king’s duty, particularly in troubled times, is defined as being the protection of the people of the four classes and the four stages of life (AŚ 3.1.38 *caturvarṇāśramasya* [...] *lokasya*). Moreover, further proof could be the occurrence of the derivative *āśramya-* in a slightly earlier verse (MBh 12.65.9 *cāturāśramyadharmās ca vedadharmās ca* “The duties of the four stages of life and the vedic duties”). According to this interpretation, the duties of the *dasyus* are limited to a natural reverence to one’s father and mother while the Dharmic society is also characterized by obedience to masters. We accept this interpretation as it seems particularly appropriate to the context. Instead, translating *āśramavāsin* as hermit-dweller would oppose the *dasyu* (who honor their father and mother) to the hermits who only partially place themselves outside traditional society.
- 62 The compound *vedadharmakriyā* allows for a double analysis. The first, followed by Fitzgerald, considers *veda-* as a subordinate modifier of *dharmakriyā* in the sense of meritorious action, then restricted to the ritual sphere (“the meritorious actions [prescribed] in the Vedas”). The second considers the compound *vedadharmā-* as a modifier of *kriyā*, ritual action. Both *dharmakriyā* and *vedadharmā-* are attested independently in the *Mahābhārata* and thus both can serve as determinants of the compound. However, the use of *vedadharmā-* in the plural (MBh 12.65.9 *cāturāśramyadharmās ca vedadharmās ca*), used in this same canto to indicate the two unique sets of duties incumbent on the Brahmins, seems to suggest the latter solution.
- 63 This reference to the participation of *dasyus* to vedic rituals is somewhat bewildering. Let us nevertheless remember that, as already pointed out by Sharma (2000, 236–8) although *śudras* were prevented from studying Vedic texts, they were also able and sometimes obliged to participate in rituals.

loyalty. The priestly gift must be given in every sacrifice by the one who desires power⁶⁴; valuable cooked offerings⁶⁵ must be carried out by all the *dasyus*.

The legitimacy of the extension of all these duties to all the subjects of the kingdom rests on the fact that they are enjoined by a universal law established since time immemorial, a description which, by the way, also matches the description of the royal *dharmā*, which surpasses the restricted Brahmins' Dharma:

etāny evaṃprakārāṇi vibhīṭāni purānagha |
sarvalokasya karmāṇi kartavyāniha pārthiva || MBh 12.65.22

These well-known ritual performances of this type that were established of old, o sinless king, must be carried out by the whole population here and now.

dasyus are thus fully part of the society, at least from the point of view of the king, who, unlike the Brahmins, is not obliged to confine himself to the Dharmic society. And the request to actively participate in social welfare by constructing wells and other infrastructures indicates that *dasyus* could also be wealthy and influential members of the kingdom. MBh 12.65.19cd seems to foster a possible match between *dasyus* and *śudras*, since both are put at the service of the three upper classes. However, this is not the case since, unlike the *śudras*, the *dasyus*, as foreigners, are allowed to have a social structure of their own, which mirrors the Dharmic one while maintaining an independent status:

māndhātovāca
dr̥śyante mānavā loke sarvavarṇeṣu dasyavaḥ |
liṅgāntare vartamānā āśrameṣu caturṣv api || MBh 12.65.23

Māndhātṛ said: Dasyu men are seen in the world in all the four social classes, even living in the four stages of life, even though in a different guise.

64 We translated the phrase *bhūtim icchatā* as the instrumental, masculine singular of *bhūtim icchat-* since we consider that the single *dasyu* aiming at a preeminent position within the society is at stake in this passage, as opposed to the duties pertaining to the category of *dasyu* as a whole (*sarvadasyu-*). Probably what is hinted at here is a *dasyu* looking for a kingly status which he can obtain provided that he becomes the sponsor of every sacrifice which has to be performed under his sphere of influence. As for an analogous use of this syntagm, see also MBh 13.34.22 and 27.

65 Possibly domestic rites. See Lubin (2016) who quotes, among others, *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra* 2.4.4, which introduces the notion of three sets of models: the *pākayajña-saṃsthāḥ*, the *haviryajña-saṃsthāḥ*, and the *soma-saṃsthāḥ*.

3.2 *The Absorption of Foreigners Within the Dharmic Society: The Fallen Warriors*

Nevertheless, more or less in the same period, other strategies were adopted to manage the complexities of the societies of the Indian subcontinent, strategies that involved finding a place for foreigners within the Dharmic society itself. A first strategy involved treating certain foreign populations as having lapsed from their class for failing to fulfil certain duties pertaining to them. See, for instance, this rather late passage:

śakā yavanakāmbojās tās tāḥ kṣatriyajātayaḥ |
uṣṣalatvaṃ pariḡatā brāhmaṇānām adarśanāt || MBh 13.33.19

Śakas, Yavanas and Kāmbojas, though all born as Kṣatriyas, acquired a low social position because of neglecting Brahmins.⁶⁶

As Karttunen (2015, 238–9) already pointed out, this allowed their status to be elevated, once appropriate rituals had been performed,⁶⁷ rites after which, it is supposed, they assumed the hitherto neglected duties (in particular toward Brahmins). The problem could also be raised outside the specific case of the relations with the war-mongering northwestern neighbors; in fact, as noted by Karttunen in the same passage “In theory, a ruler had to be a Kṣatriya. In practice, however, many dynasties arose from other *varṇas* and were only subsequently conferred the status of Kṣatriya.” This strategy seems to refer to times when it was necessary (or profitable) to maintain relations with populations perceived as foreign but allies (think of the alliances formed by the Pāṇḍavas before the war) or even with invaders who had to be entrusted with the management of the kingdom.

3.3 *The Absorption of Foreigners Within the Dharmic Society: Mixed Classes*

In the absence, however, of this possible re-integration, these people became more and more embedded in the structure of Dharmic society, which gave rise to that

66 Regarding the interpretation of *brāhmaṇānām adarśanāt* as “because of neglecting Brahmins,” as well as of *brāhmaṇādarśanena* as “by neglecting Brahmins” (in MDhŚ 10.43: see § 3.3), see Giudice (2023, 15, fn. 98).

67 Some rituals, such as the Vratyastoma, aimed formally at re-integrating into Dharmic society elements that had been excluded from it for some infringement (e.g., for not having completed the study of the Veda on time). Nevertheless, they preserve traces that suggest they were at some point used to bring elements belonging to foreign peoples or tribes into society. See Candotti and Pontillo (2015, 156–8).

proliferation of mixed classes (*varṇasamkāra*) often presented as one of the most obvious signs of a decadent society. This type of approach is effective, for example, in dealing with settlements that were gradually losing every relationship with the motherland. Early *dharma* sources record this approach and create a complex set of subclasses—mixing names of tribes and populations with names of professions—from a matrix built on the four original classes. The structure described in the *Gautama-Dharmasūtra* (late second—early first century BC)⁶⁸ follows such a pattern (GDhS 4.18–21):

brāhmany ajjjanat putrān varṇebhya ānupūrvyād brāhmaṇasūtamaḡadhacaṇḡālān || 18 ||
tebhya eva kṣatriyā mūrdhāvasiktakṣatriyadhīvarapulkasān || 19 ||
tebhya eva vaiśyā bhṛjyakaṇṭhamāhiśyavaiśyavaidehān || 20 ||
pāraśavayavanakaraṇāsūdrān chūdrety eke || 21 ||

From [men of] the four classes, a Brāhmaṇa woman begot as children in due order Brāhmaṇas, Sūtas, Māḡadhas, and Caṇḡālas. From them indeed, a Kṣatriya woman [begot as children in due order] Mūrdhāvasiktas, Kṣatriyas, Dhīvaras, and Pulkasas. From them indeed, a Vaiśya woman [begot as children in due order] Bhṛjyakaṇṭhas, Māhiśyas, Vaiśyas, and Vaidehas. [From them indeed], a Sūdra woman [begot as children in due order] Pāraśavas, Yavanas, Karaṇas, and Sūdras—so some deem.

This is the approach that would later become the canonical one that is enshrined in a text such as the *Mānava-Dharmasāstra* (mid-second century CE), which lists the following mixed classes (MDhŚ 10.43–45):⁶⁹

śanakais tu kriyālopād imāḡ kṣatriyajātayaḡ |
vṛśalatvaḡ gatā loke brāhmaṇādarśanena ca || 43 ||
punḡrakāś coḡadravidāḡh kāmbojā yavanāḡh śakāḡh |
pāradāḡh pahlavāś cīnāḡh kirātā daradāś tathā || 44 ||
mukhabāḡhūrupajjānāḡh yā loke jātayo bahiḡh |
mlecchavāco ṛyavāco vā sarve te dasyavaḡh smṛtāḡh || 45 ||

However, these people, although being Kṣatriya by birth, have gradually attained the condition of *vṛśala* in the world, due to the non-performance of ritual practices, and also by neglecting Brahmins. [These are] Punḡrakas, Coḡas, Dravidāḡs, Kāmbojas, Yavanas, Śakas, Pāradas, Pahlavas, Cīnas, Kirātas, and Daradas. The castes that are outside those that were born from the mouths, arms, thighs, and feet in the world, all those, whether they speak a non-Ārya or an Ārya language, are recorded as *dasyus*.

68 See Olivelle (2018, 21).

69 It should be noted that a similar list of mixed classes is also found in MBh 13.33.19–21ab and 13.35.17–18. See Giudice (2023, 16–18).

The specification “whether they speak a non-Ārya or an Ārya language” is particularly interesting as it highlights the well-known shift from an ethnic/cultural to a moral/social-based classification.

4. Conclusions

After Alexander the Great’s expedition, Greeks were mentioned as Western borderers in Aśoka’s Edicts and were considered part of that group of foreign populations to whom the Dharma should be spread. Based on Aśoka’s inscriptions, the perception of Greeks was not negative following Alexander’s expedition but probably changed radically after the Indo-Greek invasions (second century BC). These historical events brought foreigners, especially Indo-Greek militaries, to the core of the Āryāvarta while weakening their bonds with the motherland. They became subjects of the new kingdoms so that the problem of governing them needed to be dealt with urgently and, indeed, several strategies were adopted. These strategies varied according to the perception of the “alterity” of these populations and the importance attributed to the Dharmic society in the construction of the core of the kingdom. In this respect, one can discern a line of development that starts from a representation that emphasizes cultural, social, and even political diversity but without excessive negativity: it is a pluralistic vision of the realm in which the sovereign, while owing protection to the Brahmins and the society they shaped, nonetheless adheres to a different, more ancient and more universal dharma that allows him to manage both the foreigners within his realm and the relationships with allied kingdoms. On the other hand, particularly in later texts, diversity becomes a moral parameter: its destructive potential must be rigidly regulated in a realm that *de facto* identifies with the four Dharmic classes and relegates all complexity to the rank of impure mixture.

Abbreviations

A [*Aṣṭādhyāyī*]—*The Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini*

AŚ [*Arthaśāstra*]—*The Kauṣīliya Arthaśāstra*.

BDhS—*Baudhāyana-Dharmasūtra*

CKI—*Corpus of Kharoṣṭhī Inscriptions*

GDhS—*Gautama-Dharmasūtra*

KB—*Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa*

M [*Mahābhāṣya*]—*The Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali.

MBh [*Mahābhārata*]—*The Mahābhārata*.

MDhŚ—*Mānava-Dharmasāstra*

VDhS—*Vasiṣṭha-Dharmasūtra*

YP [*Yugapurāṇa*]—*The Yuga Purāṇa*

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Reconsidering *Mahābhārata* References to Rome and the Romans

DILETTA FALQUI

Introduction. Historical and Archaeological Background¹

In terms of interactions between India and other regions, several significant historical events occurred between 300 BC and 50 AD. These events appear to have triggered a shift in Indian xenology,² or the way India perceived the foreign and the foreigner.³ First, Alexander the Great set out on a journey to India, thereby establishing a pivotal point of contact between the East and the West.⁴ Secondly, this period also saw the rise of the Mauryan Empire, which became the largest empire in the Indian subcontinent (Thapar 2002, 174–84). In the second half of the second century BC, the rule of the prominent Indo-Greek ruler Menander

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2 My use of the term “xenology” aligns with that of Halbfass (1988, 172 fn. 2), who defined it “as a term for attitudes toward and conceptualizations of foreigners.”

3 Halbfass (1988, 172) discusses the “asymmetry” between the West’s interest in India and India’s interest in the West.

4 Bronkhorst (2016, 7–11) examines Alexander’s expedition from the point of view of its impact on religious and philosophical thought, Brahmanical responses, the transmission of ideas, religious syncretism, and the long-term effects on Indian society and religion (see also Stoneman 2019, 36–79).

contributed to the stabilization of Indo-Greek power in the region.⁵ Toward the end of the second century BC, India witnessed the culmination of the Mauryan Empire, which led to a period of political fragmentation (Thapar 2002, 204–8). Nevertheless, the rule of the Indo-Greeks continued, influencing the cultural and economic landscape of the region, especially in the Indo-Bactrian kingdom.⁶ The beginning of the Common Era is marked by the peak of Roman trade with India, a phenomenon that has been widely acknowledged to have occurred in the first century AD (Begley and De Puma 1991, 3;)—50 BC–50 AD according to Thapar’s chronology (2002, xiv). This period saw a significant increase in the intensity of contact and exchange with the outside world, particularly in the late first century AD.

In the past century, scholars underscored the significance of trade between Rome and India, emphasizing not only the importance of an alternative maritime route through the Persian Gulf for East-West trade, but also the role of Indian ships in such trade, particularly in the period between the sixth and tenth centuries AD. Cobb (2023, 368–75) highlights the crucial role Indian merchants played in the integration of the part of the world surrounding the Indian Ocean. These merchants significantly contributed to the movement of goods and cultural exchanges between East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf, and Southeast Asia, demonstrating the complex, multidirectional, and multicultural nature of trade networks during this period (Fauconnier 2012). Indeed, Indian merchants not only facilitated economic prosperity but also the spread of cultural practices and ideas, challenging traditional Eurocentric perspectives that often minimized the role of non-European actors in ancient trade.⁷

5 Menander’s rule proved instrumental in stabilizing Indo-Greek power particularly in the Indo-Bactrian kingdom. His subsequent period of rule brought about stability and consolidation. His influence extended beyond his own kingdom, as he is believed to have led a second wave of conquests and converted to Buddhism, further solidifying his power and influence in the region (See Jakobsson 2009).

6 Indo-Greek rule had a profound impact on the cultural and economic landscape of the region. Boppearachchi (2005, 172) notes that the Greeks perpetuated traditions in Bactria in the form of architecture, sculpture, and coinage. Morris (2022, 695–744) further examines the economic activities and developments during the Greek reign, emphasizing the role of the empire, migration, and Buddhist monasteries in driving changes.

7 In this sense, Gurukkal (2013, 201–2) critically challenges long-held assumptions and biases that have traditionally emphasized Roman dominance and downplayed Indian agency. By examining the economic and political contexts in both India and the Roman Empire, the scholar demonstrates how local conditions influenced trade dynamics, challenging Eurocentric narratives and calling for a more balanced historiography that considers Indian perspectives.

The Red Sea trade route was a crucial link between Imperial Rome and the Indian subcontinent during the first century AD (Begley and De Puma 1991), serving as a key artery for commerce. In this century, the Red Sea trade route served as a key artery for commerce, linking imperial Rome with the Indian subcontinent. This vital link facilitated not only the flow of goods, but also a vibrant exchange of cultural and economic ties. Both literary evidence and archaeological findings have illuminated the nature of these interactions, revealing deep mutual perceptions and influences between these distant societies. Egyptian ports such as Berenike and Myos Hormos played a crucial role in the Roman trade network (Tomber 2012, 205–8). These ports were vital hubs connecting the Roman Empire to regions beyond its borders, including Arabia, East Africa, and South Asia.⁸ Archaeological evidence, including various types of pottery and coins, attests to the international nature of these trade connections and highlights the cultural and technological exchanges that took place in these ports—especially when one considers the involvement of Mesopotamia and, in particular, the Sasanians as a medium for the exchange of goods and ideas (Tomber 2007, 982–3). As regards the trade relationships that existed between the Roman Empire and far-off Eastern territories, Roman society experienced a significant influx of valuable goods from regions such as India, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and China following the Augustan conquest of Egypt. This increase in trade also had profound cultural and diplomatic implications.⁹ In terms of diplomatic relations, the trade routes fostered relationships and alliances between Rome and distant kingdoms, facilitating the exchange of ambassadors and the negotiation of trade agreements. These interactions helped to stabilize and extend Roman influence in distant regions, demonstrating the extensive reach and integration of the Roman Empire with the wider ancient world—a phenomenon that Fitzpatrick (2011, 28) calls “classical forms of globalization.” Archaeological findings and numismatic evidence have been instrumental in shedding light on the nature of these interactions. Artifacts such as Roman coins found everywhere on the Indian subcontinent, alongside

8 For example, Thapar (2002, 44) mentions that the Palghat Gap which cut through the Western Ghats was one of the most important passes for Indo-Roman trade.

9 This trade network is further corroborated by the discovery of wine storage vessels in North Syria, central Anatolia, and Babylonia (Morgan and Richardson 2020). The Roman economy, characterized by the production of a significant quantity of wine, provides further evidence of the existence of wine trading with India (Oliveras 2019). De Romanis (2006) illustrates how ancient trade routes between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean facilitated exchanges of goods and cultural practices. Commodities like cassia, cinnamon, and obsidian had a profound impact on the culinary, medicinal, and technological realms, enhancing interconnectedness between civilizations. This trade was a vital component of the Roman Empire’s economic and cultural ties with India.

local items discovered within the bounds of the Roman Empire, underline the extensive nature of this trade network. This cross-cultural interaction was enabled by intricate trade networks that connected diverse civilizations. They were not merely economic conduits but instrumental in the dissemination of religious beliefs, artistic styles, and even governance models.¹⁰

Does the Mahābhārata Mention the Toponym “Rome”?

The *Mahābhārata* (henceforth MBh) provides a detailed ethnographical account of the interactions between the main protagonists and a diverse array of foreign ethnic groups. These groups include the *yavanas* or *yonas* (i.e., Greeks), the *śakas* (i.e., Central Asians), the *pahlavas* (i.e., Persians), and the *būnas* (i.e., Huns) and *cīnas* (i.e., Chinese) (Halbfass 1988, 176; Hildebeitel 2001, 30–1). The epic refers to these communities in various contexts, such as alliances, battles, and trade, highlighting the extensive cultural and political interactions between ancient India and these distant—often mythical—lands and underscoring the vast reach and multicultural dimensions of the ancient Indian civilization. With regard to the dating of the MBh, the question of establishing the historical period during which the epic was composed presents a challenging set of considerations. The majority of scholars have concluded that the MBh, or at least significant portions of it, can be dated to a period between 500 BC and 500 AD, with Biardeau bringing it down to the post-Aśokan period, that is 200 BC (1999, xxxiii, li-liii), and Hildebeitel (2001) indicating 150 BC as the *terminus post quem* (2001, 28).¹¹ This would make the text contemporaneous with the city of Antioch during Seleucid times and the city of Rome during the Punic Wars (Hildebeitel 2001, 31).

While collating manuscripts for the edition of the second book of the *MBh*, Edgerton (1938, 263) discovered what appeared to be a significant variant referring to the city of Rome, that is, *caiva romāṃ ca*, which occurred in only seven of the forty to fifty manuscripts examined. This mention is particularly noteworthy

¹⁰ For instance, the trade of gold, along with other valuable goods, facilitated not just the flow of commodities but also the exchange of ideas, technologies, and cultural practices across vast distances. This is the perspective Falk (2015) adopts in his discussion of the historical significance of gold in the Indian subcontinent and its trade across the Indian Ocean, providing a comprehensive analysis of gold trading, including its mechanisms, routes and impact on the economies and societies involved.

¹¹ See Hellwig (2019, 2–3): Most scholars tend to assign the MBh, or at least substantial parts of it, to a time slot between 500 BCE and 500 CE (see Brockington 1998, 131ff.). While the upper limit can be brought down to the first two centuries CE due to the evidence of the Spitzer Manuscript (Brockington 2010), the lower limit remains more strongly disputed.

because it represents the earliest known reference to Rome in ancient Indian literature, appearing in a list of cities conquered by Sahadeva, one of the five Pāṇḍava brothers, and naming three cities in the *yavana* world.

pāṇḍyāṃś ca dravidāṃś caiva sahitāṃś codra keralaiḥ |
andhrāṃś talavanāṃś caiva kaliṅgān oṣṭra karṇikān ||
antākhīm caiva romāṃ ca yavanānāṃ purāṃ tathā |
dūtair eva vaśe cakre karaṃ cainān adāpayat || (MBh 2.28.48–49)

Likewise, by means of envoys he (i.e. Sahadeva) subjugated and made tributary the Pandyas and Tamils along with the Codras and Keralas, the Andhras and Talavanas,¹² the Kalingas and Ustrakarnikas, Antioch and Rome, and the city of the Yavanas. (tr. van Buitenen 1975)

The MBh's mentions of *antākhīm*, that is, the city of Antioch,¹³ *romāṃ*, that is, Rome, and the city of the Yavanas imply historical trade connections between the southern subcontinent and the Roman world. Emenau (1953, 84 fn 29) confidently confirmed the manuscript evidence for the phrase *yavanānāṃ purāṃ*, which refers to “possibly Alexandria.” He also rejects the objection that this phrase cannot refer to Western cities because of its placement in a section on Sahadeva's southern Indian conquests, since unfamiliar references may be misplaced in a narrative that mixes real and legendary places. This discourse is further elaborated in Gurner's (1956) thorough reassessment of the MBh's references to Rome, prompted by the 1945 discovery by Sir Mortimer Wheeler of an Indo-Roman trading post at Arikamedu near Pondicherry¹⁴ which proved the existence of extensive trade relations during the first and second centuries AD. Aalto's (1975, 11–12) analysis of the linguistic relationships between terms used to refer to “Rome” and “Roman” across diverse cultures, as well as his examination of the perception of Roman influence and the impact of Roman culture in Central Asia, Tibet, and other regions, is consistent with Edgerton's interpretation. Curiously, some manuscripts of the Southern Recension (the Telugu T1 and the Grantha versions G2–8) maintain one *pāda*, specifically MBh *320.1 after 2.29.11 where the

12 For an analysis of the identity of the Tālavanas and its implications for the dating of the *MBh*, see Derrett (1957). However, it should be noted that the word presents as Talavanas in 2.28.48, whereas it appears as Tālavanas in all subsequent MBh appearances.

13 The critical edition, however, casts doubt on this claim, pointing out that the reading *antākhīm* is an emendation and thus remains uncertain. This emendation is unusually speculative, and Edgerton (1938, 264) stated that he proposed it “only with the utmost diffidence.”

14 Arikamedu was founded in the third century BC and had established trade contacts with the Mediterranean by the late second century BC (Begley 1983) It has been identified as the birthplace of a glass bead industry that supplied the Old World for over 2,000 years (Francis 1991; Verma 2022, 93).

masculine noun *roma-* appears. According to the stanza, Nakula is said to have subjugated other foreign places and people:

ramaṭhān hārahūṇānīs ca pratyāś caiva ye nṛpāḥ |
tān sarvān sa vaśe cakre śāsanād eva pāṇḍavaḥ || (MBh 2.29.11a)
 < *araṇaṁ caiva romaṁ ca yavanānāṁ purāṇi ca* | > (*320.1 after MBh 2.29.11)

With his power, the Pāṇḍava subdued all of them: the Ramaṭhas¹⁵, the Hārahūṇas, the kings living in the west, < the far-off *roma* and the cities of the Yavanas >.

The critical apparatus establishes a connection between the omitted verse and the aforementioned *śloka*, as if they were two parallel passages. From a narrative point of view, both stanzas suggest that the perception of the foreigners in question is asymmetrical, albeit diplomatic. The cities of the Yavanas to the west, are said to have been subjugated. In later sections of the text, their kings are said to have gone to court to present gifts to the recently enthroned monarch. From the perspective of xenology, this does not indicate an entirely negative view of foreigners, but a display of military superiority on the part of the Pāṇḍavas. As the narrative progresses, as evidenced in the ninth book, the text reveals the emergence of alliances between foreign tribes and the two main factions involved in the impending war. This development marks a shift toward a greater openness to foreign peoples where previously they had been merely viewed with disinterest.

In his introduction to the critical edition of the second book of the MBh, Edgerton (1944, xxvii–xxviii) proposed that the reference to Rome could serve as a chronological marker for the text, thereby significantly narrowing the estimated time frame for its composition. He argued that the text could not have been written before the name of Rome became known to the Indians, “this means surely not before the first century BC, and very likely not until a century or two later.” Brockington (1998, 134) nevertheless limits this period to the line 2.28.49ab in the reconstituted text. The reference to Rome in the text, as highlighted by Edgerton, suggests that the MBh (at least certain sections) could not have been completed before Rome’s prominence in Indo-Roman trade, which peaked around 50 BC–50 AD. The most plausible scenario is that later sections, such as those referring to Rome, may have been added at the height of Indo-Roman interactions around 50 BC–100 AD. This stratification of layers within the text makes it difficult to establish a single definitive date for the entire epic.

15 See Mani (1975, 640): “A mleccha tribe who lived in the kingdom of Māndhātā.”

An “Old” Reference Reconsidered

Nevertheless, the most complex element of this investigation concerns the two occurrences of the ethnonym “Romans” in the MBh. Let us now proceed to a meticulous re-examination of the first reference, initially addressed by Edgerton (1938). The following verse is part of the section in which different peoples of the world bring all sorts of gifts to Yudhiṣṭhira, the newly consecrated king, after his brothers had established his supremacy by subjugating a number of kingdoms, each in a different direction of the compass. The text refers to several ethnic groups. These include the Romaśas and the Horned Men, who are difficult to identify.

śakās tukhārāḥ kaṅkāś ca romaśāḥ śṛṅgiṇo narāḥ |
mahāgamān dūragamān gaṇitān arbudaṃ hayān || (MBh 2.47.26)

Scythians, Tukhāras, Kaṅkas, Romaśas and the Horned Men brought Mahāgama and Durāgama horses that numbered in the millions. (tr. van Buitenen 1975)

In analyzing the interpretation of *romaśa-* as an ethnonym, careful consideration must be given to several key points, both because of the inherent linguistic ambiguity of *romaśa-* and *śṛṅgin-*, and the contextual meaning. Both morphemes have multiple potential meanings and can function as nouns (i.e., ethnonyms and zoonyms) or adjectives. Moreover, the broader narrative and thematic context in which these morphemes are used is crucial to their interpretation. Understanding whether *romaśa-* and *śṛṅgin-* refer to particular ethnic groups, characters, or qualities depends heavily on their narrative setting. When *romaśa-* is used as an adjective, it serves as an allomorph of the attribute *lomaśa-*, which literally means “having thick hair or wool or bristles,” or simply “hairy.” This usage typically describes a physical feature. As Edgerton (1938, 264) noted, if *romaśāḥ* is the correct reading, it signifies “hairy” and has no bearing on the debate about ethnonyms. Nevertheless, both van Buitenen (1975, 815 n 25), Aalto (1975)¹⁶ and more recently Debroy (2015a) support the hypothesis that it is an ethnonym used to refer to the Romans, with van Buitenen noting that “it is not inconceivable” that *romaśa-* could refer to the Romans “given the fact that Rome is known to this Book” (i.e., MBh 2.28.49). The ambiguity is not so much when *romaśa-* is used as

¹⁶ Aalto also refers to the mention of a certain Yavana king “Kaśerumat” in MBh 3.13.29ab (*indradyumno hataḥ kopād yavanaś ca kaśerumān |* “Indradyumna has been killed in anger, and so has the Yāvana Kaserumat” [tr. van Buitenen 1975]), who also appears in the texts as *kaserumān*, an “Asura who was a Yavana” (Mani 1975, 395).

an adjective, but indeed when it is used as a noun. In its nominal form, *romaśa-* introduces additional complexity due to its zoological connotations by referring to animals such as a “ram” or a “boar.” Further complicating the interpretation is the syntactic structure of the text. The particle *ca*, following *kaṅkāś*, functions as an enclitic and arguably closes the list of the first three nouns enumerating different tribes.¹⁷ The absence of this particle after *romaśaḥ* suggests that the second *pāda* in the hemistich may be used to describe the attributes of the aforementioned tribes. Notably, the morpheme occurs four times in the *Mahābhārata* and could possibly function as an allomorph of the proper noun for the sage Lomaśa, as suggested by a passage not included in the reconstituted text (i.e., MBh App. 1, no. 45.2 after 1.1.110: *pāṇḍoḥ sutarī sahitārī romaśena* |).

As far as the morpheme *śṛṅgin-* is concerned, its ambiguity is primarily due to its multiple potential meanings and applications within the text. Literally translated, it refers to “one who possesses horns,” suggesting its key application in the animal sphere. However, this simple interpretation can become complex depending on the context in which it is used within the epic. When used as a noun, it literally translates to “with horn(s)” and is employed in a variety of contexts that showcase its diverse symbolic and literal significances across different subjects.¹⁸ The ambiguity arises when one tries to demonstrate whether *śṛṅgin-* is used metonymically, symbolically, as an adjective, or as a proper noun (that is as a proper noun or title for a character noted for his strength or aggression, akin to how a horned beast might be perceived). As a metonymy, *śṛṅgin-* is applied to animals, specifically to elephants as “the tusked [one]” and to bulls as “the horned one” (MBh 1,158.14). In geographical descriptions within the MBh, *śṛṅgin-* refers to the peaks of mountains, a symbolic usage that evokes the pointed, towering nature of horns, as noted in several passages (MBh 1,190.16; 3,43.36; 6,58.30; 9,32.36; 9,55.27). Furthermore, it denotes a mountain range bordering the mythical Ramanaka region (see Mani 1975, 640), highlighting its prominence in the physical and mythical landscapes of the epic (MBh 6,9.2–5).¹⁹

17 I would like to express my gratitude to Lidia Sudyka for her observations regarding the usage of the particle *ca* in this sentence.

18 The morpheme *śṛṅgin* finds its use in mythological narratives referred to gods, for example, when Brahmā disguises himself as a fish with a horn, serving as a divine signal for Manu to begin building the ark (MBh 3,185.31, 35–36). Moreover, it is also quoted as one of the eight thousand names of Śiva (MBh 13,17.147), highlighting its divine connotations and the reverence associated with it. The morpheme serves as a proper noun in the case of Śṛṅgin, the son of sage Śamika, who is extensively mentioned throughout the text (MBh 1,36.21, 24; 1,37.1, 4, 9, 12, 15, 16, 1,38.1, 1,46.2–3, 37; 15,43.8).

19 The noun *ramaṇaka-* is found only once in the neuter form in both the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Matsyapurāṇa* (in a parallel verse). However, it appears in one instance as a proper noun in the masculine form in the *Gokarṇapurāṇasāraḥ* and again in the *Liṅgapurāṇa*.

When *śṛṅgin-* is employed as an adjective, it serves to enhance a description by attributing the characteristics of having horns which implies strength, aggression, or prominence. This usage effectively enriches the imagery and symbolism within the epic's narrative, as seen in the following contexts. Indeed, in MBh 2,47.26, the adjective form of *śṛṅgin-* is employed to describe men, probably to convey a quality akin to the vigor or robustness associated with horned animals. It is evident that the adjective serves to intensify the traits of the individuals described, thereby signifying power or dominance. A more illustrative use of *śṛṅgin-* as an adjective appears in MBh 9,56.2, where it is included in a simile (*upamā*) used to describe Duryodhana and Bhīma during their duel, likening them to *śṛṅgiṇau vṛṣabhāv iva* "like two horned bulls." This usage effectively conveys the ferocity and the physical prowess of the fighters, enhancing the dramatic portrayal of the duel in the epic.

The final key point in question concerns the interpretation of context and the reading of *romaśa-* as an ethnonym. This meaning appears to be exclusive to this context, which raises questions about its regular use and reliability as a definitive reference to the Romans. Moreover, the critical apparatus indicates the affix *-śāḥ* in the nominative plural masculine form, which remains uncertain in its reading. While the vulgate (B 2,51.30) also maintains the masculine nominative plural *romaśāḥ*, in the critical edition, the two variants documented in the manuscripts of both the northern and southern recensions consistently denote ethnonyms. The critical apparatus shows that the Southern Recension manuscripts G2 and G3 have the *lectiones romiṇam* and *rāmaga*, respectively. However, to the best of my knowledge, the G2 variant does not appear to be traceable to any known morpheme and may seem to be an error of the copist, while G3 may be an error for *rāmaka-*, which has only one occurrence in the MBh (2,28.46 *rāmakan*) as the name of a mountain.²⁰ Indeed, in this context where ethnonyms are mentioned, a sudden mention of a mountain may be out of place. Instead, manuscripts from the Northern Recension (specifically B, D1–5) and some from the Southern Recension (specifically G1.4–6, M) read *romakāḥ* in place of *romaśāḥ*, understood as a Sanskrit ethnonym for "Romans." With regard to this variant, it is noteworthy that the vulgate includes a *pāda* about foreigners who came to honor Yudhiṣṭhira. This verse mentions the "Romakas," who were identified as Romans by Vidyabhusana (1918, 470) (B 2,51.17d *auṣṇīkānantavāsāmś ca romakān puruṣādakān*). Although the verse is not maintained in the reconstituted

20 See Mani (1975, 640): "A mountain. Sahadeva, during his triumphal tour of the south, conquered this mountain."

text, this occurrence may seem ambiguous. Indeed, if we intend *puruṣādakān* as an adjective of *romakān*, it would mean that they are referred to as “man-eating” tribe, otherwise, it seems to me that this could be another procession of tribes gathered before Yudhiṣṭhira, namely the Auṣṇikas, those living on the border (*antavāsāms*), the Romakas (i.e., the Romans), and the cannibals. Moreover, the morpheme *romaka-* is documented as an established ethnonym for the Romans in later sources (Aalto 1975, 12), including the *romaka* astronomy system mentioned in the tantric text of the *Kālacakratantra* (900 AD, see van Schaik 2020, 279) and the *Pañcasiddhāntikā* mentioned by the astronomer Varāha Mihira (500 AD), as the *Romakasiddhānta*, which deals with the Roman knowledge of astronomy (van der Waerden 1988; Sarma 1991, 185–6).

Remarkably, the morpheme *romaśa-* is not attested elsewhere in the MBh, which complicates the understanding of its contextual relevance and accuracy as a signifier for the Romans. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that three ethnonyms are mentioned in *pāda* 2,47.26a (*śakās tukhārāḥ kaṅkās ca*). Consequently, scholars’ claim (i.e., van Buitenen 1975; Aalto 1975, and Debroy 2015ab) that *romaśa-*—and *romaka-* (i.e., Vidyabhusana 1918 and Aalto 1975)—refers to the Romans and should be interpreted as an ethnonym is plausible.²¹ This is because both Śaka and Tukhara are well-established ethnonyms. Indeed, Śaka is identified with the Scythians—a nomadic Indo-European tribe, renowned for their expertise in equestrianism and archery (Johnson 1959)—whereas *tukhāra-* is probably identified with the Tukhāras, Tuṣāras (Karttunen 2015), or even Tocharians (Aalto 1975, 12). Finally, *kaṅka-* primarily translates to “heron” and appears 97 times in the MBh, predominantly used as a proper noun. However, its occurrence as an ethnonym is notably rare, with just the aforementioned instance available.²²

21 Although the interpretations of scholars such as van Buitenen (1975), Aalto (1975), and Debroy (2015ab) regarding the terms *romaśa-* and *romaka-* as potentially referring to the Romans may seem limited, their contributions deserve consideration within the broader discourse. The brief observation by van Buitenen, recently restated by Debroy, presents intriguing points, while Aalto’s comprehensive survey on how the ethnonym “Romans” is perceived and attested in different cultures provides valuable context. It is important to acknowledge the valid concerns regarding the depth of these scholars’ arguments; however, the sustained academic interest in these terms indicates serious engagement with the topic, rather than mere carelessness. Therefore, this chapter proposes that the ethnonym interpretation remains a plausible hypothesis, as it aligns with archaeological findings that were not available when Edgerton initiated the discussion.

22 This scarcity and its primary association with the heron make its interpretation as an ethnonym particularly challenging and intriguing. Even though Böhrling registers it as an ethnonym, it could thus be indicative of a lesser-known tribe or group within the *Mahābhārata*’s vast geographical and cultural landscape.

To conclude, interpreting the morpheme *romaśa-* within the textual context of the aforementioned MBh passage offers several intriguing possibilities, each providing a distinct layer of meaning for the text depending on the interpretive angle: (1) *romaśa-* can be interpreted as an ethnonym referring to the Romans. This interpretation situates the MBh within a broader global context that corroborates the archaeological data regarding historical interactions between the Indian subcontinent and the Romans. Such a perspective is particularly fascinating as it opens possibilities for re-examining the geographic and cultural reach of the epic's narratives; (2) another interpretation considers *romaśa-* as an attribute describing *narāḥ* “men” (*pāda* 26b), specifically depicting them as “horned” (*śṛṅgiṇāḥ*) and “hairy” (*romaśāḥ*); (3) finally, in a zoological context, after mentioning three ethnonyms (i.e., *śakās*, *tukhārāḥ*, *kaṅkās*), the morphemes could refer to three types of beings, namely the *romaśāḥ* interpreted as “the hairy ones,” possibly referring to animals like rams or boars, known for their thick hair or bristles; the *śṛṅgiṇāḥ* probably denoting “the horned ones,” such as elephants or bulls, whose most prominent feature is their tusks or horns, and *narāḥ* simply referring to “men.” Although this is morphologically and syntactically possible, it is the least likely option from an interpretative point of view. However, given the context—that is, the peoples conquered and subdued by Sahadeva—it is more likely to be interpreted as an ethnonym or an adjective.

A “New” Reference to Consider

Let us move on to the second reference which to the best of my knowledge has never been considered in this perspective by scholars. The passage in question is situated within a broader discourse on the origin and details of the Jambūkhanda continent, where a long list of different peoples and regions, provides a fascinating glimpse into the geographical and cultural perceptions of the Other. Notably, the appearance of the morpheme *romāṇaḥ* in the masculine nominative plural stands out, inviting speculation about its implications and how it integrates into the historical and mythological context of the narrative:

[...] *ata ūrdhvaṃ janapadān nibodha gadato mama |*
 [...] *vadhrāḥ kariṣakāścāpi kulindopatyakāstathā |*
vanāyavo daśāpārśvā romāṇaḥ kuśabindavaḥ || MBh 6,10.37ab, 54

[...] Hence, in addition to (this) region, listen to what I tell you < about other populations > [...], the Vadhras, and even the Kariṣakas, the Kulindopatyaka, the Vanāyus, the Daśāpārśvas, the Romans, the Kuśabindavas.

The use of the morpheme *roman-* as an ethnonym within the Sanskrit corpus is notably rare, appearing only once in the aforementioned passage from the MBh.²³ The vulgate (B 6,9.56) also records the masculine nominative plural *romāṇaḥ*.²⁴ In their respective translations, Ganguli (1887), Dutt (1988), and Debroy (2015b) all render the term as “Romanas.” With respect to other variants, the critical apparatus lists the following, all of which are preserved in manuscripts of the Northern Recension: *ropāṇam* (K0–2), *semāṇa* (Da2 and D5), *romāṇa* (D7), *rāmāṇa* (D3), and *romāṇā kuśanaṃdina* (D6). Given the first two variants preserved in the Devanāgarī manuscripts, it appears that the scribe made errors. While *semāṇa* is completely misinterpreted and, to the best of my knowledge, difficult to decipher, the first can be corrected as *ropaṇa-*. It is possible that the scribe intended to write either a genitive plural (*ropāṇām*) or an accusative singular (*ropaṇam*). However, the masculine form of the word means “arrow,” while the neuter form is associated with the semantics of healing and growth, especially of plants. The word occurs only once in the MBh, in the neuter form (MBh 13,99.22 *ropane*), in a botanical context. Consequently, it appears to be highly incongruous when placed in a context of ethnonyms. The last three variants show a high degree of phonetic similarity to the source word *romāṇaḥ*. The observed minor phonetic variations can be traced back to the morpheme *roman-* or to the allomorph *loman-*. According to Monier-Williams, *roman* is registered as an allomorph of *loman*, which typically refers to “the hair on the body of men and animals,” often indicating something akin to bristles, wool, or down. This connection suggests a potential symbolic use of the term in some contexts, possibly alluding to the attributes of a people rather than directly naming them. Furthermore, when considered as an ethnonym, *roman* in its nominative plural masculine form could refer to a specific group of people. However, there is some ambiguity as to whether it indicates the Romani people or the Romans as they are traditionally understood in historical contexts. The context in which *roman* appears could provide clues

23 This is the case when the text is scanned with the Digital Sanskrit Corpus (DCS). According to Böhrtlingk’s lexicon, however, the noun occurs once in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa 192, but in Wilson’s 1865 edition, the reference in question is linked to a topographical list of people and lands from the sixth book of the MBh. See Aalto (1975, 12): “[...] *romāṇaḥ* are mentioned in a list of foreign peoples, most of which are unidentified.”

24 I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need to examine the variant included in the vulgate. Nevertheless, both editions maintain the same *lectio*, that is, *romāṇaḥ*. In fact, the only difference between the vulgate and the reconstituted text is in their approaches to word division. In the vulgate, the two nouns *daśāpārśvāromāṇaḥ* are written in *scriptio continua*, whereas the critical edition has divided them into *daśāpārśvā* and *romāṇaḥ*.

about its intended meaning. If it is grouped with other known ethnic groups or within passages discussing migrations or conflicts, it might lean more toward being an ethnonym.

In conclusion, while the direct meaning of *roman-* as an ethnonym in these texts is ambiguous and limited in occurrence, the combined approach of linguistic analysis, contextual interpretation, and comparative historical study can help to clarify its significance.

Conclusions

In the context of the MBh, the references to Rome and Romans provide insights into how ancient Indians might have perceived the Romans, who were geographically distant and culturally different. The toponym Rome is first mentioned in the MBh, and only there does it appear with the morpheme *romā-* or *roma-*, as can be seen in the passage not included in the reconstituted text. Given the ambiguity of the selected references presented, the morphemes *romaśa-* and *roman-* in the MBh present a complex interpretive challenge. It seems clear that ancient Indians had heard of the Romans. But what did they call them? This mention may indicate an awareness of Rome at a time when India's cultural outlook was changing, and supports the conclusion that some authors of the MBh were aware of an inhabited city called Rome. This awareness, in turn, may suggest that ancient Indians were beginning to incorporate foreign elements into their worldview, thereby enriching their self-representation in relation to the wider world. Nevertheless, the MBh captures a significant shift in the cultural and social perceptions within ancient India. The period from around 1 BC to 1 AD marks India's transition from a phase of apparent indifference to foreigners to an era characterized by robust archaeological and historical evidence of intercultural interactions.²⁵ Initially, India showed little interest for the world beyond its immediate cultural and geographical boundaries. It seems to me that these changes within the MBh reflect a move toward a more outward-looking perspective, highlighting the importance of the cultural and economic exchanges that were becoming increasingly widespread, and providing a fascinating lens through which to view ancient Indian perceptions of self and other. With increasing contact with the outside world, India seems to be gradually recognizing and incorporating wider trade and cultural exchanges that took place over vast distances. In the passages presented here,

25 See Falk's (2022, 47) references to four phases of Indian rule, where he emphasizes the different approaches of various Indian dynasties and rulers to western and foreign contact.

the lists of conquered foreigners and those gathered before the king testify to a display of diplomatic relations that suggests a certain openness to the other. This may suggest that by the time this epic was written, there had been a shift from an India that showed no sympathy for anything or anyone foreign to an one that was in contact with the outside world. As Halbfass (1988, 172–96) notes, Hinduism did not actively seek or define itself in relation to foreign cultures. Instead, it remained largely introspective, emphasizing the universality and completeness of its own religious and philosophical systems. Hinduism has historically shown a tendency to disregard outside influences, especially those perceived as foreign or other. This has resulted in a lack of recognition of these external elements as sources of identity or as alternative worldviews. Such foreign entities were not perceived as potential challenges to Indian identity or as mirrors for self-reflection. Rather, they were seen as entities to be avoided or assimilated to a limited extent. Consequently, the absence of a well-developed concept of the Other in Indian thought can be attributed to its inward-looking self-sufficiency, which resisted the need to define itself against external cultures.

Ultimately, the study of references to Rome and Romans in the MBh may allow us to explore how ancient Indians adapted foreign elements within their context and may contribute to a deeper understanding of how ancient India saw itself in relation to the wider world. This evolution in narrative perspective enriches our understanding of India's historical self-representation and its attitudes toward the Other.

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The Chinese Representation of Venice. Ideal and Real Visions in Chinese Sources from the Seventeenth Through the Twentieth Century

DANIELE BELTRAME

Introduction¹

The Venice that we will observe in this brief survey is not the actual lagoon city, but its textual representation. For this reason, the concept of palimpsest as described by Genette ([1982] 1997) will be central. A text—in its wider sense of a signifying system—re-presents a reality and itself, albeit with slight variations over time, even without its authors being aware of it, letting the reader gloss over the concept of the “death of the author.” It embodies the transmission of a vision of referential matters mainly inherited and conditioned by a general acceptance of conventional images, until its development becomes so innovative that it finally breaks away from tradition and opens up a new path.

In order to summarize the long history of the representation of Venice in Chinese sources from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, we can identify three main phases and provide a few examples for each of them. In the beginning, the representation of Venice was essentially mediated and translated from foreign sources. Even after the encounter with the real Venice, the city continued to be

¹ This chapter is a concise preliminary presentation of a larger research study to be published soon.

described by many Chinese authors through a foreign palimpsest until a more critical view was established at the end of the twentieth century.

The Foreign Palimpsest

The Utopian Venice

The first phase was marked by the reception of a representation of Venice mediated by Western sources written in China or brought to China by missionaries, first Catholic and later Protestant, between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. After the Opium Wars in the mid-nineteenth century, these sources were incorporated into the first Chinese collections of geographical texts.

In the first geographical sources produced in Chinese by the Jesuits from the seventeenth century onward, most notably Giulio Aleni's *Zhifang waiji* 職方外紀 [Record of Lands Foreign to China] (1623), Venice—called here *Wunuojiya* 勿擱祭亞 (perhaps from the vernacular “Vinegia” or the Latin “Venetia”)—is described as a fabulous water city built on poles in the sea, with many bridges and canals, crossed by a multitude of vessels. The city, as a republic without a king, in which aristocratic families choose rulers for their virtues, is depicted as an ideal state and its inhabitants as skilled shipbuilders and glass craftsmen (Aleni [1623] 2009, 108, xxxii).² The most curious detail is that the city is located in the northwestern part of the Italian peninsula, a detail which will be repeated in later sources inspired by Aleni's works. In fact, this depiction of Venice was preserved and passed on in imperial libraries through its inclusion in later works (first of all Ferdinand Verbiest's *Kunyu tushuo* 坤輿圖說 [Illustrated Explanation of the World] (1674), and other imperial collections (Menegon 1994; Chan 1997), such as the 1785 work *Qingchao wenxian tongkao* 清朝文獻通考 [Complete Analysis of Historical Sources from the Qing Dynasty] (Masini 1989).

The descriptions of Venice in these early foreign representations—primarily by Jesuit missionaries—were highly idealistic: rarely alluding to religious wars, their authors wanted to present the Chinese with an image of a peaceful and

2 其西北为勿擱祭亚无国王世家共推一有功德者为主城建海中有一种木为桩入水千万年不腐其上铺石造室复以砖石为之备极精美城内街衢俱是海两傍可通陆行城中有艘二万又有一桥梁极阔上列三街俱有民居间隔了不异城市其高又可下度风帆国中精于造舟预庀物料一舟指顾可成他方重客每至其处阅视一两时其工已成一巨舫可以航海者矣所造玻璃极佳甲于天下。(Aleni [1623] 2009, xxxii). On the sources and the composition of Aleni's treatise, see Luk (1977); De Troia (2005, 2007). All Chinese text in the footnotes are quotations from the sources mentioned or summarized in the chapter.

civilized Europe, on a par with the Chinese Empire (Casalin 2015). A city like Venice, regarded as an urban marvel by Europeans, and one of the continent's major trading powers at the time, was something to boast about. The same idealism was used by Jesuits and some philosophers to describe China to Europeans as an example of enlightened absolutism.

However, these visions were destined to be challenged and overturned as early as the eighteenth century by thinkers like Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), Montesquieu (1689–1755), and Denis Diderot (1713–84). The former in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Mankind] (1784–91), described China as a country doomed to decay. In Book XI, after repeating the ideal presentation of China, Herder adds that it was time to “steer a middle course between extravagant praise and reproach, which would presumably be the path of truth” (Herder [1784–91] 2024, 289–90) and proceeds to give his own derogatory view of the Chinese Empire, summed in the oft-quoted definition “The empire resembles an embalmed mummy, daubed with hieroglyphs and wrapped in silk; its internal circulation as torpid as that of a hibernating animal” (293).

Similar opinions were shared by Montesquieu, who in *De l'esprit des lois* (1748) uses China as the epitome of a despotic country based on fear and a foil to Europe's moral and political advancement. Many of Montesquieu's ideas were later developed by Diderot, who first in the article “Chinois” in the *Encyclopédie* (1753) and then in the 1781 edition of the *Histoire des deux Indes* sought to challenge Voltaire's views (*Essai sur les mœurs*, 1756) on China's enlightened despotism, the reverence of the Jesuits for Chinese culture and morality, and the current taste for *chinoiseries* (Hsia 2004, 26–7; Cohen 2000).

A contribution to the changing vision of China was made also by the more pragmatic and realistic travelers at the turn of the eighteenth century. Increasingly influenced by a Eurocentric and colonialist conception of historical evolution, they made China a political and social relic, condemned to lag behind. The beginning of this new phase was undoubtedly the Macartney Mission (1793–4), which initiated a completely different depiction of China in Europe, a view which would deepen even further after the Opium Wars. Even before the Macartney Mission, we find traces of a derogatory portrayal of China in Admiral Anson's (1697–1762) account in his *Voyage round the World* (Anson 1748, 349, 357, 392–3), a book that fueled the prejudices of Montesquieu and other skeptical thinkers toward the Chinese dream created in Europe by the Jesuits (Hsia 1998; Cohen 2000). Subsequent evidence of colonialist propaganda, which paved the way for the Opium Wars, appears in the chronicle by Hugh Hamilton Lindsay (1802–81) on the 1816 embassy of Lord Amherst (1773–1857), in which the author asserts

that the industrious peoples of southern China would benefit from a more liberal government open to trade, like that of England (Lindsay 1834).

The concept of an essential division of the world into civilized and barbarian countries in its Protestant and English version had already been established within Europe by the Grand Tour and was reinforced globally by the explorations and territorial conquests of imperialism. Thus, the description of China in colonialist propaganda was not very different from the depiction of Italy offered by many foreign travelers in modern times. Italy was often represented as a country doomed to decadence despite its great and illustrious past.

The Dystopian Venice

An alternative vision of Venice, no longer utopian but even contemptuous, reached China through the geographical sources written in Chinese by Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century. In these sources we find a very different image of Italy and of Venice, which is portrayed as a decadent and stagnant city, both physically and politically, with an unjust and inhuman legal and political system. The most authoritative and influential of these sources was the *Wanguo dili quanji* 萬國地理全集 [Complete Atlas of the World] (1838) published in Singapore by the Protestant missionary Karl F. A. Gützlaff (1803–51). In this source, Venice even changes its Chinese toponym and becomes *Feinisheng* 非匿省 [Venetian province].³

In his description, Gützlaff correctly places Venice in northeastern Italy but portrays it as a decadent city. Once a great naval and commercial power, rich and respected throughout the world, Venice had, over time, succumbed to the corruption and immorality of its nobility, which spread to the entire population, rendering them poor and vile. The city thus also lost its political power and independence, so much so that only silent vestiges of its former glory still survived. Of the Doge's Palace in Venice, Gützlaff mainly focuses on its prisons, the (in)famous "Piombi" (leaden cells) and in a style reminiscent of a Gothic novel, he describes

3 非匿省，在以之東北方，其省會同名。古時此城為地中海最大之海口，連一千有餘年，嚴操自主之理，與各地貿易。在海面權勢並廣，與大國接戰，毫無敬畏，因財之多，敢作敢為，令天下人等敬之。但其五爵漸衰，陷溺日深，淫孽滋多，故此百姓懦弱無謀，隣國攻之，舉手而得之。此時尚存古時高威之古蹟矣。其監在殿之鉛蓋，若禁其罪犯者，而太陽照鉛，甚暴之，被禁者，張口大啄斷氣斃。古殿甚廣美，其廟一然，遍有耀光之狀，不可勝矣。其城建立於澤地，各街係溝，人不駕車而駛船往來也。其橋高而華美矣。居民一十萬零一千丁。所有通商，現時甚小，毋庸述言焉。(Gützlaff [1838] 2019, 210–11).

the death by heat and suffocation of an unfortunate convict. This is evidence of a negative portrayal of the city of Venice as an example of cruel tyranny, in stark contrast to the depiction offered by earlier Jesuit sources. The beauty and magnificence of Venice's monuments and bridges, as well as its urban and demographic details, are mentioned only briefly and at the end. In fact, only in the last lines does he mention that the city is built on the sea—not on water but on marshland—and is crisscrossed by roads and canals. The city had 101,000 inhabitants, all of whom were engaged in trade, which Gützlaff considered so insignificant at the time as to be unworthy of mention (Gützlaff [1838] 2019, 210–11).

Another example of this new representation of the world brought by Protestant sources in Chinese language is the *Diqiu tushuo* 地球图说 [Illustrated Geography] (1848) then republished in extended form as *Diqiu shuolie* 地球說略 [Brief Description of the Globe] (1856) by Richard Quaterman Way (1819–95) (Casalin 2015, 345–7).

These representations of Europe were conditioned by the nationalism and a cultural-religious bias of the authors who wrote them, who tended to describe countries considered less civilized in relatively unfavorable terms, according to an Orientalist logic that predated nineteenth-century colonialism. With their materialistic view of the world, with the force of economic and political power or simply with the advantage of being more up-to-date, these sources had the power to strongly condition the Chinese worldview as well, convincing them that knowledge, civilization, and power were then in the hands of different countries. Thus, these texts also offered a different version of modernity and new examples to follow.

Foreign-Chinese Sources

Spurred by events, after the First Opium War (1839–42), Chinese officials decided to learn more about foreign powers and reconsidered the time-honored self-representation of the Chinese Empire as the geographical and political center of the world. The Chinese sources hastily collected to better understand Western countries drew on all the texts available to Chinese literati at the time, from the past and from the present. The most important collection of texts resulting from this need to “know thy enemy” and the world outside China is the *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖誌 [Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms] (1844), compiled by Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857) between 1841 and 1844 and republished in an expanded form in 1847 and in 1852.

The representation of Venice in this collection is rather contradictory. Paradoxically, some errors and different transcriptions of the name “Venice” in Chinese sources lead one to believe that in *Haiguo tuzhi* the city named *Wunuojiya* (Aleni’s Venice, located in the northwest) and *Feinicheng* 非匿城 (Gützlaff’s Venice) are two different urban entities, both built on water.⁴

Thus, two alternative palimpsests on the city of Venice were handed down and repeated almost verbatim in early Chinese sources on European countries. Another mid-nineteenth century text, the *Yinghuan zhilüe* 瀛環志略 [A Short Account of the Maritime Circuit] (1849) by Xu Jiyu 徐繼畲 (1795–1873), followed the Protestant sources more closely and avoided the ambiguity of the *Haiguo tuzhi*: in it we find the replacement of the old Jesuit palimpsest on Venice and Italy, and the growing prevalence of a negative view of Italy, though less so for Venice (called *Weineisa* 威內薩 by Xu), maybe because it was then part of the Austrian Empire.⁵ The difference in approach between Wei Yuan and Xu Jiyu also lies in the fact that the former compiled a collection of heterogeneous materials, while the latter aimed to create a more coherent and unified compendium, based in part on information gathered from foreigners (Bertuccioli and Masini 2014, 190–5).

The Chinese Vision of Venice

Qing Dynasty Diplomats

Only through direct observation were original Chinese sources produced, avoiding the repetition, however selective, of foreign palimpsests. This brings

4 其西北為勿擱祭亞無國王世家，共推一有功德者為主，城建海中，有一種木，為椿，入水千萬年不腐，其上鋪石造室，復以磚石為之，備極精美，城內街衢俱是海，兩傍可通陸行，城中有艘二萬，又有一橋梁，極闊，上列三街，俱有民居間隔，了不異城市其高，又可下度風帆。國人精於造船，預庀物料，一舟指顧可成。[···] 所造玻璃最佳，甲於天下。(Wei [1852] 1998, 1239)

[···]

非匿城，在以他里之東北方，其省會同名，古時此城為地中海最大之海口。千有餘年，既富且強，屢與大國接戰。其後五爵漸衰，百姓愚懦，鄰國攻圍，舉手而得之。今尚存古時高威之古跡，殿廟甚壯麗。其城建立於澤地，各街夾溝，人不駕車而駛船往來，橋尤高壯，居民十萬零一千丁。近日通商甚小。巴士亞城有大文學院，其內三百儒，務文藝。居民五萬丁。味羅那邑居民五萬五千丁。味普撒邑居民三萬丁。蕪地那邑，萬八千丁。(Wei [1852] 1998, 1248)

5 威內薩，一作非匿，臨亞得亞海，幅員甚狹而戶口極繁，古時為地中海最大之海口，萬艘鱗集，握全海之利權者千餘年，今已衰廢，貿易無多，居民尚十萬一千，城建水中，街衢皆小河，飛橋橫跨，不礙舟行。所屬巴士亞，居民五萬，內有書院，肄業者三百人；味羅拿，居民五萬五千；味普撒，居民三萬；蕪地拿，居民一萬八千。(Xu [1849] 2001, 140)

us to the second phase of the representation of Venice: that of the Chinese diplomats who were the first to personally explore Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. One of those diplomats, Li Shuchang 黎庶昌 (1837–98), was member of the embassy led by Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾 (1818–91), the first Chinese ambassador to the United Kingdom and France; thus, Li Shuchang spent five years in Europe between 1876 and 1881 and visited England, France, Germany, and Spain among other countries. In 1879, after Guo Songtao left for China, Li made two pleasure trips to Italy, one in February and the other in September that same year (Casacchia 1990; Casalin 2017). After visiting Venice in February 1879, he left a description of the city in his *Xiyang zazhi* 西洋雜誌 [Record of the Western Ocean] (1879) (Li [1879] 1981, 161) and was the first Chinese to notice the similarity between Venice (called *Weilisi* 衛力司) and Suzhou (Bertuccioli and Masini 2014, 229).⁶ The parallel between these two cities already had a centuries-long history in Europe, beginning with the accounts of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) (Ricci [1597–1610–1611] 1949, 36) and many other religious and secular visitors. Li Shuchang uses the same procedure of domesticating the foreign and exotic by assimilating it to Chinese reality. He probably does not suffer much from the influence of foreign sources in his comparison with Suzhou, since he also uses it to describe Holland, but he, too, is the heir of the more recent palimpsest that has made Italy a country with a glorious and illustrious past, then fallen into decadence, poor and in ruins.

Another great Chinese scholar of late Qing China, Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), visited Italy, among other foreign countries, and left an account of his travels (Kang [1905] 1980). He was in Italy in May 1904, visited its cities and admired its ancient ruins, reflecting on the actual situation of China, which shared a similar fate as a great empire that had fallen into decay. However, Italy had been reunified as a new kingdom in 1861 and accepted among the Great Powers, suggesting that there was still hope for China as well. For Kang Youwei the solution to the plight of a semi-colonial China had to be multifaceted: there was a unifying

6 八点钟至卫力司。卫力司因洲渚筑成，镇市四面在水中央，其外尚有两洲环之。[···] 轮车道出海中，行约十余分钟，始至其下车处。机房外即系河道，行人往来，概用小船拨载。人家墙脚驳岸，悉在水中。中有大河一道，如大街然，此外支河汊港，布置如同小巷。街市之上，别有桥梁可以环通。所住店曰“诺得尔维克多尔利亚”。二十七日泛舟一游。河道不甚清洁。近岸大礼拜堂数座，雕刻颇细，不暇入观。观一玻璃抽丝局。用玻璃小条，燃煤气灯烧其端，良久即熔，引于缆车上，如抽蚕茧，匀细与湖丝等。[···] 泛舟后步游市肆，其街巷之仄，小桥之多，与苏州阊门一带相类，特房屋式稍异耳。中一宽阔处，四面回廊，陈设百货，名为“巴列罗亚尔”。旁有意主行宫，有人率于此散步，夜则男女往来如织。(Li S. [1879] 1981, 161)

ideological element, the Christian religion, whose role in China could be played by Confucianism; there was also a political element, a constitutional reform (a parliamentary monarchy as the best form of government) and an economic element, the free market economy (the middle class as the social propeller of modernity) (see Turriziani 2017; Brusadelli 2017). To Kang, Venice (called *Feinishi* 斐呢士 in his travelogue) was not only another great city of art rich in monuments of the past, but also the home of a famous merchant like Marco Polo and an ancient medieval republic that had become extremely rich through its trade, so it was the symbol of a possible reform program for China (Kang [1905] 1980, 111–13).

Republican-Era Intellectuals

The subsequent phase is that of the cosmopolitan intellectuals of the Republican period (1911–49). The image of Venice in the modern era became increasingly poetic and symbolic: in a world moving ever faster toward industrialization and mechanization, the lagoon city appeared as a magical and evocative survival of the past. The Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth generation often traveled to Europe to complete their education in a kind of modern Grand Tour. Venice thus became an increasingly attractive and inspiring poetic trope for those young poets and writers influenced by foreign literary movements, especially Romanticism.

The authors who wrote about Venice are so many that only a few will be mentioned here. The writer Sheng Cheng 盛成 (1899–1996), who studied in Padua, portrayed Venice in his works and so did the poet Wang Duqing 王獨清 (1898–1940) and the dramatist Li Jianwu 李健吾 (1906–82), who traveled extensively in Italy and left an inspired and colorful sketch of Venice (Sheng 1937, [1932] 1986; Wang [1936] 1998; Li 1936).⁷ For many of these intellectuals Venice was often an inevitable stopover, and even if they did not visit Venice, or before visiting it, they felt the lure of the city's lagoon, canals, palaces, sounds, and colors. Let's take the case of Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897–1931), a modern poet deeply inspired by English Romanticism, who sings about Venice in 1922 even before seeing it. While still in England, he repeated almost verbatim a poem by Friedrich Nietzsche published in 1888 (Abbiati 2007). It is interesting to assess the extent of this inspiration by comparing the two poems:

7 On the literary representation of Venice in Chinese authors, see Abbiati (2007); on Chinese writers in Italy and especially Sheng Cheng in Venice, see Brezzi (2014, 2024); on Wang Duqing and his Venetian poems, see Gálík (1996).

Here is Nietzsche's poem:

An der Brücke stand
jüngst ich in brauner Nacht.
Fernher kam Gesang:
goldener Tropfen quolls
Über die zitternde Fläche weg,
Gondeln, Lichter, Musik—
trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung
hinaus
Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel,
Sang sich, unsichtbar berührt,
Heimlich ein Gondellied dazu,
Zitternd vor bunter Seligkeit.
—Horte Jemand ihr zu? ...
(cited in Block 2005, 208)

By the bridge stood I
Lately in the dusky night.
From afar came singing:
In golden drops it welled up
Across the quivering expanse.
Gondolas, lights, music—
Drunkenly they swam out into the
gloaming...
My soul, a stringed instrument,
Sang to itself, invisibly touched,
A barcarole in secret accompaniment,
Quivering in mottled bliss.
— Was anyone listening? ...
(Nietzsche [1888] 2007, 29–30).

And here Xu's poem:

我站在桥上，
这甜熟的黄昏，
远处来的箫声和琴音——点儿，线
儿，
圆形，方形，长形，
尽是灿烂的黄金，
倾泻在波涟里，
澄蓝而凝匀。
歌声，游艇，
灯烛的辉莹，
梦寐似生，
——網蕴——
幻景似消泯，
在流水的胸前——
鲜妍，缱绻——
流，流，
流入沉沉的黄昏，
我灵魂的弦琴，
感受了无形的冲劲，
怔忡，惺忪，
悄悄地吟弄，
一支红朵蜡的新曲，

I am standing on the bridge,
This sweet ripe dusk,
The sound of a desolate *qin*—dots,
threads,
Round, square, long,
It's all brilliant gold,
Pouring into the ripples,
Clear blue and dense.
Singing, barges,
Glowing lamps,
Life-like dreams,
— Dense —
A fading illusion,
On the breast of flowing water—
Beautiful and charming —
Flowing, flowing,
Flowing into the heavy dusk
The *qin* of my soul,
Felt the invisible impulse,
Bewildered, dazed,
Quietly chanting,
A new gondola tune,

出咽的香浓；	A fragrant breath
但这微妙的新琴哟，	But this delicate new <i>qin</i>
有谁领略，	Is there anyone who can appreciate it?
有谁能听！	Is there anyone who can hear it? ⁸

(Xu [1922] 2006, 42–43)

Many Chinese intellectuals and travelers, even if only passing through, were enchanted by Venice,⁹ noting its exceptionality as a city of peace, serenity, and silence: an island of quietude in an increasingly modernizing and industrializing Europe. Venice was interesting and remarkable for being both out of history and full of history: an art city without cars, where it was possible to listen to music or the sounds of human life and nature, and where it was possible to be carried away by poetic inspiration and philosophical reflections. In one of his famous sonnets, the Chinese poet Feng Zhi 馮至 (1905–93), who was also inspired by German Romanticism and Existentialism, makes Venice a symbol of the loneliness of modern individual, isolated like an island among islands, under the illusion of being connected by artificial and temporary bridges (Giuffrè 2020).

威尼斯	To Venice
我永远不会忘记	I shall never forget
西方的那座水城，	that water city of the West,
它是个人世的象征，	Symbol of mankind,
千百个寂寞的集体。	Group of myriads of lonely beings.
一个寂寞是一座岛，	Each an island,
一座座都结成朋友。	Each making friends.
当你向我拉一拉手，	Your hand stretches towards me,
便象一座水上的桥；	Like a bridge over the water;
当你向我笑一笑，	You smile at me,
便象是对面岛上	Like a window on an island
忽然开了一扇楼窗。	That suddenly opens.
只担心夜深静悄，	But, in the deep and silent night,
楼上的窗儿关闭，	Those windows are closed,
桥上也断了人迹。	And on the bridges not even the footprints.

(cited in Giuffrè 2020, 80) [English translation by Salvatore Giuffrè (2020, 81)]

8 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

9 For an extensive list of travel notes by Chinese authors on Italy published during the twentieth century, see Castorina (2024). On the description of Venice in one of these, by Chen Yifu and Chen Dayou, written in 1937, see Tola (2024).

The sight of the lagoon city led many Chinese intellectuals to indulge in poetry, both Western and Chinese. In fact, many authors emphasize the similarity of the lagoon city with the cities of southern China, especially Suzhou, Hangzhou and Nanjing. Comparisons between gondolas and dragon boats, between the lagoon and Lake Tai or the Western Lake are very common in their writings, especially for travelers born in the Jiangnan region such as Sheng Cheng and Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 (1898–1948), both from Yangzhou. The latter noted a similarity between Venice and any of the Jiangnan water villages or Nanjing, especially the Qinhuai River district.¹⁰ By that time, the city of Venice was firmly linked to the cities of Jiangnan (especially Suzhou) in the imagination of Chinese intellectuals, who thus demonstrated that they had inherited yet another Western palimpsest: that of the “Venice of China,” as Suzhou was already known to many European readers. It is worth noting that, during the Republican period, the city of Suzhou was even described as such by some Chinese writers, for example Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898–1958).¹¹

We can also cite some lesser-known cases of travelers who wrote about Venice. Qian Yonghe 錢用和 (1896–1990) (born in Changshu, near Suzhou), who later became the secretary of Song Meiling 宋美齡 (1898–2003); Ding Xikang 丁錫康 (1921–44), a pragmatic traveler nonetheless fascinated by the poetic landscape of the city; the art critic Huang Juesi 皇觉寺 (1901–88) (born in Wujiang, not far from Suzhou); and the economist Zhu Xie 朱悝 (1907–68) (born in Haiyan, Zhejiang). Enthralled by the absence of cars, Qian Yonghe (1930) describes her arrival in Venice on a moonlit night suffused with distant music, capturing the conventional scene poetically: she writes a quatrain (a traditional poetic form in Chinese literature, the *jueju* 绝句, though in a rather unusual four-syllable line):

皓月當頭，	The white moon over my head,
悄然獨泛	I quietly floated alone
音樂鏗鏘，	the sound of the music,
歌聲婉轉	the songs so sweet

(Qian 1930, 220)

Ding Xikang (1936) again echoes Qian’s impressions and phrasing when describing his views of “the most famous water city in the world,” recalling, among other things, the music and the charm of a woman’s voice singing in a cafe along the banks. Huang Juesi, reaffirming the general resemblance between the

10 “这个略略像当年的秦淮河的光景，但秦淮河却热闹得多” (Zhu [1932] 2018, 73)

11 “有观前街的煦暖温馥与亲切之感的大都市，我只见到一个委尼司；即在委尼司的 St. Mark 方场的左近。” (Zheng [1931] 1999, 283).

Italian rural villages and those in Jiangnan, also wrote about the silence of Venice and the faint sound of a song carried by the waves. In this respect, Venice is again portrayed as a city out of time, resembling the peaceful water villages of the lower Yangzi, where natural and human sounds can still be heard and enjoyed as a “natural concert” (自然底合奏 *ziran de hezou*) (Huang 1944, 10).

One of the very last accounts of a trip to Venice by a Chinese author of the Republican era is that of Zhu Xie, published in 1951 but still belonging to the previous romantic phase. The author again emphasizes the similarity between Venice and the Chinese water cities, to the extent that the sounds of water and boats in Venice remind him of poems by Du Mu 杜牧 (803–52) on Jiangnan, and of a poem by Wei Zhuang 韋莊 (836–910) on Suzhou:

春水碧於天
畫船聽於眠
(Zhu 1951, 27)

The spring waters are bluer than the sky
I listen to the colorful boat until I fall asleep

One of the first travelogues on Venice published during the early years of the People’s Republic of China (1949–) is the translated reportage by Pëtr Andreevič Pavlenko (1899–1951); published in the magazine *Lüxing zazhi* 旅行雜誌 [Travel Magazine], it presents an alternative palimpsest—the Soviet and Communist one—offering a very unpoetic and even cynical perception of Venice (Pavlenko 1952).

Post-Mao Foreign Policy

Since there are very few references to Venice during the Mao era, and they are a mixture of literary impressions and political observations mainly based on Marxist materialism dating back to the 1950s, the representation of Venice in Chinese sources does not resurface until after 1976. A new vision, still strongly influenced by politics, was launched along with the reform and opening-up policy in the late 1970s, and it was functional to the revitalization of China’s relations with Western countries, including Italy. These relations were built on the narrative of a peaceful and friendly cooperation with foreign countries in the name of modernization and development. Extensive coverage by state media accompanied the frequent foreign trips of Chinese leaders abroad, especially those of Chairman Hua Guofeng 华国锋 (1921–2008). Hua visited Venice in November 1979, during a personal trip following his official visit to Italy. As additional diplomatic tools,

several twinning agreements were signed between Chinese and foreign cities, including one between Venice and Suzhou in 1980. It is interesting to note that, once again following a foreign palimpsest, the proposal of Suzhou as a possible twin city of Venice came from the Chinese delegation, well aware of its reputation as the “Venice of China.”¹²

After the signing of the twinning agreement, the Chinese representation of Venice was increasingly linked to a formal connection with Suzhou. Among the members of the various delegations that prepared the twinning were two great intellectuals of the time: the celebrated poet Ai Qing 艾青 (1910–96) and the novelist and playwright Gao Xingjian 高行健 (1940–), who later won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000. They both left their impressions about Venice in their writings. Gao Xingjian wrote about Venice in a highly lyrical manner. Like many before him, he noticed the numerous bridges and islands in the city and the total absence of cars, which intensified the silence and the pleasant sounds of the water around him. He could not help but feel the familiar atmosphere of Jiangnan’s water villages.¹³ Despite being caught up in the tight schedule of visits, he vividly described the places he and the other delegation members were shown, especially the lively display of human activity in St. Mark’s Square, always focusing on the sounds of the city (Gao 1981, 50–1). Thus, the romantic overtones inspired by the lagoon city were revived by post-Mao intellectuals. To celebrate the twinning between Venice and Suzhou, Ai Qing wrote a poem that was widely reprinted in the Chinese press, the fourth of his five *Venetian Serenades* (*Weinisi xiao yequ* 威尼斯小夜曲), written in June 1979 (Ai 1994, 563).

The description of Venice—and of its kinship with Suzhou (now formally established)—is once again primarily poetic. The city inspires poetic memories or original creations among the intellectuals who visit it, as it did during the Republican period, and continued to do so with Ai Qing, Gao Xingjian, and the many journalists who often depicted the floating views of the two cities.

Present-Day Reappraisals

Since the twinning agreement between Venice and Suzhou in 1980, the comparison between Venice and many Chinese riverine cities has been increasingly

12 Personal communication with the late Senator Mario Rigo (1929–2019), who was the mayor of Venice at the time of the twinning.

13 “这一切又都勾起我在江南水乡漫步时得到的感受，又新鲜而又亲切。” (Gao 1981, 50).

exploited for tourist purposes, not only in foreign sources but also in official and unofficial Chinese texts about Suzhou and other Jiangnan water towns. This has also led many Chinese intellectuals, concerned about preserving a “Chinese essence,” to reconsider certain simplistic, albeit lyrical, descriptions.

They viewed the somewhat clichéd association between Venice and Suzhou with greater realism and skepticism, recognizing it as inherited from the West and emphasized since the late 1970s for propaganda or profit. For example, Acheng 阿城 (1949–), a contemporary novelist, explores in his travelogue from Venice the vast array of potential “other Venices” in the world, scattered on all continents. While acknowledging the beauty of Venice, he simultaneously downplays its uniqueness by recognizing the existence of many water cities worldwide and thus reducing the uniqueness of the twinning with Suzhou. However, Acheng’s words convey an ironic cultural relativism that almost dismantles the longstanding imagined kinship between Venice and Suzhou (Acheng [1994] 2021, 67–8).

Starting from the 1990s, other writers and scholars began to question the common assertion that Suzhou is the Venice of China. They emphasized the Orientalist and colonialist implications of such a comparison, noting, among other things, that Suzhou is actually much older than Venice (Du 1997; Guo 1995; Zhao 1996). This perspective gained widespread acceptance, to the extent that in 2016, a primary school student wrote in an essay published in an education magazine that Venice has long been known as the “Suzhou of the West” (Zhu 2016, 6).

Conclusions

The overview of the various stages in the description of Venice in Chinese (mostly literary) sources, necessarily condensed due to the breadth of the period considered, summarizes China’s view of the cultural and geographical otherness produced by its contacts with Europe. These contacts were first established by missionaries and travelers to China, and then by Chinese diplomats and writers, who began to travel abroad in the mid-nineteenth century. From these diverse sources, we have identified different cultural-historical phases of the Chinese vision of Venice—a city emblematic of otherness due to its unique urban identity and rich cultural history accumulated over centuries. Of course, these are general trends that do not preclude the presence of alternative visions of the city in each phase. The prevailing palimpsest in the depiction of Venice, as we have seen, is the lyrical one, embedded in a well-established European tradition, in

which many Chinese authors also participated. They often blended the Italian and Chinese waterscapes, drawing on a deeply rooted foreign palimpsest that cast Venice and Suzhou (along with other Chinese water cities) as twin cities in their poetic atmosphere. Indeed, the lyrical and picturesque vision of Venice and its Chinese counterpart, Suzhou, is still very common today, especially in official, commercial and spontaneous sources on the internet: just think of the proliferation of online travel blogs. The poetic formula first used by intellectuals of the Republican era to bridge transnational cultural traditions seems to be favored once more in the age of globalized tourism.

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Call for Our Saint Jeanne d’Arc: Jeanne d’Arc in Late Qing and Republican China (from the 1910s to the 1940s)

WENXIN JIN

In China, the most popular and well-received translation of Saint Jeanne d’Arc is *Shengnü Zhende* 聖女貞德. Regarding the formation of her Chinese name, D. E. Pollard believes *Zhende* was the Cantonese pronunciation of Jeanne d’Arc in French (Pollard 1997, 32–3). But Tang Xinyü 唐欣玉 considers *Zhende* was rendered from the Japanese transliteration of her French name by Feng Ziyou 馮自由 in *Nüzi aiguo meitan* 女子愛國美談 [Tales of National Women Saviors] (1902) (Tang 2012, 90). In Chinese, *Shengnü* 聖女 is the literal translation of “female saint.” Meanwhile, *Zhen* 貞 refers to chastity, a key standard in traditional Chinese womanhood. According to *Yizhoushu* 逸周書 [Lost Book of Zhou], “being pure and chaste could be conferred *Zhen*”¹ [清白守節曰貞] (*Yizhoushu* 2000, 225). It required women to remain virgin and undefiled in girlhood and after marriage. Although late Qing reformists encouraged women to stop foot-binding and advocated for female education, they still continued the

1 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. This paper chapter is the outcome of the kind help and great support of all the people surrounding me in my research. I sincerely thank the scientific committee for their great organization of “Asia in the Mirror” conference to let us meet and exchange ideas, and for the reviewers’ suggestions to help me develop my thoughts. I also hope to express my great appreciation to Prof. Nicoletta Pesaro and Prof. Gregory Dowling, for their great patience and kind proofreading of this chapter, suggestions in mapping Jeanne d’Arc’s triangle journey to China and the inspiration of the “double taming” of Jeanne d’Arc in my conclusion.

traditions of Chinese womanhood (Tang 2012, 90). *Zhen* thus implies Jeanne's virginity and purity. Meanwhile, *De* 德, as *Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典 [*Kangxi Dictionary*] records, signifies great virtue and well-doing (Zhang et al. 1716, 1774). For ancient Chinese people, "what could be called *De* is goodness and beauty, righteousness and brightness, purity and virtuousness" (凡言德者, 善美, 正大, 光明, 純懿之稱也) (Ibid.). Here, *De* indicates Jeanne d'Arc's great deed of saving France in the Hundred Years' War. Such a translation Sinicizes the image of Jeanne with traditional Chinese values. Though it could "ease people's anxiety and discomfort in the process of reception" (Tang 2012, 91), it "ultimately reinforced rather than undermined normative notions of femininity" in ancient Chinese society (Judge 2004, 128). However, one thing we can be sure of is that, without it, Jeanne d'Arc would not have been so popular in modern China.

In fact, the Chinese introduction of Jeanne d'Arc was not directly rendered from French but through the mediation of Meiji Japan. Meiji Japan witnessed the flourishing of tales of Western heroines and introduced Jeanne d'Arc into Japan to foster women's independent spirit (Tang 2012, 87). Though Jeanne d'Arc had already appeared on the Western missionaries' records in Chinese before the Late Qing, in the 1910s, Chinese mediators brought her stories from Japan into China, like Zhao Bizhen's 赵必振 "Ruan Dake niang 如安打克孃" [The Life of Jeanne d'Arc] (1903) rendered from Sodō Iwasaki 岩崎徂堂 and Kifū Mikami's 三上寄風 *Sekai jūni joketsu* 世界十二女傑 [Twelve Distinguished World Heroines] (1902), and made Jeanne an icon of national salvation and liberation in Chinese public sphere. In her research, Joan Judge takes late Qing tales of Western heroines "as a technology of the female self, a means of regulating and imagining feminine subjecthood" (Judge 2009, 59–60). These tales not only contributed to cultivating modern Chinese female subjectivity, but also interplayed with national agendas like anti-monarchism, national revolution, and the resistance against foreign invaders, shaping modern Chinese history. This research will concentrate on the period from the 1910s to the 1940s. In these decades, China experienced two foreign aggressions, as did France during the Hundred Years' War: in the 1910s, the Siege of the International Legations and the Second Sino-Japanese War in the 1930s and 1940s. Adopting imagology in comparative literature, this research will not only trace the reception and variations of the image of Saint Jeanne d'Arc in late Qing and Republican China, but also examine how the spread of the cult of Jeanne d'Arc stimulated Chinese people to fight for liberation during a national crisis and interacted with the construction of modern Chinese female subjectivity.

The “Voices” from the Angels: The Will of Heaven or the Trick of La Pucelle?

At least in the first Chinese language magazine *Dongxiyang kao meiyue tongji zhuan* 東西洋考每月統記傳 [Eastern Western Monthly Magazine] (1833–8), founded by Prussian missionary Karl Güzlaff (1803–51), Jeanne d'Arc had already appeared in the Chinese world. In October 1837, it published an article, “Falanxi zhilüe 法蘭西國志略” [The Biography of France]. It records:

The British won. They got the most lands of France, and turned them over to the British government. [...] When the nation was at risk, a maiden cheered up the French and did her best to persuade them to fight for their nation until death at that time. Greatly encouraged, French people had one heart to help each other fight against their national enemy from the West. (Aihanzhe et al. 1997, 293)

Writing for a missionary magazine, the author took Jeanne d'Arc's appearance as the outcome of the French dauphin's piety to God, which “influenced the fate of his nation” (Ibid.). However, the Chinese magazines and newspapers in the early twentieth century tended to de-Christianize the image of Jeanne d'Arc. Facing a national crisis and foreign invasion, they downplayed her religiousness and preferred to represent her as a patriot in the mundane world. The most interesting manifestation was how they treated the “voices” Jeanne heard from heaven. Most Chinese biographers during the 1910s took it as her personal trick, which not only de-Christianized her image but also reinforced her subjectivity and individual talent rather than the mission from heaven, encouraging Chinese people to react to their national crisis and defend their nation in real life.

In his short biography “Faguo jiuwang nüjie Ruoan zhuan 法國救亡女杰若安传” [The Life of the French National Savior Jeanne] (1907), Mei Zhu 梅鑄 parallels Jeanne d'Arc with the ancient Chinese heroine Hua Mulan 花木蘭, and even praised her over Mulan:

In our nation, there was a young girl called Mulan long ago who joined the army replacing her father, as he was too old to enlist in the army. [...] Mulan was a daughter from a military family and probably had military training before. Besides, she is only famous in one country, and her deeds were just serving as a soldier in replace of her father, but she did not make such a great contribution as Jeanne, who reinvigorated her country. A woman like Jeanne is really a great heroine, which is difficult to find in history. (Mei 1907, 2)

Hua Mulan is a Chinese heroine in the Northern Wei dynasty (4–6 BC), whose legend is recorded in the ballad “Mulan shi 木蘭詩” [Ode to Mulan]. According

to it, her father received the draft order but was too old to serve as a soldier, and her brother was too young. So she dressed as a man to join the war. She behaved so bravely and finally helped her troops win the war. When she returned back, the King asked what rewards she wanted and her reply was that she wanted nothing except a horse to take her back home. When back home, she took off her male armor immediately and dressed as a woman again. Here, Mei compares Mulan with Jeanne and thinks more highly of Jeanne because she led the French people to fight against the English and saved her country in the war, whereas Mulan just served in the army on behalf of her father out of the Chinese traditional virtue of filial piety. For Mei, her deed was just limited to fulfilling her filial duty within her family and she did not lead troops and save a country like Jeanne.

Such a comparison was not rare at that time. Both Wang Tao's 王韜 "Faguo qinüzi Ruogan zhuan 法國奇女子若安傳" [A Biography of the Extraordinary Frenchwoman Jeanne] (1890) and Tian Zongzi's 天縱子 "Falanxi aiguo nüzi Ruogan zhuan 法蘭西愛國女子若安傳" [The Life of the French Woman Patriot Jeanne] (1902) rate Jeanne d'Arc more highly than Mulan as well. It reflects the inability of traditional Chinese heroines like Hua Mulan to tackle the newly emerging national crisis in the late Qing period. Although Mulan could dress as a male to join the war, she did not step outside the patriarchal framework. She merely followed the traditional Chinese family ethics and only served in the army under the name of her father, as the males in her family were unable to enlist in the army. When the war ceased, she dressed as a woman again. But what China needed in the late Qing and republican periods was not a woman perfectly following traditional Chinese family ethics, but a figure who could go beyond it and help Chinese people overcome foreign invasions and national crises. That is why Jeanne d'Arc was introduced to China.

On the other hand, in whose name did Jeanne fight for national salvation? There are different interpretations of the "voices" Jeanne heard from heaven in China. In her research on Jeanne's image in late Qing biographies, Joan Judge found that Jeanne was greatly de-Christianized in Chinese narratives as "Chinese authors are eager to appreciate her story to their own political ends" (Judge 2009, 66). They commonly treated "the invocation of voices as a ploy on Joan's part to gain the support of the ignorant and superstitious masses" (Judge 2004, 129). For them, "Joan was inspired not by divine voices but by the need to trick the lowly masses" (Judge 2009, 67). While Fraioli suggests the fourteenth-century French prophecies of a maid saving France nourished the formation of the literary image of Jeanne d'Arc (Fraioli 1981, 820), the Chinese biographers commonly take the "voices" Jeanne heard from angels as her personal trick out of patriotism, rather

than the will from heaven. Mei Zhu interprets the “voices” from angels as her trick to attract people to save the nation:

She also knew it was not easy for a peasant girl to do great deeds, so she claimed she took the mission from angels. Is it believable? It just could fool those ignorant people. This was also because of her passionate patriotic heart. (Mei 1907, 29)

One year later, the pioneer of the May Fourth New Cultural Movement (1915) Hu Shi 胡適 wrote “Shijie diyi nüjie zhende zhuan 世界第一女傑貞德傳” [The Life of the Greatest Heroine in the World, Jeanne d'Arc] (1908) where he compared Jeanne d'Arc with Mulan, and praised Jeanne for “[living] in a period a hundred times tougher than Mulan, but her deeds were a hundred times higher than Mulan” (Hu 1999, 170–1). Moreover, Hu also de-Christianizes her image and emphasizes her “citizen consciousness” and patriotic spirit more. He depicts:

The heroine Jeanne d'Arc was born with a patriotic heart, [...]. Witnessing all kinds of oppressive and cruel behaviors of the English in France, and the ill-treatment and insults that her compatriots were suffering, she was greatly agonized and could not unfold her frown day and night. (Ibid. 172)

Adopting traditional Chinese dream interpretation, Hu considers that “Jeanne d'Arc thought about how to save her nation every day, so she had dreams of saving her nation every night” (Ibid. 173). Thus, the “voices” Jeanne heard from angels and the mission to save France taken from heaven were just her dreams arising from patriotic thoughts, instead of the will of heaven. In doing so, Hu underlines Jeanne's patriotic thoughts and puts national politics over the will of heaven. Instead of the religious mission, Hu endows her with “national consciousness.” In Hu's biography, when she was dreaming that the archangel St. Michel passed her the mission to save France, Jeanne thought: “Our France is now in a time of crisis. Though I am just a young girl, I am also a part of the citizens. How can I sit down without doing anything and see its destruction?” (Ibid.) Her speeches to French people also stressed “the consciousness of citizenship”: “Our France fell into this situation. As its citizens, we should try our best to save the nation” (Ibid.). Regarding the mission from heaven, Hu surmised Jeanne's thoughts: “Considering that people in this world all believe in God, and they are fearful of nothing except God, why not call on them in the name of God?” (Ibid.) Here, Hu also took Jeanne's mission from heaven as a trick to call on people, as did Mei Zhu.

Taking the “voices” and “the mission from heaven” as Jeanne's trick to call on people to save their country, Chinese biographers put her patriotic motivation and the national crisis over her religiousness, and reconstruct her as a patriot

in worldly life. Actually, Confucianism also adds to the de-Christianization of Jeanne d’Arc in China, which, dominating Chinese people’s minds for thousands of years, shows a skeptical attitude towards supernatural beings: “[respect] spiritual beings” and “keep aloof from them” (Legge 1960, 191). Such a belief contributes to the cultural filtration of her religiousness in China. In so doing, China could “situate Jeanne d’Arc in the narrative of national salvation, rather than the heaven’s mission or the protector of monarchy, which foregrounds Jeanne d’Arc’s responsibility for the nation” (Tang 2012, 92).

In fact, the Chinese crisis in the early twentieth century was quite similar to that of France during the Hundred Years’ War, as noted by Hu Shi (1999, 177): “Compared with France at that time, our China is ten times more dangerous than it! France just fought with England at that period, whereas China is facing several dozens of powerful countries besieging itself now.” He even could not wait to see the emergence of a Chinese Jeanne d’Arc:

I really wish our Chinese compatriots will stand out and save our country quickly [...]. I look forward to seeing several Jeanne d’Arc appear in China every day. No, dozens of Jeanne d’Arc, hundreds of Jeanne d’Arc, thousands of Jeanne d’Arc! (Ibid.)

During the national crisis, nothing is more important than liberation. The de-Christianization of Jeanne d’Arc mirrors the yearning of Chinese people for a great figure much more independent than Mulan to save China from its predicament. Therefore, they “invited” Jeanne d’Arc to China and took her as an exemplar to cultivate Chinese people’s consciousness of citizenship. Sophisticatedly washing out the religiousness of Jeanne d’Arc, Chinese mediators emphasize the initiative and subjectivity of Jeanne to encourage Chinese people to react to foreign invasion and save their nation by their own actions, rather than waiting for supernatural powers.

The Ever-Changing Banner of Jeanne d’Arc

In wartime, what one fights for is suggested by which banner he or she holds. In late Qing and Republican China, the flag in Jeanne’s hands also had multiple variations in Chinese imagination. In “Lienü Ruoan fu faguo 烈女若安復法國” [The Martyr Jeanne Revitalized France] (1890), the reformist Wang Tao depicts:

Jeanne rode a white horse, dressed in armor, as radiant as gods. She held a long sword in her right hand and a divine flag in the left. When she came out to see her soldiers, they all cheered heartily. (Wang 1889, 9)

Wang also concretizes the icon on her flag “painted with the icon of God” in “Faguo qinüzi Ruoan zhuan” (Ibid. 11). Rewriting from Wang Tao, Tian Zongzi imagined her with “a long sword in her left hand and a divine flag in the right” (Tian 1902, 6). Kai Yuan 開元 also considers the flag was taken from God. In “Falanxi nüjie Zhende 法蘭西女傑貞德” [French Heroine Jeanne d'Arc] (1937), he narrates that Jeanne heard divine voices, which say: “Jeanne! Take the banner which God gave you. Take it bravely! Then God will help you!” (Kaiyuan 1937, 5). In Mei Zhu’s “Faguo jiuwang nüjie Ruoan zhuan,” the flag is embroidered with the portrait of the Madonna with two angels down on their knees in front of her (Mei 1907, 72). In the female Christian magazine *Nüduo* 女鐸 [A Woman’s Message], an article titled “Jidujiao lishi zhong zhi weida funü: Faguo nüzhèn Zhende 基督教歷史中之偉大婦女: 法國女貞真德” [The Great Woman in the History of Christianity: French Saint Jeanne d'Arc] (1940) suggests it was the icon of Jesus (Lord 1940, 23). The exception is Yan Zhen 嚴箴’s “Faguo nüyingxiong Zhende 法國女英雄貞德” [The French Heroine Jeanne d'Arc] (1946) where Jeanne holds a French national flag instead of a religious flag. It is interesting that during the French Revolution, Jeanne d'Arc also “wore a Phrygian bonnet and charged the ‘supporters of the King’ with her sword and the tricolor flag,” which also de-Christianizes the image of Jeanne d'Arc and indicates “an explicit refusal to see her confiscated by the monarchy” (Cousseau 2017, 34).

However, in the only contemporary portrait of Jeanne d'Arc by the secretary of the Parliament of Paris, Clément de Fauquembergue, in the margin of the Orleans city record manuscripts, Jeanne holds a flag with the icon of Christ in her right hand. Meanwhile, a miniature of her in the fifteenth century is also painted with the icon of God and two angels on her banner. Christine de Pizan, born in the Republic of Venice, was a court writer in fifteenth-century France. She wrote “Le Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc” [The Poem of Jeanne d'Arc] (1429), the first poem on Jeanne’s life composed when she was alive. Unlike Chinese biographers who believe Jeanne’s own patriotic thoughts drove her to stand out and fight the English, de Pizan considers Jeanne a “Young maid who was ordained of God,/In you [her] the Holy Spirit poured” (de Pizan 1994, 355). She also takes Jeanne’s achievement as “God’s doing”: “It’s God does that, who’s guiding her/Whose courage passes that of men” (Ibid. 357).

Compared with the iconographic and literary representations of Jeanne’s flag during her lifetime, both the replacement of Christian icons and the cultural filtration of divine “voices” in China manifest a gesture to de-Christianize the image of Jeanne d'Arc. For Chinese biographers, she is not a divine maiden selected by



Figure 10.1. Clément de Fauquembergue, Joan of Arc in the Protocol of the Parliament of Paris, May 10, 1429, manuscript drawing, French National Archive, Paris, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Contemporaine_afb_jeanne_d_arc.png>

God to help France out of the crisis but a worldly heroine who, facing foreign occupation, holds aloft the national flag to save the nation. Here, national politics surpassed religion again, which not only secularized the image of Jeanne, but also reflected Chinese people's wish for a new "Mulan" during their own national crisis. The ancient Mulan could only serve as a soldier in the name of her father and could not escape from Chinese family ethics, yet what China needed at that moment was not a "Mulan" perfectly following traditional Chinese womanhood, but a figure like Jeanne d'Arc who could hold a "national flag" to motivate people and save China from foreign invasion.



Figure 10.2. *Joan of Arc*, ca. fifteenth century, miniature, French National Archive, Paris, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joan_of_Arc_minia-ture_graded.jpg>

Call for a Chinese “Jeanne d’Arc”: Gender and National Salvation

As mentioned previously, Hu Shi, the pioneer of the May Fourth Movement, compared early twentieth-century China with France under English occupation during the Hundred Years’ War and called for thousands of Chinese Jeanne d’Arc. However, what he sought was not a female “Jeanne d’Arc” but a male one. At the end of his biography, Hu appeals: “I really wish that our compatriots will stand out and save our country quickly. Come on! Quick! Don’t let women laugh at our uselessness in future!” (Hu 1999, 177). Likewise, Feng Ziyou’s supposed audience in *Nüzi jiuguo meitan* were also merely men. He also took Jeanne as a role model

to prod Chinese males to wake up: “Jeanne d’Arc is just a powerless woman, but could be so patriotic for her country; as a male, shall we not bear comparison with her?” (Recheng aiguo ren 1902, 13). Both utilize Jeanne as an exemplar to call on Chinese people to fight for the nation, but the objects of their address were only males. In fact, as Tang reveals, though Late Qing reformists called for female revolution and female education, they could not reach most women and had just a limited influence on the demographic (Tang 2013, 94). Thus, the Chinese intellectuals at that time only targeted males, expecting them to shoulder the mission of national salvation.

However, in the 1930s, the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War changed the addressees of the call for Chinese Jeanne d’Arc to women. Ms. Cao Yi 曹逸 called on Chinese women to learn from Jeanne d’Arc for national salvation:

I am afraid that today’s China is in even greater danger than fifteenth-century France. But Chinese women all forget Ms. d’Arc’s spirit and lose themselves in “happy lives.” My dear sisters! Our end is coming! Awake! Awake! Learn from Ms. d’Arc’s spirit and save our homeland from danger! (Cao 1936, 17)

After the Lugouqiao Bridge Incident 盧溝橋事變 in 1937, China got into all-out resistance to the Japanese invasion. The President of Republican China, Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石, declared full-scale national resistance to the Japanese invasion. Soong May-ling 宋美齡, then first lady of China, organized a women’s conference in Lushan 廬山, appealing to Chinese women to assist in resisting the Japanese invasion. In 1938, Zong Xianqian 宗先謙 wrote “Women yao yige Ruoan Dake 我們要一個若安達克” [We Need a Jeanne d’Arc], calling on Chinese women to take Jeanne as a role model and resist the Japanese invasion. He writes:

Now, for the total resistance to Japan, though our women have already realized that if they want to achieve female liberation, they have to achieve national liberation first, and take off their jewelry, remove their make-up, and stand on the front line with men to fight for the survival of the nation and the peace of the world, there are still many women just spending time dressing up to be men’s playthings. If these women cannot wake up, how can we enhance our power of resistance to Japan? Hence, I hope women across our country can not only work in industrial production and national construction, but also learn from Chinese and foreign heroines to join in the work at the front line and fight to death against the evil enemies. (Zong 1938, 13)

Yet, the women’s national resistance and national construction plan approved by the women’s conference in Lushan lists eight missions for women during war-time—propaganda, medical aid, raising finance, comforting soldiers and their families, refugee relief, child care, field service, and traitor detection, and also calls

for women to participate in industrial and agricultural production (Zhonghua fulian 1991). Such a gender division of labor mainly continued traditional female gender expectations. It appealed to women to stay in the rear area to support troops, but did not encourage them to fight the enemies on the front line like Mulan, let alone lead troops like Jeanne d'Arc.

In 1938, Hu Zuoying 胡卓英 also published an article “Cong Zhende shuo-dao Zhongguo kangzhan jianguo zhong de funü 從貞德說到中國抗戰建國中的婦女” [From Jeanne d'Arc to the Women in China's War of Resistance and Nation-Building]. It defines Jeanne as “a patriot model,” whose “absolute and faithful patriot spirit saved her nation from danger” (Hu 1938, 48). However, the author does not think that all Chinese women could fight enemies on the battlefield as Jeanne did, but merely wishes them to “awaken defeatists to reflect themselves” (Ibid.). Instead of fighting the enemy on the battlefield like Jeanne and Mulan, he wishes women could play their role as *Guomin zhi mu* 國民之母 [the mother of citizens] to cultivate patriot children for the nation and encourage their husbands to serve in the army. He points out that, although Chinese women were greatly depressed in history, they “could control all in their family, especially for the owner of the nation in the future—children” (Ibid.). For Hu, women could not only raise children but also shoulder the duty to educate children. Appealing to women to learn from Jeanne could “impart correct nationalist thoughts to children” (Ibid.). Therefore, “when children across the country grow up, they could have a right conception of the nation and do great patriotic deeds” (Ibid.).

Here, Hu Zuoying also takes women as “the second sex” of national crisis as Hu Shi and Feng Ziyou did, who are neither considered as the real citizens of the nation nor supposed to defend the nation directly, but merely the mediators passing national agenda to the “real citizens” to stimulate them to react to the national crisis. Such a manner not only shows how women “get into nationalism,” but also is “the main mode of the production of nationalism” (Lei 2015, 101). What Hu sought was not a real Jeanne d'Arc or Mulan who could dress as a man and fight against enemies at the frontline directly, but a “mother of citizens” who could influence their husbands (the current citizens) and children (the citizens in the future), and cultivate and encourage their patriotic thoughts and actions. Such a “mother of citizens” was quite popular in Late Qing and Republican China. Jin Yi 金一 wrote in the preface of the first issue of *Nüzi shijie* 女子世界 [Women's World]:

Women are the mothers of citizens. If one wants to renew China, one has to renew women; if one wants to strengthen China, one has to strengthen women; if one wants to civilize China, one has to civilize women; if one wants to save China, one has to save women. (Jin 1904, 1)

Yate 亞特 also emphasized the importance of women's role in the "production" of citizens:

If there is not a mother of citizens in a country, how could its citizens be delivered? If there is not a citizen given birth by the mother of citizens in a country, that country cannot be a country. Hence, if one wants to cultivate citizens, one should start by cultivating the mother of citizens. (Yate 1904, 1)

In this view, appealing to women to learn from Jeanne was not to have a female Jeanne d'Arc, but, by the maternity and productivity of women, to cultivate "the consciousness of citizenship" of Chinese males and to "produce" the male successors of Jeanne d'Arc for Chinese national salvation.

Conclusion

After traveling with Jeanne d'Arc in China, we could see the "temporal popularity" of the call for a Jeanne d'Arc during the Late Qing and early Republican period and from 1938 to the 1940s. After the 1940s, though there were still tales of Jeanne d'Arc featured in Chinese magazines, such a call did not exist anymore. As de Carles discovers the "temporal limitation" of female warriors in history: "[t]he unruly Amazonian figure can be tolerated only in terms of crisis and its necessary consequence, which suppose the absorption of the marginal female within a normative maleness" (de Carles 2010, 205). Like the sudden appearance of Mulan in ancient China, women could only show their face in history when their nations were in crisis or males were unable to play their part—consider Mulan's young brother and aged father whose inability to enlist in the army legitimizes Mulan's participation in national politics. Both Mulan and Jeanne are actually "gap-fillers": they "can only exert some form of power if there is no man to do so legally or politically" (Ibid.). Only when China faced a national crisis or males could not take action or tackle the crises with their own power would China need a Jeanne d'Arc. In Late Qing and early republican China, the addressees of the call were males and Jeanne's function was to dare "male citizens" to take action for national salvation. Nevertheless, during World War II, the Japanese invasion urged China to unite all its powers to fight for national independence and the addressees of the call were altered to women. The national crisis opened a temporal gap to legitimize the transitory appearance of Mulan in Northern Wei and Jeanne d'Arc in modern China. They "can only exist while the war is on, while the crisis is raging" (Ibid. 207). If there had been no war or national crisis, there would not have been Mulan, nor the call for Jeanne d'Arc in modern China.

Even though the addressees of the call were switched to women after 1938, what China was expecting was not a mighty Amazon like Jeanne d'Arc or Mulan, but a tame woman—a gentle *mother of citizens* who, standing firmly in the rear, passes patriotic thoughts to her husband and children to encourage them to fight for the country. The call of Jeanne d'Arc enabled women to “appear” on the stage of history and to contribute to national salvation. Yet, such a gentle mother of citizens was the outcome of the domestication of women warriors like Jeanne d'Arc and Mulan, whose uncontrollable power might challenge the established social and gender order. The reception of Jeanne d'Arc in modern China is a history of the symbolic taming of a foreign heroine: for her foreignness, the cultural filtration of her Catholic religiousness makes her not a threat to Confucianism, but, instead, serves Chinese national agendas; for her threatening power, she was dressed up as a gentle mother of citizens, who reinforced the gender convention and expectations in traditional Chinese womanhood. The same story of Mulan putting on her old dress was staged again in modern China.

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Travel Writing in Modern Sanskrit Literature: London, Paris, and Other Cities in the Mirror of Travel Accounts¹

LIDIA SUDYKA

Introduction. Indian Traveler in the Past and in Modern Times

In his *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, James Clifford, whose research combines history, literary analysis, anthropology, and cultural studies, defines travel thus: “‘Travel’, as I use it, is an inclusive term embracing a range of more or less voluntarist practices of leaving ‘home’ to go to some ‘other’ place. The displacement takes place for the purpose of gain—material, spiritual, scientific” (Clifford 1997, 66). Of course, travel can be described more broadly as any spatial mobility of a human being resulting in a change of location, regardless of the cause and whether it is the result of one’s free will. Speaking of descriptions of journeys in the Sanskrit epics—the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*—Danielle Feller points out that:

- (1) with a few exceptions, traveling for pleasure is, by and large, unknown;
- (2) the heroes travel mostly when they are forced to do so, in situations of hardship (exile, war, fleeing to save one’s life, etc.);

1 The present article is a result of the project, “How hard can a dead heart beat? Reflections on Modern Sanskrit Literature,” OPUS 22 2021/43/B/HS2/02046 funded by the National Science Center, Poland.

(3) voluntary travels are mainly undertaken in religious contexts, for the purpose of sacrifices (*yajña*) and pilgrimages (*tīrbhayātrā*). (Feller 2018, 89)

Later, comparing the reasons for and the nature of the journeys made by the protagonists of the two epics with similar activities found in another group of works of equally epic proportions, namely the *Bṛhatkathā* [Great Story] cycle,² Sanskrit texts written between the ninth and eleventh centuries AD, Feller notes that in these later compositions the journeys are undertaken

[...] in a spirit of enterprise which is quite unknown to the darker, more tormented and religiously-minded spirit of the epic age. In the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle, it is mostly desire for women or gold—not necessity or religion, which prompts the heroes to undertake difficult voyages. (Feller 2018, 106–7)

Compositions belonging to the *Bṛhatkathā* cycle share certain features with the two great epics, such as the manner of narration, namely the specific construction of embedding one story within another. Being the works of the *kāvya* period, they naturally use literary techniques that are characteristic of that period. The *kāvya* literary style, which began evolving approximately in the first century AD, dominated the canons of taste for a millennium in its classical form, then interacted with vernaculars and local traditions, and today still continues to influence modern Sanskrit writing, including the form of narrating travels, namely in verse, as we shall see. However, though at no point in its history was Sanskrit literature devoid of descriptions of journeys, certain features attending such descriptions did change over time.

In the case of modern Sanskrit, travel writing today undoubtedly differs from the one attested to in the earlier, classic *kāvya* texts: the mapping of a real space traversed and documented for the enjoyment of the contemporary reader is done mostly by a first-person narrator—often the author herself or himself. Unlike the current scenario, many of the genres well established in the *kāvya* tradition right from its beginning, such as the *mahākāvyas* [great poems],³ for example, offered mainly third person narrative accounts of the geography of the imagined spaces, or else verbal portrayals of the actual places; the descriptions, however, were always composed in accordance with the established literary convention. The *saṁdeśakāvyas* [messenger poems], on the other hand, matched the imagined

2 These are several works regarded as being adaptations of the lost *Bṛhatkathā* [Great Story], written in Prakrit Pāśāci.

3 *mahākāvya* [great poem] can be considered closest to the epyllion [miniature epic] art of the Alexandrian poets. The first surviving examples are the compositions of Aśvaghōṣa (first/second century AD).

journey of a non-human messenger (cloud, peacock, wind, etc.) with real places on the map, following a pattern known since Kālidāsa (c. fifth century AD),⁴ the most celebrated and important *kāvya* writer. Abdul Rahman's *Samdeśarāsaka*, a work of poetry that can be placed on the periphery of the *samdeśakāvya* genre, would be of interest for several reasons, including the use of a late form of the Apabhraṃśa language. Its author and narrator, a Muslim merchant Abdul Rahman, describes in much detail his own journey from Multan (in present-day Pakistan) to Khambat in Gujarat, via the town of Vijayanagara. There are some indications that the Vijayanagara in question is not the capital of the kingdom of Vijayanagara, situated on the Tungabhadra River, but a place in Rajasthan (Bhayani 1948, 82), although a long-distance journey, with a big detour to the south, cannot be ruled out completely.⁵

Understandably, descriptions of real places, including journeys to other countries and continents, which are currently at the center of our interest, have become more common in modern times due to rapid changes that took place in the nineteenth century and thereafter. These include political, economic, social, cultural, educational changes; the influence of Western, mainly English, literature; and finally, an increase in the number of Indians traveling abroad. Attitudes toward journeys other than pilgrimages also changed significantly. Traveling could be an important and formative life experience, bringing pleasure and certainly education, rather than being seen almost exclusively as a painful and dangerous, though sometimes unavoidable, departure from a familiar and safe world.⁶ With the proliferation of the travel itself, more and more accounts of such travels began to appear in various Indian languages.

The first early modern Indian account of an overseas journey⁷ in a vernacular is found in Malayalam in the form of a travelogue by Fr. Thoma Paremmakel (1736–1799) who, between 1778 and 1786, traveled from Kerala to Rome via Madras, Africa, South America, and Portugal. This Kerala priest, traveling as a

4 The *Meghadūta* [Cloud-messenger] is the earliest preserved representative of this genre.

5 As to the dates, the commentary by Lakṣmicandra is dated 1409 by its author (Mayrhofer 1998, xii), so the poem could have been penned at the end of the thirteenth century or even earlier.

6 Surprisingly, Harihara, the seventeenth-century author of *Sūktimuktāvalī* [The Thread of Pearls that are Good Sayings], shows a very positive attitude toward traveling and living abroad (but still within the “Indian cultural world”), which, as far as we know, was very rare in Sanskrit literature at that time. See Franceschini (2019) for a discussion on this view.

7 Guruvappa Pillai (died in August 1724), a son of Nayiniyappa, who was an intermediary and translator (*dubash*) for the Governor General of Pondichéry, Guillaume André d’Hébert, traveled to Paris, where he took to writing a diary. Had this diary been preserved, we would have had descriptions of Guruvappa’s life in Paris and of Paris itself. More about the Pillai family can be found in Agmon (2017).

companion of Rev. Dr. Joseph Kariyattil, presented in his *Vartamānappustkam* [Travel Journal] or *Romayātrā* [Travel to Rome], personal experiences and reflections on the journey undertaken to seek the help of Queen Maria I of Portugal and Pope Pius VI in uniting the divided Syrian Christian Church of Malabar (Irumbayam 1987). One could say that it was a travel with a spiritual aim and motivated by a desire to resolve a difficult situation involving infighting within a certain religious community of the time. Significantly, it was also an account of a travel that took place before the British had begun to assume, first indirectly, then directly, control of larger and larger areas of the Indian peninsula. The later, post-eighteenth-century literary renderings of various travels by Indians were produced, in words of Simonti Sen, by a “Western-educated colonized mind”⁸ (Sen 2005, 6). A special place, in Indian travel literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is occupied by accounts of visits to Britain. It was the country most often visited by the educated and affluent Indians, possibly propelled by a need for direct exposure to the culture they had known through education and literature, including travel writing. These Indian travelers, “bred within a vision of Englishness, were in a way insiders to the culture that they were physically exploring for the first time” (Sen 2005, 202). England exemplified for them the highest form of development, while India, left far behind, presented itself as a backward province (Rokicka 2019). Often, travels were undertaken on receiving a scholarship or an invitation from an institution, as in the case of Swami Vivekananda, or because of an official business, as in the case of Annadashankar Ray, a Bengali who was an Indian civil servant working for the British administration in India. In connection with his work, Ray lived in England from 1926 to 1930 and visited various European countries during this period. He left behind a work, *Pathe prabāse* [On the Move and Abroad], which is a description of his experiences during his travels and sojourn abroad. For him, as for others, India was a backward corner of the world that needed to be remodeled on the pattern of Europe (Rokicka 2019). Mary Bhore, who came from a Christian community in Maharashtra, went to England in 1898 to study English literature for a year at Somerville College in Oxford, and later stayed on in London to study methods of early childhood education at the Froebel College. She wrote *Some Impressions of England* in English as a result of her stay. Tara Puri calls her work an “educational memoir,” claiming that it is “[...] a record of specific encounters that have shaped

8 This was not the case of the two Keralites, even though they were Western educated. They objected to the interference of the Jesuits, who came with the Portuguese, into the liturgy of the native Syrian Christians (Irumbayam 1987).

a particular kind of self and, most importantly, collating them in a memoir can shape its readers in a particular kind of way” (Puri 2018, 65).

As far as modern Sanskrit literature is concerned, travel books, a novelty in the realm of Sanskrit literature, focus both on secular trips (within the country and abroad) as well as pilgrimages. The accounts centered on the latter are sometimes written to highlight the importance of a pilgrimage site the way the *mahātmyas* did in the past; however, the modern reader enjoys reading first-hand reports of places the author visited and see them from his perspective. That is why, very often, also in the case of descriptions of pilgrimages, we are offered a first-person narration. The relation between the life and times of the author (as in biographical criticism) is tangible here. However, in the present article we will not concern ourselves with journeys to pilgrimage sites.

A.R. Rajaraja Varma’s Imagined London

Often, travel accounts narrate imaginary journeys, to and in places the author has never visited, having only read about them or heard about them second hand. This is the case for A. R. Rajaraja Varma (A. R. Rājarājavarmma, 1863–1918), a grammarian known as the Pāṇini of Kerala, a poet writing in Sanskrit and Malayalam, and a literary critic; an extraordinary figure in every sense of the word. Excellently educated in Sanskrit⁹ and its literature, he knew Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada in addition to his native Malayalam. Moreover, he had also received an English-style of education. Among Rajaraja Varma’s Sanskrit works, the most extensive is an epic poem (*mahākāvya*) of 23 chapters titled *Āngalasāmṛājya* [The British Empire], written shortly after the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria’s reign in 1897, which was observed in India with great pomp. The poem, published in 1900, begins with a description of London, and then moves on to British sea expeditions leading to India, the East India Company, and the British presence in India. Let us see what image the author has created based on what he knew about London.

9 The seventeen-year-old A. R. Rajaraja Varma wrote a short, but very sophisticated and complicated poem called *Citranakṣatramālā*, showing his skills as a poet and his extraordinary knowledge of Sanskrit (more about this composition in Cielas 2016).

In the first stanza, he says:

asti praśasteṣv atalāntikābdhi-
kṣipteṣu viśvak puram āṅgaleṣu |
tiṃsānaditīravatamṣabhūtam
bhūmaṇḍanaṃ laṇḍananāmadheyam ||1||

In the glorious English (lands) scattered on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, there is a vast city called London (laṇḍana)—an ornament of the Earth, crowning the banks of the river Thames (tiṃsā-nadi).¹⁰

The idea of depicting the city of London as an ornament crowning the river Thames might have occurred to someone who had never been to London, while looking at a map of London. A very likely candidate here would have been the eye-catching map¹¹ of Edward Stanford (1827–1904), who in 1853 founded a cartographic printing company that still exists today. In 1862, he published a library map of London, which an anonymous author of Stanford’s obituary in *The Geographical Journal* called “the most perfect map of London that had ever been issued” (J.B. 1904, 686). It was frequently updated. There were also pocket maps of London, such as those produced by James Reynolds (1817–1876),¹² to whom we owe many maps and tourist guides of London and the surrounding areas. Indeed, in 1862, the year of the International Exhibition in London, pocket maps would have been of great use. Rajaraja Varma, writing in India, certainly had access to some of these maps of London. The scientific and technological achievements of the West were a source of great interest and admiration to many of the earlier travelers who described them at length. Rajaraja Varma, who never visited London, wrote also about industrialization, but in a poetic manner.

dhūmaṇḍanam vamaṇḍaṅ śikhinam gilanto
vetālavirā iva yantrarājāḥ |

10 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. It should be mentioned, however, that the first chapter of the *Angalasāmrājya*, the whole *Vicitrapariśadyātrā*, and *Saṅkarajīvanākhyāna* were read and discussed during the weekly meetings of the group working on the project “How hard can a dead heart beat? Reflections on Modern Sanskrit Literature,” that is: G. U. Thite, C. Rajendran, H. Cielas Leão, M. Karcz, A. Wójcik, D. Pierdominici Leão, and L. Sudyka. The transliteration of the stanzas from the *Angalasāmrājya* was prepared by C. Rajendran as this Sanskrit text was written in the Malayalam script.

11 “Stanford’s Library Map Of London And Its Suburbs 1864,” MAPCO: Map and Plan Collection Online, accessed May 29, 2024, <<https://london1864.com/>>.

12 “1862 Reynolds Pocket Map of London, England,” Wikimedia Commons, accessed May 29, 2024, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1862_Reynolds_Pocket_Map_of_London,_England_-_Geographicus_-_London-reynolds-1862.jpg>.

śilpāni yatrādbhutaduṣkarāṇi
niṣpādayanti śramam antareṇa ||9||

In this city,¹³ the best machines spitting smoke and swallowing flames like heroic demons produce astonishing and intricate contrivances without any effort.

The smoke mentioned in the preceding stanza, also noted by other travelers from India, was the price of industrialization. Romesh Chandra Dutt in his *Three Years in Europe* speaks about “a long weary year spent amidst the smoke and toil and dust of old London”¹⁴ (Dutt 1896, 21). Rajaraja Varma, however, sees smoke billowing out of the chimneys of London factories through the eyes of a poet:

sadaiva nānāvīdhaśilpaśālā-
praṇālamārgēṇa vinirgaḷadbhiḥ |
dhūmapratānaiś śaradāgame 'pi
yatrābhralīptīva virājati dyauḥ ||2||

In this city, always, even with the arrival of autumn, the sky shines as if anointed with small clouds because of the dispersion of smoke emanating through the series of chimneys of diverse factories.

According to the poet, the gray autumnal sky over London acquires a shine because of the white clouds of smoke. White clouds in the sky are also a part of the conventional description of autumn in classical Sanskrit literature. Two worlds thus fused: the real London landscape and the idealized mode of representation characteristic of the *kāvya* tradition.

There is one more thing that especially catches the attention of Rajaraja Varma. Rajaraja Varma is particularly interested in the fact that Londoners cross the Thames not only by bridges and boats, but also by way of the underground tunnels.

13 The description of London consists of nine stanzas which form a thematic whole. Thus, the name London, introduced in the first verse, is not repeated in the subsequent stanzas, however there is a clear indication that everything referred to takes place there, in London. There are pronouns in locative case (*yatra, yasmīn*) and pertinent information to describe the city. Such a collection of 5–15 stanzas linked by a single theme was called a *kulaka* [multitude] by theorists of Sanskrit literature and it belongs to the category of *laghukāvya* which covers all kinds of short poems (see more in Lienhard 1984, 65–160).

14 English writers of the time also wrote about the smoke and fog of London. See the works of Charles Dickens, for example, in his last completed novel *Our Mutual Friend*: “Animate London, with smarting eyes and irritated lungs, was blinking, wheezing, and choking; inanimate London was a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither” (Dickens 1926, 402).

poteṣu madhye salilaṃ calatsu
 tiṃsānadīṃ yatra taranti paurāḥ |
 na kevalam vyomagasamkramithair
 adhastalaprotasuraṅgayā 'pi ||6||

In this city, residents cross the river Thames in boats floating on water, not just over bridges, and even through constructed underground tunnels.

The history of the London Underground begins in 1825 with the construction of the Thames Tunnel, which was completed in 1843. It was originally designed for horse-drawn carriages and pedestrians. In 1869, it was converted into a railway tunnel, thus starting the history of the London metro,¹⁵ described by Rajaraja Varma in an interesting way:

yatrāgniyānāni suraṅgikābhir
 vīthīṣv adhastāl laghu paryaṭanti |
 gr̥hapraṇālodarakheladākhu-
 viceṣṭitānīva viḍambayanti ||8||

In this city, trains move quickly in tunnels under the streets, imitating activities of rats moving to and fro inside the drains/pipes of the house.

Rajaraja Varma, a well-educated Keralite and an advocate of progress, development and change at various levels, draws attention primarily to the outward manifestations of the superiority of technology and the powerful science of the Other. These include high-rise buildings along the streets of London.

taleṣu pūrṇeṣv avakāśakārsyād
 ropya bhūmīr muhur ūrdhvam ūrdhvam
 āmreḍyamānāvasathā yathārtham
 abhraṃliḥā yatra gr̥hā vibhānti ||5||

In this city, throughout the whole area, owing to scarcity of space, buildings dazzle, duplicating floors [climbing] higher and higher, literally licking the sky.

This stanza resembles the conventional descriptions of cities found in Sanskrit epic poetry, but it reveals that the author knew a great deal about London, its architecture, and transport solutions.

When it comes to recognizable and important places in London, only Buckingham Palace and the British Parliament are mentioned.

15 "Thames Tunnel," World History Encyclopedia, published March 6, 2023, <https://www.worldhistory.org/Thames_Tunnel/>.

vasvokasāreva viṣṭvarāṇām
 nānāvasūnām nilayāyamānā |
 jāgarti yatrāṅgalabhūmipānām
 bakhiṅgamākhyā kularājadhānī ||3||

In this city, an ancestral residence called Buckingham, the seat of the English kings reminding the abode of Kubera, provides shelter to various teeming treasures// Vasus //.¹⁶

adhyāsyamānā prabhubhiḥ paraiś ca
 paras sahasraiḥ paritaḥ sadasyaiḥ |
 dvidhā vibhaktā kila bhūmikābhyām
 yasmin mahāmantrasabhā vibhāti ||4||

In this city, the Parliament shines, divided into two houses,¹⁷ sitting more than thousand powerful lords and members of the assembly.¹⁸

Rajaraja Varma most probably does not mention these buildings as tourist attractions, because he is not constructing complex metaphors or sophisticated comparisons for which he was known, nor is he emphasizing their beauty; he is probably trying to understand and find the source of the colonizers' success while presenting his word picture of the metropolis. In addition to advanced science and technology, it is the political system, and the way England is governed that seem to inspire most interest and awe. The mention of the Thames, where the masts of ships appear to form a dense forest, seems no mere accident in this context. England's naval superiority was an essential tool of its hegemony.

guṇair latāveṣṭitabhaṅgicaurair
 viṣṭvaraiḥ kūpakavṛkṣakaiś ca |
 timsātaraṅgopari yatra potā
 vanīm vitanvanti vicitra saṁsthām ||7||

In this city, ships on the river Thames manifest the wonderful shape of a spreading forest with the trees of masts wrapped in thievingly creeping rope lianas.

16 The word *vasu* can mean “wealth, riches, a jewel, a pearl” but a group of divine beings is also recognized as Vasus. The number of Vasus is a vague issue. In certain Vedic texts their number is given as 8, in others as 333 (MacDonell 1897, 130). Kubera, the god of riches and treasures, guarding the northern quarter, is one of the groups. The author could consider both meanings here, referring simultaneously to the Buckingham Palace and the abode of Kubera.

17 The Houses of Parliament consist of two chambers where the House of Lords and the House of Commons meet.

18 Today the House of Lords counts 785 sitting members, and the House of Commons is a body consisting of 650 MPs.

This description, in fact, speaking of masts, ropes and thus sails, portrays the very end of the Age of Sail when the shipbuilding moved on from sails to steam and other modern means of powering the vessels.

To sum up, Rajaraja Varma views London through the eyes of a practicing poet well versed in classical Sanskrit tradition (*kāvya*). It could be said of this traveler, who had crossed oceans and lands only in his mind, that his stanzas describing London, like many travelogues by those who have actually traveled to England, belong to “case studies of technological progress and fieldwork accounts of modernity” (Majeed 2007, 79). He was certainly impressed by the achievements and technical innovations he had read and heard about, as we can see in his brief description of London. But at the same time this description can be read as an intellectual search to locate the reasons for British domination and an attempt to answer a question that could not be voiced directly and loudly in his times, at least not in public. Besides, he was surely aware that the skillful introduction of modernization in the princely states of India, such as Travancore, was also a means of keeping the British colonizers at bay.¹⁹

Rajaraja Varma’s composition was undoubtedly a very special instance of travel writing, a description of London, and of a voyage from England to India not experienced by the author himself. Interestingly, the description of London that opens the work is of a city that was contemporary with the author, but the sea voyage from England to India is, from his point of view, an expedition that took place in a distant past, a moment zero from which the period of the establishment and consolidation of British power in India up to the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria’s reign would be counted.

Kshama Rao Tells Her Own and Her Father’s Journey

The subsequent literary works to be discussed here are reminiscences of actual journeys and mostly a fusion of travel accounts and autobiography. They are primarily first-person narratives relating the opinions, emotions, and experiences of travelers, which in itself is a novelty in Sanskrit literature; in addition, descriptions of journeys undertaken for scholarly purposes are beginning to dominate.²⁰

19 More can be found in Pillai (2021) regarding the world of colonial Indian kingship and the issue of modernization carefully planned by some rulers or their ministers, who clearly show that they are capable of serious government, although described by the British as infantile individuals, thinking only of their own pleasures and therefore requiring imperial supervision.

20 It is therefore clear that academics predominate among the authors of these works.

However, the earlier tradition is not completely discarded, as these are still works written in verse, often in the form of *śataka*, that is, compositions of a hundred or more stanzas. They provide a link with the tradition of the messenger poems (*saṁdeśakāvya*, also known as *dūtakāvya*) mentioned earlier. Probably the first poem in this form is *Vicitrapariśadyātrā* by Kshama Rao (1890–1954) who, being an enthusiast of Sanskrit and writing her own compositions in this language,²¹ travels to take part in the All India Oriental Conference (AIOC) in Trivandrum. In 1918, scholars from the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune proposed to establish an umbrella institution to provide regular forum for scholarly discussions on Sanskrit and Oriental studies. The first meeting was held in Pune in 1919, November 5–7. Thereafter, the AIOC became a biennial conference, hosted in all parts of India, usually in selected cities most renowned as centers for Sanskrit studies. In 1937, from December 20–22, it was the turn of Trivandrum to host the Ninth Session of AIOC and the conference was organized under the patronage of the Maharaja of Travancore, Chitthira Thirunal. Dr. F. W. Thomas, the Boden Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford, was the President General of this session.

The composition of Kshama Rao describing her travel will not be addressed here for several reasons. First of all, it was a journey within the Indian peninsula, though a foreign one for someone living in Maharashtra, as it was a long travel by train to the kingdom of Travancore. In addition, the piece is almost entirely about what happened at the conference, a report which, although interesting for many reasons, is not very faithful and quite often in disagreement with the official account (Sarma 1949, *Proceedings* 1940). There is almost nothing about Trivandrum and its surroundings, or the inhabitants. Mornings walks to the small villages nearby²² and a trip to Kanyakumari, which the authoress made alone,²³ are mentioned briefly. However, she has not recorded her impressions of the Kanyakumari escapade, only her reflections on the poverty of Sanskrit scholars, which she translates into the situation of Sanskrit itself. Moreover, it is Sanskrit, according to Kshama Rao, that is the single, most important unifying factor of the Indian nation.²⁴ It is with this message and a call for better facilities to be made

21 More information on Kshama Rao in Tripathi (2020).

22 *ekahorāvadhī bhrāntvā prāptā grāmaṃ samīpagaṃ / alpam yat tu mayā dṛṣṭam ramyaṃ āsīd vinirmalam* || 68 || [Having roamed around for half an hour I reached the small village, which I found beautiful and clean.]

23 *purāṭaṇim abhaṃ kanyākumārīm avalokitum / ekākiny eva nirviṇṇā prasthitā bhojanottaram* || 99 || [Disheartened, after the meal I went alone to see the ancient Kanyakumari.]

24 *aho mūrtir asau devyā devabhāṣā sanātani / rāṣṭrīyavān na jāvat syāt tāvad dāsyam dhruvaṃ hi naḥ* || 104 || [Alas, as long as this eternal language of the gods (i.e., Sanskrit), the embodiment of the

available to the scholars that Kshama concludes her account of the travel undertaken because of her devotion to Sanskrit. The same authoress, in a biography of her father, Shankar Pandurang Pandit,²⁵ an eminent scholar of Sanskrit literature, describes his trip to London to take part in a congress:

nacirād atha pāścātyā vebarmokṣamlurādayaḥ |
prācyabhāṣāsabhāṃ cakrur mahatīm laṅḍane pure || 33 ||

Western scholars Weber,²⁶ Max Müller,²⁷ and others organized a major Congress on Oriental Languages²⁸ in the city of London.

atha labdhapratīṣṭho 'sau pūjyamāno 'dhikāribhiḥ |
prātinidhyaṃ samāsādyā śāṅkaro laṅḍanaṃ yayau || 34 ||

Shankar, known and respected by his superiors, having received membership, went to London.

The said event was the 2nd International Congress of Orientalists in 1874, initiated in Paris in 1873. The study by the 36-year-old Shankar Pandurang Pandit was a great success. Kshama Rao does not talk about what her father saw in London, but who he met.

ṣaṅmāsābhyantare tasya videśasthāyino mahān |
prācyasaṃskṛtisamprītaiḥ sañjātaḥ saṃstavo janaiḥ || 38 ||

During six months, a great intimacy developed between this sojourner abroad and the lovers of Oriental culture.

One would be wrong, however, to suppose that the names of the well-known Orientalists with whom Shankar Pandurang Pandit came into contact would now be enumerated. Rather, the authoress tells us of a mysterious woman whom her father befriended in London:

Goddess, is not the language of the nation, ours is enslavement.]

25 More about the *Śaṅkarajīvanākhyāna* [The Story of Shankar's Life] in Sudyka (2024).

26 Friedrich Albrecht Weber (February 17, 1825 to November 30, 1901), a German Indologist and historian, born in Breslau.

27 Friedrich Max Müller (December 6, 1823 to October 28, 1900), a German philologist and Orientalist who lived and worked in Great Britain. He is known in India as Moksha Mula. The form given in the original text probably contains an error. It seems to aim for the "mular" sound, although the beginning "mokṣa" would suggest that the writer's intention is to use "mūla." This stanza I have also discussed in Sudyka (2024).

28 Most probably the 2nd International Congress of Orientalists in 1874, which had its first iteration in Paris in 1873.

original manuscripts brought from India to London. Presumably he also attended meetings, both academic and social, for the English poetess (I have not yet been able to identify this person so far), fascinated by the man who, in her eyes, probably represented the wisdom of India, eventually managed to talk to him on a variety of subjects, perhaps on one of these occasions. Of course, this is not a first-hand account of the travel.

Autobiographical Accounts of Work-related Travels

One such example of a description of a journey that comes from the traveler himself is the poem *Śarmanyadeśaḥ sutarām vibhāti* [Germany—the Shining Land] with the subtitle: *Śarmanyadeśayātrāsatakam* [The Collection of a Hundred Stanzas on the Travel to Germany]. It was authored by Professor Satya Vrat Shastri who, in 1975, went to the Federal Republic of Germany on an academic tour arranged meticulously by the German Embassy.²⁹ As he writes, he met many well-known German Indologists and visited the most important centers of Indian studies there. The list of these centers was, indeed, long. As Satya Vrat Shastri points out in his “Preface,” India has been of interest to Germans since the time of Goethe, a fact which was reflected in the great number of Indological institutions functioning in German universities.³⁰ Among his German colleagues, he particularly singles out Professor Paul Thieme, whom he had previously met and to whom he feels an affinity. Although the program was busy and the time filled with traveling from one German university to another, giving lectures, and meeting German colleagues, there was time for sightseeing. Of the cities he visited, Shastri devoted most stanzas of his *śataka* to Bonn (41–53), the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany, with its buildings and the river Rhine where he particularly enjoyed a boat trip. It was in this city that the first Chair in Sanskrit in Germany was established in 1818. He also saw Schwarzwald “with stately trees” and “with

29 Satya Vrat Shastri also describes his journey to Thailand in a book published by Eastern Book Linkers in 1979 under the title *Thāideśavilāsa*.

30 Sheldon Pollock in his article, “Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond Raj,” states that “[...] the size of the investment on the part of the German state in Indological studies throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries [...] and the volume of the production of German orientalist knowledge [...] almost certainly surpassed all the rest of Europe and America combined” (Pollock 1993, 82). Pollock sees two important reasons for this: “[...] the German romantic quest for identity and what was eventually to become one of its vehicles, the emerging vision of *Wissenschaft*.” (Pollock 1993, 82) This kind of orientalist knowledge led to discourse on Aryanism which was used and politically manipulated in the period of National Socialism and became “[...] part of the official worldview of a newly imagined empire [...]” (Pollock 1993, 83).

charming falls, with cows sitting merrily on grassy meadows adorned with water channels and rivers” (Shastri 1976, 32). Traveling by train made him realize that German villages were no different from small towns and that there were very good roads everywhere. Thus, this writer, like other travelers from India, noted details that distinguished the ways of life between their own and foreign countries, peculiarities of the natural and architectural landscape.

Shastri’s Sanskrit travelogue was translated into German and English.³¹ The book, containing the original Sanskrit text alongside both translations, was published by the Akhila Bharatiya Sanskrit Parishad in Lucknow. In the publisher’s note, there is a sentence that emphasizes the fact that the author was not a mere traveler or tourist but a cultural ambassador of that very institution, tasked with establishing contacts between Indian and foreign Sanskrit scholars. And here is what the author himself says about his reasons for recording the account of his journey:

The poem primarily written for my inner satisfaction, *svāntaḥsukhāya*, could well, I thought, put across something of Germany to them [i.e., Indian Sanskritists–LS] through a literary form which could interest them and bring them still closer to it. Sanskrit literature is deficient in such areas as travelogues, autobiographies and so on. (Shastri 1976, 10–11)

There are also records written by visiting professors from India who stayed for a while at one of the European universities, that is, authors who left their place of residence for work, as a sociologist would describe this situation (Podemski 2004). One of the earliest such works would be the poetic compositions of Prof. T. V. Parameshvar Iyer,³² *Germany-yātrā-varṇanam* [Description of a Journey to Germany] and *Swiss-deśe prakṛiti varṇanam* [Description of Nature in Switzerland] (Sharma 2019, 2).

Professor Hari Dutt Sharma’s scholarly travels constitute a longer work, presented as a *mahākāvya* in twenty-one chapters (*sarga*). Each chapter of *Vaidēsikāṭanam* [Foreign Travels] is devoted to a different academic journey, taking him to a different part of the world. These include trips to the World Sanskrit Conferences, beginning with its seventh edition held in Leiden in 1987; participation in the first and the second International *Rāmāyaṇa—Mahābhārata* Conferences; trips under the Indo-German Cultural Exchange Program and the Indo-French Cultural Exchange Program as well as a visiting professorship at Silpakorn University,

31 Available from Prof. Satya Vrat Shastri’s online digital library <https://archive.org/details/@satya_vrat_shastri>.

32 He was born in 1915 in Calicut, Kerala.

Thailand. Descriptions of conferences, as in the case of Kshama Rao's account, include details that have stuck in the memory of the participant. Sometimes traveling to a conference provides an opportunity to visit other cities in that particular country. For example, after the 13th World Sanskrit Conference in Edinburgh (2006), described in Chapter 15, Hari Dutt Sharma flies to London.³³ Chapter 16, titled *Landananandanam* [Pleasures of London], consists of only twenty stanzas. Green Park, Buckingham Palace, strolling along the banks of the Thames and traveling around London by various means of transport are mentioned. Institutions of importance to the Indologist are also named there: the School of Asian and African Studies, the India Office Library, and the Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

Of note is a longer composition—this time devoted to a stay in one only country—by Om Prakash Pandey, a visiting professor at the Sorbonne Nouvelle for three years, starting from 1997. The *Rasapriyā Peris Rājadhānī* was published in 2004. Its first stanza³⁴ is undoubtedly a reference to the beginning of Kālidāsa's famous *Meghadūta*. The first word in both compositions is the indefinite pronoun *kaścit*, which in Kālidāsa's poem refers to a certain Yakṣa³⁵ who, banished from his abode and condemned to be separated from his beloved, lives in a hermitage on Rāmagiri [Mount of Rāma]. In *Rasapriyā Peris Rājadhānī* the pronoun concerns a certain teacher of Sanskrit who lives peacefully in a city founded by Rāma's younger brother. This is an allusion to Lucknow, which according to a legend was founded by Lakṣmana. Thus, both the Yakṣa and the author of the work, Om Prakash Pandey, reside in places related to the geographical network of places associated with the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Like Lakṣmana, Om Prakash Pandey, too, must part with his beloved wife as he must go on a mission to teach Sanskrit.

The story of Pandey's sojourn abroad is told in the third person. The author describes his experiences through his narrative alter persona, namely a teacher of Sanskrit sent to Paris by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Thus, it is a kind of memoir generously providing the reader with glimpses of the sociocultural

33 *sammelanānte ca vimānamārgāt samāgato 'ham bhuvī landanasya | viśāla-bīhthro suvimānapaṭṭe 'vatīrya dṛṣṭam nagaram suramyam || 1 ||* [After the conference, thanks to a flight connection, I arrived in London, having landed at Heathrow, the large and well-connected airport, to see the beautiful city.]

34 *kaścid devagiro vidagdharasikaḥ prādhyāpakaś cāpy asau svacchando nyavasat sukhenā nagare rāmānujasthāpīte | śāntyaṁ tatra grhasthadharmanivṛataḥ svādhyāyāniṣṭhaś ca yaḥ kālām vāhayati sma śiṣyanikarair nityaṁ ca saṁsevitaḥ || 1 ||* [A certain learned connoisseur as well as an independent great teacher of Sanskrit lived happily in the city founded by Rāma's younger brother. There he quietly performed the duties of a householder and devoted himself to the recitation of the Vedas, passing his time in the company of numerous disciples.]

35 *yakṣa* is a class of semidivine beings, attendants of Kubera, the god also mentioned in ft.16.

realities in Paris. The composition is written in verse and described by the author as a *prabandha*, that is a longer poem (*mahākāvya*) consisting of several chapters. In the *Rasapriyā Peris Rājadhānī*, consisting of eleven cantos, the poet describes his impressions of the city, but also his intense longing for his family, friends, and country, which plunges him into a temporary depression. However, his work with students, new acquaintances, and friendships lifts his spirits and turns his mood around. He befriends the city itself, which dazzles him. He describes its most beautiful places, the way of life, and the customs of the inhabitants he has come to know. Among other things, he “reflects on the over-sensual and sexual approach and luxurious lifestyle of the French people” (Sharma 2019, 6). Each canto is followed by explanatory notes from the author (*ṭippaṇī*). They quite often refer to specific places in Paris (*Sacré-Cœur*, Champs-Élysées, Place Pigalle) or in France (Orléans); sometimes the author gives the meaning of a word in French; for example, footnote one in Canto 1 explains the Sanskrit word *mahānivāsa* as: *phremicabhāṣāyām “mejorī” (Maison) iti kathyate* [In French language it is called “Maison”]. In this manner, a new way of writing is embedded in the centuries-old tradition. In a sense, the city of Paris (*perispurī*) becomes the heroine (*nāyikā*) of this composition, sometimes introduced as a young maiden going to meet her lover, sometimes as a newly married beautiful bride, as Shakuntala Gawde has already observed (Gawde 2013, 171–2).

Conclusion

To sum up, writings such as those discussed in this article, “embody the idea of what can be called New Sanskritism—the modernized revivalism of Sanskrit literature influenced by Western languages and Indian vernaculars” (Cielas 2020, 187). Their authors adjust the language in such a way that they are able to express everything and be intelligible to the modern reader; they do not, however, abandon the repertoire of stylistic devices rooted in tradition, and even enrich it with new effects (e.g., the image of Shankar Pandurang Pandit in the library). All authors also try to assimilate foreign proper names in the most suitable way³⁶

36 N.V. Krishna Warriar (1916-1989), a poet writing in Malayalam and occasionally in Sanskrit, translator, journalist, scholar, and activist from Kerala who traveled to the U.S. in May and June 1959 (Ramakrishnan 2000, 49), gives a detailed account of the geography of Niagara Falls just at the beginning of his thirty-two-stanza poem in Sanskrit titled *Nayāgrāprapātaḥ* [Niagara Falls]. It mentions the Niagara River (*nayāgarā*), which flows from Lake Erie (*īrī*) into Lake Ontario (*oṇḍāriyo*) and then, via the St. Lawrence River (*lorensa*), into the Atlantic Ocean (*atalāntikābḍhi*).

and keeping in mind the meter of the composition they have chosen. They create neologisms, but such that are easy to understand.

Modern Sanskrit works such as these are usually published by the well-known publishers of Sanskrit texts (e.g., Nag Publishers in Delhi, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in Mumbai).³⁷ They are read by experts in Sanskrit, which, at present, means mainly Sanskrit teachers, scholars, and their students. These readers, too, notice and point out the similarities and differences in the way of life in India and outside and share their opinions with others.³⁸

The writers of contemporary travelogues in Sanskrit introduce a new subject³⁹ and a new mode of writing but link it to earlier tradition. They take the *śataka* form, associated with poems about the journey of the messenger (*sarindeśakāvya*), and create the *mahākāvya*s, but now with the dominant theme of travel and sojourn abroad. Foreign travel is no longer portrayed, as it was in the earlier Sanskrit literature, as almost exclusively associated with feelings of fear and loneliness. Now, it is viewed as an opportunity to explore the world and enrich one's inner self, perhaps transferring certain patterns to one's own life. Different ways and conditions of living abroad often make the traveler aware of the existence of values in his or her own life that he or she has not previously appreciated or even noticed. This aspect is clearly visible in the the *Rasapriyā Peris Rājadhānī* by Pandey.

Although contemporary Sanskrit writers have embraced the new theme of travel and the cognitive dimension it brings, they have not abandoned their cultural heritage, and we still often witness “dialogues” with masters of the past, references to Sanskrit aesthetic theories and, above all, the metrical form of the works. None of the travelogues that I know of are written in prose. In the case of modern Sanskrit literature, the innovation and search for new paths does not mean abandoning long cherished values.

Of course, the reference is to the location of the falls within Canada (*kanaḍā*) and the United States of America (*saṃyuktamāmerikarājya*) (Muralidharan 2022, 31–2).

37 It was not the case of Kshama Rao and earlier writers.

38 Gawde, while analyzing *Rasapriyā Peris Rājadhānī*, states: “This gives us picture of materialistic society and degeneration of value system. Indian culture is strong enough that we don't have such society though some influence of western culture is unavoidable.” (Gawde 2013, 174). On the other hand, she appreciates the fact that people of Paris are very active, they work hard, and that “Discrimination and crisis on the basis of caste, creed, gender and religion do not exist in Paris. Cases of female infanticide are not the issues here because parents shower love on their child without any gender prejudices” (Gawde 2013, 175).

39 Secular journeys undertaken by individuals, it should be remembered, usually were not the subject of description in earlier Sanskrit literature.

The authors are mostly Indian academics proficient in Sanskrit, so a significant group of works describe travel to conferences and stays in foreign academic centers as visiting professors. In all cases, the description of their experiences is a kind of mirror in which the image of the society and culture they are exploring and the way they internalize these experiences are reflected, but also it is a mirror in which their own images get displayed. Such encounters can be important for relocating their notions of the Self and the Other.

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Encounters in West Asia: Perceptions and Self- Representations of Jordan and Saudi Arabia

MIRIAM AL TAWIL—FABIAN SPITALER

Introduction

Ideas and agendas such as imperialism, colonialism, and orientalism have historically shaped the European and North American perceptions of the people of West Asia. Travel records of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries serve as a starting point to trace the development of these perceptions and Western narratives. Nonetheless, developments of the last decades in West Asia led to a shift in this perception, resulting in a higher degree of self-representation of these populations.

This article aims to investigate the strategies employed by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to create, propagate, and market their individual identities in the era of globalization. Despite their geographical proximity and shared cultural and religious commonalities, various historical, political, and economic factors have led Jordan and Saudi Arabia to follow distinct trajectories in creating attractive perceptions of their respective countries for foreign tourists and investors.

Concepts such as “staged authenticity” (MacCannel’s 1973, 595–6), “hyper-realities,” and “simulacra” (Eco 1986, 7; Baudrillard 1993, 50), which have emerged in the last 50 years, are useful for the description and interpretation of these developments. These concepts have been applied to data collected during fieldwork in

Jordan¹ and observations made in NW-Saudi Arabia.² Strategy papers, UNESCO reports, public data, and online appearances have also been considered.

The colonial history of Jordan, together with the political impact that the creation of the state of Israel had on the region, forced Jordan to create an identity distinct from the Palestinian one. At the same time, this identity was also used to attract tourists, who are nowadays offered different glamping adventures in the desert and “authentic Bedouin experiences.”

Saudi Arabia, having undergone a different historical trajectory with fewer external impositions on its identity, and being more independent, is progressively abandoning its relative global isolation, recognizing its economic dependency on its natural resources. The Vision 2030 program aims to modernize the country and diversify its financial portfolio by creating Giga projects. These initiatives position Saudi Arabia as a global tourist destination while consolidating the royal family’s power.

Historical Background

The reasons that brought European explorers, diplomats, archeologists, and academics of the nineteenth century to what was, at the time, referred to as the “Levant” (French *levant*: designating the area of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Cyprus) were diverse. We, however, prefer to use “West Asia” as a geographical term, in an attempt to distance ourselves from the eurocentric, imperialist, and colonial connotation that widespread terms like “Middle East” or MENA³ imply (Culcasi 2023, 108–10).

Some of the best-known personalities who traveled to West Asia exhibited a scholarly interest, such as the Swiss Johann Ludwig Burckhardt (1784–1817) and the political officer and archeologist Gertrude Bell (1868–1926). They both left detailed notes and publications describing the languages, appearances, and customs of the local populations they encountered.

Among the few Western scholars who had access to Saudi Arabia, Harry St. John Bridger Philby (1885–1960) is noteworthy for having met Ibn Saud while employed as a British intelligence officer, also becoming the king’s advisor. Later, he was often described as the most prolific explorer of the Arabian Peninsula (Goldberg

1 We refer here to the ethnolinguistic fieldwork campaigns conducted by Al Tawil between 2020 and 2022 in the governorates of al-Mafraq and Irbid in northern and northeastern Jordan.

2 We refer here to the observations provided by Spitaler, who participated in multiple archaeological fieldwork campaigns in northwestern Saudi Arabia between 2021 and 2024.

3 Acronym for the Middle East and North Africa.

1985, 223). Philby had a strong British antagonism, anti-modernist views, and his publications must be read through the lens of a cultural assimilation bias, which is evident in his book *Saudi Arabia* (1955, 12). Heavily criticized by other scholars (Gibb 1955, Goldberg 1985), his works have been for a long time the most extensive records of Saudi Arabia's history and geography available to English readership.

A useful genre for understanding the *Zeitgeist* of those scholars is the *hodo-eporics*, consisting of travel recounts, full of personal comments, opinions, and perceptions of the authors. Some of these writers, according to their different sensitivity and knowledge, were not only able to delve into physical descriptions and linguistic remarks but also report the points of view of the encountered individuals and groups (see also Al Tawil 2024).

Western scholars and archeologists often promoted imperialistic or colonialist ideas through the instrumentalization of their field. This resulted in disconnecting the indigenous populations from their past (Greenberg 2021, 316), also contributing to ideas such as that of the “Immovable East” (Baldensperger 1913). In the aforementioned work, the author described a population that is so traditional and embedded in history that its society has become stagnant.

Another idea expressed is that the “civilization” that developed in West Asia has since moved to Europe and then to North America, establishing a claim to this heritage. This is visible through the proposal for the foundation of the Oriental Institute (Chicago) by Henry James Breasted who in 1919 wrote: “The study of these lands is the birthright and the sacred legacy of all civilised peoples [...]” (Emberling 2010, 115).

The idea reproduced by Breasted, although in a more religious form, has been a driving factor in the scholarly endeavors of the nineteenth century. To settle the debate about the historical authenticity of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, Western scholars traveled into the region of modern-day Iraq, Syria, Israel, and Palestine. One of the staunchest defenders of the accuracy of the Bible was Edward Robinson (1794–1863) who, together with the missionary Eli Smith (1801–57), traveled through Palestine linking modern place names to places mentioned in the Old Testament. As an example, the location of Bir es-Seba was identified as Beersheba (Stiebing 1993, 87–88). The resulting map was successfully superimposed on the Ottoman province (Silbermann 1982, 45).

The Case of Jordan

During the nineteenth century, while Western scholars and tourists were motivated to visit Biblical sites, tourism in Jordan increased after the (re)discovery of

Petra in 1812 by Burckhardt. It was, and still is, one of the most visited sites in Jordan and has fascinated generations of visitors with its archeological remains of the ancient Nabatean capital and the natural beauty of its landscapes. In the first half of the nineteenth century, tourists were mainly directed to major cities or religious destinations such as Jerusalem and Cairo. Then, in the second half of the nineteenth century, they slowly started venturing out to the desert where the number of archeological excavations was growing, attracting more visitors. Nonetheless, visiting Petra was still hard due to the lack of facilities and the remoteness of the area, which was isolated from the government control of the Ottoman authorities (Shoup 1985, 279–80).

It was only under the management of the British colonial mandate and the government of Amir Abdullah that visitors started to feel safe, following the end of tribal raids and the increased security guaranteed by the government. During the 1920s, the British travel company Thomas Cook built the first hotel camp inside the archeological site of Petra, allowing the tourists to enjoy some comfort. The British archeological excavation of 1929 was one of the major attractions in Petra (Meskell and Luke 2021, 2–3). With the increase of tourism, for a big part of the population, the first encounters with foreigners took place. In the 1940s, the hotel was sold to a Palestinian family who expanded and named it “the Nazzal Camp.” It was only in the 1950s that the Jordanian government opened its own local Rest House in the area and hired local staff. It was in the same period that one of the two main local tribes (Layathna) began exerting its control over the touristic trade, that is, selling souvenirs (Shoup 1985, 281). At the same time, at the end of the 1950s, UNESCO announced its participation in assisting with the reconstruction at Petra, heralding a new phase in the internationalization of the site (Meskell and Luke 2021, 3). During the 1960s and the 1970s, the other local tribe (the Bdul) also started to get involved in the tourism field, offering fresh drinks and tea. In the 1980s with the improvement of public transportation, a daily bus was provided from Amman to Petra. In 1983, the first first-class hotel (The Forum Petra Hotel) opened, hiring local staff. The management of the hotel was British and hired members of the Bdul tribe. The staff had to perform in dances, cook the Bedouin typical dish (the *mansif*), and offer “traditional Bedouin hospitality” in a tent bought and erected to offer the “real taste of Bedouin life.” The year 1984 marked a pivotal point, when the Bdul experienced the trauma of being expelled from Petra by the government. On one hand, the government claimed that their flocks would annoy tourists and threaten the ruins. On the other hand, it wanted to limit contact between the Bdul and the tourists to preserve the morality of the tribesmen.

Consequently, after two decades of fighting, 400 people were forced to relocate to a specially constructed settlement called Umm Sayhun (Shoup 1985, 282–3; Meskell and Luke 2021, 10).

The 1980s was also the decade in which the tribalism debate in Jordan was elevated to a national level. Discussions on Jordanian society and Bedouin and tribal identity were popular among anthropologists, universities, and local news media. Local intellectuals and politicians took different positions: some were anti-tribalist, claiming that sticking to the tribal identity constituted an obstacle to the efforts of modernizing the country. Others were pro-tribalist, supporting the Bedouin values as ideals to be emulated and examples of noble—typically Arabic—morals (Layne 1994, 96–101).

In the last 30 years, the encounters with “the other” increased, making tourism the major source of income in the country, leading to capacity problems for the site of Petra (Tisdell 2007 in Steiner 2010, 240). While the archeological and natural beauties of Petra were already attracting tourists, the Bedouins were also used early on as a representative, later commercialized, image of Jordan. Both the Jordanian government and the private sector handled tourism similarly to what the British management previously did, taking advantage of the local tribal identity. Tourists were offered authentic Bedouin hospitality in tents, Bedouin coffee and dishes, as well as camel rides, despite them not being historically known for having used camels.

The state government created and reinforced through tourism a national identity, typically Jordanian, based on the tribal local heritage. This was not only helping the economy of the nation, but also the national political discourse. A delicate historical period in the 1970s saw Jordan promoting a distinctive identity to distinguish itself from the “other” *par excellence*: Palestine. Jordan made use of the pro-tribalism discourse—in vogue in those years—to hinder the threat of an Israeli-promoted Palestinian takeover (Layne 1994, 103).

If, on one side, economy, politics, and tourism used the Bedouin identity for their own interests, the Bedouin identity in turn is reaffirmed through tourism (Wooten 1996; Cole 2003, 254). In 2005, UNESCO rendered the Bdul tribe an intangible heritage. They were and continue to be associated with this social category in the presence of tourists. In front of visitors, they become even more “Bedouin” since they must sell a product: their original but marketed identity (Cole 2003: 254). They will show camels and offer rides, tell anecdotes and stories, and put efforts into reinforcing the pre-existing stereotypes, to meet tourists’ expectations. This was supposed to leave them satisfied with the presumed “authentic” experience. These stereotypical images, once partially built through movies such

as “Lawrence of Arabia” or “Seven Pillars of Wisdom” are reproduced for the new generations through social media.

Despite that, new science-fiction movies such as “The Martian” (2015) and the “Dune” saga (2021), partly filmed in the Wadi Rum (defined as “a desert [...] with an [...] expansive cinematic history”), contribute to create an additional exotic image of Jordan. It is noteworthy that the local film industry does not usually make use of the Wadi Rum desert as the location for Bedouin TV series.

As time has passed, the concept of performing “bedouinness” has not changed in the tourist industry. Nowadays, members of Bedouin tribes still aim to attract tourists through images of “hospitality” and “primitiveness,” while leading modern and comfortable lives removed from what they portray as the Bedouin lifestyle.

This phenomenon can be described as “staged authenticity,” in reference to Bedouins playing on stage for an international audience. Performing “bedouinness,” as stated by Laaber⁴, renders this part of their collective identity an integral part of their daily life (Laaber 2025, 186).

Nowadays tourists are offered a romanticized, simple, nomadic life amidst Bedouin camps in a secluded desert, advertised through social media and travel blogs. The advertisements promise an untouched environment from where it is possible to hear the call to prayer and admire the starry sky. At the same time, though, some of the hotels offer a luxurious glamping experience in the middle of Wadi Rum, providing soft beds and AC, in rooms styled like Bedouin tents but “more comfortable.” Tourist agencies offer a “glimpse of what life is like for these nomadic tribes” through spectacles and coffee-making rituals. Some luxotels offer even better services such as loungers and Jacuzzis positioned close to the “bubble domes nestled among the Petra mountains that have their hot tubs.”

Other blogs advertise hotels and touristic Bedouin camps claiming that “being with the Bedouins makes you feel the real Jordan,” implying that the real Jordan is the Bedouin one only. Bedouins are usually defined as the autochthonous, “hardy people” that have lived in Wadi Rum for centuries, and some of them still live in goat-hair tents. In the desert, tourists have the chance to walk in the footsteps of historical legends such as Lawrence of Arabia. Finally, in a news article published in June 2021 by the Travel Courier (a Canadian weekly online and monthly print magazine established in 1965), the Jordan Tourism Board North America wrote “Your clients give Jordanians purpose, alleviate hunger, increase educational

4 Who conducted fieldwork among the Bedouin tribes of Wadi Musa, Umm Sayhun, and Petra between 2022 and 2023.

opportunities and gender equity, allow local communities to thrive, and sustain their livelihoods” (Travel Courier 2024). It is from these passages that we can still confirm the interdependency that exists between tourists and the Bedouins working in the tourist industry in Petra. Their sustenance inexorably depends on tourists and tourists need the exotic holiday. They seek naturalness and believe in what Bedouins present to them on stage. Paradoxically, the economic stability guaranteed to the Bedouins by tourism allows them to live a modern and comfortable life. In the last century, Bedouins wanted to live close to the sites but far enough from tourists to preserve their way of life and morals.

Another important aspect is the environmental one. Considering the small area of approximately 740 km² that the natural reserve of Wadi Rum covers and how it has been exploited for touristic purposes, the management of the high number of visitors has become problematic. UNESCO started denouncing the issue in every report over the last few years, highlighting the lack of proper conservation and maintenance of the archeological sites, and an absence of traffic and visitor management plans as well as housing. Since 2014, all reports focused on the impact of tourism and recreation, and how to deal with solid waste, listed as “factors affecting the property.” To be sure, glamping and luxotels are among the main causes of solid waste disposal problems, all of which is generating worrying effects.

Moreover, since the 1960s, American archeologists and heritage practitioners have become entangled with the tourism development scheme of U.S. foreign policy. Foreign expertise led to the corporatization of culture, exclusion of the communities (Meskell and Luke 2021, 2), and over-tourism⁵, causing undesirable effects on the natural reserve and the site. Nevertheless, heritage practitioners have claimed that before their intervention there was no national or site policy for preservation (Meskell and Luke *ibid.*). Tourism proves to be, at least for southern Jordan, the problem and the solution altogether. Even so, according to Meskell and Luke, “capitalizing culture [...] has had detrimental impacts not only on conservation, [...] but more importantly, on connected communities, ways of life, and legacies of heritage” (2021, 12).

5 UNWTO defines this term as “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitor experiences in a negative way.”

Redefining Bedouin Self-Perceptions—Disappearance of Lifestyle and Shifting Identity

Jordanians say that the “real Bedouin” nomads of the past do not exist anymore, and the Bedouin lifestyle has disappeared. However, their customs and traditions still exist. This is, at least, the conclusion that has been drawn from recent fieldwork campaigns in northern⁶ and southern⁷ Jordan. During them, the interviewed speakers have always stressed their strong sense of belonging to the Bedouin tribes and their maintenance of Bedouin identity. For the tribes of the north, one of the ways this is expressed is through the organization of their houses, which reflects the structure of a tent (Sekhaneh 2017, 208–9). The presence of a representative tent near the main entrance, the preservation of traditional Bedouin dishes, the practice of Bedouin poetry, and their adherence to Bedouin laws are part of this proud identification as Bedouin (Al Tawil 2023, 254–6). In the south, according to the fieldwork data of Laaber, Bedouinity (a term proposed by Prager 2014) means holding onto their strong sense of morality dictated by their religious beliefs, traditions, and lifestyle. Nonetheless, they also acknowledge the role of tourism and its influence on their customs and livelihoods (Laaber 2025, 198–199).

Differently from the Bedouins of the north, those of the south tend to stress the *karam*, “hospitality” (Laaber 2025, 199). On the other hand, for the Bedouin of the north, this value mostly belongs to the stories of the past. Hospitality nowadays is translated into accepting visits from guests and offering tea and coffee, without expecting the guest to stay a few days. Nonetheless, there is a general nostalgia. During the fieldwork, the older people referred to the past as a period when the tribespeople used to care more about each other. “Before, people were affectionate [...], they used to pay a visit to each other. [...] Nowadays it is not like this, everyone is locked in their houses.” (female speaker, 65, Muḡayyir as-Sirḡān, Al-Mafraq, Jordan).

Some Bedouins in northern Jordan, when asked to be visited, usually accepted and offered to stage a performance of Bedouin poetry and music, in exchange for compensation. This allows a twofold interpretation: on one hand, it means that not everyone is willing to welcome guests and honor Bedouin values; on the other hand, it happens so often that they are prepared and expect payment. In the south, since the Bedouins deal with tourists who tend to

6 Al Tawil (2020–22).

7 Laaber (2022–23).

consume more than locals, the rituals have been commodified and standardized, as also proven by Laaber's fieldwork, with the presence of "automated responses" (Laaber 2025).

The Case of Saudi Arabia

The second case study of our article focuses on the self-representation and perceptions of Saudi Arabia, where the area of present-day Saudi Arabia (excluding the Hejazi region) was never the object of strong colonialist interests from European imperial powers. The unification of its various tribes under King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud between 1902 to 1932 into the state of Saudi Arabia demanded a common national factor. This collective identity was predominantly based on Islam and Arab culture, and a sense of nation on a local level (Nevo 1998, 34). Islam has always served to consolidate the legitimacy of the royal family since it has the custody of the most important religious sites of Sunni Islam, which lie within Saudi Arabia's territory.

Concurrently, in reaction to the former Ottoman rule and to the colonial atmosphere in neighboring countries, from the 1920s to the 1940s of the last century, Saudi scholars began to investigate and document their history and heritage in Arabic (Masry 1981, 228). In this context, the efforts of scholars such as Abdullah Masry and Abdulrahman al-Ansary during the twentieth century are noteworthy (al-Rashid 2005, 209–13). Their contributions resulted in a strong, nationally managed body for Saudi heritage, avoiding dependence on Western institutions. This high degree of autonomy was further assured by the increased importance of crude oil, extracted and refined by ARAMCO⁸, a state-owned company since 1974. After the overtake of ARAMCO by the Saudi State, the percentile contribution from the oil-based sector to the GDP started to decline. In 1970, 63.45 percent of the total GDP (peaked in 1973 to 84.39 percent) came from oil-based industries, and in 1996 it only amounted to 30.95 percent (Choudhury and Al-Sahlawi 2000, 238). The twenty-first century saw at first an increase to 54.10 percent in 2008, followed by the oil crisis in 2014, dropping it to 20 percent in 2016, before hitting an all-time low in 2020 with 16 percent (World Bank, 2024).

In the twenty-first century, the drawbacks of overdependency on hydrocarbons became evident and forced the Saudi state to develop a strategy. The Vision

8 Acronym for Arabian American Oil Company, it is the official Saudi Arabian oil company.

2030 strategy program was presented in 2016 as a reaction to the 2014 oil-price collapse, aiming to modernize Saudi Arabia, diversify its economic portfolio, and become a stronger global player. This proved to be a sensible decision since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and the inefficient mitigation measures, directed at controlling it, further contributed to a detriment for the oil sector (Shehabi 2022, 1, 14). A key point of the program is the development of the tourism sector to transition from an oil-based to a service-based economy (Abuhjeeleh 2019, 13).

Historically, predominantly religiously motivated tourism (pilgrimage) within and to Saudi Arabia has been a constant factor in the country. With some exceptions (e.g., ban on Iran in 1992), the number of pilgrims has increased annually in the last sixty years due to new and affordable modes of transportation. In 1965, 300,000 Muslims from abroad made the pilgrimage and by 1983 this number had already reached one million (Doumato 1992, 92). The fear that Philby expressed in 1955 about the West corrupting Saudi Arabian society was still present at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The government was concerned about how possible offenses caused by foreign behavior and appearance would affect the conservative local societies. Since the oil revenue represented the major income, there was little incentive to promote tourism. Additionally, working in tourism was perceived as undignified for a Saudi citizen (Nadia 2014, 65).

Nevertheless, this has changed drastically in the last two decades. In 2009, 48 percent of the 33.5 million domestic and 13.3 million international trips were driven by religious purposes (Mufeed 2014, 169). Data from the Ministry of Tourism (Ministry of Tourism, 2024) indicate a significant decrease in religious trips from 33.46 percent in 2015 to 14.83 percent in 2022. This decrease is partly due to the enhanced mobility of Saudi residents, who are now additionally traveling for leisure, and to the lifting of restrictions, allowing easier access to the country. Moreover, the introduction of more accessible visa processes has opened Saudi Arabia to foreign tourism and investors, contributing further to this shift.

To capitalize on this trend and attract more foreign tourists, the Vision 2030 strategy also includes five Giga projects aimed at transforming various sectors of the country: housing and society (ROSHN), entertainment, sports, and arts (Qiddiya), cultural heritage and tourism (Diriyah), nature and tourism (Red Sea Global), and urbanization and technology entrepreneurship (NEOM) (Vision 2030, 2024). To realize these projects the Public Investment Fund (PIF) was created, claiming to manage 925 billion USD (Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute 2024). The symbol of these changes in the country is NEOM, the prime destination for international tourists.

NEOM is a 26,500 km² special economic zone in the northwest bordering Jordan which features an abundance of projects with new ones progressively introduced. With 40 percent of the world's population within a six-hour flight, and with all the commodities, NEOM is set to become the hub for business, trade, services, and tourism. Particularly, "The Line," as it is called, has gained much media attention since it claims to revolutionize living, urbanization, technology, sustainability, and much more. It constitutes a futuristic project, in which an international team is creating a 170 km long, 200 m wide, and 500 m high city with the intent of housing nine million residents upon completion.

Other projects in NEOM follow the same trajectory, gaining media attention. OXAGON, a floating business hub, aims to capitalize on the 13 percent of world trade that passes through the Red Sea. TROJENA and SINDAHLA are specifically destined for tourists, offering unusual experiences, such as skiing and snowboarding in the Hejaz. Everything in NEOM is catered toward Western tourists. Common themes in advertisements include futuristic architecture, luxurious lifestyles, well-being, nature, sustainability, technology, sports, arts, and entertainment. The protagonists of these images and videos are often well-styled, elegant Western women. This entirely disconnects the product, in this case, the sub-projects of NEOM, from the religion, history, and culture of Saudi Arabia, offering a commodified version for European and North American tourists interested in a high-class lifestyle.

Another project that is worth mentioning is the development of the Al-'Ulā region. The "Journey through time Masterplan" aims to transform part of the region into a "living museum." Through the utilization of ancient heritage, natural landscapes, luxury, entertainment, and "Arab hospitality," the region is becoming attractive to affluent tourists. Shuttle services provide a connection between the archeological sites, such as Dadan, Jabal Ikmah, and the UNESCO site of Hegra (modern Mada'in Salih) and the commodities of the town. The transformation of "Al-'Ulā Old Town" into a commodified surreal experience of an Arab Souk, and the construction of luxurious hotels aim to render the location more attractive. Tourists are offered "traditional crafts," concerts, exhibitions of contemporary art, and performances. An important role is played by nature, made accessible to visitors, emphasized by projects such as Shaaran resort, and Arabian Leopard program. Both have the aim of reintroducing wild animals into the natural environment.

While these state-funded projects allow us to outline the image that the country wishes to portray and create for the international community, literature shows a more internal view. Arabic literature in Saudi Arabia, whose most popular genre

has since pre-Islamic Arabia been oral poetry (Britannica, 2024), was not revolutionized as in the neighboring countries until the 1970s. It is during the second half of the past century that Saudi Arabia developed a written canon and started incorporating modern Western genres such as short stories or novels. One of the first writers, Abdullah Ibrahim, even added the Gulf colloquial variety into the tales, often having a working-class community set. It is with his literature that Saudi fiction got success (Culture Gate, 2024).

Another author, considered the father of Saudi novel, despite being born in Jordan, is Abdul Rahman Munif (1933–2004). He studied in Baghdad, Damascus, and Paris, and in his works he explored themes of decadence and despotism in the Arab world. Munif gained popularity in Saudi Arabia during the 1970s with works such as *Cities of Salt* and *East of the Mediterranean*. However, following the resurgence of Wahhabism, catalyzed by the Iranian Revolution and the so-called Siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, both in 1979 (Al-Rasheed 2010, 142–3), this trend of critically examining Arab history and self-constructed cultural narratives was largely suppressed. The strict Islamic interpretations of Wahhabism imposed significant restrictions on the arts and led to the banning of Munif's works (Qantara, 2024).

In the past two decades, a new wave of Saudi novelists has emerged, addressing subjects such as class inequality, gender discrimination, censorship, repression of sexuality, violence, and cultural identity, which provide a critical lens through which the complexities of modern Saudi society are investigated. Female writers also start denouncing the repressive society through their works, describing arranged marriages, women's oppression from men and even old women, and the restrictions imposed by religion, which were previously taboo (ArabLit, 2024; Rivearabe, 2024).

Literature, on a national and international scale, is also at the center of the International Book Fair, which takes place in Riyadh. At this event, visitors are offered the opportunity to discover foreign and Arab publishers, meet readers and writers, and explore international literary culture. Riyadh will also host the Riyadh Fashion Week for the second time, welcoming local and international designers to foster the fashion industry and become a reference point for style.

Discussion

As stated at the beginning of this article, the two case studies present different trajectories in the development of their modern identity and how they market it for

the tourist sector. Jordan, with its colonial past and heritage tourism destinations, and Saudi Arabia, with limited Western influence and religious tourism, have exhibited different degrees of self-determination. Through tourism and media advertisement, we can also conclude their self-representations.

Western representations (or, to quote Said, *dynamic exchange*) “invented by Europeans” (Varisco 2007, 40), have been imprinted on West Asia. Western descriptions of the “Near East” as an exotic, sensual, picturesque, romantic, and spiritual “Other” contributed to creating the Orientalist image, through literature, paintings, and arts (Said 1978), which attracted European tourists. In the past, the “Orient” was depicted as the place of lascivious women in harems, of Bedouin sheikhs on horseback, and *Arabian Nights*. However, nowadays, Jordan exploits part of the same perceptions to market its *oriental* image. Presently, those who take advantage of this created concept are not only the Western powers, but also the Jordanian government, tourist agencies, and, to a lesser degree, local populations. Both the government and agencies portray Jordan not only as an exotic destination but also depict it as a Bedouin country.

Drawing on the work of Steiner (2010) and his postmodern interpretation of the (re)structuring of tourism spaces (Steiner 2010, 241), we also interpreted the tourist spaces in Jordan and Saudi Arabia as “hyper-realities” (Eco 1986 in Steiner 2010). Hyper-reality refers to an entity that appears to be real although it is not and is based on the imitation of it (Steiner *ibid.* 245). Hyper-realities appear to be more real than the archetype since they are the direct object of perception. Bedouins, exhibiting their identity through tents, performances, hospitality, and so forth, make these appear real, by imitating reality. Since these spaces and this reality are the only ones that tourists have access to, the distinction between the original and the copy is erased (Eco 1986, 7–14).

We observe at once the disappearance of the Bedouin lifestyle and the reproduction and imitation of it for marketing purposes. Later, drawing on Eco, Baudrillard developed three levels of hyper-realities that he named *simulacra* (Baudrillard 1993, 50). First-order simulacra are imitations of the real by using signs of the signified. This applies to the hotel rooms in the Wadi Rum, designed to imitate Bedouin tents. Second-order simulacra identically reproduce reality, therefore disintegrating the border between the copy and the original. Mass-produced souvenirs that identically reproduce Bedouin artifacts such as a coffee-mortar or teapots fall into this category.

The third-order of simulacra is represented by something real that does not have an archetype and is characterized by permutation of signs. This third-order can be attributed to the Martian Domes which are spaceship-like tents, whose

design creates the idea of a futuristic tent (an arbitrary and mixed combination). Another third-order simulacra or hyper-real paradox is constituted by the presence of ACs, Jacuzzis, spas, and other luxurious comforts in the supposedly “Bedouin” desert. The “hyper-real Orient is completely commodified and easy to consume for tourism purposes” (Steiner 2010, 246).

Other interpretations of touristic places in Jordan are offered by MacCannel. He coined the expression “staged authenticity” referring to those settings arranged to produce a specific impression and support the tourists’ beliefs in the authenticity of the experience (MacCannel 1973, 595-6). MacCannel applied Goffman’s (1959) front-back dichotomy to tourism. He claimed that visitors want to enter back regions to experience the intimate reality, but touristic settings are front regions arranged to appear like the back ones to support tourists’ beliefs (MacCannel 1973, 589). Visitors cannot always easily access back regions where locals live and retire. This is what travel blogs and agencies suggest and advertise for Jordan, where visits to the off-beat, original places are promised to tourists. What we can observe in both Petra and Wadi Rum are stage-two front regions (MacCannel, 598). It is the case of shops inside tents that imitate Bedouin ones and decorated as such in the Wadi Rum, where visitors can drink tea and buy souvenirs.

As for Saudi Arabia, the first and second-order simulacra are applied to the region of Al-‘Ulā, though to a lesser degree. Despite the non-commercialization of Saudi culture, a role is played by “Arab” features, such as hospitality and architectural elements. This can be seen in Al-‘Ulā where commodified simulated souks and traditional crafts are at the disposal of visitors. Tourists are also offered various accommodations in the form of resorts and other luxurious apartments that reproduce the architecture of a tent. For example, “the Palm” in the Emirates (Steiner 2010, 247–8), and the tent-shaped apartments in Al-‘Ulā, represent a generic place and not a specific culture, such as the Bedouin one. While the tent in Jordan serves as a symbol for Bedouin identity, in Saudi Arabia this association is not made explicit. The use of the rich pre-Islamic archeological heritage can be interpreted as a strategy to dissociate the region from the state religion, which might be a disincentive to Western tourists.

This dissonance from their own cultural and religious values is a deliberate choice by the engineers of the modernization process. Contrary to the Jordanian context, Saudi culture and identity cannot be commercialized because of the negative associations of the country in the West. Anti-Islamic sentiments in the West have been at an all-time high since the events of 9/11. Additionally, media representation of Saudi Arabia in major western newspapers formed a negative image of the Kingdom, associated with restricted women’s rights, anti-LGBTIQ+

policies, modern slavery, and severe punishments including beheadings. As of October 2024, 213 people have been executed, despite the country competing for a seat in the UN Human Rights Council (Middle East Eye, 2024).

Consequently, hyper-realities are the preferred tool to represent and advertise the country. Because they lack social, cultural, and historical embeddedness, these hyper-realities can be imbued with a new narrative that is attractive to foreign visitors and investors. The Line exemplifies the advancement of technology, futurism, and sustainability, while reinventing civilization and urban lifestyle. There are no references to the country of Saudi Arabia, its culture, or its society.

The same applies to the other projects located in NEOM. As already pointed out by Steiner for Dubai and the Gulf countries, these new large-scale projects are reshaping the tourism landscape in the region (2010, 242). Due to the extent of these macro-projects, they are progressively establishing a new image of these West-Asian countries, which does not bear negative connotations. Another benefit of these hyper-realities is that the only connection they have is with their architect and is therefore used to consolidate their power. Other sectors that are contributing to the establishment of a new image for the kingdom, on a minor scale, are the cultural events offered. Especially in the realm of literature which, on one side, is now opening to Western and international readers and writers through its book fairs in the capital. On the other side, it is witnessing more women taking part in the social discourse. A similar strategy has been applied in fashion, with the purpose to both internationalize the sector and open it up to make Saudi Arabia a reference point in the industry.

Economic power is not the only aspiration of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which also strives for global influence by force of its religious legitimacy. The Kingdom claims to be dominated by a kind of true Islam which it embodies. It then makes use of religion as a tool in foreign policy in the Islamic World and beyond (Lohlker 2020, 21).

In a globalized society, where tourism is one of the major contributors to a country's GDP and competition is strong, the creation of superstructures such as the Burj Khalifa in Dubai or The Line in NEOM offer symbolic capital to their creators. The symbolic capital, the sum of cultural and social recognition (Bourdieu 1979), is used to create an image and place it on the global map to attract investors and tourists and spread its influence. Hence, their benefits far exceed the economic resources invested in their creation (Junemo 2004). This exchange of people, cultures, and ideas with the globalized Saudi society inevitably forces it to change and adapt to an international audience, although this transformation is controlled and regulated by Saudi authorities.

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Representing the Chinese Self and the Foreign Other in China's English-Language Press Editorials

LUTGARD LAMS

Introduction

For many decades, the issue of media representation of the cultural Other has been a prime topic within cultural studies, communication studies, and area studies. The main target of critique has been the Western media for what is seen as a biased representation of the Oriental Other and, by extension, the larger developing world (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Said 2003). A prejudiced portrayal of the Other through ethnocentric lenses, what has been termed “Othering” (Riggins 1997) is believed to induce social exclusion by framing a contrasting image of those people who are not “one of us,” because of different ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, and so forth (Fursich 2002). The academic interest in the process of Othering has been largely inspired by postcolonial literature and cultural theorists, like Edward Said. He argues that at the basis of the Othering process lies a strategy of adopting a “flexible positional superiority” (Edgar and Sedgwick 1999, 266), putting the “Westerner in a series of possible relationships with the Orient without losing him the relative upper hand” (Said 2003, 7). Over the last three decades, the indictment of a flawed Western Orientalist gaze at the cultural Other has found strong traction in scholarly work within the Humanities across the globe.

The critique on biased Western representational practices has also been articulated by political elites with alternative world views, such as the Chinese leadership,

who does not share the same values cherished in liberal democracies and is intent on redefining concepts like human rights and democracy along particularist cultural lines. Since the early 2000s, China's leaders have started reclaiming a voice within the international community by participating in supranational bodies such as the WTO, promoting Chinese culture and language courses via Confucius centers worldwide, sponsoring bilateral cultural and educational exchanges, and organizing global events, such as the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai World Expo.

Besides these tangible “soft power” initiatives to show China to the world, much attention has been devoted to the ideological role of discourse as an essential tool in domestic and foreign opinion management. Public diplomacy efforts have been mobilized to advance new *discourses* to let the international community better understand China and how its historical experiences have shaped its present world views. At first, under the presidency of Hu Jintao, official appeals to party cadres and diplomats to use China's “discourse power/right” [*huayu quan*] appeared in internal CPC documents. Directives on this matter were gradually also propagated through the Party's domestic media channels and academic circles. The potential impact on the stability of the existing international order eventually dawned upon the foreign community, when the full meaning of deploying *huayu quan* was incrementally disambiguated in speeches of President Xi Jinping, government spokespeople and diplomats, official documents, and state media.

Since the advent of President Xi, China has not only expressed its desire to be “heard” on the international scene in building “international discourse power,”¹ but has also set out to openly challenge the Western-led world order and advocate an alternative for a “more equitable” global order. It has presented itself as the leader of the developing world and has promoted equal rights for “all countries under heaven” [*Tianxia*]² or, in modern Xi lingo, “the community of common destiny.” The notion “discourse right/power” underpins the guidelines to officials, scholars, media professionals, and ordinary Chinese citizens to spread “the China story properly/thoroughly” through cultural and educational initiatives. Large investments in an expanded global Chinese media presence since the late 2000s have facilitated the drive to bring local and global news to world audiences through a Chinese perspective.

1 This was one of the three objectives made explicit in President Xi's speech on propaganda work, given at the National Propaganda Ideology Conference in August 2013.

2 The abstract ‘*Tianxia*’ theory, based on a traditional Confucian governance style, has been dug up from the imperial graves and has given rise to renewed debates within some Chinese scholarly circles about its usefulness as a theoretical foundation for a new postliberal international order (Puranen 2020, 336).

The first time that China's engagement in this ideological struggle on the global stage was articulated quite poignantly in front of the international cameras was in March 2021 at the occasion of the Sino-U.S. talks in Anchorage, when Chinese senior diplomat Yang Jiechi openly gave a strong rebuke of the American Secretary of State Antony Blinken's opening comments and criticized the United States for playing the role of "arbiter of universal values" (Lams 2024). This critical discourse moment offers a useful insight into China's worldview which underpins its official rhetoric about the Self and the foreign Other, analyzed in this chapter.

This study sets itself three objectives. First, it intends to examine representational practices about China and the United States in contemporary Chinese English-language media, catering to the foreign community, Chinese diaspora, and the domestic audience. It is to supplement my longitudinal study of China's media coverage of the Chinese Self and the foreign Other, starting from 1997 with the Hong Kong handover. This ongoing project has primarily focused on crises on the international scene, such as diplomatic standoffs following international incidents/accidents, for example, the collision of the Chinese jetfighter with the U.S. surveillance plane in Hainan in 2001 (Lams 2010), the collision of the Chinese fishing boat with a Japanese coast guard patrol vessel near Diaoyutai Islands in 2010 (Lams 2017) or the protracted trade war between the United States and China (Xu and Lams 2023). The present study zooms in on a less critical time frame, namely President Joe Biden's first year in office after the turbulent period of the Sino-U.S. trade war under President Trump. It begs the question of whether coverage in a relatively less conflictual period will yield different results or if the negativity toward the United States, uncovered in earlier studies (e.g., Stockmann 2011; Lams 2010, 2017), will be sustained. Secondly, the study aims to add to the debate about the Western-biased perspective of the Oriental Other with an assessment of Chinese media performance in representing the Western Other. Thirdly, the chapter wants to demonstrate how theoretical concepts or methods drawn upon in different scholarly disciplines, such as communication science and linguistics, can be integrated to examine institutional and political discourses.

While there is no dearth of literature about Chinese media's portrayal of the United States, with studies employing either content analyses (e.g., Liu and Yang 2015) or CADS (computer-assisted discourse studies), analyzing keywords and their concordance lines (Chen and Wang 2022), analyses combining insights from linguistics and communication science are rare. The present study sets out to make these disciplines meet and see how they can jointly facilitate a granular approach to examining representational practices.

Theoretical Observations

The interdisciplinary approach of this study blends framing and social actor representation theories, as used in sociology and communication science (Goffman 1974; Entman 1993; Van Leeuwen 2008), and positioning theory originating in narratology (Bamberg 1997), with linguistic insights from critical discourse studies (Van Dijk 1998), language pragmatics (Verschueren 1999), and systemic functional linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). These disciplines all perceive communication as a primarily social action. The study thus combines a framing analysis with tools from critical discourse analysis, examining referential and predicational language choices, along with other discursive strategies to uncover power dynamics in media narratives. In line with the typology of discursive practices in Chinese media, as set out in my project on Othering in Chinese official media narratives (Lams 2017), it examines framing and positioning, legitimation, reification, and dramatization processes. The strategy of legitimation serves to justify actions or policies to solidify or subvert existing power relations. Reification can be identified when “essentialist discourse represents a transitory state of affairs as if it were natural and permanent while eliminating its social and historical character and denying the contingency of social processes” (Lams 2010, 103). Unmodalized assertions and presuppositions—one of the core tenets within linguistic pragmatics—fix particular perspectives on reality into unquestioned truth claims. Dramatization emphasizes emotions, such as pride and joy or harm, sustained by a victim at the hands of a perpetrator. Framing relates to privileging certain interpretations over others, rendering alternative perspectives invisible. A framing analysis thus aims to identify schemes by which individuals perceive the world. The concept finds its roots in anthropology (Bateson 1972) and was further developed by sociologists like Goffman (1974) and Gitlin (1980). For Goffman, frames or “schemata of interpretation” (Goffman 1974, 21) are “sets of concepts and theoretical perspectives that organize experiences and guide the actions of individuals, groups, and societies.” Framing has also become a popular theory in communication science. Frequently cited are the four framing functions, pointed out by Entman (1993, 52) as follows,

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

The discursive practice of positioning places people in relation to one another, oftentimes in a dichotomous framework of an “us/them” binary, which is the essence of Othering. In narratology, positioning is seen as a discourse strategy not only constructing social actors into certain relationships but also constituting their identity. Syntactic patterns in actor positioning may consistently construct some individuals or groups as agents of (verbal) actions thus bestowing power on them while placing others as passive recipients, depriving them of active agency. A study of “positioning” can also be linked to the socio-cognitive approach in critical discourse analysis, which sees discourse as a polarizing activity, in which a negative Other is mirrored against a positive Self. Highlighting one’s strengths and the outgroup’s weaknesses while hiding the flaws of the Self and the assets of the Other, contributes to the construal of an “ideological square” (Van Dijk 1998).

Positioning can also be linked with “representation practice,” as outlined in social action representation theory by Van Leeuwen (2008), who presents a social-semantic inventory of representational categories, such as exclusion, appraisal, association, and dissociation. Mechanisms involved in exclusion are, for example, agent deletion or nominalization, both typical linguistic resources often examined in critical discourse analysis. Appraisal is achieved by using evaluative semantics, involving emotion, judgment, and appreciation (Martin and White 2005). Association operates when social actors are represented as sharing common features and goals. Conversely, dissociation materializes when diverging interests between actors are emphasized. It concerns highlighting contrasts between social groups either via explicit juxtaposition (e.g., China’s national pride versus the dysfunctional democratic system in Western countries) or indirect “mirroring” by pointing at the other’s weakness, thus implying the strength of the Self. As Lams (2010, 324) argues,

While the national Other seems to be the direct addressee, it constitutes the negative mirror of the national Self [...]. The Other does not only serve as a stereotype of the unfamiliar, but also as the opposite in the sense of self-categorization [...]. Outsiders’ features must be contrasted unfavourably with our own.

Positioning works by linguistically assigning positive qualities to the Self and negative properties to the Other through referential and predicational strategies, involving semantics and syntax. The semantics of denotation and connotation of lexical terms are not mere labels, but express moral evaluations, frequently placed in antithetical opposites, thus enabling moral judgments. Positioning through syntactic means assigns roles to social actors, positioned as “agents” on the one

hand and “victims or beneficiaries” at the receiving end of harm or benefit, respectively. These roles serve to empower the Self and disempower the Other, depicted as the negative mirror of the Self.

Empirical Analysis: Dataset and Analytical Approach

The study targets English-language media because they are the vehicle through which the Chinese government spreads its views on local and foreign affairs to a wide readership, international and domestic alike. The newspapers selected are the two largest national English-language newspapers, the *China Daily* (henceforth CD) and the *Global Times* (GT). For comparative reasons, editorials of the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), published in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) have also been included. These three newspapers operate in two different media environments, the first two within the PRC’s strictly controlled media system while the SCMP is published in the Hong Kong SAR enjoying a different system with relatively more media freedom. Although the PRC official media have had to adjust to a marketized media industry since the early 1990s, they are still expected to adhere to ideological correctness and are part of the official English-language propaganda mechanism. The official print newspapers are especially used to define ideological orthodoxy (Wang 2024).

The *China Daily*, published by the Chinese State Council Information Office, is China’s leading official English-language newspaper and serves the primary function of communicating the stances of the Chinese government to the world. The *Global Times*, as the English version of its sister publication in Mandarin, *Huanqiu Shibao*, calls itself the “most informative English-language paper” and offers a sanitized image on its webpage as follows,

[it] avoids touching upon conflict and confrontation. It, however, distances itself from the other extreme, namely, designed provocation that is common in Western media’s China reportage. Given the circumstances in China, the *Global Times* takes great pains to present facts and views that could help the readers better understand China.³

Contrary to its online self-introduction, the *Global Times* has a reputation for adopting aggressive language that Chinese officials are not allowed to utter for diplomatic reasons (Huang 2016). Often dismissed as radical or only representing a fringe opinion inside the Chinese government, according to Hamilton and

3 <<https://www.globaltimes.cn/about-us/index.html>>.

Ohlberg (2020, 289), the newspaper “actually represents mainstream thinking inside the CCP leadership.”

The *South China Morning Post* used to be the prestigious English paper in colonial Hong Kong, known for its elite readership and liberal stance. Through two ownership shifts to business tycoons with high economic stakes in China, it gradually lost its traditional critical positioning toward China (Frisch et al. 2018; Lee 2018). As a former staff member rationalizing his departure from SCMP, reports,

the paper retains a curious mixture of often quite outstanding reporting, including some brave and insightful pieces providing news about what is going on in the Mainland. This is mixed in with a relentless diet of front-page stories portraying China’s growing prowess in the world both on the economic and political fronts. Most of the critical voices have been purged from its comment pages. (Vines 2018, November 13)

The time frame selected comprises the beginning and the end of the first year of President Biden’s first term (March/April and November/December 2021) and thus captures any evolution in representation. Although in 2021 no major diplomatic Sino-U.S. “crisis” emerged, it was still a friction-laden year.⁴ As units of analysis, editorials were singled out, given this genre’s perlocutionary effect the editorial team intends to generate on the readership by persuading audiences of the validity and legitimacy of specific truth claims and normative arguments about moral righteousness. Since the CD and the GT operate as mouthpieces of the government, their editorials serve as guiding torches to illuminate PRC official perspectives on domestic and foreign affairs. Although a platform is also granted to freelance contributors for integrating public opinion into the editorials, articles are expected to adhere to national policy lines (Lupano 2019). As concerns the Hong Kong SCMP, operating in a relatively free environment with private media organizations, analyzing its editorials offers the best possible clue to understanding the positions taken by the newspaper’s editorial staff.

A search of the keywords “Biden” and “editorial” in the NexisUni databank with the time filters of March, April, November, and December 2021, yielded a

4 Events included the U.S. blacklisting of five Chinese companies (March), the bilateral meeting between China and the United States in Anchorage (March), a joint Sino-U.S. declaration on collaboration to combat climate change, and a declaration of intent for more Japanese-U.S. strategic collaboration (April), the U.N. Climate Change Conference (November), a virtual meeting between the American and Chinese presidents (November), the U.S. Congress passing of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (December), and the U.S. initiative for a ‘Summit for Democracy’ (December).

dataset of 102 editorials from the *China Daily* (56), the *Global Times* (27), and the *South China Morning Post* (19).

The study consists of a qualitative inductive approach to retrieve frames about the protagonists, complemented by a frequency analysis of the frames. To uncover underlying frames, all texts are coded for framing and reasoning devices, following the three coding phases as set out in Grounded Theory⁵ (Glaser and Strauss 1967). During the cyclical phases of open, axial, and selective coding, relations between the codes are identified, clustered, and labeled. Framing devices consist of linguistic resources operational at the micro-level of lexical and syntactical choice-making. This comprises evaluative lexis in nomination and predication, syntactical patterns involving unequal assignment of agency to actors, and carriers of implicit meaning, such as tropes and presupposition triggers. It is precisely at this analytical level that insights from language pragmatics and systemic functional linguistics can supply extra evidence to unpack the framing process. Reasoning devices are argumentation resources, operating on various structural levels, be it at the micro word and sentential level or the supra-sentential macro level. They provide argumentation in terms of problem definition, attribution of responsibility for current conditions, moral judgment, and suggestions for problem resolution (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Entman 1993).

Once the overarching frames have been distilled from the data during the three qualitative coding phases, a subsequent deductive cycle of textual analysis quantitatively maps frame presence per text, thus establishing a ranking order of frames per corpus and allowing a basic comparison between the three corpora.⁶

Empirical Analysis: Findings

Since the dataset concerns opinionated editorials, it is hardly surprising that interpretative frames are woven into the text fabric of the three corpora. Five frames are identified: one for the United States, two for President Biden, and two for China. The principal frame for the Chinese Self is a positive one, namely “China as a benevolent and responsible global actor.” Yet, the frame of “the victimized China,”

5 All credit for the empirical analysis goes to Maarten Bockstaele, who coded the articles under the author’s instructions and guidance.

6 Since the study focuses on the qualitative analysis of how the frames originate through linguistic choice-making, the quantitative exercise remains purely descriptive and does not make claims about the statistical significance of comparative results.

as highly salient in Chinese media narratives in the 1990s, persists in 37.3 percent of all editorials. Not a single positive frame for the U.S. actor emerges.

In terms of ranking, the foremost frame with an overall incidence of 66 articles (or 64.7 percent out of 102 articles) concerns the United States as “a hegemonic, selfish troublemaker,” followed by the second most salient frame, reserved for China, depicted as “a benevolent and responsible global actor” in 55 articles (53.9 percent). Third in rank is President Biden, portrayed as “an incapable leader and a Trump in disguise” (46 articles or 45.1 percent). The fourth frame positions China as “a victim” in 38 articles (37.3 percent) and the frame with the lowest incidence is for Biden as “an untrustworthy president” with 21 articles or 20.6 percent of the editorials.

When breaking up the figures per newspaper, only the relative figures render a more conclusive idea about frame distribution, given the different dataset sizes of the CD on the one hand and the GT and SCMP on the other hand. The ranking order in the *China Daily* (N= 56) is as follows: top frame is “the United States as hegemonic troublemaker” (69.6 percent), second is “incapable Biden” (53.6 percent), next comes “China as a benevolent global actor” (48.2 percent), closely followed by “China as a victim” (41.1 percent), and “untrustworthy Biden” (33.9 percent).

More extreme figures are recorded for the *Global Times* (N= 27), where the top frame is also reserved for the “hegemonic US” with a high percentage of 81.5, followed by “China as a benevolent global actor” (66.7 percent). Much lower on the scale are the frames “China as a victim” (40.7 percent), and “incapable Biden” (33.3 percent), trailed by “untrustworthy Biden” in only 7.4 percent. The *South China Morning Post* has a markedly different picking order: the prime focus goes to the “China as a benevolent actor” frame (52.6 percent). Falling far behind are the frames of the “United States as a hegemonic troublemaker” (26.3 percent), and “China as a victim” (21.1 percent). The smallest frame in the other corpora, “untrustworthy Biden,” is absent in the SCMP editorials. By the end of the year, when the U.S. government’s China policy has taken shape, an evolution is found between both periods. In the CD corpus, for example, the “hegemonic U.S.” frame moves from 55 percent in the spring articles (N = 20) to 77.8 percent in the autumn dataset (N=36), while the “victimized China” image moves in parallel up from 25 percent to 50 percent of the articles at the end of the year. A similar pattern is found in the *Global Times*.⁷

7 For the SCMP, the two periods cannot be compared, as the autumn period features no relevant articles.

In terms of positioning and Othering, two antinomies emerge: (1) the U.S. versus China in general, and (2) Biden and his administration versus Xi Jinping and the Chinese government. First, the United States is negatively mirrored against China in a villain/victim framework. The United States is marked with 847 instances of framing and reasoning devices signaling negative attributes while China is coded 224 times featuring positive framing devices. For example, an editorial in the CD on March 14 issued the following dire warning, “if the United States can do whatever it wants *regardless of market rules and fairness*, it is the normal running of the global economy that will suffer.”⁸ Negative predicates and presupposition carriers, such as genitives, establishing unquestionable “truth” claims about the nature of Washington, used metonymically, are exemplified in the following proposition in the editorial of the GT on April 26, “The world *hijacked* by Washington’s *selfishness*.” Both actors are explicitly juxtaposed in the same sentence, exhibiting actions with opposed denotational value, as in the CD on December 7, “by *ignoring* what China has *achieved* in improving the livelihoods of people of different ethnic groups in Xinjiang, the United States is *denying* the progress of human rights in the region.” In the following example, the actors are positioned as antagonists, again in the villain/victim binary, “They [the United States] *pose a direct harm* to the interests of the 1.4 billion Chinese people, *depriving* the natural right of the Chinese people to seek a better life” (GT, March 3). At times, the roles are reversed and the United States comes out on the losing end, while China is pictured victorious and morally superior, as in these editorial lines, “The Chinese people will no longer be shocked by whatever tricks the United States plays. On the one hand, we are fully aware of the hostility from Washington. On the other, the *U.S. has lost its halo* in Chinese society” (GT, December 8).

Joe Biden and the U.S. administration are marked with 192 instances of negative attributes while 47 framing devices are identified for Xi Jinping and the Chinese government, all denoting positive traits, while not a single negative referential or predicational utterance is detected for Xi and his administration. This is not surprising, given the strict directives and red lines for the Chinese official media. Ideologically marked presuppositions are illustrated in the following argument, “New administration will *continue* leading United States on wrong path” (headline editorial GT on March 5). An example of moral judgment as a reasoning device can be noted in this assessment, “Foreign Minister Wang Yi has taken the *right approach*, meeting counterparts from neighboring countries and *encouraging* them to play a positive role in *promoting stability*” (SCMP, April 3). As for

8 All italics in the text extracts are the author’s marks.

the practice of association, a consistent associative pattern emerges between the term “cooperation” (and its derivatives) and China, while the notions of “competition” and “confrontation” (and their derivatives) are solely reserved for the American actor.

Reification practice is exemplified in naturalized statements or insistence on factuality and truth, combined with heavily laden lexis and existential presuppositions through the use of the definite article “the,” as in the following examples, “India *in fact* has become a *victim of the U.S. tricks*” (GT, April 26) or “*The U.S. hypocrisy in preaching values and morality while engaging in such dirty deeds against China is beyond question*” (CD, December 16). Dramatization can be found in playing up emotions as follows, “No country in the world would tolerate any plot aimed at subverting state power by *taking people’s well-being hostage*” (CD, March 2). Legitimation is achieved by rationalizing or constructing a chain of reasoning to defend a set of social relations. In positioning the United States as the perpetrator, initiating the wrongdoing, the editorials legitimize China’s reaction, “Washington must understand that it has gone too far, *leaving China with no way back*” (GT, November 15). Justification is also realized by reference to international laws and experts or simply by selectively showing support from befriended nations, “Moreover several Islamic countries have signed a joint letter *supporting China’s position* on issues related to the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in 2019” (GT, April 2).

Strong “us versus them” rhetoric emerges in 100 and 70 percent of the GT and CD editorials of the first period, respectively, while only 36.8 percent of the Hong Kong paper engages in antagonistic framing of the American Other. The GT records the highest incidence of us/them antagonistic positionings while the Hong Kong paper registers relatively fewer instances of Othering, dramatization, and legitimation practices. The United States is positioned as morally weak in 92.9 and 85 percent of the GT and CD editorials, respectively, whereas, again, only 36.8 percent in the SCMP shows signs of belittling the U.S. actor. Editorials in all three papers, including the Hong Kong daily, participate in applauding the morally strong China (100, 90, and 78.9 percent, respectively, for the GT, CD, and SCMP).

Conclusion

The combination of insights from sociology and communication studies on the concept of framing, narratology on the practice of positioning, and language and discourse studies on the strategies of legitimation, reification, and dramatization

bears fruit for the analysis of how the Chinese Self and the U.S. Other is represented in China's English-language editorials during the first year of President Biden's first term in office. Frames have been identified based on the retrieval of framing devices, primarily resting on linguistic choices made at the production level. It has been shown how actors are positioned in oppositional dichotomies, and examples have been offered on how narratives are legitimized, reified, and dramatized.

In the process of Othering, the Self is ascribed a positive identity through the often-negative attribution of features to the Other. Antinomies work very powerfully in processes of identity construction, be it implicitly or explicitly. This also emerges from the present case study. Even in relatively "crisis-free" times, the practice of Othering in the Chinese editorials about the United States is maintained, especially in the *China Daily* and the *Global Times*, and thus corroborates earlier findings about increasing negativity toward the United States in the Chinese media (Stockmann 2011). By juxtaposing American negative attributes and Chinese positive characteristics within the same sentences, borders are drawn explicitly between archetypal categories such as "heroes," "victims," and "villains." But positioning and framing practices are also operational implicitly. Via de detour of a consistent focus on the negative properties of the United States, China emerges as the morally superior and fair global player.

The detected frames cumulatively make up China's master narrative indexing its outlook on the international world order. Moralizing arguments, backed by legitimizing references to external and "like-minded" experts, strategically serve to steer public opinion at home and abroad. The study's findings about the *Global Times* dataset featuring the highest incidence of us/them antagonistic positionings echo arguments in the literature about the newspaper's "belligerent" tone (Huang 2016; Wilbur 2021). The analysis also illustrates how the SCMP is still to be differentiated from the other two newspapers, while it is all the same converging with Chinese official discourse in exhibiting strong support of China's moral position and displaying a more patriotic attitude. This adduces further evidence to earlier findings about the gradual SCMP editorial adoption of a pro-China stance (Lee 2018).

Different from the official discourse in the 2000s is China's pride in its role as a major world player, aspiring to a global leadership position (Brown 2022; Carrai 2021; Huang and Lams 2024). The frame of the Chinese Self as a benevolent and responsible global actor ranks higher than the "victim" image, which nonetheless still survives. Promoting the Chinese-style modernization as peaceful and more sustainable fits in the CPC's new geopolitical narrative, presenting China's

alternative governance style as a model, far more equitable than the perceived dysfunctional system of liberal democracies in Western societies.

The persistent antagonism against the West, especially the United States, can be rationalized in various ways. First, highlighting a hostile Other is a useful tactic to unite the population (Brady 2006). Editorials target not only the foreign actor, denying the Chinese state its dignity and face, but also the local population, important subjects in the domestic nation-building project. Secondly, China has been in search of ontological security, ever since it felt victimized by foreign powers. At times of crisis when a state's national security is challenged, new identities are forged using historical narrativization. For China, this is exemplified in accounts like China's "victimhood of 100 years of humiliation at the hands of foreign imperialists" (Lams 2005; Callahan 2010; Wang 2012). Oscillating between the utopian view of the great civilized superpower and the dystopian perception of the victim state, still belonging to the developing world, contemporary official Chinese discourse projects a combination of pride and shame, based on fear of the unexpected and suspicion of foreign powers with "ulterior motives," intent on stemming China's rise (Hagström 2021). Throughout the *CD* and the *GT* editorials, the United States is consistently positioned as the revisionist power, intent on changing the international status quo and starting a new Cold War, and, as such, the prime agent of Chinese containment, necessitating what is seen as a logical and legitimate Chinese counter-reaction. Furthermore, because Western-style democratic governance is perceived to be utterly chaotic, the Western-led international order is believed to be in dire need of an alternative system. Thirdly, by defining the present-day geopolitical climate as a threat to sustainable and peaceful international relations, for which the United States is consistently assigned all blame, the Chinese, in particular the CPC, can assume the moral high ground to position itself as the supporter of a more equitable and multilateral world order, based on its superior Chinese-style governance model under the guidance of the CPC. This way, the Party's continued rule can be legitimized. Hence, it can be argued that positional superiority is not just a feature of Orientalist Western discourses but is also evident in the Occidental imagery of the United States in general, and, by extension, the essentialized "West" in the discourse articulated by the Chinese leadership and disseminated through its state media. It is, above all, inspired by "national interests and security concerns rather than mere culturalist ethnocentrism" (Lams 2017, 8).

While the vilification of the outgroup and the glorification of the national Self is not peculiar to the Chinese media alone, the consistency of the discursive strategies in the Chinese English-language media over several decades reveals how

historical wounds at the hands of foreign powers do not seem to heal and how national insecurity or fear of foreign “interference” dictates China’s foreign policy and its perception of the U.S. Other. The case study demonstrates how linguistic resources at different structural levels join hands in cumulatively producing media frames that run parallel with the Chinese national interest.

The potential impact of repetitive and consistent framing practices on the readership cannot be underestimated. Cumulatively, the editorials, albeit with some variation in antagonistic tone between the Hong Kong paper and the two other dailies, can exert an invisible influence on readers with respect to defining problems or situations, interpreting causal relations, making moral judgments, and conceiving possible solutions to existing conditions. These four framing functions are all carefully crafted by the editorial teams in support of the PRC’s master narrative on global relations. It is up to the readers not to let themselves be positioned, nurtured, or “interpellated” as passive subjects or recipients of pre-packaged food ready for consumption, but instead approach the editorials as stimulating food for further critical thought.

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The Literary Movement of Translation in the United Arab Emirates.

Some Remarks on the Kalima Project

ANGELA DAIANA LANGONE

إن الجلال صدق للفكر النبيل

—LONGINUS ('ABD ALLĀH 2009: 105)

Introduction

In 2007, the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage launched *Mašrūʿ Kalima li-l-tarǧama* (the Kalima Translation Project, where *kalima* means “word”) which aims to translate into Arabic hundreds of high-quality works from all over the world. An important purpose of the project is to revive the art of translation in the Arab world and to revitalize the so-called Golden Age of translation, which occurred during the Abbasid dynasty, especially during the reign of Al-Maʾmūn in the eighth century, when the translation movement was at its peak. So, in some ways, the Kalima project aspires to become the third largest consciously organized translation movement in the Arab world—the first two being the movement of the so-called Bayt al-Ḥikma [The House of Wisdom] in the Abbasid Baghdad in the Middle Age and the so-called Nahḍa [Renaissance or Awakening] period, which happened specifically in Cairo and Beirut during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Just three years after the start of the project, Nassar (2010) analyzes this translation movement in its aspects of distribution, finance, and administration, applying the SWOT¹ matrix, which is a tool for evaluating the strategic position of organizations of many kinds. From another point of view, Kesseiri and Bani Hashem (2013) investigate techniques and strategies used by the Kalima project to assess and guarantee the quality of translations, while Brown (2010) questions the reception of these translated texts outside the narrow circle of scholars and advanced students.

What are the guiding principles for selecting the works to be translated? Who are the most translated authors? Which literature is most frequently drawn upon in translations? And why? In short, to borrow the words of Even-Zohar's influential paper (1990), what is the position of translated literature within the polysystem of the Arab Gulf?

These questions prompted me to seek answers in the archives of the Kalima project that are available on its official website.²

Numbers and Statistics

The database shows 1,416 publications in total; if we therefore consider 16.5 years of activity, the average number of books published is around 86 annually (rounded up), somewhat less than Kalima's declared objective of publishing 100 new titles per year. In fact, the website is not always up to date, as previously pointed out by Benmessaoud and Buzelin, according to whom "the extent to which the Kalima program has lived up to its stated target is not clear," thus highlighting "a big problem that plagues research on translation into and from Arabic, namely the absence of accurate and current bibliographic data" (Benmessaoud and Buzelin 2018, 173). Therefore, all the data mentioned and processed in this article has been taken from the project's website and have also been supplemented by what we can consider secondary sources, in particular from Wikālat Anbā' al-Imārāt WAM (Emirates News Agency—WAM),³ the catalog of Maktabat Muḥammad bin Rāšid,⁴ and a number of Emirati newspapers such as *al-Ittiḥād*, *al-Bayān*, and *al-Ḥaliġ*.

1 This is an acronym for the four parameters—Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats—examined by the technique.

2 "Kalima Homepage," Kalima, <<https://kalima.ae/>>, last consultation July 26, 2024.

3 "Homepage," Emirates News Agency—WAM, <https://wam.ae>, last consultation August 17, 2024.

4 "Catalog—MBRL," Mohammed Bin Rashid Library, <<https://www.mbrl.ae/catalog>>, last consultation August 19, 2024.

It should be considered however that before 2007 there were already several institutions in the country translating works mainly from English and Persian, such as al-Mağma‘ al-Taqāfi in Abu Dhabi, the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi, and Mu‘assasat Muḥammad bin Rāšid al-Maktūm in Dubai. Nevertheless, the two-year period 2008–2009, immediately after the start of the Kalima project, marks an impressive increase in the number of books translated in the United Arab Emirates, as shown in the table on the UNESCO database—Statistics and Index Translationum. Unfortunately, however, the latest index data concerning the evolution of translation in the UAE dates back to 2009 without any subsequent updates.⁵

On the Kalima project website, we can find twelve different categories:

1. *Atfāl wa-nāšī‘a* (Children’s and Young People’s Literature);
2. *al-Adab* (Literature);
3. *al-Tārīḥ wa-l-ġūġurāfiyā wa-kutub al-sīra* (History, Geography and Biography books);
4. *al-Diyānāt* (Religions);
5. *al-Riḥlāt* (Travel Books);
6. *al-‘Ulūm al-iġtimā‘iyya* (Social Sciences);
7. *al-‘Ulūm al-ṭabī‘iyya wa-l-daḡīqa* (Natural and Exact Sciences);
8. *al-Falsafa wa-‘ilm al-nafs* (Philosophy and Psychology);
9. *al-Funūn wa-l-al‘āb al-riyāḍiyya* (Arts and Sports);
10. *al-Luġāt* (Languages);
11. *al-Mā‘ārif al-‘amma* (General Knowledge);
12. *Turāt wa-Tārīḥ al-Imārāt wa-l-Ḥaliġ al-‘arabī* (Heritage and History of the Emirates and the Arabian Gulf).

Presented here is a pie chart (Figure 14.1 “Books translated in the Kalima project”) that visually demonstrates the distribution of the twelve categories.

“Literature” (which includes both literary works and essays on literary criticism) is the category with the highest number of translations (41%), followed significantly by “Children’s literature” (19%) and the considerably smaller “History, Geography and Biography” (9%). Since children’s literature is a literary genre (for more information on children’s literature in the UAE, see Gjylbegaj 2019), we can safely say that 60% of the books translated under the Kalima

5 “Index translationum,” UNESCO Culture Sector, <<https://www.unesco.org/xtrans/bsstatexp.aspx>>, last consultation: July 20, 2024.

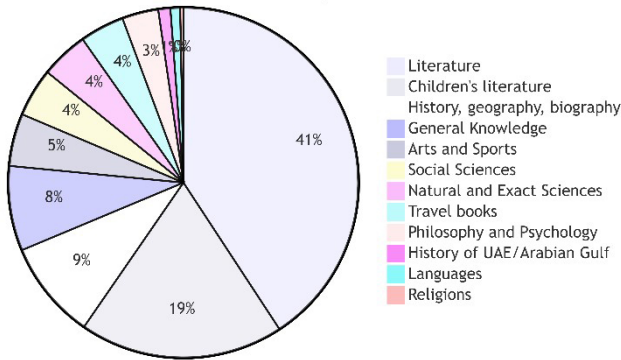


Figure 14.1. Books translated in the Kalima project.

project are literature related. It is also worth remarking that “Religions” remains the least translated category of texts.

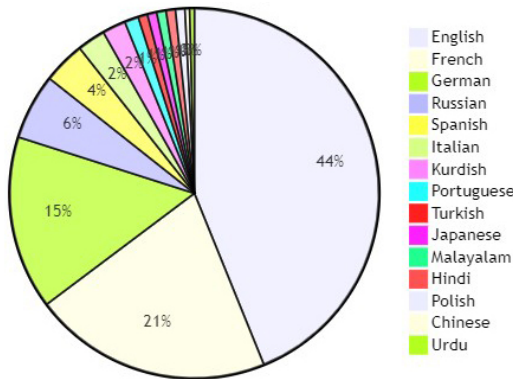


Figure 14.2. Source languages.

As can be seen from the second pie chart (Figure 14.2 “Source languages”), there are currently fifteen languages from which texts have been translated, namely Chinese, English, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Kurdish, Malayalam, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, and Urdu. English (44%) occupies the lion’s share of the source languages, followed by French (21%). Both languages also serve as pivot languages, especially in the first years of the project’s translation activities. Then, due to the importance of translating directly from the source language, the Kalima project signed cooperation agreements with some of the world’s leading scholarly foundations in order to develop the idea of translation

into a process that takes place between two international institutions. For example, Kalima signed agreements for German in March 2009 with Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, for Italian in July 2009 with the Carlo Alfonso Nallino Institute for the Orient, based in Rome (concerning Italian literature translated by the Kalima project into Arabic see Diana 2010, Elmenfi 2022, Abdelmontaleb 2023), for Japanese in May 2023 with the Japan Foundation and, most recently, an agreement for Chinese was reached with China International Communications Group (CICG) in July 2024.

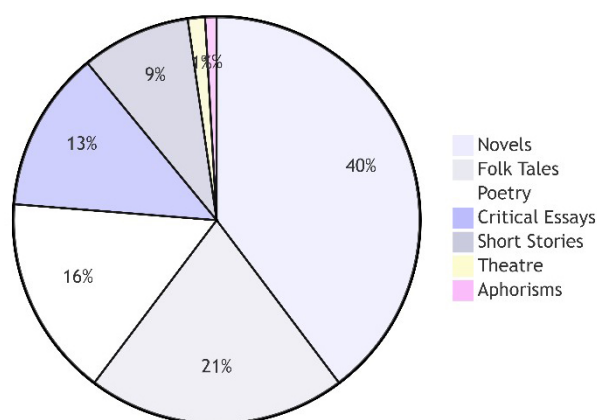


Figure 14.3. Genres.

Figure 14.3 indicates “Genres”: almost half of the translated books are novels (40%), with a good deal of interest also found in folk tales (21%) and poetry (16%). There are still very few translations of theatrical texts (1%), in the UAE, a country where the medium of theater has only taken hold very recently (Michalak-Pikulska 2012), and in addition to this, according to Tijani (2014, 129) “dramatic literature seems to be the least patronized literary genre by the Emiratis.”

Authors that have been translated so far by the Kalima project are listed here. This table does not include children’s literature nor critical studies:

American writers Ai Ogawa (born Florence Anthony); Billy Collins; Junot Díaz; William Faulkner; Louise Gluck; Denis Johnson; Ted Kooser; Jhumpa Lahiri; Dorianne Laux; Denise Levertov; Solomon Northup; Robert M. Pirsig; Sylvia Plath; Marilynne Robinson; Sarah Ruhl; Anne Sexton; Charles Simić; Danielle Steel; Mark Twain; Michael Weaver

Ancient literature	<i>On the Sublime</i> (in Greek); <i>Rāmāyaṇa</i> (in Sanskrit); <i>Aeneid</i> (in Latin); <i>Snorra Edda</i> by Snorri Sturluson (old Norse literature)
Arab authors writing in French	Abdelhak Serhane, and some critical essays on the francophone literature from the Maghreb
Austrian writers	Daniel Glattauer; Peter Handke; Paulus Hochgatterer; Walter Kappacher; Michael Köhlmeier; Hans Platzgumer; Teresa Präauer; Rainer Maria Rilke; Arthur Schnitzler
British writers	Kingsley Amis; J. G. Ballard; Elias Canetti ⁶ ; George Eliot; Joanna Kavenna; John Milton; William Shakespeare; Ali Smith
Chinese writers	Shěn Cóngwén; Dài Sījié; Cáo Yǔ; and a Dictionary of Chinese Literature.
Czech writers	Stanislav Biler
Dutch writers	Kader Abdolah; Multatuli
French writers	Charles Baudelaire; Michel Butor; Albert Camus; Simone de Beauvoir; Edmond de Goncourt; François de La Rochefoucauld; Guy de Maupassant; Gérard de Nerval; Alexandre Dumas père; Jean Echenoz; Maxence Fermine; Gustave Flaubert; Théophile Gautier; Jean Giono; Victor Hugo; Joris-Karl Huysmans; Jules Laforgue; Lautréamont; Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio; André Miquel; Laurent Mauvignier; Jean-Marc Moura; Patrick Modiano; Marie Ndiaye; Marcel Proust; Olivier Rolin; Gao Xingjian; Émile Zola; and an Encyclopedia of French Poets as well as a collection of short stories
German writers	Kirsten Boie; Daniela Danz; Heinrich Heine; Svenja Leiber; Dea Loher; Paul Maar; Kai Meyer; Herta Müller; Ralf Rothmann; Joachim Sartorius; Ingo Schulze; Lutz Seiler; Christa Wolf; and an Anthology of German Poetry
German Austrian writers	Daniel Kehlmann
Indian writers	Amitav Ghosh; Qurratulain Hyder (Urdu); R. K. Narayan; Phanishwar Nath Renu; K. Satchidanandan; Seema Singh; Vandana Singh; Krishna Sobti; Perumbadavam Sreedharan; Kamala Surayya; M. T. Vasudevan Nair; and Anthology of Contemporary Kerala Poetry as well as a Dictionary of Indian Literatures

6 Elias Canetti was a German-language writer born in Bulgaria. He became a British citizen in 1952.

Italian writers	Carmine Abate; Sergio Atzeni; Gesualdo Bufalino; Cristiano Cavina; Grazia Deledda; Umberto Eco; Fulvio Ervas; Elena Ferrante; Giacomo Leopardi; Carlo Levi; Eugenio Montale; Cesare Pavese; Ermanno Rea; Roberto Saviano, and an introduction to Italian literature (by Peter Hainsworth and David Robey)
Japanese writers	Fumiko Hayashi; Daisaku Ikeda; Mitsuyo Kakuta; Tetsuo Miura; Miyuki Miyabe; Haruki Murakami; Bunroku Shishi; Natsume Sōseki; Rika Yokomori, and a Dictionary of Japanese Literature
Kurdish writers	Selahattin Bulut (Turkey); Jan Dost (Syria); Hesenê Metê (Turkey)
Latin-American writers	Jorge Amado (Brazil); Mario Benedetti (Uruguay); Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina); Carlos Liscano (Uruguay); Augusto Monterroso (Guatemala); Julio Ramón Ribeyro (Peru); and a selection of Brazilian poets as well as an introduction on Modern Latin-American Literature
Polish writers	Czesław Miłosz; Wojciech Żukrowski
Portuguese writers	Fernando Pessoa
Russian-language writers	Leonid Nikolaevič Andreev; Ivan Alekseevič Bunin; Kanta Ibragimov; Aleksey Ivanov; Zachar Prilepin; Michail Evgrafovič Saltykov-Ščedrin; Aleksey Tolstoj; Ivan Turgenev; Aleksey Varlamov; Andrej Volos, and a selection of Russian short stories
South-African writers	Nadine Gordimer
Spanish writers	Miguel de Unamuno; Don Juan Manuel; Luis García Montero; José Maria Merino
Swedish writers	Gunnar Ekelöf; Henning Mankell
Swiss writers	Lukas Bärfuss; Eugène; Franz Hohler; Ilma Rakusa
Turkish writers	Serkan Özburun; Işık Sükan; and an anthology of Turkish short stories by Tarık Dursun and Rıfat Ilgaz et al.

As shown by the histogram (Figure 14.1—“The most translated authors”), the most translated author is Patrick Modiano (Nobel Prize winner for Literature in 2014) with six novels translated into Arabic: *Sirk yamurr* [Un cirque passe], *Şibya tayyibün* [De si braves garçons], *Daftar al-‘ā’ila* [Livret de famille], *Min*

aqāṣī al-nisyan [Du plus loin de l'oubli], *Sulāla* [Un pedigree], *Ḥādīṭ laylī* [Accident nocturne], all published between 2015 and 2016.

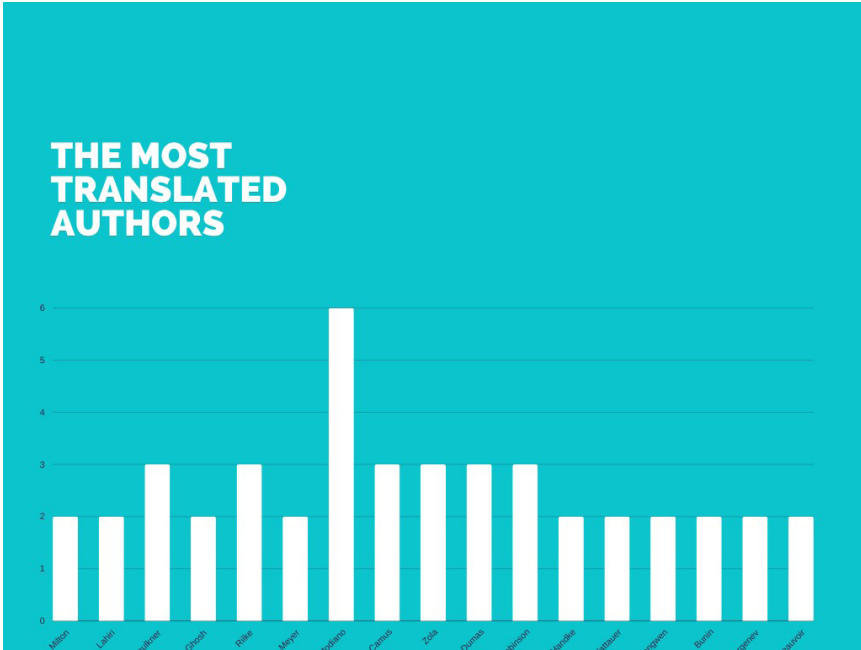


Figure 14.4. The most translated authors.

Needs

Regarding the first major translation movement in the Abbasid Baghdad, Dimitri Gutas in his compelling work entitled *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (1998) wonders which works were translated into Arabic and why some works of Greek, Persian, and Indian heritage were translated, while others were overlooked. Why did the Abbasid caliph commission the first Arabic translation of Aristotle's *Topics*, based on a Syriac intermediary, and a century later *Topics* was retranslated into Arabic from the original Greek, and fifty years after that yet another translation was produced? Why this great interest in precisely translating Aristotle's *Topics*? Gutas explains the existence of these multiple translations on the basis of a need. In fact, in the early Abbasid period, Muslims found in the Jews and Christians some formidable intellectual opponents with centuries of experience in interfaith debate. For this reason, they realized that they needed a handbook in Arabic that would teach them the art of argumentation and disputation (*ǧadal* in Arabic).

As for the translation movement that took place during the Nahḍa, it served at the very beginning bureaucratic and technological needs for a speedy modernization of Muḥammad ‘Alī’s Egypt in the hope of closing the gap with the West and achieving progress (Abu-Lughod 1963). At a second stage, it served the project of language reform and the expansion of journalism (Selim 2019).

So, what are today’s needs? Why have certain texts been translated or retranslated by the Kalima project? What is the common thread that holds such an arbitrary group of translated texts and authors together? Who selects the books? Who chooses the texts most worthy of being translated?

Researchers, intellectuals and academic partnerships from all over the world feed Kalima with suggestions and ideas for new translations. A book, before being selected, is cross-checked against existing translated works, grouped into a genre and studied by the Kalima committee (Seaman 2010; Snir 2017, 64).

Brown (2010, 147) frankly admits that he cannot find a way to make sense of this collection because “it reads like a selection of texts that were picked arbitrarily from the reading lists of the entire course catalog at a decent, comprehensive university.”

What lies behind this list of authors and titles?

As Umberto Eco teaches us in *La Vertigine della Lista (The Infinity of Lists)*—a work that was also translated in 2013 within the Kalima project under the title *Lā nihā’iyyat al-Qawā’im*—lists can also be read in another way, for example to deform, to express the excess or destruction of an order, especially when it comes to chaotic lists, which are assemblages of things with no apparent relationship to one another:

[Possono] suggerire abbondanza, colmare il bisogno di *kolossal*, mostrare non una sola immagine affascinante ma molte, moltissime [...], così come i potenti di un tempo si adornavano con cascate di gioielli. Così, la tecnica dell’elenco non mette in forse alcun ordine del mondo, anzi vuole riconfermare che l’universo dell’abbondanza e dei consumi rappresenta l’unico modello di società ordinate. (Eco 2009, 353)

[They can] suggest abundance, show not just one fascinating image but many, many [...], just as the mighty adorned themselves with cascades of jewels. Thus, the list technique does not call into question any order of the world, rather it wants to reconfirm that the universe of abundance and consumption represents the only model of an ordered society.

In short, such lists can be understood merely as a huge collection of literary works. What is the objective of this Kalima project then? Is it merely another tool to enhance Abu Dhabi’s image as that of a high-end luxury environment?

Perhaps some answers can be found in the paratextual elements of the published volumes (for a definition of paratextuality, see Genette 1987, 11), in both categories of peritext (located close to the text, in the book, i.e., prefaces, titles, notes, etc.) and epitext (originally outside the book, i.e., interviews, reviews, publicity announcements, etc.). Unfortunately, there are few translations containing introductions edited by translators providing important information not just limited to a simple biography of the author translated.

Among the many texts consulted, we consider the following example to be particularly worthy of attention because of its preface and introduction: the book *Fi l-Ġalāl* [On the Sublime], the Arabic version of the treatise entitled Περὶ Ὑψους by an unknown author, conventionally referred to as Longinus or Pseudo-Longinus. In its foreword (*tawṭīʿ* at *al-mutarġim*), the translator ʿAdnān Ḥālid ʿAbd Allāh, a scholar from the University of Sharjah who deeply studied the theory of translation during the Abassid era (Abdulla 2021), explains why he chose to translate precisely the Greek treatise *On the Sublime*:

يمكن أن يُعدّ كتاب لونجين «في الجلال» أول وثيقة أدبية وأخطرها تؤرخ للتقابل بين الفكر النقدي اليوناني والنظرية الشعرية العربية قبل ما يقرب من ألف وسبعمائة عام، عندما التقى لونجين ذو الأصول العربية والثقافة الإغريقية الواسعة والذي بلغ حدا من العلم والمعرفة حتى أن معاصريه أطلقوا عليه لقب «المتحف المتنقل» في بلاط زنوبية—ملكة تدمر—بحضارات وآداب متنوعة ومدهشة.

Perhaps the book *On the Sublime* by Longinus is the first and most significant literary testimony that chronicles the encounter between Greek critical thought and Arabic poetic theory nearly 1,700 years ago, at a time when Longinus, who had Arab origins and had such a vast Greek culture that his contemporaries nicknamed him “a walking museum,” encountered different, wonderful civilisations and literatures at the court of Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra. (ʿAbd Allāh 2009, 7)

Thus, based on this account, we realize that the translator moves the history of contact between Greek culture and Arabic literature further back, long before the Abbasid translation movement, through the bridging figure of the Neoplatonist philosopher Cassius Longinus.

According to the scholar, Longinus, a close advisor to Zenobia, was both *dū l-uṣūl al-ʿarabiyya* [of Arab origins] and *dū l-taqāfa al-iġriqiyya al-wāsiʿa* [with extensive knowledge of Greek culture]: the first element is justified by the fact that he was born in 213 AD in Emesa, an ancient city in Syria built near the Assyrian city of Qadesh in the area of present-day Homs; the second, because he was educated in Alexandria and appears to have taught in Athens.

On the Sublime, sometimes referred to as *The High Effect in Literature*, is one of the most important classical treatises on aesthetics and the effects of good writing.

Longinus, or rather Pseudo-Longinus, defines the “Sublime” as the loftiness and exceptionality of speech where the soul is elevated by nature under its impulse. For Longinus, the sublime is the supreme quality of all poetry and discourse, whereas its antipodes are represented by the category “mediocre” or “unsuccessful.”

‘Adnān Ḥālīd ‘Abd Allāh explains that he came up with the idea of translating this treatise by Longinus after publishing his own research (‘Abd Allāh 2000) entitled *Lunġīn wa-l-Ġurġānī: dirāsa tārīḥiyya muqārana* [Longinus and al-Ġurġānī: A Historical Comparative Study]. Instead of using the original Greek text, he translated *On the Sublime* through an English version and admits that he felt a deep sense of urgency to make the text available in Arabic:

وعلى الرغم أن الكتاب قد نقل إلى أكثر من مائة وعشرين لغة، وموضوعه أقرب ما يكون إلى الشعرية العربية، والحاجة أشد ما تكون إلى نقله إلى العربية قبل غيرها من اللغات لاحتمال تأثير لونغين بالشعر العربي، إلا أنه من المحزن أنه لم يترجم إلى العربية كاملاً قط!

Although the book has been translated into more than one hundred and twenty languages, and despite its subject matter being very close to Arabic poetry to the point that it should have been translated into Arabic even before all other languages because of the influence between Longinus and the Arabic poetry, it is disappointing that it was never translated into Arabic in its entirety! (‘Abd Allāh 2009, 8–9)

The last few words of this excerpt refer to the translation into Arabic made by Hayfā’ Hāšim of only a few chapters of Longinus’ treatise. ‘Adnān Ḥālīd ‘Abd Allāh also points out that there is another motivation behind his translation choice:

ولعل أهم سبب دفعني إلى ترجمة هذا الكتاب المهم هو الأمل الذي يحدوني في أن يقوم بعض الباحثين بدراسته دراسة معمقة لإلقاء الضوء على نقاط التشابه والاختلاف بين البلاغة الإغريقية والعربية، ومن ثم المساهمة في المناقشات والجدل الدائر حالياً حول تلاقح وانتقال الأفكار وتفاعل المفاهيم الشعرية العربية واليونانية.

Perhaps the greatest reason that prompted me to translate this important book is the hope that scholars will one day study it in depth to shed light on the points of similarity and difference between Greek and Arabic rhetoric, and thus contribute to the ongoing debate and discussion on the cross-pollination and transmission of ideas and the interaction of Arabic and Greek poetic concepts. (‘Abd Allāh 2009, 13)

After the foreword, ‘Adnān Ḥālīd ‘Abd Allāh inserts an introduction [*muqaddima*], where he acknowledges the Kalima project for realizing the importance of Longinus’ treatise *li-l-taqāfa al-‘arabiyya al-mu‘āšira* [for contemporary Arabic culture].

Some leading Greek scholars now tend to date this treatise to AD 1 (see, for example, Guidorizzi 1991, 22–23), but, even if it were later and dated to the

third century AD, the crucial question is: what would this treatise have to offer contemporary Arabic literature?

Pseudo-Longinus analyses the mechanisms of greatness in literature and states that it essentially comes from five sources: i) the power of forming great conceptions; ii) vehement and inspired passion; iii) the due formation of figures; iv) a noble diction; and v) dignified and elevated composition. Therefore, ‘Abd Allāh’s translation and analysis are rightly part of the debate on aesthetics in Arab thought, from von Grunebaum (1952, 336) who stated that the Arabs did not have to follow the Platonic and Plotinian tradition to investigate the nature of the beautiful, to Harb (2020) defining the aesthetics of wonder for Arabic literature, which is very different from European conceptions of beauty and sublime.

In Europe, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Longinus’ text underwent an astonishing renaissance, because, by filling an emotional need that Aristotle’s *Poetics* did not have, any literary genre was evaluated according to Longinus criteria and there was no major theorist who did not make use of it (Giordanetti and Mazzocut-Mis 2005). In England, in particular, the debate on the sublime leads to the definition of a poetry that arouses passions and enthusiasm, the paradigm of which becomes John Milton (Vozar 2024) who deeply knew Longinus’ *On the Sublime* and recommended it for the literary education of youth (Teskey 2015, 411).

It is not by chance that the Kalima project, following the thread of the debate on the sublime, decided to publish or republish in 2009 the translation of two works by John Milton, namely *al-Firdaws al-Mafqūd* [Paradise Lost] and *‘Awdat al-Firdaws* [Paradise Regained], both translated by the famous Egyptian dramatist and critic Muḥammad ‘Anānī (1939–2023), also nicknamed *ṣayḥ al-mutarǧimīn* [sheikh of the translators].

In his later renowned essay on style in translation, Muḥammad ‘Anānī expresses his deep interest in Longinus’ treatise due to the similarity of its views to many Arab ideas and suggests that it may have influenced the “Grand Style” in both Milton and in Shakespeare (Enani 2020, 123). Issa (2017) notes how skilfully ‘Anānī uses the poetic resources of classical and Koranic Arabic to render Miltonic language.

Why all this attention to the sublime and to the importance of the elevation of the language? Is this a purely linguistic need? As a matter of fact, in recent years, a debate on the vitality of Arabic has arisen among many Arab intellectuals who fear a possible decline of their language, under the pressure of dialects, external forces, and the appeal of foreign languages.

Standard Arabic is obviously the official language of the UAE, but as Jacquemond (2009, 20) states regarding this country, “although it has launched the latest and most ambitious Arabic translation program to date, any visitor to the region cannot but notice the subaltern status of the national language.” Many languages are used for communication because of a large non-Arab, non-national population. Among them, the first is English, which is used among educated people to the point that “Arabic, the autochthonous and official language of the territory, has practically been relegated to a minority language or second language, especially in the educated strata of society and the education system” (Siemund et al. 2021, 192), provoking Arabic-English code-switching phenomena especially in the speech of the younger generation. The second is the so-called Gulf Pidgin Arabic that is spoken by numerous incoming workers from the Indian sub-continent and Southeast Asia. In addition to these languages, hundreds of thousands of Asian workers speak Bengali, Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, and Urdu, a phenomenon that has been called “Asianization of the work force” (see Kapiszewski 2007).

Accordingly, the presence of so many foreign languages on the Emirati territory has created fear of a weakening Arabic language, a perception described by Suleiman (2014) as “Arab(ic) Language Anxiety” and as an exaggeration by Holes (2011, 144) considering that the reality is that Arabic is not dying but rather public exposure to and passive comprehension of the standard language, even among the older, less educationally advantaged generations, is increasing.

Translating *On the Sublime* is perhaps not a simple invitation to elevate the language, but to raise the spirit, with ethical implications that one of the largest newspapers in the Emirates, *al-Ittihād*, goes so far as to emphasize:

نقصد أن الحياة التي يعيشها الأديب يجب أن تكون مرتكزاً لنظريته الأدبية،
مهما كان مثالياً أو مهما كان واقعياً. فلا يجوز أن يقدم الأديب أدباً راقياً ويعيش حياة
منحطة ... بل أكثر من ذلك فقد حذر لونجينوس من أن التفكير السيئ في الأدب
ينعكس في حياة المرء نفسه، فالنبييل يجب أن يبقى نبيلاً في الحياة وفي الكتابة معاً.

We mean that the life that a writer lives must be the basis of his literary theory, no matter how idealistic or realistic it is. It is not permissible for a writer to present refined literature and live a decadent life ... More than that, Longinus warned that bad thinking in literature is reflected in the person's own life, for a noble person must remain noble in both life and writing. ('Abbūd 2019)

Moreover, Longinus is considered the illustrious ancestor of great Arab literary theorists such as ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Ġurġānī and especially Ḥāzīm al-Qarṭāġannī (d. 1285), the author of a remarkable work entitled *Minhāġ al-bulaġā’ wa-sirāġ*

al-udabā' [The Path of the Eloquent and the Lamp of Educated], that 'Abbūd (2019) describes as *tarğama ħurra li-kitāb Lūnğinūs* [a free translation of Longinus' book].

The author of *On the Sublime* believed that literature could mold a soul and vice versa; that a great soul could pour itself entirely into a work of art. The author seems to yearn for a kind of universal library to which only that which is indisputably great, and for that very reason unanimously admired, has access for all of eternity.

The Kalima project, in its desire to establish that universal library, wishes to lay the foundations for a cultural renaissance that is hoped will soon flourish in the Arab Gulf (see Langone 2023, 56).

Conclusions

The United Arab Emirates was founded in 1971: it is a very young country but, at the same time, it is also one of the fastest growing. From a cluster of villages surviving on pearl diving and fishing, a nation has emerged with a thriving art scene that is gaining international recognition. The Arabian Peninsula, especially the UAE, has now become the new center of gravity of Arab culture, or rather, in the words of Pascale Casanova (1999, *La République mondiale des Lettres*) the new "Greenwich Meridian" of Arabic literature. The UAE represents a real cultural experimentation laboratory and aspires to be the protagonist of the third largest and consciously organized translation movement in the Arab world, after the Bayt al-Ĥikma of Abbasid Baghdad and Cairo and Beirut during the Nahḍa period.

The term Renaissance is omnipresent in the Emirates press when mention is made of the Kalima project for translation. Here are just a few examples:

The project serves to advance the Emirate's role on the regional and international cultural scenes, setting the stage for a widespread Arab scientific and cultural *renaissance* built around books. (Emirates New Agency—WAM, November 30, 2022);

The Kalima Translation Project in 2007 with the aim of reviving the art of translation in the Arab world, supporting a vibrant literary ecosystem in Abu Dhabi and contributing to an Arab cultural *renaissance*. (Department of Culture and Tourism—Abu Dhabi, November 28, 2019);

واليوم، بعد مرور أكثر من عقد من الزمن على تلك البداية المدروسة، ها هو «كلمة» في أعين الكثيرين من نخبة هذا العالم من المثقفين والمفكرين والأدباء، نتاج تنموي معرفي رصين، وخطوة لاستعادة النهضة العلمية للأمة.

Today, more than a decade after that inspired beginning, here is “Kalima” in the eyes of many of this world’s elite of intellectuals, thinkers and writers, a solid cognitive development product, and a step towards restoring the nation’s scientific renaissance. (Laḥbib 2018)

As in the great periods of the Renaissance, the field of translatability has become unlimited: any text, of any genre, in any language, is now considered suitable for translation. The Renaissance was marked first and foremost by a massive increase in the volume of translations. Nevertheless, despite the apparent “*illimitation du champ de traduction*” (Berman 1988, 23), as in a carpet, all the details of the patterns are “readable,” meaning they are symbols of the values and wishes of its owner.

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Part Three: Asia as the Other

The Morality of Confucius on the European Stage: Between *Chinoiserie* and the Representation of “the Other”

ALESSANDRO TOSCO

In Western culture, the concept of the East has long been mythologized, dating back to antiquity when the Greeks defined their identity in opposition to the Asia of the Persians. This myth has evolved through various stages, particularly as Western knowledge of Asia expanded, resulting in a complex and multifaceted representation that resists a singular definition.

One significant interpretation of the East in Western culture transcends its geographical meaning, residing instead in the realm of the mind, detached from both space and time. Paul Valéry (1871–1945) aptly observed that the myth of the East often refers to a place one has never visited, but has come to know through images, narratives, or objects, often in vague and confusing ways (Valéry in Bezombes 1953, 8).

The perception of China among Enlightenment intellectuals in Europe, particularly during the *chinoiserie* craze, aligns closely with this notion. This trend encompassed not only artistic artifacts but also literary and theatrical works that permeated European courts (Hawkes 1989, 101–11).

This chapter explores the Western perception of Asia, particularly China, in the eighteenth century, focusing on how this perception was portrayed on the European stage following the first translation of a Chinese libretto into a Western language. The original work is *Zhaoshi gu'er* 趙氏孤兒 [*The Orphan*

of *Zhao*] by Ji Junxiang 紀君祥 (1234?–1279?). The Jesuit missionary Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare (1666–1736) partially translated it into French, titling it *Tchao chi cou ell, ou le Petit Orphelin de la Maison des Tchao*, published in 1735 in the *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise* edited by Jean Baptiste Du Halde (1674–1743).

Despite being incomplete, Prémare's translation sparked vivid interest in the cultural debates of the time, leading to a European fascination with “Chinese orphans.” This work inspired many European playwrights and librettists, who not only drew inspiration from it but also produced adaptations and rewritings. Among these were William Hatchett (1701–1760?), who wrote *The Chinese Orphan: An Historical Tragedy* in 1741, Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782), who composed the melodrama *L'eroe cinese* in 1752, Voltaire (1694–1778), who wrote *L'Orphelin de la Chine* in 1755, and Arthur Murphy (1727–1805), who composed *The Orphan of China* in 1756.

This chapter undertakes a preliminary analysis of these European rewritings by comparing them with the original Chinese libretto. It seeks to explore how China was perceived in Europe through these texts and their associated paratexts,¹ balancing between exoticism and the representation of “the other.” The analysis focuses on the works of Hatchett, Voltaire, and Murphy, which share common elements such as their classification as “tragedies” and the introduction of a female character—the orphan's mother—that is fairly marginal in the original Chinese text. This character, in each rewriting, shares the emotional burden of sacrificing a child with her husband.² The research aims to examine how traditional Chinese (i.e., Confucian) values were preserved and received in Europe and to determine whether China was merely an exotic backdrop for narratives imbued with more familiar Western content.

The Chinese Drama *Zhaoshi gu'er*

The original drama *Zhaoshi gu'er*, composed by Ji Junxiang, belongs to the “variety drama” (雜劇 *zaju*) genre, a theatrical form of the Yuan 元 dynasty (1271–1368),

1 For a general overview of these works, cf. Chen (1936, 89–115); Luo 羅 (1977, 373–4); Hsia (1988, 335–51); Wu 吳 (1996, 1–23); and Yu (2018, 144–71).

2 Metastasio's *L'eroe cinese* has been excluded from this analysis as it does not share these common elements. On the reception of this work in European culture, cf. De Rosa (2015, 338–46) and Tosco (2019, 191–213).

during the period of Mongol domination in China.³ Subsequently, during the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644), this libretto was published in the collection *Yuan qu xuan* 元曲選 [*Anthology of Yuan Sung Dramas*] edited by Zang Maoxun 藏懋循 (1550–1620) in 1616.

The work, divided into five acts and a prologue, has a highly intricate plot, spanning a period of twenty-five years. It narrates the story of a loyal minister (the apothecary Cheng Ying 程嬰), a treacherous general (Tu Anqu 屠岸賈), the preservation of an orphan—the Zhaoshi gu'er of the title, or Cheng Bo 程勃, and the ensuing revenge and retribution.⁴

Ji Junxiang's libretto, which traditional criticism has characterized as an authentic "Chinese tragedy" (中國悲劇 *Zhongguo beiju*; Wang 王 2014, 118), exalts the Confucian value of loyalty (忠 *zhong*) of a subordinate toward his lord (Idema 1988, 162–89). In an effort to ensure the safety of the last descendant of an exterminated hereditary lineage and to remain faithful to the trust bestowed upon him by the puerpera, the orphan's mother, Cheng Ying, a devoted and fearless servant of the Zhao family, decides not only to sacrifice his own son but also, against his will, drags other characters into a series of mournful events to fulfill his mission. For a Western audience, the story may appear grim, with bloody events narrated, yet all these sacrifices, made with stoic resolve—framed within a Confucian perspective—appeal to the deeper laws of social duty rather than personal will.

The drama is, therefore, primarily a celebration of personal loyalty, as demonstrated by several characters. In accordance with the conventions of Yuan theater, Cheng Ying is not the protagonist (正末 *zhengmo*) of the story, but rather the character who sets the entire action in motion. Present in every act, as the architect of the conspiracy aimed at safeguarding the last descendant of the Zhao family, he must face a series of dreadful trials, during which he demonstrates both self-control and clear awareness. To ensure the orphan's survival, he compels, against his will, three characters to commit suicide: the puerpera, General Han Jue 韓厥, and the elderly and faithful Gongsun Chujiu 公孫杵臼. His persuasive power is so effective because he is the first to agree to sacrifice not only his own life but also that of his newborn baby.

Gongsun Chujiu, on the other hand, demonstrates great resolve by proving himself a true-hearted accomplice and agreeing to carry out a noble and just mission—an exaltation of the Confucian value of 義 *yi*: righteousness, justice, equity—regardless of the cost. However, it is the determination with which Cheng

3 On *zaju*, cf. Crump (1990); Liao 廖 and Liu 刘 (2013, II, 2–203).

4 For recent English translations of the work, cf. Hsia, Li, and Kao (2014, 20–55), West and Idema (2015, 73–111).

Ying declares his readiness to sacrifice himself and his own son that motivates his friend to embrace this cause and decide to take his own life.

Thus, through the immolation of an infant and three suicides, the playwright reaches the pinnacle of pathos associated with the tireless pursuit of loyalty. Above all, it is Cheng Ying who demonstrates that the sacrifices, of which he is in some way the instigator, were not in vain.⁵

The most poignant scene in the work is when Cheng Ying is forced to witness the killing of his newborn baby. Ji Junxiang narrates the cruel event in the third act with these lines:

(卒子抱孩兒上科，云) 元帥爺賀喜，土洞中搜出個趙氏孤兒來了也。(屠岸賈笑科。云) 將那小的拿近前來，我親自下手，剝做三段。兀那老匹夫，你道無有趙氏孤兒，這個是誰？[...](正末唱)【七弟兄】我只見他左瞧、左瞧、怒咆哮，火不騰改變了猙獰貌，按獅蠻拽剝起錦征袍，把龍泉扯離出沙魚鞘。(屠岸賈怒云)我拔出這劍來。一劍，兩劍，三劍。(程嬰做驚疼科，屠岸賈云)把這一個小業種剝了三劍，兀的不稱了我平生所願也。(正末唱)【梅花酒】呀！見孩兒臥血泊。那一個哭哭號號，這一個怨怨焦焦，連我也戰戰搖搖。[...](收江南)呀！兀的不是家富小兒驕。(程嬰掩淚科)(正末唱)見程嬰心似熱油澆，淚珠兒不敢對人拋，背地裏搵了。沒來由割捨的親生骨肉吃三刀。

(*Soldier enters, carrying child in his arms, speaks:*) Congratulations, Marshal! We discovered the Orphan of Zhao in a hole in the ground. (*Tu'an Gu acts out laughing, speaks:*) Bring that little one over here. I will hack him into three pieces with my own hand. You old fella, do you still say there is no Orphan of Zhao? So who is this? [...]

(*Tu'an Gu speaks:*) When I see this Orphan, I can't help but get angry.

(*Male lead sings:*) (*Qi dixiong*) All I see is him glance left, / Glance right, and bellow in rage, / A fiery redness alters his hideous and vicious features. / Over his lion-buckle belt he lifts the brocade battle gown / And draws his Dragon Spring sword from its sharkskin sheath.

(*Tu'an Gu speaks in a rage:*) I've drawn my sword. One stroke! Two strokes! Three strokes! (Cheng Ying acts out being startled and pained. *Tu'an Gu speaks:*) I have hacked this little seed of disaster into three pieces. Haven't I achieved my lifelong desire?

(*Male lead sings:*) (*Meihua jiu*) Ah! / I see the child lying in a puddle of blood! / That one weeping and wailing, / This one fuming with rage. / And even I tremble and shake. / [...](*Shou Jiangnan*) Ah, / Isn't this a case of "If the family is rich, the child is pampered"? (*Cheng Ying acts out covering his tears.*) (*Male lead sings:*) I see Cheng Ying, his heart as if scalded by boiling oil, / Not daring to shed a single teardrop in front of others, But

5 For a detailed analysis of the drama, cf. Falaschi (2015, LX–LXXVII); Wang in Sieber and Llamas (2022, 127–50).

behind their backs wiping them all away. / Without reason he parted with his own flesh
and blood merely to see it cut in three!⁶

Appealing to the Confucian principle that a man noble of spirit (君子 *junzi*) realizes himself in the public/social context (公 *gong*) rather than the private/personal one (私 *si*), Cheng Ying accepts that his son, flesh of his flesh, be sacrificed in the name of loyalty (*zhong*) to the Zhao household. However, the scene places the audience before a father who helplessly witnesses, without betraying any emotion, the dismemberment of his infant's body. It is no coincidence that the playwright includes a stage direction (科 *ke*) indicating that the apothecary struggles to hold back the tears that seem to be on the verge of flowing: 程嬰掩淚 *Cheng Ying yan lei*. This scene will soon be analyzed in relation to Prémare's translation and its adaptations in subsequent rewritings.

The French Translation by Prémare

The Chinese drama, translated into French by Prémare and published in the encyclopedic work *Description* edited by Du Halde, another French Jesuit, was introduced to the xenophile European audience for the first time in 1735.⁷ As previously noted, this translation is devoid of all the sung arias present in the original text and contains numerous mistranslations. The Yuan dramas are in fact composed of alternating sections of recited vernacular language and arias in *qu* 曲 lines, sung in an elegant literary language. Prémare translated only the sections in vernacular language, omitting all the arias intended for singing and merely noting this omission with the gloss “Il chante.” In the *Avertissement*, written by Du Halde, this choice is justified with the following words:

Il y a des pièces dont les chansons sont difficiles à entendre, surtout aux Européens, parce qu'elles sont remplies d'allusions à des choses qui nous sont inconnues, & de figures dans le langage, dont nous avons peine à nous apercevoir [...]. (Prémare in Du Halde 1736, III, 420–1)

For Prémare, the decision to omit the arias was therefore dictated by the difficulty of conveying the lyrics to the European audience. However, this omission is significant, as the literary value of a *zaju* drama lies precisely in the sung lines that

6 The analysis of the drama was conducted on the text contained in: Ji 紀 (1958, IV, 1476–98; 89). The English translation is taken from: West and Idema (2015, 73–111; 96–7).

7 For a detailed analysis of this translation, cf. Criscuolo (2021, 309–48).

compose it. In fact, as R. Étienne observed (1989, II, 147), the arias in Yuan dramas hold the same value as the chorus in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. The loss is even more unjustified in light of what Prémare himself states regarding the value that the singing sections hold in a Chinese play (Prémare in Du Halde 1736, III, 420). To demonstrate the impact of this omission on the European reception of the drama, we present Prémare's translation of the original text mentioned earlier:

UN SOLDAT: Monseigneur, bonnes nouvelles: en cherchant dans une cave de la maison, on a trouvé l'Orphelin.

TOU NGAN COU éclate de rire: Qu'on m'apporte ici ce misérable avorton, pour que je le voye, et que j'aye le plaisir de le mettre moi-même en pièces. Hé bien, vieux scélérat, tu disois que tu n'avois point caché le petit Tchao; qu'est-ce donc que je tiens? [...] La vûë de cet enfant excite ma colère. (*Kong lun chante. Le Tyran ait*) Je prends ce poignard, un coup, deux coups, trois coups; (*Tching yng est faisi de douleur*) je prends ce maudit rejetton, & je lui enfonce par trois fois le poignard dans le cœur: me voilà au comble de mes désirs. (*Kong lun chante, & exprime ses regrets, Tching yng cache ses larmes*). (Prémare in Du Halde 1736, III, 446)

As one can easily observe, the absence of arias prevents the reader from fully grasping the inner turmoil of Cheng Ying, which is narrated in the original text through the lines sung by Gongsun Chujiu, a name transliterated here as Kong lun. The heart-wrenching pain experienced by the apothecary is reduced to mere stage directions, losing the emotional depth conveyed in the original.

Before analyzing the European rewritings inspired by this first translation of a Chinese libretto, it is essential to understand why Prémare chose to present *Zhao-shi gu'er* to a Western audience. One primary explanation is that the themes of loyalty and self-sacrifice exemplified in the drama must have greatly attracted the Jesuit missionaries, who viewed these as noble examples of Chinese virtue, worthy of being shared with their own people. However, there is more to this choice. In the subtitle of his translation, Prémare describes it as a “tragédie chinoise,” even though, as Du Halde points out in the introduction, quoting Prémare himself:

Les Chinois [...] ne distinguent point comme nous, entre tragédies & comédies. On a intitulé celle-ci tragédie, parce qu'elle a paru assez tragique; [...]. (Prémare in Du Halde 1736, III, 420)

Therefore, although traditional Chinese theater does not clearly distinguish between the genres of tragedy and comedy, this drama, among the various *zaju*

of the Yuan dynasty, appears to align with the Western tragic genre in terms of content and plot. It may lack the unity of place, time, and action, but the plot does nevertheless share what Western culture defines as “tragedy”: the sacrifice of an innocent child and the killing of a loving parent by a vengeful. Furthermore, the narrative, set among the noble classes, is filled with painful and bloody scenes. The work, with its focus on infanticide, has been compared to Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* trilogy (Tosco 2020, 168–82). Undoubtedly, the presence of these “tragic” elements played a significant role in the success of Prémare’s translation in Europe. However, it is important to note that the omission of the sung arias influenced the perception of this Chinese libretto in Europe, leading to its misinterpretation as more akin to the genre of tragedy rather than opera or melodrama.

In any case, in the eighteenth century, the translation of a Chinese play did not stem from a genuine desire to understand the theater of that country but rather from the need to better comprehend and evoke Chinese civilization. At that time, European philosophers contrasted Catholicism with an idealized Confucian humanism, founded not on revelation and dogma but on reason and natural morality, which inspired a just and equitable society. Consequently, following the myth of the “noble savage,” the myth of the “wise Chinese” flourished with similar intentions. The discovery of a refined and advanced culture in Asia fostered the development of a cosmopolitan spirit. Chinese antiquity, supposedly even greater than it actually was, provided French philosophers with arguments to question the biblical account of human history’s origins and, consequently, the authority of Revelation (Borsa 1977, 83). The European rewritings of this Chinese libretto must be understood within this social and cultural context.

The Chinese Orphan by Hatchett

Following Prémare’s translation, the first play inspired by Ji Junxiang’s libretto was composed in English by William Hatchett. In 1741, he published his rewriting of the Chinese drama in London, entitled *The Chinese Orphan: An Historical Tragedy Altered from a Specimen of the Chinese Tragedy in Du Halde’s History of China, Interspersed with Songs, After the Chinese Manner*. The work, divided into five acts, is a sentimental drama in blank verse that adheres to the unity of time. It assumes that the actors sing arias in the Chinese style—though these have nothing in common with either the form or the content of those in *Zhaoshi gu’er*—but to the rhythm of European music. Here lies a paradox: Prémare’s translation had omitted the original sung arias, thus affecting the reception of the libretto in Europe.

The adaptation inspired by this translation included sung sections; these lines, nevertheless, hold little interest for either the English or the Chinese audiences.

The drama contains political references, as it seems Hatchett wrote his play to create a pamphlet, disguising the action with harangues in which he expounds political opinions irrelevant to the story. Critics have claimed that the play, which was probably never staged, was directed against Sir Robert Walpole (1676–1745), the first Prime Minister in British history. This can be inferred from the dedication to the Duke of Argyle, Walpole’s political enemy (Hatchett 1741, VI; Liu 1953, 204; Hsia 1988, 339–40).

Reading the work, it becomes evident that Hatchett’s knowledge of China was very limited, apart from a few historical figures whose echoes remain in the names of the protagonists. In his rewriting, the orphan is called Camhy, which, according to the transcription of the time, refers to Kangxi 康熙 (1654–1722), the great emperor of the Manchu Qing 清 dynasty (1644–1911). The loyal minister Gongsun Chujiu of the original libretto became Laotseu, i.e., Laozi 老子 (circa sixth century BC), the famous thinker of the pre-imperial period belonging to the Daoist school (道家 *Daojia*). Furthermore, it seems Hatchett had some knowledge of General Wu Sangui 吳三桂 (1612–78) and made his name an unlikely phonetic transcription into a single word for a new character: Ousanguee, a friend of Kifang. The latter is a transposition of the character of Chen Ying from Ji Junxiang’s libretto. The names of the other characters, such as Siako for Tu’An Gu or Lyping, the wife of Kifang—another new character—further demonstrate the lack of attention Hatchett paid to accuracy in Chinese history. The playwright altered the Chinese names to imaginary ones, with vague assonances to Turkish-Mongolian or Persian words. These names seem inspired by a well-established theatrical tradition of “barbarian” names, which must have seemed more familiar to a European audience than the abstruse Chinese sounds.

Regarding the plot, the driving force is no longer Kifang (i.e., Cheng Ying in the original libretto) who contributed substantially to the orphan’s final revenge, but Siako, a ruthless politician. While Tu’An Gu was an evil general eager to destroy his rival’s family, Siako is instead portrayed as a more complex character, embodying all the flaws of a careerist politician like Sir Walpole. One of the major changes Hatchett introduced is the reduction of the unity of time. In the Chinese source, about twenty years pass between the third and fourth acts. During this time, the orphan Cheng Bo grows into a young adult, ready to take revenge. However, in the rewriting, Camhy remains a minor and plays no decisive role. The theme of revenge is therefore significantly diminished. Siako,

on the other hand, meets the fate he deserves and perishes, but more due to his political failure than a family feud.

New characters are also introduced in the adaptation, such as the aforementioned Lyping, Kifang's wife. Perhaps to be consistent with the title of the work ("An Historical Tragedy"), Hatchett introduced the character of Lyping to represent a scene full of pathos, in which she is desperate to recover her child after discovering that he has been taken away by her husband and replaced with the orphan:

LYPING: As soon persuade me there's no pangs in childbirth;
I wo' not be deceived! I you want to substitute
The favorite brat your heir; barbarous man!
But by the Gods he shall not be so served!
I'll make all China echo with my wrongs;
And strait will lay my grievance fore the Throne. [...]
Lawless authority is still unbinding!
You shall not force me to desert my child:
He has no other advocate but me!
Left unprotected by a cruel father.
Here, take your changeling! [...] (Hatchett 1741, act III, scene 1, 30)

Her desperation is understandable: she appeals to her deepest maternal feelings. However, Kifang, asserting his paternal affection, explains to her that this is for a noble and just cause:

KIFANG: [...] Nor call in question my paternal feeling,
Unknowing the severity o' the cause
Has taken from us our last pledge of love!
Witness ye Gods! I bear him strong affection! [...]
Thou haft not hear the inhuman, savage edict,
Which dooms the infants male, from six months under,
All to be sacrificed in three days spate.
On learning this, I strait exchanged our dear one!
The motive was a glorious one, believe me!
I found a father proper for my purpose; [...] (Hatchett 1741, act III, scene 1, 30–1)

After listening to her husband's arguments, Lyping understands and conforms to Kifang's will:

LYPING: Is he then changed to save him from destruction!
Artful to screen him from the general havoc!
I'm all over scarlett at my keen reproaches!

O pardon this first frailty of your wife!

This sudden transport of maternal fondness! (Hatchett 1741, act III, scene 1, 31)

However, the dialogue between husband and wife contributes little to the plot; in fact, Lyping no longer appears on stage. This scene is completely absent in Ji Junxiang's work, simply because, in traditional Chinese culture, women were excluded from social issues and public life (外 *wai*), confined within the domestic walls (内 *nei*) (Goldin 2000, 133–61). It would therefore have been unthinkable for a Chinese audience to witness a scene in which the wife complains to her husband, Cheng Ying.

The analysis of the play, therefore, demonstrates that China is considered only as an exotic setting for a story that has little to do with the original values of revenge and final retribution. However, there is also a gratifying reflection on the benefits that Chinese drama, filtered through Prémare's translation, can bring to European theater (Hatchett 1741, VI).

***L'Orphelin de la Chine* by Voltaire**

Voltaire's tragedy is a reimagining of Ji Junxiang's libretto and was first performed in 1755 at the Comédie Française in Paris. The work's subject matter is purportedly inspired by that of Metastasio, of whom Voltaire was a fervent admirer. Although in a letter dated May 21, 1755, Voltaire firmly clarified that his work had nothing in common with *L'eroe cinese* (Voltaire 1785, XXXVIII, 377), two elements seem strongly influenced by the Italian librettist's text: the setting, which takes place during the Yuan dynasty under Tatar domination, and the episode involving the sacrifice of a son by a loyal subject to save the heir to the Chinese throne. However, there are also substantial differences. In Metastasio's libretto, Chinese civilization and customs serve as an exotic backdrop, whereas Voltaire intended to place these elements at the heart of the plot. Furthermore, it seems that the French playwright was unaware of Hatchett's tragedy, as Hatchett's name is never mentioned in his correspondence.

Unlike Ji Junxiang's libretto, Voltaire transposes the characters to the era of the Yuan dynasty and replaces the treacherous Tu'an Gu with Genghis Khan (1162–1227), the formidable Mongolian leader. The text, divided into five acts, features a fairly simple plot. After the conquest of Cambalau (北京 Beijing), the Chinese imperial family is annihilated, except for an infant heir who is hidden by the mandarin Zamti and his wife Idamé. Genghis Khan, now the emperor, demands the orphan's death. To save the last descendant of the dynasty, Zamti, without

informing his wife, substitutes their newborn son. Idamé, driven by maternal love rather than patriotism, rescues her child. The enraged Khan captures Zamti and Idamé, but he is moved by Idamé's willingness to die for her family. He promises clemency if Idamé marries him, but she chooses death over betrayal. Ultimately, Genghis Khan's admiration for their virtue leads him to pardon them.

As can be observed, Voltaire retains very little of the original drama's intrigue. Firstly, as with Hatchett's work, he changes the Chinese names to "barbarian" ones. Only Zamti seems to approximate a phonetic transcription of Shangdi 上帝, the Lord on High (Étiemble 1989, II, 182; Chang 2015, 75). In terms of content, the French playwright maintains the original idea of substituting the orphan with the son of the loyal subject, but he does not preserve the sacrifice. Like Hatchett, Voltaire introduces a female character, Idamé, who refuses to allow her son to be sacrificed in the name of natural law and is prepared to die with her husband rather than become the consort of the Tartar invader. Unlike Lyping in the English rewriting, however, Zamti's wife plays a significant role in the tragedy. Furthermore, Voltaire places love at the center of the work as the principle of moral elevation for the barbarian conqueror, unlike the Chinese libretto where loyalty and revenge dominate. Finally, he venerates Genghis Khan as a benevolent figure, who is ultimately won over by the virtues of the people he subjugated. This aspect is highlighted in the introductory letter that Voltaire dedicated to the Maréchal Duc de Richelieu (1696–1788) (Voltaire 1785, IV, 272).

It is evident that, with *L'Orphelin de la Chine*, Voltaire drew inspiration from a Chinese drama only to create a French tragedy in the style of the eighteenth century, leaving very little of China in the process. However, he sought to place China itself at the center of the narrative. Indeed, Chinese customs and virtues not only define the plot—Zamti's loyalty, which compels him to sacrifice his son, mirrors the Confucian virtue of *zhong* in Cheng Ying—but also drive the events, as Genghis Khan's final clemency appears not as an assertion of sovereign superiority but as the "conversion" of the barbarian conqueror to the values of Chinese civilization represented by Zamti and Idamé.

Nevertheless, it is neither from *Zhaoshi gu'er* nor from *L'eroe cinese* that Voltaire derived this idea of the conversion of the barbarian. He drew it primarily from the tragedy *Polyeucte* (1643) by Pierre Corneille (1606–1684) and other contemporary French dramas of the period, where the superiority of Christian virtues, embodied by the hero-martyr, led to the "enlightenment" of the pagan characters (Falaschi 2005, 499).

In light of these considerations, it appears that Voltaire was motivated to rewrite the drama translated by Prémare for at least two reasons. First, the work

aimed to depict on stage the assimilative power of the Chinese civilization and celebrate the wisdom and reason of the Tatars, who could recognize the ethical superiority of the defeated Chinese. The portrayal of Tartar victors, subdued by the cultural superiority of the Chinese, was thus driven by the desire to exalt China and the Confucian morality, as Voltaire clearly expressed.⁸ Using the image of the Kingdom of Heaven (天國 Tianguo) that the Jesuits had endeavored to spread in Europe through treatises (such as Du Halde's work) and "edifying and curious" letters (Vissière 1978), the French playwright sought to use the theater to demonstrate how other ancient cultures could exist beyond Europe, possessing values, habits, and customs that rivaled those of the West, especially in terms of religious tolerance, politics, and ethics (Voltaire, act IV, scene 2 and scene 4, IV, 323 and 327; Falaschi 2005, 500).

Despite this professed sinophilia, it is necessary to note that this tolerance and open-mindedness toward other peoples was not entirely free from prejudice. Indeed, Voltaire envisioned an ideal of refined civilization that he believed he had found in ancient Confucian thought. However, this era had long since ceased to exist in his view, as revealed by some disconcerting remarks made in the dedication to the Duc de Richelieu.⁹ Royal China of his time does not receive the same favorable treatment in his other works.

Nonetheless, despite describing the Chinese play as "barbaric" compared to the French ones of his time, Voltaire was captivated by reading Ji Junxiang's libretto. He considers it superior to the «farces monstrueuses» of Shakespeare (1564–1616) and Lope de Vega (1562–1635) (Voltaire 1785, IV, 274), praising the action's interest and the clarity which, according to him, was lacking in contemporary French dramas. This is despite the writing's perceived shortcomings (Voltaire 1785, IV, 275). However, it must be remembered that the absence of pathos, which Voltaire identified in Prémare's translation, was due to the omission of the sung lines.

The only element that Voltaire's drama retains from Ji Junxiang's libretto is the theme of sacrificing one's son to preserve the ruler's child. However, despite this shared narrative element, the two works address the issue in ways that reflect their distinct cultural and value systems. Unlike the Confucian values expressed in *Zhao-shi gu'er*, Voltaire fundamentally transforms the essence of the Chinese original. The French playwright, while depicting events that are less harrowing than those

8 Voltaire described his play as "la morale de Confucius en cinq acts." Cf. Martino (1906, 223).

9 Voltaire writes "Ces Chinois [...] ne savent pas encore à quel point nous leur sommes supérieurs" (Voltaire 1785, IV, 276).

in Ji Junxiang's libretto, significantly intensifies the tragic conflict inherent in the Chinese drama—namely, the dilemma between the private sphere (*si*: love for one's child) and the public one (*gong*: the duty to sacrifice the child for the state).

Zamti is portrayed as a hero with Cornelian characteristics, who, despite being torn between his love for his son and his duty as a subject, ultimately makes the extreme sacrifice in favor of the latter. This act certainly echoes Cheng Ying's deeds, but the fundamental difference from *Zhaoshi gu'er* is that Voltaire, following European tradition, places greater emphasis on the personal anguish and emotional hesitation that are only vaguely alluded to in the Chinese text. Zamti's inner turmoil is expressed through these lines, after he hands his son over to the enemy:

J'ai fait taire le sang! Ah! Trop malheureux père!
J'entends trop cette voix si fatale et si chère.
Ciel! Impose silence aux cris de ma douleur:
Mon épouse, mon fils, me déchirent le cœur.
De ce cœur effrayé cache-moi la blessure.
L'homme est trop faible, hélas! Pour dompter la nature:
Que peut-il par lui-même? Achève, soutiens-moi
Affermis la vertu prête à tomber sans toi. (Voltaire 1785, act II, scene 3, IV, 293)

As can be seen, the father struggles to suppress his emotions. This contrasts with the scene in the Chinese libretto, where Cheng Ying, without any Hamlet-like hesitation, helplessly witnesses the death of his son, even though, as previously mentioned, Ji Junxiang's stage directions indicate that the father struggles to hold back his tears.

The French rewriting further diverges from the Chinese original with the introduction of Idamé, a resolute female character who—like Lyping in Hatcher's work—adamantly refuses to sacrifice her son:

IDAMÉ: Qu'ai-je vu? Qu'a-t-on fait? Barbare, est-il possible?
L'avez-vous commandé ce sacrifice horrible?
Non, je ne puis le croire; et le ciel irrité
N'a pas dans votre sein mis tant de cruauté.
Non, vous ne serez point plus dur et plus barbare
Que la loi du vainqueur, et le fer du tartare.
Vous pleurez, malheureux!

ZAMTI: Telle est notre misère:
Vous êtes citoyenne avant que d'être mère.

IDAMÉ: Quoi! Sur toi la nature a si peu de pouvoir! (Voltaire 1785, act II, scene 3, IV, 296)

These lines encapsulate the conflict between the two value systems. The sacrifice of his son, despite its noble intentions, is perceived by Idamé as sacrilegious, exposing those who carry it out to the ignoble charge of not truly being a man. However, in challenging a specific value system, the woman essentially expresses the same reasoning that had already been tormenting Zamti. Yet, all of this is far removed from Ji Junxiang's drama (Falaschi 2005, 503).

The Orphan of China by Murphy

Interest in China, sparked in France by the works of Du Halde and the staging of Voltaire's tragedy, soon spread across the Channel during a period when both countries were engaged in the Seven Years' War (1756–63). In England, there was a series of translations and adaptations of *L'Orphelin de la Chine*; among these, Murphy's rewriting stands out. In 1756, he wrote *The Orphan of China*, which was first performed in 1759 at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in London.

Although Murphy claimed to have been drawn to Prémare's translation, his work clearly modeled itself on Voltaire's drama. This is evident from several elements: the setting in the Mongol era under Genghis Khan, here renamed Timurkan; characters such as Zamti—retaining the same name as the loyal mandarin in Voltaire's version—and Mandane, his wife, a counterpart to Idamé. Once again, the names of the protagonists bear no resemblance to the phonetics of the Chinese language.

However, Murphy made substantial changes to the plot and the depiction of characters. First and foremost, he entirely removed the love story between the Tartar conqueror and the Chinese woman, which he deemed ridiculous, as stated in the letter "To M. De Voltaire" included in the 1759 edition of the play (Murphy 1797, VII–VIII). In Murphy's rewriting, Timurkan, the proud Mongol emperor, closely resembles Tu'an Gu, the treacherous general of the original libretto. Unlike Voltaire, Murphy was not interested in glorifying the Chinese culture and morals that subjugated the victorious Tartars.

As noted by A. Hsia, Voltaire also identified a Shakespearean trait in the Yuan drama, which he perceived as a weakness. Conversely, Murphy regarded Shakespeare as the greatest genius since Homer and sought to develop this Shakespearean trait to align with the roughness of the Mongol emperor (Murphy 1797, XIII; Hsia 1988, 340).

The main modification by the British playwright concerns the central role given to Zaphimri, the surviving orphan of the exterminated family, who

corresponds to the Chinese character Cheng Bo, believed to be the son of Zamti and Mandane. Upon reaching the age of twenty, with the same resolve as the character in the original libretto, he decides to avenge the dishonor suffered by his family and, by extension, his country. In this manner, the play returns to themes present in the Chinese work, such as revenge and retribution.

Murphy also removed the happy ending of Voltaire's drama, that is, Genghis Khan's benevolence, who, moved by the loyalty of Zamti and Idamé, granted clemency to all. The British playwright thus proposed a more gripping plot; he had criticized the French playwright for the lack of action in his play: "A scantiness of interesting business seemed to me a primary defect in the construction of the French *Orphan of China*" (Murphy 1797, X). Upon discovering his true identity, Zaphimri, without hesitation, first kills Timurkan in a duel and then reunites with Hamet, the biological son of Zamti and Mandane, who had been sent away and replaced with him. Meanwhile, Mandane, who had pleaded her son's case before Timurkan, committed suicide, and Zamti was tortured to death. Thus, the play adheres much more closely to the definition of "tragedy" compared to Voltaire's version.

As is evident, although the story and characters have been significantly altered, this rewriting retains the overall spirit of the original work and comes closer than any other adaptation to Ji Junxiang's libretto.

Murphy's tragedy also differs from Voltaire's in other fundamental aspects. The French playwright depicted virtue as triumphing over everything, whereas the English playwright presented Genghis Khan as a tyrant. This difference is also a reflection of the political and social contexts in which the two authors wrote. Voltaire, a monarchist, idealized rulers like the enlightened patriarchal despots Kangxi, Qianlong 乾隆 (1711–99), or Yongzheng 雍正 (1678–1735), on whom he modeled his Genghis Khan. Murphy, on the other hand, was a constitutional monarchist and did not comprehend the absolute loyalty of a subject to his sovereign. Critics have pointed out that this difference is reflected both in the potential of the plot and in the dramatic tension in the work (Hsia 1998, 340–41; Chang 2015, 66).

Nonetheless, in a drama where Chinese characters contribute to the discourse on British nationalism and patriotism, there is also room for an exotic setting. This is clearly expressed in the prologue written by the poet William Whitehead (1715–85):

Enough of Greece and Rome. Th'exhausted store
Of either nation now can charm no more: [...]

On eagle wings the poet of to-night
 Soars for fresh virtues to the source of light,
 To China's eastern realms: and boldly bears
 Confucius' morals to Britannia's ears. (Murphy 1797, XVI)

Nevertheless, in *The Orphan of China*, little remains of Confucius' morality. Unlike Voltaire, Murphy was not driven by philosophical speculations aimed at demonstrating the superiority of culture over barbarism but rather sought to present a well-conceived play that would attract a wide audience.

What remains of the French playwright's work in the English version is the total loyalty, to family and country, of Mandane, the counterpart of Idamé. The woman, appealing to the most visceral maternal instincts, implores her husband to return her son:

MANDANE: Give me my child,
 Thou worse than Tartar! give me back my son!
 Oh! give him to a mother's eager arms,
 And let me strain him to my heart! (Murphy 1797, act II, scene 2, 46)

As a father, Zamti deeply shares the suffering that tears his wife apart but ensures that reason prevails over emotion and, with cold lucidity, reminds Mandane that social duties come before family ones:

ZAMTI: Heaven knows
 How dear my boy is here! But our first duty
 Now claims attention to our country's love
 All other tender fondnesses must yield:
 I was a subject ere I was a father. (Murphy 1797, act II, scene 2, 46)

The mother then invokes Nature and refers to the most intimate bonds between husband, wife, and child. Zamti, however, reminds her that the child can only submit to the will of fate. Mandane continues her lament, and then the man challenges her to accept his will:

ZAMTI: Then go, Mandane, thou once faithful
 Dear to this heart in vain: go, and forget
 Those virtuous lessons, which I oft have taught thee, [...]
 Go, to Timurkan
 Reveal the awful truth. Be thou spectatress
 Of murdered majesty. Embrace your son,
 And let him lead in shame and servitude
 A life ignobly bought. Then let those eyes,

Those faded eyes, which grief for me hath dimind,
With guilty joy re-animate their lustre,
To brighten slavery, and beam their fires
On the fell Scythian murderer. (Murphy 1797, act II, scene 2, 48)

Mandane understands her husband's reasons and becomes aware that she too is a citizen before being a mother. She thus accepts the fate to which her son must submit:

MANDANE: And is it thus,
Thus is Mandane known? My soul disdains
The vile imputed guilt. No, never, never
Still am I true to fame. Come lead me hence,
Where I may lay down life to save Zaphimri,
But save my Hamet too. Then, then you'll find
A heart beats here, as warm and great as thine. (Murphy 1797, act II, scene 2, 48–9)

The scene, highly poignant, is clearly inspired by the dialogue between Zamti and Idamé in Voltaire's tragedy but also recalls Cheng Ying's inner conflict in the original work and his turmoil narrated through the arias sung by Gongsun Chujui, which were omitted by Prémare in his translation.

Murphy's tragedy was the last European drama inspired by Prémare's translation.

Conclusions

In 1735, Prémare first presented a Chinese libretto to the Western public; it was the first Chinese play ever translated into a Western language. In 1834, the renowned French sinologist Stanislas Julien (1797–1873) fully translated Ji Junxiang's libretto, allowing Europe to finally gain a complete view of this masterpiece of Chinese dramaturgy. The impact of this second translation was vast and profound because, as R. Étiemble notes (1989, II, 204), it marked the transition from sinophilia to sinology: a significant change in perspective. Over the century that separated the two translations, Europe experienced the aestheticizing fashion of *chinoiserie* and "Chinese orphans" on stage, almost as figures in exotic costumes emerging from Chinese screens. The preliminary analysis presented in this chapter has demonstrated how, through various adaptations, Confucian morality has often been merely a pretext for Western culture to reflect on itself from a different perspective.

As in the famous passage of Zhuangzi's 莊子 (fourth century BC) "dream of the butterfly" (蝴蝶夢 *hudie meng*), the European "Chinese orphans," and the Confucian morality to which the various characters alluded, remained suspended between the reality and the imagination of the cultural world that had dreamed them.

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Ex Oriente Lux, Ex Occidente Lex: Three Ways to (Mis) understand Japanese Legal Culture

MATE PAKSY

Ex Oriente Lux, Ex Occidente Lex: Its Three Meanings

One of the longest unresolved issues in comparative jurisprudence is the challenge of classifying Japan's legal system (Colombo 2014). Is it fundamentally different from Western legal systems, or does it share similarities with them? Is it more aligned with Eastern or with Western legal traditions?

Previous classifications often resulted in problematic assumptions influenced by colonial perspectives in legal scholarship or they reflected geographical biases. As a result, lawyers have frequently categorized Japanese legal culture as part of "Oriental" or, more specifically, "Far Eastern Laws."

To better understand Japanese legal culture, I have chosen a Latin aphorism as the title of my study: "*Ex oriente lux, ex occidente lex*," which translates to "light comes from the East and law from the West." This saying has often been used

uncritically in the past¹ and has recently sparked controversy.² I will elucidate three meanings of the aphorism: (1) geographical, (2) religious, and (3) economic, providing a clear analytical framework for my argument.

1. *Geographical*. Represented by the Japanese flag, the initial and most heuristic interpretation of *ex oriente lux, ex occidente lex* seeks to grasp a *geographical law (lex)*: the sun (*lux*) rises in the geographical East and sets in the geographical West.³

1 It is common to come across the use of this aphorism as title for journals in fields like theology, orientalism, or the history of Eastern cultures. However, it is also intriguing to observe the geographical relativity of the usage. Henry D. Thoreau (1817–62), the American philosopher who popularized the idea of disobeying an unjust government in the United States, also employed an aphorism. His work *Walking* sheds light on the American understanding of the East/West divide (e.g., “We go eastward to realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure” (Thoreau 1862). In this work, Thoreau discusses Arnold Henri Guyot (1807–1894), a Swiss geographer who settled in the United States. Thoreau initially presents Guyot’s ideas without endorsing them:

“As the plant is made for the animal, as the vegetable world is made for the animal world, America is made for the man of the Old World.” [. . .] The man of the Old World sets out upon his way. Leaving the highlands of Asia, he descends from station to station towards Europe. Each of his steps is marked by a new civilization superior to the preceding, by a greater power of development. Arrived at the Atlantic, he pauses on the shore of this unknown ocean, the bounds of which he knows not, and turns upon his footprints for an instant. When he has exhausted the rich soil of Europe, and reinvigorated himself, then recommences his adventurous career westward as in the earliest ages. (Thoreau 1862)

As we can see, this is the context where Thoreau coins a Latin phrase that, finally, endorses Guyot’s opinion on the supremacy of the West: *Ex Oriente lux, ex Occidente Frux* [From the East, light; from the West, fruit]. It is also revealing that Thoreau’s use of human geography has clear religious connotations. The “Wild West” is a synonym for the wilderness from the Hebrew *mid-bar* [into the wilderness] or *mi-gan* [out of the garden] (Genesis 3:23). On the other hand, according to Thoreau’s text, Adam and others might be in the (Oriental) Eden, a biblical term again, which is a better place when compared to the habitat of the (Occidental) “backwoodsmen”: “To Americans, I hardly need to say—‘Westward the star of empire takes its way’. As a true patriot, I should be ashamed to think that Adam in Paradise was more favorably situated on the whole than the backwoodsman in this country” (Thoreau 1862).

2 For the university in question, the aphorism was as follows: *Oriens Ex Occidente Lux* [“Light Rising from the West”]. This very wording was suggested by R. M. Homer, the Principal of Queen’s Royal College in Trinidad and an almost identical version was suggested by M. Platnaver of Brasenose College, Oxford.

3 It is to be noted that this apparently geographical symbol has an immediate and obvious religious and historical significance, rooted in Japan’s legal history. Namely, the red disc at the center of the flag represents Amaterasu Ōmikami, the highest deity in Japanese mythology. She is not only the ancestral deity of the Japanese imperial house, but also deemed to be the common ancestor of the Japanese people.

When further considering the significance of the symbolism in the flag, the geographical meaning of the aphorism is determined by the observer's point of view: the Earth's movement around the Sun follows universal laws, but the perception of the sunrise in the East may vary from person to person. As Patrick H. Glenn, an English-speaking Canadian lawyer points out accurately with regard to the Japanese island, this land is of the rising sun, if seen from China (Glenn 2014).

In terms of legal history, it is common knowledge that Chinese normative systems had a significant impact on early Japanese society. However, a challenge arises for the mainstream legal positivism, which often denies conceptualization of early Chinese and Japanese laws in the modern sense. In Western legal positivism, human law is defined as a system of rules, and, in contrast to universal geographical laws, each independent country has its own binding laws; as the twentieth-century English legal philosopher Herbert Hart states, law is "the union of primary and secondary rules" (Hart [1961] 1994, 79). Because the content of domestic laws varies and references to a universal natural law (similar to geographical laws) are excluded from scientific discourse, the perspective of positivism implies to compare different legal systems. Moreover, for positivists, such a scientific comparison should be done as objectively and scholarly as possible.

2. *Religious*. An alternative interpretation of the aphorism could be in direct relation to religion as a socio-cultural construct: all of these systems of belief across the world reflect the light (*lux*) in one way or another.

In a way like various legal systems, religious systems embodied in the general culture also aim to impose normative *duties* (*lex*) on the members of a church as part of organized religious life. These two normative systems (i.e., religious and legal orders) may emerge in close or loose connection. For instance, Protestantism fueled not only the capitalist market but contributed a lot to the separation of the state and churches in Europe, as manifested in the principle of laicity in France, where, since the Revolution, indeed, religious *lux* and public *lex* have been kept separated.

The obvious question to ask is: which was chronologically the first? *Lex* or *lux*? As to genealogy, it is widely believed that while the Roman Empire introduced law in Europe (*lex*), Jesus Christ from Nazareth brought the light (*lux*). However, one may also raise doubts about this chronological order of law and light. Thus, one may say that early Christianity might be understood as the radical teachings of a small and dangerous sect which was forbidden in the Roman Empire. One could argue indeed that it was not the religious light but the violent Roman law that came first.

Besides accepting a broader concept of law and acknowledging that “the law” existed even before the Roman Empire, especially in Asia (i.e., the codes of Hammurabi or Manu), it becomes plausible to say that law appeared first or at the same time as religion. Another, but still relevant issue is that the “Far East” has cultural differences from other oriental cultures. Said’s classic work *Orientalism* ([1980] 2005) offers a critical analysis of colonialist orientalism. While insightful in many aspects, it may not be completely applicable in the case of Japan, where Islam, a major influence on legal culture in other parts of the East, played a minor role.

In any case the sort of understanding of religion as a moral duty to obey a personal God cannot be genuinely Japanese, and is therefore inadequate as a complete understanding of Japanese law. Instead of this concept, there are other institutionalized community-building cultural forces which we might call “religion” that shaped Japanese culture.

3. *Economic.* Understanding law, theology, and economics as distinct yet overlapping fields relies on the concept of normative rules that generate duties and rights. In this context, it may be irrelevant whether law or luxury originated first; what matters is how these fields intersect through the phenomenon of normativity. In terms of *economy*, “lux” or “luxury” may refer to a particular material resource. The debate of the Enlightenment philosophers on the ethics of luxury has significantly shaped our understanding of the word. For this meaning of *lux*, one example is the entry for “Lux” in the *Encyclopaedia of Diderot and D’Alembert*⁴ which defines “luxury” as *l’usage qu’on fait des richesses & de l’industrie pour se procurer une existence agréable*. For these authors, luxury is not a matter of any single cause arising from one particular social fact, such as the growth of the population or depopulation, levels of equality and inequality, use of money, or reliance on patriotic sentiments.

4 It is interesting to note that there are three entries related to Japan in the *Encyclopédie*, namely, *Japon*, *Japonais*, *philosophie de*, and *Japonner*, all of which are heavily influenced by Western biases. The entry on Japan describes it as *large and the most Oriental country in Asia (grand pays de la partie la plus orientale de l’Asie.)* and compares it to Great Britain, stating that both countries are proud because of their similar situation as islands. China is the main country of comparison in this entry. (*Le Japon, aussi peuplé que la Chine à proportion, & non moins industrieux, tandis que la nation y est plus fiere & plus brave, possède presque tout ce que nous avons, & presque tout ce qui nous manque.*) (“Japan,” Diderot and D’Alembert 1751). The author acknowledges that both Japan and China were more developed than Western countries in the past, but due to the rapid development of modern science and art in the West, the latter have now become the “first” countries. The author also notes that although Japan has a rich antiquity and nature, the “oriental population” is not present in the arts. *Les peuples orientaux ne sont à présent dans les beaux arts, que des barbares, ou des enfans, malgré leur antiquité, & tout ce que la nature a fait pour eux* (“Japan,” Diderot and D’Alembert 1751).

In the *Encyclopédie*, whereas Western countries are the source of good examples (except at their earlier stages of the social development), Japan does not provide a good example of regulation at all:

Il y a beaucoup de luxe au Japon, & les mœurs y sont toujours atroces. Il y avoit plus de vertus privées dans Rome & dans Athènes, plus de bienfaisance & d'humanité dans le tems de leur pauvreté que dans le tems de leur luxe. (“Japon,” Diderot and D’Alembert 1751)

For Enlightenment thinkers, the concept of luxury is not exclusively a Western or Eastern phenomenon; rather, it is something that is linked to what is considered “natural.” These views are reflected in various sections of the encyclopedia. For example, “art” is defined as *l’industrie de l’homme appliquée par ses besoins ou par son luxe, aux productions de la Nature* (“Art,” Diderot and D’Alembert 1751). This suggests that art, as a form of luxury, transcends basic human needs while still being connected to natural products. Thus, according to the Western understanding exemplified by the French authors, luxury is a universal concept.

However, *lex* shall meet *lux*. In other words, the legal transfer from West to East is necessary in order to facilitate the transfer of the Eastern luxury to the West. The exploitation of Japan’s natural resources, including human resources such as geishas, was evident in the unequal contracts signed by the Japanese government with the American government. By 1898, the last of these humiliating “unequal treaties” had been repudiated, and Japan in Asia became an important regional player under under Meiji transformation. The country successfully defeated the Russian Empire in the subsequent war and began to engage in its own colonization in the Asian region. Undoubtedly, one of the causes of economic growth was the forced opening of Japan’s market, starting gradually in 1854 when Commodore Perry arrived there. Critics claimed that before that, the closed market resulted in local cartels and clans and with openness, the overall prosperity of the country increased.

A Genealogy of a Perplexity: A Short History of Japan’s Law and Comparative Jurisprudence

Today, nobody casts any doubt on where to locate Japan on our globe and in hundreds of books, papers, presentations, and commentaries, comparative lawyers have abundantly argued that Western legal influence has shaped the form (codification) and content of modern Japanese legal rules.

What may come as a surprise is that most of them still hesitate to categorize the legal system of this particular island without considering its geographical location. They focus instead on this Far Eastern country's efforts to reform its legal system to align with Western standards. This contradiction between its Western-influenced law and its Far Eastern geographic location makes Japanese law resistant to easy categorization within a particular legal family, such as "Western" or "Far Eastern" law.

We may trace back our misunderstanding of Japan's law to the earliest comparative jurisprudence. At the outset, comparative lawyers used the wrong methodology. They compared legal systems of two reference states or geographical regions, oscillating between "completely different" and "essentially identical." They used geography without precise definition. I quote Nottege (2003, 52):

The scholarship on Japan's law involves the study of a legal system located in "Asia", on virtually any definition. But should it be grouped with "East Asian" law? How far west does East Asia extend—to the Uigur area in the People's Republic of China, with its Muslim traditions creating close links with neighbouring "Central Asian" countries? How far east—to Guam? Or is Japanese law better conceptualized as part of "North Asian law"? How far north does that extend? If North Asia incorporates Sakhalin Island in Russia, then do "legal" norms exist there which are still shared by the (arguably) indigenous Ainu people on Hokkaido Island in Japan, so that we should distinguish "indigenous North Asian law" from the rest of Japanese law? What about Okinawa, in the far south of the Japanese archipelago?

In addition, several comparative lawyers have also very often overlooked a range of important social facts. Most of their flaws may pull us back to the origin of the modern comparative jurisprudence, which was established toward the end of the nineteenth century, at the historical peak of Western colonialism. While, of course, Western lawyers allowed for sociological and anthropological reflections on "primitive" societies in addition to the exegetical analysis of different legal texts of "civilized nations," neither was anthropologically relevant in regard to the European legal systems, nor was the exegetical analysis extended to non-European legal systems, most of which were not even classified as law. The result is to present a binary division between "developed," "codified," "modern," or "rational" Western law on the one hand, and the rest of the world on the other.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Japan's own academic lawyers prepared to codify law by considering first the French and, subsequently, the German legal scholarship. Van Mehren tells us that there were lawyers equipped with Anglo-Saxon common law in Tokyo who were strong enough to undermine the

authority of the invited French professor Gustave Émile Boissonade de Fontarabie (1825–1910). His mission was to codify Japanese law according to the *Code Civil*. As to the German lawyers, the Imperial University in Tokyo provided an important German Law Section with them (Van Mehren 1958, 1487). The academic competition between French and German lawyers was always intensive not only in Tokyo but also in Europe, largely for political and economic reasons. Whereas the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 undoubtedly gave a certain pattern to the relations between the new German and the ancient French Empire under Napoleon III, the concurrence in the market of export laws to the Asian colonies remained economic, at least insofar as “economy” can be detached from colonialization at all.

In the meantime, at the first international conference on comparative jurisprudence held as part of the Universal Exposition in the symbolic year of 1900 (some years before the 100th birthday of the *Code Civil* of 1804) French academic lawyers were still over-represented compared to lawyers from other countries. The very event was organized in Paris by the *Société de Législation Comparée*, a French ministerial authority. Although a Japanese delegation was present, none of its members were actually domiciled in Japan. From a theoretical point of view, the most interesting debate in Paris revolved around the very comparability of the different legal systems of the world. This debate took place among the French academic lawyers who, without claiming it directly, understood the comparability problem from a French point of view: under what conditions could French law be a model for another country?

The congress discussed meta-theoretical issues related to comparative law as well as issues which emerged in relation to international commerce, such as the question of foreign trade companies. The society declared that its work was scientific and the act of comparison counted as “scientific principle” for studying law (Rapport 416). Regarding the main speakers, Edouard Lambert believed that “comparative legislation” “could only establish a common fund for those countries that had achieved a similar level of civilization” (Clark 2000–2001, 884). In turn, Raymond Saleilles thought that a *fond commun de l’humanité civilisée*—or to put it briefly, a unitary (positive) law that is not universalized moral or natural law—might be achieved by comparative legislation. Other French professors were, just like Lambert, in favor of the recognition of legal pluralism. Relying on Montesquieu, Andrés Weis pointed out that the differences between legal systems might be the consequences of extra-legal facts. Gabriel Tarde, in his account, emphasized the task of a legal sociology that focused on living law instead of the

written law. He also urged the *classification* of legal systems (Clark 2000–2001, 885–6). Ultimately, however, it was Adhémar Esmein, who accomplished this task of classification.

Esmein's system was almost the same as the system of the Konrad Zweigert and Heinz Kötz, elaborated in the last third of the twentieth century, with the difference that the German authors added Chinese, Japanese, and Hindu law to Esmein's Islamic group (Clark 2000–2001, 886, n. 62). Thus, it can be argued that the approach advocated by them closely aligns with the methodological framework employed by any *fin de siècle* French jurist, as both adopt a functionalist perspective. In their seminal work *An Introduction to Comparative Law* ([1977] 1987), the German professors offer a comprehensive taxonomy of the world's legal systems. However, a notable challenge emerges within this classification: while Japanese law, from a strictly functionalist standpoint, reflects Western legal principles, Zweigert and Kötz categorize Japan alongside China under the broader classification of "Far Eastern Laws" due to geographical considerations. Following a concise historical overview, the authors examine Japan's efforts to codify civil law, shaped significantly by French, German, and American legal influences. They further endeavor to elucidate the distinctive nature of Japanese law and the underlying reasons why litigation has not become a fundamental aspect of the Japanese legal ethos. What these functionalists predominantly do is something similar to that which Said attributed to Western orientalists. According to Said, Western orientalists constructed the discourse on orientalism from an external point of view, without input from non-Western orientalists. In the book authored by Zweigert and Kötz, the difference between East and West in Japan's case is that whereas Western citizens are ready to fight for their rights, Japanese citizens "don't like law" (Noda 1966). If we view Japanese law solely as a codified set of legal rules, while overlooking the widely reported hesitance of the Japanese population to engage in litigation, we can categorize Japanese law as a blend of the continental European legal tradition and the common law system of the Anglo-Saxon legal world. The authors from Germany attribute the perceived reluctance of Japanese citizens to go to court solely to legal factors. They view this phenomenon as a consequence of the Japanese approach to commercial negotiation, rather than associating it with cultural or religious influences.

Let me come back to the functionalists' classification of legal systems. René David (David 1950) used only two criteria for his taxonomy: legal ideology (to distinguish Socialist from Capitalist law) and technicality (to compare different rules of legal liability). In Germany, Zweigert and Kötz used five criteria: the historical development of law, the mode of legal thought, the most noteworthy

specific institutions, sources of law, and the ideology underlying the legal system. This results in “legal families” like the Romanist, Germanic, Nordic, Common Law, Socialist, Far Eastern, Islamic, and Hindu families. Stating that these “families” are but “ideal-types,” they do not deny the *de facto* existence of mixed legal families. New orientations in comparative jurisprudence take this *hybridity* as a point of departure for legal comparison. According to Ulph’s understanding, “Japanese Law is an unusual hybrid: onto its original customary law has been grafted another law from two different families: the common law family and the civil law family” (Ulph 1992,18). This description is accurate overwhelmingly in relation to Japanese law post-World War II as Von Mehren highlights also that “[t]he introduction of Occidental law was but one element in the wholesale importation of things Western” and “[t]he Japanese lawyer [...] was imported with the new civilization” (Von Mehren 1958, 1487; 1489). It is crucial to be cautious when it comes to discussing what is covered under Japanese law and what is not. While it includes Western influences that have shaped the local culture, these influences do not entirely define the norms of the Japanese legal system.

Law and Religion in Japan: The Gravitational Force of the Normative Non-laws

In 1873, another conference on the comparative study of religion took place, also in the French capital. This event was the diametrical opposite of the lawyers’ gathering.

In contrast to the comparative lawyers’ colloquium where the Japanese presence was only virtual, the keynote speaker at this event was Léon de Rosny, the founding father of Japanese studies in France. Despite never having been there, his admiration for Asian cultures led him to conceptualize Japanese religion by reproducing Japanese discourse. This very fact seems to contradict Said’s claim, that such a dialogue could never happen in Orientalist Studies, which, according to Said, are interpreted as Western colonialist discourse on Asia. The issue is, of course, more complex. As Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm (Storm 2015) demonstrates, *shūkyō*, the Japanese word for “religion” and the key concept of de Rosny’s presentation, is essentially a linguistic reinvention or neologism. It combines two Japanese characters: *shū*, meaning “sect” or “principle,” and *kyō*, meaning “teaching.” The use of this word was rare before the end of the nineteenth century. It seems that Japanese intellectuals reintroduced it to comply with international legal conventions when dealing with the United States as American politicians

required a stipulation of religious liberty for their officials in Japan. Storm also notes that the Japanese delegation at the conference on comparative scholarship of religion was very active and engaged in dialogue with Western partners. For their part, Western partners were pleased with the Japanese intellectuals, not only because they agreed with de Rosny, but also because Japan was not a colony and, at the same time, represented Asia.

As for the developments after World War II, a few brief notes are needed concerning Takeyoshi Kawashima, who formulated the well-known thesis that the Japanese are a non-litigious people:

[T]raditionally, the Japanese people prefer extra-judicial, informal means of settling a controversy. Litigation presupposes and admits the existence of a dispute and leads to a decision which makes clear who is right or wrong in accordance with standards that are independent of the wills of the disputants. (Kawashima 1976, 277)

In discussing possible causes of this reluctance to be involved in any litigation in Japan, Kawashima relied on cultural facts for an explanation. Thus, it seems true that extra-legal conciliation was the principle earlier, and draws support from Shinto, the native religion in Japan, which promotes a belief *in harmony*. According to this thesis, if a judge decides a legal case, it would imply that the judgment clearly and universally determines who is right and who is wrong. Such a judgment is incompatible with hierarchical and horizontal relations, as it goes against deference to superiors and the flexibility of personal relationships. If the tradition of harmony and other values becomes less influential, litigation will become more widespread in Japan.

Numerous scholars interpreted Kawashima's research as suggesting that Japanese people were culturally predisposed not to sue each other before a tribunal, leading to the belief that Japan's law was culturally different from other countries. Some Western stereotypes emerged, suggesting that the Japanese people did not have legal consciousness. However, it is important to note that Kawashima's intention was not to study legal consciousness as such, and his theory was more about predicting a future secularized Japanese society rather than reflecting the current state of Japanese law.

In any case, *The Myth of the Reluctant Litigant* by John O. Haley (1978) directly attacked Kawashima's assertion of a cultural predisposition, pointing instead to numerous systemic factors as the primary explanation for low litigation rates in Japan, such as the relative lack of legal education and the number of the lawyers and judges in Japan. According to Haley (2006, 896), Kawashima "erred" as he presented no evidence of a peculiarly Japanese aversion to litigation.

In addition, in Haley's interpretation, statistics show a fairly intensive litigation during the pre-World War II era that was supposed to be more traditionalist compared with the post-World War II decades under the American occupation. On a personal level and as a representative of the American way of Japanese studies, Haley went so far as to deconstruct Kawashima's personal authority and academic monopoly in his own country. For him, "The Japanese legal system [...] was just like any other legal system." (Ramseyer 2009, 214) Unfortunately, Haley repeats the same mistake of the functionalist methodology; such a statement keeps the scholarly debate very unproductive by oscillating between the positions of "very different" and "almost the same." In addition, it seems also too quick to hint that Kawashima was a nationalistic lawyer who overemphasized the "Japaneseness" of Japan's law. His methodology was rather sociological, and the focus was on the actual state of affairs in Japan, not on future legal developments.

Glenn, in his account, puts the accent on the effects of Chinese Confucianism on Japanese legal thought. He distinguishes between legalism (*fa*) and morality (*li*) (Glenn 2017, 328) as follows: "[i]n Japan *li* becomes *giri*, often translated as an omnipresent obligation of thanks and loyalty." If *giri* is a religious morality, and if Confucianism is a "religion," then it is quite obvious that at least in some periods of Japanese legal history, religion cast its light on law. Confucian normativity emphasized rigidly defined and hierarchical social relationships and the critical necessity of obedience to one's lord or parent. Another reference in Glenn's classic book on comparative legal traditions is to the Shinto or "the way of the kami (gods)." This is Japan's indigenous faith which recognizes divinity in nature. Besides these, Buddhism also teaches its adherents to avoid litigation in light of the fact that all things are changing and impermanent and that one can attain an absolute reality of perfect quietude and self-realization by eschewing desires for pleasure in this world of change (see also Gambaro et al., 2011, 408).

Any religion can be relevant to law as a set of rules, along with the ideological justifications that support them. To broaden the scope of legal scholarship that is supported by positivist ideology by incorporating non-legal social factors, a more comprehensive concept of comparative jurisprudence is needed. In this context, David Nelken's theory of legal culture evaluates law as part of a society's broader cultural framework, integrating jurisprudence, legal sociology, and social anthropology. This truly interdisciplinary approach to comparative jurisprudence is particularly useful for understanding both Asian and Western legal cultures. By blurring the boundaries between law and non-law, it allows us to consider non-legal factors, including geographical and normative influences such as religion, customs, directives, and best practices. Recognizing the local interpretation of

“religion” in Japan as legally significant offers insights into cases where non-normative social practices, such as religious beliefs, may have legal implications. This perspective helps lawyers understand why some Japanese citizens may feel hesitant to litigate in certain areas of the legal system, while being more open to it in others.

***Lux* as Economic Value?**

As the final semantic cornerstone of the Latin saying, the term *lux* holds significant economic importance, too. Western lawyers, both European and American, have generally operated under the unspoken (and occasionally spoken) assumption that it is advantageous for us to export our legal practices to Japan. When the law is not just local but global, not only does the exploitation of Japan’s natural resources become more straightforward, but there is also the potential for substantial profit in controlling the legal system, including local lawyers, judges, government officials, and law schools—essentially, the practice of law.⁵

Whereas the rather hidden layer of lawyers’ discourse illustrates the economic stakes of the Western legal transplants, it is worth noting that Japanese and Western attitudes toward the market economy are notably different. According to Fallows, for Americans, economics is seen as a “positive-sum game,” while in the Asian region, economic competition is viewed as a form of war. Thus, the American perspective implies that anyone can emerge as a winner, while the Asian perspective suggests that for every winner, there are significant losers. This further implies that only strong nations can be independent and have the power to give orders to others and control them.

The Japanese attitudes toward economics may be rooted in specific historical experiences, above all in the rejection of egalitarian Protestantism as the origin of the capitalistic spirit. Let’s consider the issue of anti-trust legislation in Japan after World War II from this angle. In this context, a cartel is not seen as a form of anti-egalitarian cheating that is morally wrong. Instead, it is viewed undisputedly in Japan as bad because it aims to achieve short-term harmony at the expense of a more lasting and general harmony, which can be considered as public welfare. But

5 Although some may disagree—particularly lawyers in Japan—about the necessity of fundamentally reforming their legal system and infrastructure, Kelemen and Sibbit (2002, 323) demonstrate a strong correlation between the exported economic liberalism and the influence of American practices on lawyering in Japan.

how can Japan protect its national economic interests without simply adopting Western ideas? Naohiro Amaya argues for a third way with regard to genuine Japanese anti-trust legislation. Given that the progressive part of society, which wrongly seeks to imitate the Western, particularly American way of life, is a small minority, and on the other hand, the traditionalist part of society would, also wrongly, hesitate to regulate cartels at all as something that just does not fit with the national culture, Amaya tries to find a third way that limits the cartels in the market, while maintaining a legal regulation that is still rooted in Japanese culture (Amaya 2001).

The most common explanations for the limited effects of transnational commerce point to Japan's geographical borders. If this is accurate, it is surprising that an American textbook (Milhaupt et al. 2001) designed to introduce students to Japanese law starts by discussing the main European laws that influenced Japan's positive law. This raises the question: how could foreign law have any impact in a context where international commerce interacts with significant geographical borders? Ernest Désiré Glasson (1839–1907), an early comparative scholar, examined Japan's legal system from what we might now describe as a deterritorialized perspective. In his analysis, he categorized Japan alongside Austria and Switzerland, grouping these countries together (Glasson 1880, 689). This taxonomy of legal systems is grounded on the impact of Roman law, that is, its state—strong, weak, or equal—relative to German law. Given the transfer of German and French law, Roman law influences Japan legal system might become as evident as in the case of Switzerland or Austria.

The expansive character of the economy might invite us as a sort of dialectic to frame Japan's exceptionality or, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos coins it, a localized globalism with regard to Japan's legal development after World War II and by considering the implication of a transnational interest in the global market alongside a local (Japanese) normative response. However, Nelken (Nelken 2006, 936) finds this category unsatisfactory:

[I]t is unclear to what extent this contrast faithfully reflects the different stages of economic development and global integration in Japan and China, and to what extent it is rather a product of the varying degrees of 'Orientalism' that affect the normal scholarly approach to these two states.

In economic terms, the global local dichotomy might be "deterritorialized," but Nelken seems to be right to think that Boaventura's *bon mot* is just a reconfiguration of the East-West dichotomy. "Glo-cal," of course, is a fashionable buzzword of this methodology.

A study in microeconomy, namely in marketing studies (Schmidt-Devlin, Özsomer and Newmeyer 2022) articulates a hypothesis of “glo-cal” which argues that it is in the service of the interests of multinationals to “[...] simultaneously enhance perceptions of local authenticity and their global acceptance [...].” However, it also keeps maintaining the Occident/Orient divide, because the interviews on which the study is based carefully distinguish between “Eastern” and “Western” managers’ responses to the survey. A similar application of the same outdated divide is the contrast between “Western and Developed Countries” versus “Developing Countries” where the second refers to Asia excluding Japan. The study in question is on glocalised issues again, but this time focuses on the syllabi used for the education of international social workers in Japan. No one denies that syllabi with Eastern examples provide good pedagogical tools for working with the students. But students remain either caught in the classical dichotomy or too shy to take a critical stance. One Japanese student was happy to learn foreign examples to understand Japan better.⁶ Another student was happy to learn from the practice of developing countries. A third expressed satisfaction at having enhanced their skills of critical thinking. In my understanding, these statements are just reconfigurations of the above-mentioned divide between “we” (developed countries and the West) and “they” (developing Asian countries) (Higashida 2024).

Should understanding the Japanese legal system as part of the West seem odd on its face in terms of geography, during the post-World War II era this country had to overcome obstacles to introduce a fully fledged market economy like its allies. As a result, its black letter contract law closely resembles Western, above all American contract law. In this context, it is worth returning to the question of litigation as Kelemen has remarked that (Kelemen 2002, 322) “[t]his [Americanization], however, should not be overemphasized. [...] Litigation has increased [in Japan], but not to anywhere near the ‘adversarial legalism’ of the United States.” Another interesting issue regarding the Westernization of the Japanese private law is that certain German legal concepts, which can be traced back to Roman law, may not be fully supported by underlying cultural or ideological principles in Japan, nor are they interpreted in practice in the same way as in Germany. For example, the concept of *Rechtsakt*, meaning “juridical act” in German, conveys a different meaning under Confucian ideology compared to its meaning in German legal thought (Cuniberti 2015, 24).

6 Haley (2010, 13) develops the same argument regarding Japanese law: “In the end my answer to the question ‘Why Study Japanese Law?’ is this: whatever the field—economic growth, distribution of wealth, health care, corruption, or crime—by understanding Japan’s successes and their relationship to law, we may well find better ways *to solve our own problems*” (my italics).

Conclusion

The presentation focused on how comparative jurisprudence initially viewed Japanese law as an Asian legal system due to geography, influenced by Western law exportation to Asia. However, Japan's legal system is also shaped by non-legal rules, behavioral patterns, beliefs, and expectations. New approaches in comparative legal scholarship aim to showcase the role of non-legal normative systems in Japan and the perceived resistance to official law, warranting thorough multidisciplinary examination.

Japan has become a model for other countries in various fields, including the digital revolution, artificial intelligence, security, and robotics. It seems that it might be no exaggeration to rewrite the Latin maxim as *Ex oriente lux et lex*. Maybe this hypothesis might not fall far from Nelken's theory, who gently but critically remarked in one of his commentaries on an American scholar, Eric A Feldman (2006), that what the author attributes to Japan (and China) might also be interesting to explore in the United States:

For example, the articles on China say relatively little about everyday practices in the wider culture, such as *guanxi*, that help shape legal culture. Nor do they spell out the possible implications for the rule of law of the Asian reluctance to criticize established authority. Conversely, in his discussion of the introduction of anti-smoking laws from the United States, *it might have been helpful* [author's italics] for Feldman to discuss how U.S. (Puritan) culture shaped the introduction of the United States' own laws, rather than assuming U.S. authorities responded only to health concerns.

One scarcely negligible benefit from such an approach would be the practical aspect of being more modest in the West when declaring as culturalist any approach that seeks to understand the Japanese attitude toward the law. Minami highlights the economic advantages of such modesty (Minami 1986, 317):

In the Japanese business world, litigation is in many instances considered such an aberration from the business community's accepted sphere of normal practice that it is viewed as an indication of incompetence. [...] Thus, litigation is a last resort and is often viewed as a failure of the company or businessman in being unable to avoid the courts. This perspective is a product of the mediatory tendency of the Japanese which appears opposed to the adversarial underpinnings of the role of American attorneys.

In Europe, Gambaro and his colleagues (Gambaro et al. 2011, 413) emphasize the comparative advantage of Japanese legal culture when compared to European legal systems. From an internal perspective, a Japanese lawyer recognizes that the

Western aspect of their legal system is merely one component of the entire legal framework, which also comprises significant unwritten or customary law. In contrast, European lawyers are aware of the existence of such laws, but they rarely rely on them and often do not consider them to be “law” at all.

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“All things Oriental”: Visions of the Far East in Amy Lowell’s Poetry

ANNA CADONI

To play with an atmosphere is one thing; to translate is another.

—Lowell (1922, 171)

Introduction

Images of the “Far East” came to occupy a crucial place in the Modernist literary discourse, especially through its emphasis on a stereotyped symbolism adopted in sharp opposition to a Western poetic tradition. Ezra Pound’s Imagist movement highlighted the constraints and cultural limits of American Modernism from the early stages of its foundation in 1912 and called for a reconsideration of lyrical form and content. The urgency to address an aesthetic and structural revision in Western poetry mirrored what Amy Lowell, among other Imagists, had been striving for in her pursuit of an experimental “New Poetry.” The Oriental influence upon Western poetic form acquires a central role in Lowell’s translations and original verse that both problematizes and maintains structures of hegemonic representation of the Asian subject.

Interrogating the Orientalist discourse in Amy Lowell's representation of China and Japan in *Can Grande's Castle* (1918), *Pictures of the Floating World* (1919), and *Fir-Flower Tablets* (1921), I argue that Lowell's engagement with Chinese and Japanese poetry produces an exotic perspective on the representation of the Asian "Other" through a collection of hybrid poetic expressions. This perspective entails, on one hand, the construction of the Far East as a collection of stereotypes, as a natural consequence of the widespread enthusiasm about *Japonisme* and the fascination with "all things oriental" (Damon 1966, 329) that characterized exoticism in Western poetry. On the other hand, understanding the role of the Far East in Lowell's work offers a unique insight into the author's deployment of Orientalism as a significant tool to oppose the "artistic ignorance and gallant self-confidence of America" (Lowell 1918, 8). Lowell's juxtaposition of "Oriental craft and Occidental bluff" (8) certainly concurs with legitimizing a vague Asian subjectivity from which the poet conceives new possibilities of artistic expression. However, the open defense of an intrinsic delicacy and artistic clarity of the Oriental subject—as opposed to the limitations of American poetry—participates in a process of essentializing the role of Japanese and Chinese poetic forms as capable of invigorating the otherwise decaying Western verse. Impressions and accounts of the "Far East" bespeak the assimilation of new foreign literary forms and imagery into both Lowell's works and the Imagist movement in general. To further this claim, I consider the limits of the Orientalist discourse and how they intersect in the specific context of Imagism, from which Lowell drew much of her inspiration as a poet. How did the essential features of Imagism (i.e., simplicity and immediacy of the "thing") engage with Lowell's approach to the study and reenactment of Asian poetry from a Western perspective? How, conversely, did Imagist propositions collide with the grounding features of Chinese and Japanese poetic styles and contents?

Drawing from Mari Yoshihara's statement (Yoshihara 2003, 103) that Lowell problematized the portrayal of China and Japan both on gender and racial lines, this article interrogates the continuous oscillation in Lowell's works between desiring a synergic combination of Western tradition and Eastern innovation and framing the exotic character in a timeless and paralyzed condition of subjection for the sake of an American aesthetic experiment. A critical observation of Lowell's translational strategies, specifically in *Fir-Flower Tablets'* ambitious project, reinforces the view that Lowell's knowledge of an Orientalist approach to translation shaped the possibilities of her work toward a new understanding of the East (and the West). Exploring several examples of the translated poems, I argue that Lowell's adoption of specific paratextual strategies (i.e., supplementing, footnoting,

and prefacing) overlaps with those aesthetic and formal choices that defined a feminist translation practice¹ drawn apart from a conventional (and patriarchal) perspective on the literary text. Therefore, the discrepancies that emerge in Lowell's use of proto-feminist practices and intensify stereotypical gender roles attached to the "Oriental Woman" reinforce the problematic correlation between the author's radical translational choices and her hegemonic representation of the female Other.

Lowell's Intertextual Travel Through China and Japan

Regarding Lowell's early fondness for Japanese art and aesthetics, Michael Katz argues that Sevenels, the family mansion in Brookline in which the Lowells grew up and which was later owned entirely by Lowell herself, was covered in Japanese prints and sculptures collected by her brother, Percival (Katz 1981, 125). For many years during Lowell's childhood, Percival traveled across Japan as an American correspondent to East Asia, where he vividly described the customs and society that he had encountered during his residency in Japan and Korea. Undoubtedly, Percival's accounts of the Far East, real and imagined, must have meant a powerful incentive to his sister's mind as a young person that certainly fueled her inspiration in the years to come. Indeed, in ten years, Percival Lowell had published four books on the topic: *Chosen* (1885), *The Soul of the Far East* (1886), *Noto: An Unexplored Corner of Japan* (1891), and *Occult Japan* (1895).

The early influence of the Japanese prints and wood carving found at Sevenels mansion (Katz 1981, 125) as a result of Percival's travels can be recognized in Lowell's inaugural work of poetry, *A Dome of Many Coloured Glass* (1912), although the style of the first section "Lyrical Poems" is rather conventional, as well as the content of the verses. For instance, "A Japanese Wood Carving," which vividly portrays the details of the wooden images of the entrance door, hides any sign of experimental effort that will only appear in Lowell's poetry after the first contact with Imagism (Lowell 1912, 18).

In 1913, Lowell became acquainted with Imagism after reading the January issue of *Poetry*, edited by Harriet Monroe and featuring some of the names that were to be found in the early stages of Imagism. Among others, H. D.—who was

1 On the origins of feminist translation, Louise von Flotow indicates that the phenomenon developed in Quebec in the late 1970s as "a method of translating the focus on and critique of 'patriarchal language' by feminist writers" (von Flotow 1991, 72). The Canadian school emphasized the need to intervene in the source text and make the feminist translator's work "visible" (74).

entering the literary cluster with the name assigned to her by Pound, *imagiste*—and John Gould Fletcher were particularly influential on Lowell’s education about Chinese art and literature (Katz 1981, 125).

Her association with the Imagist movement was eventually to turn her eyes toward the East for inspiration into new possibilities for poetry. Literary Orientalism provided Imagist writers with tools to break from existing conventions and express new literary aesthetics. To some degree, Lowell’s distance from Pound allowed her to grow on her own not just as an independent poet, but especially as the promoter of Imagism. Between 1915 and 1917, three volumes of the anthology *Some Imagist Poets* were published that established Lowell’s authority as the new intellectual leader of the movement.

Orientalism was well grounded in the social and cultural background of a Western hegemonic discourse around Asia. According to Lowell’s biographer Foster Damon, Imagism’s acknowledgment of Chinese and Japanese models was due to emerge as it “was simply in the air” (Damon 1935, 587). Therefore, engaging with the avant-garde movement also meant embarking on a new set of possibilities coming from outside the Western literary canon.

Amid her lasting commitment to Imagism, Lowell published some of the first poems that revealed her growing involvement with Orientalism. *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* (1914) contains, according to Fletcher, a clear reference to Chinese models: he observes referring to “the Temple” and “a Tulip Garden” that those “vividly pictorial sonnets [...] could not have been what they were without some reference to Chinese models” (Fletcher 1942, 160). Katz, for his part, considers in the same collection “A London Thoroughfare: 2 a.m.” and “The Pike” as both relatable to Chinese poetry (Katz 1981, 126) and to the founding rules of Imagism. The following lines are part of the central stanza of “A London Thoroughfare: 2 a.m.”:

Opposite my window,
The moon cuts,
Clear and round,
Through the plum-coloured night.
She cannot light the city;
It is too bright.
It has white lamps,
And glitters coldly.

Recurrent themes such as the “faith in Nature’s ability to restore to the human psyche an equilibrium destroyed by the emptiness of materialism” (127) show Lowell’s adoption of the Imagists’ techniques and Chinese imagery (129). Specifically,

the “visual image of the woman watching the moon” (127) locates Lowell’s poetry in a well-established aesthetic and poetic tradition.

Foster Damon associates *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* with the actual origins of Lowell’s career as a poet. From 1914 on, Lowell edited the new Imagist anthology *Some Imagist Poets* (1915), in which the pursuit of formal and aesthetic innovation combined with experimenting with foreign inspirations. The Imagist credo, which incorporated ground principles such as the deployment of “the *exact* word,” the creation of “new rhythms” and the production of “poetry that is hard and clear” (Lowell 1915, vi), was influenced by the then-burgeoning interest in Chinese poetry. Whether the oriental influence over the movement was indirect or, at least initially, not fully intended, comes from the fact that Imagism derived its catalyst primarily from French Symbolism.² Nonetheless, Fletcher seems to identify 1913 as the year in which the influence of Chinese and Japanese verse on the “new school” marked a watershed in American poetry. Moreover, he upholds the idea that Pound, in receiving Fenollosa’s papers from his widow, subscribed to the scholar’s belief that the “Chinese language was the most perfect poetic instrument to be found in the world, because of its ideogrammatic constituents” and therefore “it perfectly combined the element of pictorialization and of temporal continuity” (156).

In the following years, Lowell’s experimenting with Asian verse began to occupy an important place, as she growingly invested in the refinement of her poetry. As for Lowell’s rising interest in unusual literary structures, James Tupper observed (1920, 40), retracing the poet’s production until 1920, that

A Dome employs only regular metrical and rhymed verse; that out of 54 poems *Sword Blades* has 29 specimens of regular metre, 22 of vers libre, and only 3 of polyphonic prose; that *Men, Women, and Ghosts* has only 6 examples of metrical verse, but 17 of vers libre and 8 of polyphonic prose; and that *Can Grande’s Castle* has nothing but polyphonic prose. (40)

When compared to the early stages of Lowell’s experiments with verse, *Can Grande’s Castle* turns out to be a clear rupture from the previous works because it displays a thematic unity of the poems and unique use of polyphonic prose, which the poet defines as “the freest, the most elastic of all forms” (Lowell 1918, preface). Far from aligning with the nonrhythmic association, the polyphonic prose was her favorite form from 1918 onwards, its only “touchstone” being the “taste

2 As Fletcher maintains in framing the origins of the literary group, “the main sources of Imagist Poetry were still to be found in Greek, Latin, French, and Pound’s Provençal; the Chinese influence, if it existed, was only a vague something in the background” (Fletcher 1942, 155).

and feeling of its author” (Lowell 1918, preface). Similarly, *Pictures of the Floating World* engages with some plausible representations of Chinese and Japanese poetry, although Lowell admits that imagination and suggestion played a central role in constructing her version of “Oriental art” (Lowell 1919, vii). Therefore, neither the “Lacquer Prints” nor the “Chinoiseries” managed to reproduce the linguistic structure or comply with the syllabic rules of the original texts. Instead, Lowell acknowledges her intention to “keep the brevity and suggestion of the *hokku*, and to preserve it within its natural sphere” (Lowell 1919, viii).

Lowell’s case sheds light on a common trend in the Imagist circle, which found new possibilities in Asian poetry, not just in terms of stylistic innovation, but also in relation to their imagery. The Japanese verse consisting of three short unrhymed lines and seventeen syllables is suited to the effect desired by the exponents of the New Poetry in experiencing unprecedented lyrical representations. The reason for this is not just that, as Fletcher argues “something in the conciseness of Japanese poetry, as well as its pictorial quality, early attracted” (Fletcher 1942, 149) the members of the movement.

Considering T. S. Eliot’s statement on Pound’s *Cathay* as the critical reading of his “translucent” (Eliot 1928, 14) Chinese verse, the question of authority emerges as a central feature in the collection. In Eliot’s words, Pound is described as the “inventor of Chinese poetry for our time” (14). Therefore, the original text, as well as the language, form, and symbolism, are conducive to a recovery of the English language, and to that sole purpose is Chinese verse capable of stimulating a poetic shift. The “illusion” of Chinese poetry, which Eliot seems to attach to the source text, is a compelling perception of the Other as valuable only in terms of suitability for the target text. The meanings ascribed to the Chinese characters in translation derive from a Western epistemological system that acknowledges a definite system of re-signification. The “inevitable Anglicization that Chinese undergoes when translated” (Hayot 1999, 518) is just one of the radical modifications that affect the comprehension of poetry in its original form.

Amy Lowell, for her part, acknowledged the implications of appropriating specific tones from Chinese and Japanese poetry for the sake of their exotic qualities, leaving behind other aspects (such as the *hokku* strict syllabic rule) to the extent that “apologies” on her translations and original poems introduce *Can Grande’s Castle* (“I should be exceedingly sorry if any part of this poem were misunderstood”) (Lowell 1918, preface), *Pictures of the Floating World* (“It should be understood [...] that these poems, written in a quasi-Oriental idiom, are not translations”) (Lowell 1919, vii), and *Fir-Flower Tablets* (“Let me state at the outset that I know no Chinese”) (Lowell 1921, v).

But Lowell's "intertextual travel" (Huang 2002, 94) reaches well beyond the cultural exploitation of Japanese and Chinese forms' rejuvenating style and content that started to permeate Western poetic symbolism in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As shown through *Can Grande's Castle* and *Pictures of the Floating World*, Lowell's approach to the "original" texts is that of appropriating the visible expression of the Oriental subject, while conversely subverting its content to the detriment of the borrowed—or, as suggested by Lowell herself, stolen (Lowell 1918, preface)—connotation. The practices adopted by Lowell, both in creating a Japanese verse and in translating Chinese traditional poetry, assemble an archetypal exotic paradigm to be represented through a Western perspective. Examples of this tendency to crystallize stereotyped themes can be found among the "Lacquer Prints" written after the Japanese *hokku*, in which Lowell employs poetic elements such as the lantern, the moon, and the longing lover. "The Fisherman's Wife" (Lowell 1919, 8) engages with some classic traits of the verse that mark the composition as typically Japanese:

When I am alone,
The wind in the pine-trees
Is like the shuffling of waves
Upon the wooden sides of a boat.

The figure of the lonely wife stands still in perpetual paralysis to the extent that the wind is the only natural element that shakes her existence. Similarly, "To a Husband" (8) draws on traditional traits to display the lovers, set in the foreground on the poetic landscape of the river:

Brighter than fireflies upon the Uji River
Are your words in the dark, Beloved.

Here, the specific setting of the Uji River constitutes an exotic imagery through which a Japanese narrative is essentialized in a frame of Western aesthetic taste. "Lacquer Prints," which includes mostly original poems written by Lowell and some translations from Japanese verse that are "taken from legends or historical events, others owe their inception to the vivid, realistic color-prints of the Japanese masters" (Lowell 1919, vii). Many poems in *Pictures of the Floating World* refer to specific names, places, and cultural images of Japanese origin: "the bridge of Ariwarano Narikira" (6), "Yoshiwara Lament" (6), and the "Camelia Tree of Matsue" (13) among others are central to the expression of the poem in Lowell's words.

The process through which essential elements of Oriental poetry have been inserted in a Western adaptation to the detriment of an accurate representation

and correspondence of the original version has been at the center of a recent critique of Orientalism and its problematization on several levels. The calquing of an Asian stereotyped poetic form has been widely explored in Mari Yoshihara's *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism*, which delves into the ramifications of Western representation of Asia in Lowell's poetry. According to Yoshihara, Lowell participated in the Orientalist discourse from a perspective of privilege and appropriation that emerged throughout her translation of Chinese poetry and her own poetic creations years later (Yoshihara 2002, 103).

Widening Lowell's gaze on Asian customs and literature, Yoshihara contends that

their attitude towards Orientalist vision, offered many American women an established and legitimized tool through which to become part of a dominant American ideology and to gain authority and agency which were denied to them in other realms of sociopolitical life. (Yoshihara 2002, 6)

Cultural and stylistic appropriation in Lowell's poems act to the detriment of a faithful representation of Japanese and Chinese and is problematized on the lines of gender and race.

The category of gender in the Orientalist discourse has long been discussed especially concerning "the uniform association between the Orient and the Sex" (Yeğenoğlu 1998, 25) as Meyda Yeğenoğlu puts it in *Colonial Fantasies*. In other words, the need to engage with Orientalism through sexual and gender dimensions has emerged as an urgent and inevitable task, since representations of the Orient have been "historically interwoven by sexual imageries, unconscious fantasies, desires, fears, and dreams" (26). Lowell's poetry follows this tendency as it engages with multifaceted imagery of the exotic as both idealized and strongly stereotyped on the matter of gender roles.

Contradictory engagement with the Far East in Lowell's work demonstrates how the gendered constructions of Orientalism found their expressions in a fractured attitude toward the representation of the East, common in a variety of female subjects of which Yoshihara gave an extensive account in *Embracing the East*. Among the focal points of analysis in gender politics operating in American discourse about China and Japan in diverse sites of cultural production as the literary field, Yoshihara included Amy Lowell's involvement with the construction of a political and aesthetic discourse on Asian poetry.

Drawing on Said's seminal concept of Orientalism as a predominantly white, upper-class, masculinist discourse, Yoshihara states that although Said rightly

depicted his formulations as mainly framed in a system of men, “the discourse and practice of empire ha[ve] been created, challenged, and/or reinforced by women as well as men, and that white women benefited from their complicity and participation in the culture of empire” (Yoshihara 2002, 193).

Hence, Yoshihara problematizes the binary of a Western masculine agency over the eastern feminine ground to conquer. Expanding on the consequences of racial and gender dynamics in the ideological construction of the opposition between East and West, she states:

Orientalism as a masculinist Western discourse marginalized white women in its public sphere and simultaneously used the status of white women and Western gender relations as a symbol of the superiority of the Western civilization over the rest of the world. (193)

Lowell’s works, which feature Chinese and Japanese subjects as central to her understanding of poetry, seclude the Oriental other to an unreachable place that is uniquely evocative. The limited perspective from which the exotic subject is observed and exploited is ultimately deprived of any credibility, regardless of the author’s intention to praise and magnify the Oriental other.

To support this claim, Yoshihara further delves into the labor dynamics in which Lowell produced her poetry and delivered her translations. Specifically, Yoshihara contends that *Fir-Flower Tablets* displays the structures of knowledge and relations of labor involved in the creation of Orientalism. According to the author, Lowell’s relationship with her “native informants” Florence Ayscough, a sinologist and translator who had been an old acquaintance of Lowell’s since the school days in Brookline, and Nung Chu, Ayscough’s Chinese mentor, was one of unequal power. To this purpose, Yoshihara compares Lowell’s bond to her collaborators with the “relationship between white women printmakers and Asian craftsmen” (105), thus focusing on the hierarchical nature of the teamwork behind literary production, which inevitably replicates the structures of power that framed it. Yoshihara presents an example of Lowell’s hegemonic role in the working relationship between her, Ayscough, and Nung Chu. At Nung Chu’s suggestion that the team should include female poetry in *Fir-Flower Tablets*, Lowell instructed Ayscough: “Be firm with your teacher, hold him strongly between your finger and your thumb, and keep him to classics.” (106).

The necessity to adhere to traditional poetry clarifies what Lowell considered valuable and what, on the contrary, could be ignored in the translating choices. Hence, what Yoshihara introduces is “the Orientalist construction of Asia as a timeless, ethereal, utopic space removed from the reality of contemporary Asia”

(106). In this representation, little space is left to problematize Oriental characters, who provide instead a rather fixed portrayal of stereotypical *personae*, whose main purpose is to offer an alternative to the depiction of Western characters.

Translating Chinese Poetry in *Fir-Flower Tablets*

In the Autumn of 1917, Mrs. Ayscough arrived in America on one of her periodic visits to this country. She brought with her a large collection of Chinese paintings for exhibition, and among these paintings were a number of examples of the “Written Pictures.” Of these, she had made some rough translations, which she intended to use to illustrate her lectures. She brought them to me with a request that I put them into poetic shape. (Lowell 1921, v)

There are several ways in which Lowell’s translations and compositions engaged with the imagined and real Asia, expressing a diverse and multifaceted function of Orientalism. As previously mentioned, the translation practice reflected relations of power and cultural regulation between her and the Asian literary subjects.

Lowell intended to work on the ambitious translation and creation of a new kind of Chinese poetry, not just as a technical and methodological challenge, but also to outdo Pound’s credibility attained with *Cathay*, which translated into poetry Fenollosa’s 1915 seminal notes. Lowell was seemingly aware of the evident discrepancies in the translating process between Chinese characters and Western learners. Her intention was mainly “to knock a hole in Ezra Pound’s translations” because as she stated in her private letters to Ayscough, “they were not Chinese in the first place, and Heaven knows how many hands they went through between the original Chinese and Professor Fenollosa’s Japanese original” (Katz 1981, 132). On the contrary, Lowell’s and Ayscough’s method aimed to translate in a “practically exact” manner by literally deciphering every single character on several levels.

Feeling that embarking on such a translation would prove unfruitful if not conducted properly, Mrs. Ayscough found a native scholar of reputation to help. Mr. Nung Chu “could not speak English but he could read it fluently,” while “Mrs. Ayscough spoke Chinese fluently but read only a little” (133). The collaboration was useful, although the work turned out to be rather complex. Of this experience, Lowell gives a full account in the preface to *Fir-Flower Tablets*:

Mrs. Ayscough would first write out the poem in Chinese. Not in the Chinese characters, of course, but in transliteration. Opposite every word she put the various meanings of it which accorded with its place in the text, since I could not use a Chinese dictionary. She also gave the analyses of whatever characters seemed to her to require it. The lines were carefully indicated, and to these lines I have, as a rule, strictly adhered; the lines of the translations usually corresponding, therefore, with the lines of the originals. (Lowell 1921, ix)

The strenuous process of writing, re-writing, and revising was repeated numerous times, to the extent that “some poems crossed continent and ocean many times in their course toward completion” (Lowell 1921, ix). The team resolved to find equivalence by translating a character into a phrase, rather than into a word. This decision was meant to assist Western comprehension with a disclosed set of cultural references, symbolism, and imagery that were available and readable. Nevertheless, it was this rigorous accuracy in the translating process that attracted criticism for having deprived the source text of its proportion and original effect. The Lowell-Ayscough translation was therefore, and almost unanimously, considered too “weighty in descriptive detail” (Katz 1981, 135), to the extent that the “personal” voice of the poet was so vehement that it obscured the primary Chinese verse (Tietjens 1922, 331).

Nonetheless, this opinion, openly expressed in Eunice Tietjens’ commentary on Western attempts to translate Chinese verse published in the 1922 issue of *Poetry*, exposes Lowell’s translation strategies as remarkably resembling what Louise von Flotow listed among the feminist translation practices. Supplementing, prefacing, footnoting, and “hijacking” are, according to von Flotow, an integral part of the Feminist translator’s strategy to “make her work visible” (von Flotow 1991, 74). In other words, the “intrusion” in the source text, as well as “the serious interference” (74) with it, are displayed in feminist translation as necessary tools to reveal ambivalences and multiple meanings that are bypassed in conventional (von Flotow referred to it as “patriarchal”) translation.

Therefore, considering Tietjens’ remarks on Lowell’s unreliability³ (Tietjens 1922, 331) as a translator in light of von Flotow’s elucidations, a certain quality emerges that characterizes Lowell’s translational choices as feminist, despite their appearance many decades before the Feminist Translation Studies of the early 1980s. By affirming that the “racial interpretations” were “*my* versions, seen through *my* eyes” (Lowell 1922, 171), Lowell introduces—perhaps involuntarily—the “conscious manipulation of language” (Federici and Leonardi 2013, 1) involved in the transition to the target text.

The manipulation of the source text is achieved, according to Yoshihara, “through specific uses of language and form” that “allowed Lowell to address and critique the masculinist vision of U.S. imperialism” (Yoshihara 2002, 103).

3 Tietjens commented on the “reliability” of Lowell’s Asian poetry:

I for one cannot quite trust Miss Lowell. She has given us so many racial interpretations—Japanese, Indian and others—which were all essentially herself, that when I find that this too reads like her own poems I doubt their essentially Chinese quality. She has surely too vivid a personality to make a good translator. (Tietjens 1992, 331)

As for gender relations and their representations in the translated text, Yoshihara asserts that Lowell offers “alternative gender roles and sexuality” (109) by constantly highlighting the foreignness of female subjectivities at the center of the poems. Therefore, the Asian female character surfaces in Lowell’s translation as highly stereotyped and rigidly inserted in a sexual category that allows only some sentiments such as grief, longing, and desire for the lost lover. Such representations foster the identification of unfamiliar paradigms of Eastern conceptions of femininity, thus confronting them from a Western perspective.

The extensive notes on poems that portray the female character as lonely and miserable in the absence of their men, (examples can be found throughout Li T’ai-Po’s poems, such as “The Lonely Wife” (Lowell 1921, 10), “Written in the Character of a Beautiful Woman” (14), “Ch’ang Kan” (28), “Poignant Grief During a Sunny Spring” (32), “A Beautiful Woman encountered on a Field-path” (49) show the tendency to exoticize gender roles and frame them in an unexplored context of timeless settings.

The poem “Ch’ang Kan” (28) exemplifies several of Lowell’s choices:

When the hair of your Unworthy One first began to cover her forehead,
 She picked flowers and played in front of the door.
 Then you, my Lover, came riding a bamboo horse.
 We ran round and round the bed, and tossed about the sweetmeats of green plums.
 We both lived in the village of Ch’ang Kan.
 We were both very young, and knew neither jealousy nor suspicion.
 At fourteen, I became the wife of my Lord.

According to Yoshihara, translations such as “Unworthy One” and “Lord” highlight the specific role of the woman in the story, charging the female character with expressions of highly nostalgic and idealistic imagery connected to a Western perception of Chinese romanticism. Reference to a low “value” of the female speaker “accentuates the patriarchal relations whereby a woman is defined by her relation to her husband.” Moreover, the expression “Lord” *instead of* “husband” clearly denotes a hierarchy between man and woman that resembles the dynamics of slavery.

Through Ayscough’s notes, the reader understands that the verse about the young girl hiding in shame (28) is a reference to the Chinese custom among little girls, who are “supposed to hide their faces at the suggestion of marriage” (Ayscough 1921, 190) thus suggesting the traditional attention to the role of future wives in children’s early rituals. In the following lines, the emphasis on the exotic setting is made clear not only through the translation but, once more, through the rich “supplementing” of the notes:

I wanted to be with you, as dust with its ashes.
I often thought that you were the faithful man who clung to the bridge-post.
That I should never be obliged to ascend to the Looking-for-Husband Ledge.

The choice to keep the reference to a deeply situated cultural context, which is certainly unknown to the Western reader, is promptly untangled in a note: here, Ayscough reports the legend of the reliable and faithful Wěi Shēng, who waited for his beloved one until the waves engulfed him at the bridge-post, and the myth of the hill on the banks of the Yangtze, in which a woman was turned into stone after having waited in vain for her husband to return (190). The recurring theme of endless love and affection is thus exploited as a convincing device to convey the melancholic trait, that, according to Lowell, characterizes the amusing background of the Oriental verse.

The last three lines follow a similar translating choice:

Prepare me first with a letter, bringing me the news of when you will reach home.
I will not go far on the road to meet you,
I will go straight until I reach the Long Wind Sands. (Lowell 1921, 29)

Ayscough's note stresses the obstinate inclination of the woman to wait for her husband against all the possibilities:

The Long Wind Sands are many a day's journey from the village of Ch'ang Kan, which stands just outside the South Gate of Nanking. What the lady implies is that she will go to "the ends of the earth" to meet her returning husband. (191)

Yoshihara maintains that Lowell's translations make use of an exoticized and sexualized tone, especially compared to a more neutral version found in Pound's. This effect, considered in light of the explicatory notes and the "foreignness" produced through the topical references, provides *Fir-Flower Tablets* translations with a moral connotation in the opposition between West and East. The Asian subject is deprived of its agency as it mainly serves as a formal structure for Western readers to conceive an appropriate connotation.

Conclusion

Drawing on Lowell's experience in translating from Chinese traditional poetry and expanding on the concept of appropriation, Yoshihara argues that "White women participated in playing pivotal roles in inscribing gendered meanings

to Asia, both complicating and replicating the dominant Orientalist discourse founded upon the notion of ‘West = male vs. East = female’” (Yoshihara 2002, 103). In this context, which witnessed Imagism and the need to rejuvenate American literature as the basis of Lowell’s innovative drive, Orientalism served various purposes. The process of recreating poetry from a dominant perspective relates to the original exoticized text in several unexpected ways. It envisioned new possibilities, subjects of representation, and unexplored styles and forms. Furthermore, as observed through Yoshihara’s study, Orientalism provided Lowell’s poetry with authority and power, highlighting American hegemony on Asian subjects.

Throughout this article, Lowell’s poetry has been considered capable of maintaining hierarchy in poetic representation and subverting this canonized order. Following Yoshihara’s ideas on Lowell’s problematization of the Eastern verse along both racial and gender lines, this study specifically engaged with how the dominant discourse on literary femininity intervened in molding Lowell’s translations, which displayed the social construction of gender in the foreign context of Chinese legends.

Racialized and gendered constructions in the poetic reproduction of Asia are directly convenient to a re-signification of categories of the Western subject, and therefore they ultimately foster a poetic Orientalism. Since, according to Yeğenoğlu, the “cultural representation of the West to *itself* by way of a detour through the other” (Yeğenoğlu 1998, 1) is central to the Orientalist discourse, Lowell’s use of the exotic through the means of translation and poetic production aims to explore and speculate on the aesthetic and formal possibilities of Western poetry.

However, Lowell’s adoption of the exotic subject to foster poetic experimentation also offers an interesting perspective on the Western hegemonic gaze on Asian subjects. Throughout the translation of classic Chinese verse in *Fir-Flower Tablets*, Lowell’s extensive use of supplementing and explicatory notes “unveils” (Yeğenoğlu 1998, 39) both the author and the female subject, despite showing only some archetypal traits. Through the perspective of the Western gaze, Lowell’s poetry discloses the colonial fantasy of which Yeğenoğlu gives a thought-provoking account: “Whether male or female, the Western subject’s desire for its Oriental other is always mediated by a desire to have access to the space of its women, to the body of its women and to the truth of its women” (72).

The drive to reveal the oriental female other, both by preserving the stereotyped traits of conventional romantic poetry and setting those narrative elements in opposition to the Western perspective, is expressed in Lowell’s verse in ways that ensure and, at the same time, problematize the Orientalist discourse. About this ambivalence in relating to the hegemonic literary gaze toward the Far East,

Yoshihara assumes that Lowell's "Asian works appear to be internally at odds" (Yoshihara 2002, 125). The reason behind evident discrepancies in Lowell's treatment of Chinese and Japanese verse and aesthetics might be found, as Yoshihara states, in the "multiple ideologies, expressions and functions of Orientalism" (125). Despite the potentially subversive nature of Lowell's poems about Orientalism, her persistent oscillation between a critical perspective and the tendency to essentialize Asia demonstrates her uncertain attempt at appropriating Asian poetry as a white American woman.

The role of the white woman in the Oriental discourse is exemplified in Yeğenoğlu's consideration of "Western woman as supplement": "as the one who completes through her addition, [Western woman] functions to constitute the fullness and coherence of the narratives of man" whom she "supplies with [...] the knowledge of the inside" (Yeğenoğlu 1998, 76). This split "loyalty" certainly influenced Lowell's engagement with the "gendered nature of the discourse" (Yoshihara 2002, 125) bringing her to reflect and act upon the exotic subject from two opposite, and ultimately colliding perspectives.

The imagined (and translated) East in Lowell's poetry introduces possibilities of unfamiliar sexual and gender dynamics and therefore performs a liberating poetic "act" of Asian, rather than Western, origin. Nevertheless, while attempting to offer an alternative construction of gender paradigms through strategies that classify as radical, Lowell's translation practices fail to adhere to a consistent subversion of gender stereotypes and extend their Western gaze toward the objectification of Asian aesthetics, ultimately preserving the Orientalist discourse throughout her poetry.

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Yusuf Idris Goes East: Asia as a Mirror for Egypt

CRISTINA DOZIO

Beyond the East-West Encounter

The encounter with Europe and the creation of a European imaginary were crucial issues in modern Arab culture. A turning point was the French invasion of Egypt in 1789, but all throughout the nineteenth century, Arab intellectuals and cultural institutions engaged with the “Other” with repercussions on the internal debates about identity and reformism. The three main channels of exchange were: educational missions of Arab students sent to Europe, which greatly enriched the tradition of travel writing (*riḥla*); European educational institutions established in the Arab world under the colonial rule; the translation of texts, especially from English, French, and Russian into Arabic, as well as the adaptation of European literary genres. Nevertheless, these East-West encounters did not happen on an equal footing. Said’s groundbreaking study, *Orientalism* (1978), critically examines the politics of defining the European self against an essentialist image of the Other, the exotic and uncivilized East. Subsequent criticism and re-elaborations of Said’s paradigm (Alessandrini 2018) have added valuable insights on the identity formation in relation to the Other.

While the West imagined the East, Arab literature has contributed to crafting a Western imaginary. El-Enany (2006) offers the first comprehensive diachronic

study of this topic, with a focus on nineteenth- and twentieth-century prose. With the aim of presenting, at least in part, a reverse study of Said's *Orientalism*, the author examines how Arab intellectuals saw the West by selecting some works that stage an actual encounter between Eastern and Western characters in one of their respective locations. El-Enany identifies the love story or the sexual encounter as the main literary trope, constructed along the lines of an ambivalent relation of love/hatred and admiration/repulsion toward the West.

Agreeing on the centrality of the European theme and love trope in the Arab novel, Casini (2015) suggests examining these literary representations not as mirrors for reality, but as narrative discourses developed through the novels' themes and style (Casini et al. 2013). This approach is anchored in studies that conceive the West as a narrative construct historically determined in Western and non-Western contexts. Casini mostly agrees with the notion of Occidentalism elaborated in Area Studies (Ketelaar 1991; Chen 1995), which argues that the representations of the West are used by individuals and social groups with strategic aims in the context of their domestic ideological debates. In his analysis of the canonical Egyptian novel, he demonstrates "the strong connections between the 'European theme', the construction of a national imaginary, and the critical reflection on alternative paths to modernisation" (Casini 2015, 196). Moreover, his "research on Egyptian novels published after the 1960s indicates that strategic Occidentalism operates also in the inverse process of critique and deconstruction of the hegemonic national imaginary" (Casini 2015, 197).

Looking at the contemporary production, the East-West literary encounter includes new geographical routes and stylistic innovations to respond to contemporary global debates, for instance about diasporas and forced migration (Sellman 2022). Meanwhile, recent studies are re-addressing or discovering some encounters that were previously overlooked, such as the contribution of Arab American migrant literature to the cultural flourishing at the turn of the twentieth century (Imangulieva 2009),¹ connections with South America (Civantos 2006; Hassan 2024), and the Russian and Soviet influences (Kane et al. 2023). These contexts transcend the binary East-West opposition by adding other historically constructed cultural poles and staging various experiences of modernity along similar or different colonial experiences.

A route that has been less explored—both in the literary output and academic studies—connects the Arab world to Asia. One exception is the Egyptian novel set

¹ This literary movement, known as *adab al-mahjar*, contributed to the Arab cultural and literary renovation (*nahḍa*).

in Uzbekistan *Qamar 'alā Samarqand* (Moon over Samarqand, 2004) by Muḥammad al-Mansī Qandīl (b. 1949).² In her analysis of this novel, Litvin remarks the peculiar image projected by this encounter with the Asian Other: “Unusually for an Arabic literary work set in the post-Soviet space, *Qamar* expresses no nostalgia for Communist ideals. Instead, it uses Uzbekistan as a double mirror for Nasser- and Sadat-era Egypt, grimly exposing life under authoritarian rule and also, more remarkably, conjuring an alternative humanist Utopia based not in socialism but in the mythopoetic and spiritual resources of the classical Islamic tradition.” (Litvin 2011, 101)

To contribute to the study of Arab Asian encounters, this chapter examines the journalistic travelogue *Iktishāf qārra* [Discovering a Continent] (1972) by Yusuf Idris (Yūsuf Idrīs, 1927–91).³ The famous Egyptian writer was inspired by his journey across India and East Asia in 1970. I argue that the representation of Asian societies in this work is a mirror for Egypt that not only reflects an image but also projects a constructed narrative that the author strategically used in the internal debates of post-colonial Egypt. These encounters allow a triangulation between Asia, Egypt, and the West (Europe and the United States) at the time of the Cold War and Japan in particular is presented as a source of inspiration for the renewal of the Egyptian society. The analysis will illustrate some discursive techniques that range from exoticism when looking at the East and strategic Occidentalism (also in its Asian projections) when looking at the West. These techniques will be explored in two of the travelogue’s chapters based on Idris’s trips to Japan and Berlin, in which he defines his artistic and political positioning through his interaction with the foreign cultural institutions. Before delving into the analysis, the next section overviews the various types of encounters in Idris’s oeuvre and in other Egyptian travelogues to Japan.

An Egyptian in Europe, America, and Japan

Yusuf Idris was a very prolific writer whose literary output cuts across different genres (Allen 1994): short stories, novels—some of which adapted for the cinema—, drama, and journalism. Among his aesthetic innovations is the fictional representation of various social groups whose concerns are expressed

2 This novel is based on the author’s journey to Central Asia to write a travelogue published for the Kuwaiti magazine *al-‘Arabī* (1996), to which he contributed with several travel reportages in the 1990s.

3 I would like to thank my former MA student Nura Emam for drawing my attention to this work.

through Egyptian Arabic as a rich literary language (al-Qiṭṭ 1980; Kurpershoek 1981; Mikhail 1992). While the setting and the social issues are very local, the characters and their language introduce elements of diversity. In parallel, Idris sought to create a uniquely Egyptian dramatic form by inserting Egyptian Arabic and some elements of traditional folk drama and shadow theater in the international dramatic trends (Sibley 2019; Suriano 2019). He shared his ideas in a series of three essays entitled *Naḥw masraḥ miṣri* [Towards an Egyptian Theatre] (1964) and tried to put them into practice in his own plays, including *al-Farāfir* (1964).

When Idris became an established literary figure in Egypt, he traveled abroad to take part in seminars and literary events. Thanks to his journeys and his knowledge of world literature, the representation of the West is a recurring theme across his literary output, as has been highlighted by El-Enany (1997; 2006). In particular, two of his novellas stage an encounter between an Egyptian male character and a Western female character, in Europe and the United States, respectively: *al-Sayyida Fīyīnā* [Madam Vienna] (1959) and *Niyū Yūrḳ 80* [New York 80] (1980?). The two novellas were later published in a single volume (Idris 2012), with the title of the first one changed into *Vienna 1960*, thus inviting to comparison. The recurring trope of the love story, traditionally blossomed during a study abroad experience, takes the shape of a sexual relation between two ordinary middle-class characters in *Madam Vienna*, whereas in *New York 80* an Egyptian writer and a sex worker who holds a Ph.D. do not have sex, but engage in a heated argument about prostitution.

In her reading of *New York 80*, Hartmann (2002) remarks that Idris's harsh criticism of the United States, in particular its materialism and claim to advancement, is achieved through some stereotypical images of the city and the female Other. In contrast, the author poses a positive Arab male identity by reversing some stereotypical gender roles and conveying a message of third world solidarity. Comparing the two novellas, El-Enany (2006) remarks that Idris moves from staging the challenges of the encounter with the Other, in *Madam Vienna* and other works published in the same period,⁴ to harsh criticism of the West in his late production which includes *New York 80* and his journalistic output.⁵

The travelogue *Iktishāf qārra* examined in this chapter belongs to the latter trend. El-Enany remarks that the United States emerge as the real opponent, an incompatible Other, in a specific historical context: "Written at the height of

4 The works mentioned by El-Enany that stage this kind of encounter are: *al-Baydā'* [The White Woman] (1955), *al-Laḥẓa al-ḥarija* [The Critical Moment] (1958), "Sirruhu al-bāti" [The Secret of His Power] (1958), "A-kāna lā-budd an tuḍī'i al-nūr yā Lili?" [Did you have to turn on the light, Li-Li?] (1971).

5 El-Enany mentions: *al-Ṛāda* [Will-Power] (1977), *An 'amd isma' tasma'* [Listen intently and you will hear] (1974), and the short story "al-Sijār" [The Cigar] (1985).

America's involvement in Vietnam and against a background of its continuing anti-Arab policies with regard to the Palestinian question, or to put it in more general terms, at the height of the Cold War years when to most third world countries America was the symbol of capitalist reaction and neocolonialism working against progressive powers the world over, it is not difficult to understand Idris's anti-American rhetoric." (El-Enany 2002, 176). This rhetoric is expressed not only through a direct attack toward America, but also through a positive encounter with Asia. Therefore, Roussillon (2005, 156–162) places *Iktishāf qārra* among other Egyptian representations of Japan, spanning from the late Ottoman period to the incipient affirmation of nationalism, until post-World War II (WWII) travelogues.⁶

By changing the perspective, other historical references emerge in Roussillon's study: post-colonialism, neo-imperialism, and the 1967 defeat (*naksa*) are complemented with key events of Japanese history, such as the naval victory in the Battle of Tsushima (1905) in the Russo-Japanese War and the "second miracle" after the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945). Across this long timespan, Japan is a fruitful term of comparison thanks to its contradictions: alterity *vs* similarity, tradition *vs* modernization, state *vs* population, mores *vs* pleasure (Roussillon 2005, 26). This comparison is strategic in the Egyptian domestic debate about identity and modernity at its various stages, as the metaphor of the mirror suggests: "Miroir inverse, pourrait-on dire, dans la mesure où l'éclatant réussite du Japon a surtout pour effet de manifester crûment les retards et les blocages de la modernisation ottomane ou égyptienne" (Roussillon 2005, 16). Expanding El-Enany's and Roussillon's readings, the next section examines the main discursive strategies employed in this work to construct the image of the Self against multiple Others.

Discovering a Continent

The Other(s): Asia

In 1969, Idris joined the most important Egyptian daily, *al-Abrām*. In the following years, his journalistic output was more abundant than the literary one, to the extent that he took almost a ten-year break before publishing his late literary

⁶ Roussillon counts about 15 travelogues published between 1950s and 1990s and, besides *Iktishāf qārra*, examines: *Ḥawla al-‘ālam fī 200 yawm* [Around the World in 200 Days] (1963) by the established journalist Anīs Maṣṣūr (1924–2011); *Min aqṣā al-sharq* [From the Far East] (n.d.) by Mamdūh ‘Abd al-Rāziq, based on his study abroad experience in the early 1960s; and *al-Yābān fī ‘uyūn miṣrī* [Japan in the Eyes of an Egyptian] (1983) by Yaḥyā Zākariyā, based on his study abroad experience in the early 1980s.

works in the 1980s. He wrote his articles about Asia for *al-Abrām* and collected them in the volume *Iktishāf qārra* (1972), originally released in the popular book series *Kitāb al-Hilāl*. Some topics were later tackled in the journalistic collection *al-Ab al-ghā'ib* [The Absent Father] (1987).

Iktishāf qārra consists of seven chapters, one introduction, and one conclusion. The first chapter and the conclusion summarize Idris's attitude and the main issues addressed in his book. In the opening pages, the author explains that after attending the Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in New Delhi (November 1970)⁷ he traveled across India and East Asia. Unlike what one might expect from a travelogue, he does not describe cities, monuments, or food, but records his impressions (*inṭibā'āt*) of an unknown world that receives some coverage only in case of conflicts, famines, and natural disasters.⁸

Idris is impressed by the continent's geographical extension, its big population, and the countries' contradictions in terms of institutional systems, socio-economic conditions, and religions. This diversity, however, is never fully explored since each country is crystallized into its most relevant trait or its role in the Asian scenario. Thus, India stands for spirituality, Korea and Vietnam embody resistance, China is the economic alternative to capitalism, and Japan represents the economic miracle after the defeat:

ومع كل ما رأيت، فإن البلد الذي خلب لبي في آسيا هو الهند؛ الشعب، والحضارة. وفي البطولات ليس أعلى من فيتنام. في التحلّل هناك تايلاند وهونج كونج. في الطموح المخيف نرى اليابان. في أي مكان لا بدّ أن تُعثر على نموذج، والنموذج صارخ، وفي كل مكان تلاحظ حركة التاريخ سائرة سريعة، لا يوقفها شيء. في الواقع آسيا كونيّ، ومهما درت مع أفلاكه، في الشرق والجنوب والشمال، فأني تذهب فستشعر حتماً أن لهذا الكون مركزاً، ثقله من ثقل الشمس، ومكانه الصين. (Idris 2019a, 81–82)

With everything I have seen, the country in Asia that has most impressed me is India with its people and its civilization. For heroism, there is no higher example than Vietnam. For emancipation, Thailand and Hong Kong. For the terrific ambition, Japan. Everywhere you must find a model, and the model is stark, and everywhere you notice the rapid movement of history, unstoppable by anything. Asia is really a universe, and if you orbit its planets in the east, south, or north, wherever you go, you will feel that this universe has a center, its weight equal to the weight of the sun: China.⁹

7 The Afro-Asian Writers' Conferences were a series of gatherings of literary figures from Asia and Africa that took place over two decades, from 1958 in Tashkent till 1979 in Angola. It was inspired by the Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung in 1955.

8 The writer's considerations about the media coverage of Asia are still valid for the Arab world. On the textual genre, see also Idris (2019b, 7–9).

9 All translations from the Arabic are mine. Henceforward, only the page number will be provided for quotations from *Iktishāf qārra*.

Idris states that his aim is a deeper understanding of the Asian man, his nature, his inclinations, and the role of women in society: this is a journey to the heart of the human being (*riḥla li-qalb al-insān*). The human factor is at the core of the evolution of each civilization (*ḥaḍāra*). So far, the Western civilization—which started from Ancient Egypt—and the Eastern civilization evolved in parallel, but the writer believes that this is the era of Asia (*‘aṣr Āsiyā* or *‘aṣr al-insān al-aṣfar*, lit. “the era of the yellow man”). This means that this continent will play a crucial role in all global issues, including the Palestinian question and the fight between capitalism and socialism. In conclusion, the writer explains that Asia will emerge as a third space among the two Cold War superpowers thanks to its economic boom and technological progress: it will establish equality through diversity, and a new equilibrium based on cultural factors, instead of atomic deterrence, will emerge.

Idris usually resorts to exoticism, stereotypes, and formulas used in the media to refer to the Asian countries (such as “yellow peril” and “red giant”). However, this coherent image and the positive values strategically ascribed to Asia serve to craft a negative image of the West: while the European civilization saw a regression after WWII, American neo-imperialism learned a hard lesson in Korea and Vietnam. The author’s anti-American rhetoric is based on a monolithic Other, a laughable civilization (*ḥaḍāra muḍḥika*) that blocks the progressive current of history and subordinate human beings to technology. This harsh criticism is coupled with anti-Zionism, as will be detailed below.

Asia is the unknown Other, a mystery still to be solved, whereas America is the antagonist Other, whose power construction mechanisms are as clear as day. In between is Egypt, the cradle of the ancient Western civilization and now seeking regeneration in Asia. It is a continent of its own.

The Self: Egypt

It is not easy to define Egypt’s geographical and cultural identity in *Iktishāf qārra*. If Asia is the East, then Egypt belongs to the West, but was colonized by Western powers. It is not an African country since the continent is mentioned only at the very end and Egypt does not seem to be attached to it. Pan-Arabism is also overcome except for the full support for Palestine. Rather, it is a third world country. The main traits of its identity are its pharaonic past and Islam, even if religion has a marginal role in the text and can be criticized.¹⁰

10 In the chapter about life and death in Hinduism, Idris criticizes religion in Egypt since it encourages to look backwards and place one’s destiny in the hands of God.

Almost every aspect of Asian societies discussed in the book serves to craft the Egyptian identity through these strategies: superiority *vs* inferiority, radical difference *vs* similarity, the writer's mediation of exemplary Asian stories, and witty comparisons. As regards the first strategy, Idris admits that he wants to learn from his journey because Egypt is at a dead end (*ma'zaq*). Nevertheless, he never misses the chance to praise his country's luminous past, a golden era that should be reached again; meanwhile, he remarks that the Asian countries that are currently living a boom are smaller, younger, and poorer in natural resources than Egypt. The second strategy consists of inserting some elements of shared knowledge and common experience to reduce the Asian alterity. One example is a romantic poem by Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm (1878–1932) dedicated to a Japanese girl:¹¹

الهند ليست في نظرنا سوى غاندي ونهرو وأنديرا وبضعة أفلام هندية رأيناها. اليابان ليست سوى ضحية أول قنبلتين ذريتين والراديوهات الترانزستور والبضائع التي تُغرق السوق، وبالنسبة لي — على الأقل — قصيدة حفظناها في الثانوي لشاعر النيل حافظ إبراهيم عن غادة يابانية، «صفراء، ذات صفرة تُتسى اليهود الذهب» عشقها — في القصيدة طبعاً — وصارت تحدثه عن وطنها وضرورة خدمته. (10)

In our eyes, India is nothing but Gandhi, Nehru, Indira and a few Indian films we have seen. Japan is nothing but the victim of the first two atomic bombs, the transistor radios, and the goods that flood the market, and for me—at least—a poem that we learnt by heart in high school by the Poet of the Nile Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm about a Japanese girl «[Her skin] so yellow that it makes the Jews forget gold». He loved her—in the poem, of course—and he talked about her homeland and the duty of serving it.

To give another example, Idris states that the Asian men are even more different than what he expected in their behavior, almost another kind of person (*naw'ākhar min al-bashar*), but are similar in their physical appearance, since some traits commonly perceived as Egyptian are indeed of Asian origin. What is unique is the shape of the oriental eyes, so beautiful that should not be changed with surgery to conform to Western beauty standards. Examining this passage, Rousillon (2005, 158) identifies a certain degree of exoticism that strategically diverts toward the Other the internal debate about preserving one's identity.

Moving to the third strategy, the writer reports only exemplary stories about the people he meets during his tour: no names or specific circumstances are given, but his mediation as an established writer guarantees the story's accountability. His sources include the bride and the groom at a Hindu wedding ceremony (26–7), an Egyptian friend dating a Japanese girl (34), a hairdresser (45), a Japanese economist (48), a scientist researching about IQ in a British hospital (53), and an

11 This poem is quoted in Idris (2019b, 103).

Indian scientist (75). Their stories bridge between big theories and everyday life. For instance, in Chapter 4, after discussing committed literature to the point of sacrificing one's own life, Idris asks why the Asians are prone to sacrifice and what life means to them. His answer is that life depends on one's own will and having a plan; this is exemplified by the story of a young Japanese hairdresser who achieved her goal to open a hair salon exactly in the time she had planned. Planning (*takhtīt*) requires a good management of time and money, both issues addressed in theoretical and practical terms. All these elements contributed to launching a successful industrial sector in Japan after WWII, which should not be labeled as a miracle (*ma'jaza*), as suggested by a Japanese economist he met.¹² The invention of the transistor radio had a positive repercussion on female employment in Japan and even changed the lives of the Egyptians.¹³ His argument is reinforced by a witty closing remark that compares the two peoples:

إنَّ الفرقَ بيننا أنهم ناس طموحهم الأكبر أن يُنتجوا السيارة من لا شيء لا أن يَمتلكوها، بينما نحن طموحنا الأول أن نمتلك السيارة، وبالذات حَيِّدًا لو كانت من إنتاج غيرنا.
والصناعة أولًا وأخيرًا إنسان.
والإنسان أولًا وأخيرًا موقف من الحياة.
وموقف الإنسان الآسيوي — بشكل عام — من الحياة موقف جاد.
وكانت لنا الحقيقية أن موقف إنساننا من الحياة موقف هازل. (50)

The difference between us and them is that their greatest ambition is to produce a car from nothing, not to own it, while our first ambition is to own the car, especially if it is produced by someone else.

Industry first and human beings last.

Human beings first and the attitude towards life last.

The Asian attitude towards life—in general—is serious.

Our real catastrophe is that our attitude towards life is a joke.

Writing Japan: Mishima

As has been seen so far, Japan—viewed through the prism of economy, spirituality, and social mores—is the most emblematic term of comparison in *Iktishāf qārra*. To better understand this country, Idris chooses a shocking event that

12 See also Idris (2019b, 105–12, 119–23).

13 It is implied that, following the Japanese example, the inclusion of women in the work force in Egypt would be desirable. However, women do not play a big role in Idris's travelogue and his approach is usually paternalistic.

happened just a few days before his arrival, the suicide of the Japanese writer Mishima Yukio (1925–70).¹⁴ Three main narratives are intertwined in the chapter about Mishima: the exceptionality of this event and its alterity to Egyptian culture; international literary debates; internal debates about nationalism. All of them reinforce the image of Idris as an engaged writer.

To convey the exceptionality of Mishima's suicide, Idris insists on his heroism and his traditional attributes,¹⁵ as if he were coming from the past:

فهو كاتب، ومخرج سينمائي، وممثل، وبطل مصارعة وركوب خيل، ورياضي، وقائد جيش خاص من صنعه، وذو نهم شديد إلى النساء، وذو ألفة للساكي «النبيذ» الياباني الشهير المصنوع من الأرز، شخصية تكاد تكون أشهر شخصية أدبية في كل شرق آسيا، كان قد أقدم على الانتحار بالطريقة المشهورة «الهيراكيري». (29)

He is a writer, film director, actor, a wrestling and horse-riding champion, athlete, commander of a private army of his own making, a man with an insatiable appetite for women, and a connoisseur of sake, the famous Japanese “wine” made from rice. He is probably the most famous literary figure in all of East Asia. He committed suicide using the famous “harakiri” method.

The Egyptian author first remarks on Mishima's literary merits and later, increasing the suspense, delves into the crude details of his gesture, which were captured in photographs and live recordings, but were probably unknown to the common Egyptian reader. In this respect, Idris acts as a translator, a role that he partly acknowledges in the text: he inserts some Japanese terms in Arabic script and glosses them; he admits that suicide in public is alien to Egyptian culture and wonders how to transfer or translate the same scene in his own country; and, finally, he hopes that Mishima's novels will be translated into Arabic.

However, besides the common reader, Idris addresses his fellow intellectuals to place himself in the global literary scene. He reports that the magazine *Newsweek* published the opinion of some American public figures about this event, including that of the playwright Arthur Miller (1915–2005). Idris harshly criticizes him both as an untalented playwright and as a spokesman of American imperialism since he judges Mishima's suicide without trying to understand it, corroborating the idea of an irrational East. The Egyptian writer, instead, tries to penetrate this

14 Mishima was the founder of Tatenokai (Shield Society), which aimed to restore the sacredness of the emperor. On November 25, 1970, he and four members of his group entered a military base of the Self-Defense Forces, took the general hostage, and addressed the soldiers from the balcony inviting them to rise and overthrow the 1947 Constitution. Due to the failure of his speech, he committed *seppuku*, a ritualistic suicide by self-disembowelment and beheading (Scott Stokes, Henry 1974; Yamanouchi 1972).

15 He wears a kimono and carries a sword like the samurai warriors.

mystery by resorting to some notions pertaining to world literature. According to him, Mishima's gesture reminds of "literature-action" and of the "new living theater" in which acting is indiscernible from life.¹⁶ Another international reference is the Nobel Prize that might have consecrated Mishima, had he not taken his life. This is implicitly a wishful thinking, since Idris was nominated for this prize. Finally, Mishima is compared to Don Quixote for his utopian dream.

This literary discourse is functional to tackle issues of national identity and modernity. As a writer who recorded his country's history and his people's values, Mishima embodies Japan. Therefore, his heroism is a lesson to be learned by Egypt in order to wake up from the torpor.¹⁷ This shocking episode invites taking Japanese nationalism as a model even if it is based on different grounds than the Egyptian one: while Egypt has always been open to foreign contacts, Japan was isolated for a long time, an isolation encapsulated by the country's name "land of the short people" (*al-aqzām al-sumr*);¹⁸ the victory in the Russo-Japanese War was followed by the defeat in WWII, but the country was able to recover and direct its nationalism toward the economic boom; its recipe was absorbing work ethics, personal sacrifice, and long-term planning from Asia, while absorbing technology and the industrial know-how from the West. Nevertheless, this recipe leads to a quick modernization that Mishima could not accept:

جيل جديد طاغ مُكتسح نشأ، وسائل حديثة من راديو وتلفزيون وصحافة تمسح الماضي كله وتُحيل مسرح الكابوكي الشهير إلى المتحف، وتقاليد الجيша العتيبة إلى مركز كمرکز الفنون الشعبية يحتفظ به اليابانيون الأذكياء ليُفَرِّجوا عليه السياح ويذيقوهم جرعة من خمر اليابان القديمة ويلتقطوا معهم الصور والتذكارات. (36)

A new, despotic, usurping generation has arisen, modern means such as the radio, the television, and the press erase the entire past and turn the famous Kabuki theater into a museum and the ancient traditions of the geisha into a center like the Folk Arts Center, all of which the smart Japanese preserve for tourists to enjoy, to taste a dose of the wine of ancient Japan, and to take pictures and souvenirs with them.

16 He refers to happenings organized in Europe and the United States by *The Living Theatre* and other troupes in the 1960s.

17 This is expressed through a wordplay based on the terminology of Arabic grammar.

18 Idris does not give an explanation for this expression nor mentions his sources. The first term to designate Japan in written sources is the Chinese ideogram 倭 (in Chinese: *wō*; in Japanese: *wa*). Expressing the meanings of "short, dwarf," "obedient," or "ugly," this term expressed the disparaging attitude of the Chinese. It was used in Chinese historical sources and appropriated for self-designation until the seventh century. The same sound was rendered with the kanji character 和 (*wa*), that means "harmony" (Miyake 2012).

Idris's recipe for his account of Mishima's suicide is a mixture of exoticism and localism,¹⁹ alterity and proximity, and literary and political considerations. Even if this account is not always accurate (Idris admits that he read his novels after this journey), the coherent image of Japan it crafts reinforces a strong image of Idris as a committed writer. Two decades later, another Japanese author is chosen as a symbol for the Other in one of the few Arab novels with an Oriental reference: *'Azīzī al-sayyid Kawābātā* [Dear Mr. Kawabata] (1995) by Rashīd al-Ḍa'īf (b. 1945). Written in the aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90), this semi-autobiographical novel is a long letter to the great Japanese Nobel Prize Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972). In his narratological analysis, Seigneurie (2016) argues that Kawabata is ontologically distant but emotionally engaging for the narrator and implied reader, thus placing the aesthetic concerns of this post-modern novel in a distant but familiar Other. The following quote from this novel summarizes the potential of defamiliarizing the gaze in the triangulation between the Arab world, Japan, and the West examined so far:

by the way, Mr. Kawabata, why did the Western media portray us as if we were some strange specimens of humanity? Why this malice? Why this blindness on the part of people who defend themselves from each other with atomic bombs? How did you look at us in Japan? (Daif 1999, 138)

A Very German Story

While Japan helps an understanding of Egypt in the chapter about Mishima, it also helps an understanding of Germany in the chapter about Idris's journey to Berlin after his Asian tour. While Mishima is a mirror for literary engagement, the cultural institutions based in Berlin are criticized for their subservience to the American and Zionist political plans. With an oversimplification, the Egyptian author does not mention the existence of West and East Germany, nor that Berlin was a divided city; even if I am aware of this historical context, I will employ Idris's categories according to which "Berlin" and "Germany" belong to the Western bloc.

19 An example of exoticism is: "The reason [of the suicide] was strange, and the circumstances were even stranger. Something reminding of the atmosphere of old legends, a whiff of Asian perfume, so mysterious and secret, tickling the nose." (29). Examples of localism are idiomatic expressions, such as "flogging a dead horse" (*yu'adhbin fi Malta*, lit. "preaching in Malta") and "everybody and his brother" (*al-ḥābil wa-l-nābil*) (34, 36).

The main discursive strategy in this travel account is harsh criticism coupled with the ironic storytelling that characterizes most of his short stories.²⁰ This chapter opens with the writer's invitation to the Festival of Egyptian Culture organized by the Evangelische Akademie zu Berlin, funded in 1951 by the historian Erich Müller-Gangloff. Idris wonders about the reason of this invitation that—in his eyes—clashes with tight surveillance in Berlin and Germany siding with the Jewish community and Israel. Therefore, he ironically depicts this trip as a hurdle course, until a small delegation arrives in Berlin in the middle of the winter and in the middle of nowhere:

مبنى صغير أنيق قابع في آخر الدنيا. هناك على طرف بحيرة «وانزه» التي انتحر على شاطئها شاعر ألماني لا أذكر اسمه ومعه حبيبته.
والمكان فعلاً يُغري بالانتحار؛ فهو وحيد معزول، بعيد جداً عن وسط المدينة، نفس بُعيد حلوان عن قلب القاهرة، التاكسي يأخذ في قطع المسافة بما يوازي ثلاثة جنيهات مصرية. (62)

An elegant small building located at the end of the world. On the shores of Lake Wannsee, where a German poet, whose name I forgot, committed suicide along with his lover. The place really tempts people to commit suicide. It is isolated, very far from the city center, as far as Helwan is from the heart of Cairo. The taxi takes the equivalent of three Egyptian pounds to cover the distance.

Once the Festival begins, the narrative is a push-pull situation between the Egyptian writer and Dr. Müller. The first roundtable is attended by a small audience of academicians of religious background who do not criticize the speakers' bold views about sensitive topics, such as Palestine and socialism. Once again, Idris wonders about the real reason behind the invitation. When he discovers that Uri Avnery is invited as a speaker in Berlin,²¹ he goes on a rampage: are the Arabs just decoration (*dikūr*) for the big media coverage of the Israeli cause? He takes his revenge during his public lecture in which he exposes this farce (*masraḥiyya*) and attacks every German cultural institution, including the leftist ones: "For the first time in my life, I feel I am really suffocating in 'free' Berlin" (70). Everybody remains silent. Only later, the mystery about the invitation is solved: an Egyptian

20 This section's title plays on the title of Idris's short story "Ḥikāya miṣriyya jiddan" [A Very Egyptian Story] (1970) that stages a witty repartee between a taxi driver and a beggar who capitalizes on his severe injury. He makes an agreement with one traffic policeman after the other only to trick them and, at the end of the story, offers a deal to the taxi driver as well.

21 Uri Avnery (1923–2018) was an Israeli journalist and member of Parliament who supported the pacifist movement. However, Idris does not give him any credit because—in his view—even dissident voices support the Zionist project.

friend of Dr. Müller living in Germany was arrested upon his arrival in Egypt and the festival was a deal for his release from prison.

This narrative effectively conveys Idris's critique, but it is overburdened with his polemical rant. For instance, through a naïf psychological analysis, he suggests a parallelism between Germany and Japan whose expansionistic plans failed because of a degeneration of their complex of superiority and inferiority, respectively. After their defeat in WWII, Japan started reconstruction with a critical approach, whereas Germany became a strong economic market thanks to its subservience to America and Israel. He concludes that the Germans pretend to be stupid and act only in their own self-interest. These weak arguments are coupled with the author's usual anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. It is useless to give space to such ideas here, but they are a recurrent discursive strategy in his travelogue.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined Idris's travelogue *Iktishāf qārra* as an example of his journalistic output to be read in relation with his late-career literary production. While cultural encounters have always been a central issue for this author, *Iktishāf qārra* adds a new pole to the traditional East-West relationship. Asia is a mirror to discuss global political issues of the 1970s, such as the Cold War, the nuclear threat, the non-aligned movement, and the Palestinian question. As Roussillon (2005) and El-Enany (2006) have already noted, Idris is very political and polemical in his approach. The author's impressions are conveyed through some effective discursive strategies, such as exoticism and localism, stereotypes, and references to world literature, as has been analyzed in the section about Mishima. His travelogue clearly betrays some orientalism and oversimplification, but also mediates between distant cultures through storytelling and witty remarks. The linguistic register is journalistic Standard Arabic (except for one sentence in Egyptian Arabic) characterized by some formulas used in the press, idiomatic expressions, and a simple syntax.

In the triangulation between Egypt, Asia, and the West, some internal debates about identity and modernity are strategically projected to Asia through the writer's commentary based on what he saw during his journey: Egyptian nationalism on the eve of economic liberalizations should look at the Japanese model, while third world countries have the chance to fight Western imperialism as demonstrated by the Vietnam War and the Asian economic boom. Which image of

Egypt does this Asian mirror project? According to Idris, in its glorious past Egypt was the cradle of the Western civilization, but should now turn to Asia for spiritual and social regeneration: the anecdotes about the ordinary people he collects suggest that economic success can be achieved if somebody has a strong will, and such success is not prevented by spirituality or nationalism; praising social justice and human empowerment in the Asian countries is an indirect criticism to the Egyptian government; Mishima's suicide and Idris's fight in the Berlin arena encourage engaged intellectuals to speak the truth to power, be it in the global or Egyptian context. All in all, the monolithic images of Asia and the West reinforce Idris's standing as an engaged writer who openly expresses his anti-Americanism.

Since Japan is almost the protagonist in this travelogue, it would be interesting to examine its cultural exchanges with Egypt and identify other references in contemporary Arab novels. Moreover, Idris noted China's cultural influence in Asia, but could not foresee its strong economic interests in Africa and the Arab world. Another pole that is almost absent in the author's journalistic output is the Gulf, where Arab and Asian identities are negotiated nowadays. These axes could be further explored when examining Asian Arab encounters.

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Index

A

Abu Dhabi 263, 269

Authority for Culture and Heritage
xxv, 261

Kalima Translation Project xxv, 264,
269, 261–277

categories 263

languages 264, 265–267

statistics 264–265, 268

Wikālat Anbā' al-Imārāt WAM (*also*
Emirates News Agency—WAM)
newspapers 262, 274

Admiral Perry 305

al-Ansary, Abdulrahman 235

al-Ḍa'if, Rashīd 346

al-Drubi, Hafidh 7, 16

al-Mansī Qandīl, Muḥammad 337

Al-Ma'mūn 261

al-Rahhal, Khalid 9, 15, 16

al-Said, Shakir Hasan 9

al-Shaikli, Samir 9

al-Turk, Ismail Fattah 16

Abdullaev, Shamshad 89, 90, 100

Aleni, Giulio 172

Alexander the Great xxii, 125, 128,
147, 154

death 127

Amaya, Naohiro 313

Achaemenid empire 126, 130,

Bactria 126, 154,

Battle of Hydaspes 126

Gāndhāra 126, 127, 130, 131, 132

Hindu Kush 126

Indian Campaign 125, 126

Indus Valley 126

Kabul Valley 126

North-Western Frontier 22

Pāṭaliputra 126, 127, 128

Punjab 126

Sogdia 126

Taxila 126

Ai Qing 183
 Amy Lowell, xxxvi 319-
 brother 321
 childhood 321
 feminist translation practice 321, 329
 paratextual strategies 320
 translation 320, 321, 322
 Arab culture, (*see also* Arabic) 4–5, 17,
 235, 274, 335
 artists 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 18
 elements of 6
 literature 270–2, 336
 markets 261–4
 religion 4, 17–18
 Arabic (language) 21
 context of 23
 dialectal 30
 dictionary of 22
 discourse-marking usage 30
 formal 31
 function 21, 33
 informal 31
 in Egyptian 26
 Turkish-based (*see also* pasha) 23
 discourse tradition 33
 Egyptian Arabic 22–3, 26, 29, 31,
 32–5
 contemporary 23
 informal 31
 form of address 26
 Golden Age of translation 261
 history of 23
 honorific-related usage 25–30
 Levantine Arabic 23, 25, 30
 Jordanian usage 22, 25, 230–31
 Syrian usage 22
 Egyptian Arabic 22–3, 26, 29,
 31–34, 338
 linguistic and cultural dimension xvii,
 xxviii, 21

 loanwords in 22, 23, 24–5, 32
 script 13, 18, 23
 standard (*see also* classical) 21, 24, 33,
 273, 349
 spoken varieties 22, 30
 translation project xxv, 261, 274
 Turkish loans 24
 Turkisms in 23, 31
 art
 modern 6–17, 76
 modernist style 89
 state-commissioned 13
 monument 4, 6, 7, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18,
 340
 technique 12, 14, 15
 symbolism 18, 161, 303

B

bin Rāšid, Maktabat Muḥammad 262
 Bell, Gertrude 228
 Biden, Joseph (*also* President Biden) xxv,
 247, 251, 252, 253, 254, 256
 Blok, Aleksandr 88
 Breasted, Henry James 229
 Burckhardt, Johann Ludwig 228, 230

C

Candragupta Maurya 127, 130,
 Cavadly, Constantin (Kavafis) 99
 cultural memory 5, 6, 17, 18
 codification of history 5, 306–8
 collective memory xxi, 5, 46, 51, 354
 construction (de-) xvii, xxi, xxvi, 5, 6,
 39, 42, 46, 47, 52, 96, 122, 190,
 198, 256, 320, 326, 327, 332, 333,
 336, 341, 348

- historical memory 5, 257
- interpretation xviii, xxii, xxiii, xxiv, xxix, 5, 131, 143, 145, 157, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 165, 192, 193, 227, 234, 238, 239, 240, 248, 281, 287, 302, 303, (talking about others' interpretation of that culture), 311, 329
- Jan Assmann xx, 5, 17
- Maurice Halbwachs 5
- Chairman Mao (*also* Mao Zedong) 44, 47, 182, 183
- China
- anti-monarchism 190
 - charm offensive 42
 - China's Story (*also* propaganda) 39-45, 246
 - Chinese Party-State 43, 51
 - Chineseness xxii, 41, 107-124
 - Hundred Schools of Thought 108
 - Cultural Revolution 9, 45, 47,
 - Communist Party of China (*also* CPC)
 - xxi, 39-57, 246, 256, 257
 - Party model cadre (*see* Jiao Yulu) 40, 52
 - heroic image xxi, 39
 - the Jiao Yulu Spirit 39, 44-45, 47-52
 - reinforcing legitimacy of 52
 - Confucianism 177, 194, 201, 311
 - humanism 287
 - values 291
 - Daoist 115, 118, 121, 288
 - databank 44, 250, 251-253, 256
 - directions 112, 115
 - discourse xxi, xxiv-xxv, xxvi, 39, 41-44, 46, 51-2, 114, 117, 246-9, 255-8, 295, 303, 320-1
 - gender dynamics xxiv, xxvi, 197-201, 321
 - Great Flood 114, 118-9
 - Great Leap Forward 46
 - Han Dynasty xxii, 108, 112, 116, 119
 - Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (*also* SAR) 247, 250-1, 255
 - Hua, non- (*also* Xia) (*see* barbarian or foreigner) 107-124
 - Hua Mulan (*also* Mulan) xxiv, 191-203
 - filial piety 192
 - image 191
 - institutions
 - Jeanne d'Arc (*see* qualities of womanhood)
 - chastity 189
 - de-Christianization 192
 - motivations 193
 - translations of 189
 - Keywords to Understand China 44
 - Luguoqiao Bridge Incident 198
 - Maoism 45
 - Macartney Mission 174
 - Manchu Qing Dynasty 288
 - media 48-52, 245-58
 - Ming Dynasty 283
 - Mongols 12
 - national identity 190
 - national revolution 190
 - New Era 43-4
 - Opium Wars 172-3
 - People's Republic of China (*also* PRC) (*see also* Self) 39, 40, 42, 47, 49, 51, 52, 182, 250-51, 258, 306
 - narrative power 40-41, 44
 - domestic and foreign affairs 49
 - news platforms 49
 - Reform and Opening-up Policy 182
 - Sino-Japanese War 190, 198
 - Suzhou xxiii, 177, 180-85
 - Tiananmen protests 47
 - Yuan Dynasty 287, 290

de Prémare, Joseph Henri Marie xxv
 Demetrius I 127
 Derrida, Jacques 96,
 Diderot, Denis 173, 304–5
 Ding Xikang 181
 Drubi, Hafiz 10
 Du Mu 182
 Dutt, Romesh Chandra 211
 Dubai,
 Burj Khalifa 241

E

Egypt(-ian)
 Arab Spring 25, 31, 35
 Colloquial 26
 cultural influence 35
 identity 35
 Nasser era 4, 337
 Revolution of 1952, 26
 Sadat era 337
 Emperor Meiji 306
 Esmein, Adhémar 308
 Ezra Pound 320, 328
 Europe(-an)
 Arab students in 9
 artists 9
 audience 285
 Catholicism 287
 crusades 17
 cultural missions to 205–23
 exhibitions 7, 11
 Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1971
 307
 French legal though 307
 German(-y) 177, 218, 308, 346
 legal thought 307
 Jesuits 172, 208, 292
 rewritings 282–295
 Rome 8, 132, 138, 153–66
 trained in 7–12

Venice
 description of 171–88
 representation of 177–182
 twin city xxiii, 182, 184

F

Far East 301, 306, 319–21
 Feng Zhi 180

G

Gasparyan, Djivan (*see* Fergana School)
 93
 Gao Xinjian 183, 266
 Glasson, Ernest Désiré 314
 Guan Zhong 112
 Guo Jianhua 48
 Guo Songtao 176–7
 Gu Wenchang 50
 Gützlaff, Karl F. A. 175–76

H

Haley, John O. 310–11, 314(f)
 Hamudi, Jamil 8–9
 Hasan, Faiq 7, 9, 14
 Hatchett, William xxv, 282, 287–91
 Herder, Johann Gottfried 173,
 Hikmat, Muhammad Ghani 9(f) 16
 Hu Jintao 246
 Hua Guofeng 182
 Huang Juesi 181

I

Ibn Saud, King Abdulaziz 235
 Ibrāhīm, Ḥāfīz 342

- Idris, Yusuf xxvi, 337
 works 338–39
 Indian subcontinent 129, 153, 155
 Bhāratavarṣa (*also* Āryāvarta) 139
 Central Asians (*also* śāka) 156, 162
 Chinese (*also* cīnas) 146, 156
 core tribes 134
 dasyu 142–6
 dharma 128, 131, 143
 Brahmins 143–7, 153, 160
 Greeks (*also* yavana) 127–130, 157
 Huns (*also* huṇas) 156
 Edicts of Aśoka 130
 Kharoṣṭhi script 130, 147
 Greeks (*also* yavana)
 Magadha 126, 127, 136, 142
 Mauryan Empire 153
 Mesopotamia (*also* Elam) 129, 155
 Persians (*also* Pahlavas) 134, 146, 156
 Iraq(-i)
 artists 7–8
 financial support to 8
 historical perspective 14
 modernity 14
 Baghdad 7
 cultures
 Abbasid 270
 café 7
 Mesopotamian xx, 4–6, 8, 11,
 12–18
 Christians 4, 14, 132, 134, 177, 268
 Gulf War 3, 6
 festivals 7,
 heritage inspiration 10
 history xx, 5–7, 12, 14–15, 17, 18
 identity 6–9, 12, 17–18
 institutions 8, 9, 11
 Iran-Iraq War 3
 Islam(-ic) 4, 11, 14–15, 17–18
 civilization 17
 manifesto 11–12, 18
 Middle Ages 4
 national identity xx, 4–6
 artistic 4, 7–9, 11, 15, 17–18
 creation of 9, 11
 modern xx, xxi
 pre-Islamic 4
 Muslim 14
 monuments 14–16
 canonization 17
 politics and ideologu 17
 Arab Socialist Baath Party 6, 10, 15,
 18
 political figures, Saddam Hussein 3,
 4, 17
 Sasanian empire 18
 Writers 9
 Iran
 Iranian Revolution 238
 Israel
 creation of, 243, 347
 Iyer, Parameshvar T. V. 219
- J**
- Jabra, Ibrahim Jabra 12
 Japan 190, 301–16, 320–28, 344–46
 Battle of Tsushima 339
 law 301–316
 Meiji Era 190, 305, 350
 Russo-Japanese War 339, 345
 Ji Junxiang 282–4, 287–90, 292–94,
 295,
 Jiao Yulu (*see* CPC Party model cadre)
 39, 44–51
 Julien, Stanislas 297
 Jordan, Hashemite Kingdom of 10, 227
 authenticity 228–9, 232, 240
 British mandate 230,
 culture 233, 235, 239,
 colonial history 228
 identity (*see also* Oriental identity)
 228, 231–2, 238–40

language 228,
 Ottoman control 22, 229–30
 Petra 229–33, 240
 reconstruction of 230
 travel to 230, 232, 240
 Wadi Rum 232–3, 239–40

K

Kariyattil Rev. Dr. Joseph 208
 Kātyāyana 129, 130
 Kattan Naim 9
 Kawashima, Takeyoshi 310
 Khan, Gengis 290–91, 294–5
 Khan, Nusrat Fateh Ali (*see* Fergana School) 93
 Khaled (*see* Fergana School) 93
 Khaidar, Abdulla (*also* Aleksandr Kuprin) xxii, 91, 93, 100
 Khayyam, Omar (*see* Persian intellectual) 92
 Kang, Youwei 177
 Kohelet, Grigorii 90
 Kötz, Heinz 308

L

Lambert, Edouard 307
 language
 abandonment of 24
 Arabization of 24
 counter-trend 31
 evolution of 35
 intergenerational transfer of 24
 loanwords 24, 32, 134,
 semantics 164, 249,
 technical analysis (*see also* SAND) 63–6
 Lebanon 7, 22, 228

culture 346
 Civil War 346
 Levant (*also* West Asia, Middle East, MENA) 228
 Lei Feng 47
 Li Jianwu 178
 Li Shuchang 176–77
 Lindsay, Hugh Hamilton 173–4

M

Mai Xiande 51
 Märkaṇḍeya 138
 Masry, Abdullah 235
 Menander 127, 138, 153, 154
 Metastasio, Pietro 282, 290
 Miller, Arthur 345
 Muller, Friedrich Max 216
 Müller-Gangloff, Erich 347
 Munif, Abdul Rahman 238
 Murphy, Arthur xxv, 282, 294–97
 Middle East (*see also* Ottoman Empire, Levant) 21–3, 34, 101, 228
 MENA (*acronym*) 228
 Montesquieu 96, 173, 307

N

Nelken, David 311, 313, 315
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 178
 Norman Bethune 44, 51

O

Occidentalism xvii, 336
 Other
 anti-American 341, 348–49
 anti-Zionism 348

- audience xxi, xxiv, 41–42, 49, 51, 60, 61, 79, 197, 232, 241, 246–7, 251, 283, 286, 288, 296, 347
- barbarians (*also* foreigner) xxii, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 114, 115, 117, 118, 120, 134, 135
- East(-ern)
 mythologized 281
- encounters with 230, 231
- Eurasianism 88(f),
- female 321, 332, 338
- framing 49, 248, 252
- France 177, 189–198, 221, 294, 303, 309
 Hundred Years' War 190, 194, 197
 French Revolution 195
- positioning 88
- perception of 107–10, 133, 147, 149, 157, 158, 182, 258, 281, 287, 324
- tourism, 229–33
- Western 247
 Construct 249
- Oriental identity
 Bedouin, 228, 230–34, 239–40
 hospitality 239
 civilized Eastern power (*also* re-Oriented) 41
 self-orientalization 89, 99
 woman 189–90, 191–2, 196, 198, 201, 294, 296, 321, 330, 331
 world literature 338, 345, 348
- Orientalism xvii, xxvi, , 218, 227, 304, 308, 313, 320, 322, 326, 327, 328, 332, 333, 335–6, 348
- chinoiserie xxv, 173, 281, 297, 324
- cultural assimilation 229
- colonialism xv-xvi, 175, 227, 306, 339
- glocal culture 92
- interdependency 233
- legal influences 308
- legal traditions 301, 311
- missionaries xxiii, 172, 174, 184, 190, 286
- tribalism (*also* tribal identity) 231
- U.S. international relations
 trade war 247
 Vietnam War 349
- Ottoman Empire (*see also* British mandate) 21, 24, 31
 bureaucracy 23
 fall of (*see also* First World War) 31
 language and culture 23–6
 Mamluk sultans (*also* Kipchak Turks) 23
 regions 228
 rule 23
- P**
- Pandey, Om Prakash 220
- Patañjali 127, 129, 130, 140
- Persian
 New Persian 23(f)
 intellectuals 92
- pasha (*also* bāšā) xxi, 22–35, 27, 32
 evolution of 24–5, 35
 stages 32
- in Egyptian Arabic (*see also* Arabic) 33
- etymology of 25
- uses of
 as a title 23
 as a technical term 23
 as an attention-getting device 27
 discourteousness 28
 formal 25–26
 form of address 25, 29
 honorific use 23, 25, 26
 in pop culture 30
 in professional settings 25–26
 informal 29–30

sarcastic use 27
 Turkism 24
 plural form 26a
 renewal of 34
 semantics 35
 Palestine, 22, 228–9, 341, 347
 Pandit, Shankar Pandurang 216–17, 221
 Paremmakel, Father Thoma 207
 Pillai Guruvappa 207
 Philby, Harry St. John Bridger 228–9, 236
 Porus 126
 Pushkin, Aleksandr 88

Q

Qian Yonghe 181

R

Rao, Kshama 214–8
 Ray Annadashankar 208
 Robinson, Edward 229
 Russophone cultures, xxvi 86–88, 94
 Russian colonization 89
 cultural identification 87
 historical development 87, 308
 invasion, 85
 Russian language 86, 92, 93
 literary works 97, 99
 Russian Federation 86–7, 90
 Russophonia 86–7
 Slavic studies 85–6
 Central Asia 88–9

S

Sabri, Attar 7
 Sabri, Mahmud 9–10
 Salim, Jawad 7–8, 10, 12–14

Salim, Nizar 8–9, 12
 Sanskrit
 literary sources
 Aṣṭādhyāyī 129, 132
 Dharmasāstric texts 128, 132
 Mahābhārata xxii–xxiii, 128, 132,
 137, 141, 143, 156, 160–1
 Mahābhāṣya 140
 Prakrit sources 129, 130
 Rāmāyaṇa 133–4, 266
 Yūgapurāṇa 128
 literary style
 Bṛhatkathā, 206
 kāvya 206–7, 209, 211, 214, 215
 mahākāvya 219, 221, 222
 saṁdeśakāvya 215, 222
 modern literature xxiv, 206–7, 209,
 210, 222
 New Sanskritism 221
 travel accounts xxiv 209, 214
 autobiographical 218
 Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of xxiv, 61, 63,
 72–3, 79, 227–9, 235–41
 culture 237–8, 240
 communication strategies 60
 Giga projects 228, 236
 Hejaz 71, 235, 237
 heritage 60, 74
 king (also *royal family*) 235
 Ministry of Tourism 79, 236
 NEOM (also *The Line*) 237, 241
 oil 235
 perspective 60
 pilgrimage 236
 population 60
 Riyadh Fashion Week 238
 role of women 79, 341
 Saudi Tourism Authority (also *STA*)
 xxi, 61
 Saudi Arabia Self-Narrative Dataset
 (also *SAND*) (see also *language
 analysis*), 63–71

Siege of the Grand Mosque 238
 social media 61, 79
 society 79
 tourism 239
 Wahhabism 238
 Said, Edward 60, 92, 239, 245, 246, 304,
 308, 309, 326, 335–6
 Scylax of Caryanda 125
 Seleucus I Nicator 127
 Serebrianskii, Iurii 87
 Sharma, Hari Dutt 219–20
 Shastri, Satya Vrat 218–19
 Sheng Cheng 178
 Sima Guang 51
 Song Meiling 181
 Swami Vivekananda 208
 Syria
 culture 155, 208, 228–9, 270
 language 22–3, 267–8
 Self
 change in narrative 297
 cultural soft power 41
 discourse power 40–2, 52, 246
 Central Asian culture xxi, 85–103
 Otherness of 99–100, 108–13,
 171–88, 337–8, 339
 perception of (*see also* Chineseness) xxi,
 xxii, xxiv, xxv, xxvi, xxvii, 3, 23, 24,
 30, 34, 42, 59, 60, 87, 107–8, 110,
 114, 115, 119, 133, 147, 155, 157,
 158, 163, 165, 182, 227, 229, 234,
 239, 257–8, 273, 281, 287, 314,
 324, 354
 self-determination 239
 self-representation xvii, xix, xxi, xxii,
 xxiv, 10, 17, 35, 43, 60, 107–13,
 165, 166, 175, 228, 235, 239
 analytical strategies, cluster analysis,
 K-means 61–3
 victimization 248, 250, 252–57, 342
 Smith, Eli 229

T

Tarde, Gabriel 307
 Thirunal, Chitthira (*also* Maharaja of
 Travancore) 215
 Turkish 21–7, 28, 30–4, 264, 267
 turkism; 21, 23, 24–5, 31
 Trump, Donald (*also* President Trump)
 247, 253

U

UNESCO 8, 230, 231, 233, 237
 reports 228, 233
 Statistics and Index Translationum 263
 Uzbekistan, xxi 86, 88–9, 97, 99, 337
 literature 89, 93–4, 97
 Russian xxi, 87–9, 90, 92, 93
 Fergana School (*see* self-orientalization)
 xxi, 88–93, 96, 101
 geography 92, 98
 Asian character 92–3, 100
 Fergana Valley 88–92
 melting pot 90–3

V

Valéry, Paul 281
 Varma, A. R. Rajaraja 209–14
 works of 209
 Viṣṇu (*also* Indra) 141, 164
 Voltaire xxv, 173, 282, 290–7

W

Weber, Friedrich Albrecht 216
 Wei Yuan 175–6
 Wei Zhuang 182

Weis, Andrés 307
 West Asia xxiv, 227–9, 239
 Whitehead, William 295
 World War, First 24
 fall of the Ottoman Empire 24
 World War, Second 7–9, 200, 309–14,
 339

X

Xi Jinping 40, 41, 44–6, 50, 246, 254
 Xu Jiyu 176
 Xu Zhimo 178

Y

Yasunari, Kawabata 346
 Yudhiṣṭhira 137–8, 159, 161–2
 Yukio, Mishima 344

Z

Zhakirov, Hamdam (*see* Fergana School)
 xxi, 86, 92–100
 Zhang Boxing 51
 Zhang Fuqing 51
 Zhang Side 51
 Zheng Zhenduo 181
 Zhu Xie 181
 Zhu Ziqing 180
 Zhuge Liang 51
 Zweigert, Konrad 308

Names of Artistic Works and Groups

Iraq

Zabība wa-l-malik [Zabiba and the King]
 (2000) by Saddam Hussein 6

Suq Ukadh Festival of Poetry (1922) 7
 Industrial and Agricultural Fair, Baghdad
 (1931) 7
 Music Institute, Baghdad (1936) 7
 Institute of Fine Arts (1941) 7, 10
 Art Friends Society (1941) 7
 Cairo International Exhibition (1947) 8
 UNESCO Conference in Beirut (1948) 8

Salam Library (1920) 8
 Baghdad Antiquities Museum (1926) 8
 Public Library (1929) 8
 Institute of Fine Arts (1939) 8
 Baghdad Symphony Orchestra (1944) 8

Popular Theatre Company 8
 Baghdad Film Studio 8
 Modern Theatre Company (1953) 8
 Iraqi Artist Society (1956) 11
 University of Baghdad (1957) 8
 Société Primitive 9–10
 The Baghdad Group of Modern Art
 9–10, 12
 Impressionist Group 10
 National Museum, Iraq 9, 11, 15
 General Institution for Archaeology, Iraq
 11
 Mansur Club (1956–1958) 11
 Royal Olympic Club, Adhamiyya 11

al-Ṣibā (1930s) 8
 ‘Aṣṭarūt (1940s) 8

al-Fikr al-Ḥadīṭ (1940s) 8
al-Waqt al-Ḍā'i' (1946) 9

The Freedom Monument (Naṣb al-Ḥurriyya)—Rifat Jadirji 13
The Post-Revolution Mural—Faiq Hasan 14
The Monument to the Unknown Soldier—Rifar Jadirji 14
The Battle of Qadisiyya—Faiq Hasan 14
The History of Iraq—Faiq Hasan 15
The Monument of the Journey (Naṣb al-Masīra)—Khalid al-Rahhal 15

The Hanging Gardens of Ancient Babylon 15
Mother and Son 14
Swords of Qadisiyya 14
Martyr's Monument (1983) 16
A Child, a Mother, and Hammurabi's Stele—Muhammad Ghani Hikmat 16
Shahrazad and Shahrayar (1971) 16
Kahramana, the wife of Ali Baba (1971) 16
Abbasid poet al-Mutanabbi (1977) 16
The Fisherman and the Genie (1982) 16
Saving Iraqi Culture (2010) 16

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