

THE END OF AN EXOTIC ERA? REFLECTIONS OF A COMPARATIST

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The aim of this contribution is a theoretical and practical study of some important issues of exotic and exoticism in different realms of material and spiritual culture viewed from the angle of East-West intercultural process.

Several years ago, Professor Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit, the renowned Japanologist from Free University, Berlin, published a book entitled *Das Ende der Exotik* (The End of Exotic Era), devoted to the issues of Japanese literature, culture, feminism, and questions connected with contemporary and recent scholarly and political events. Already in its introduction the author advanced two problems which are of interest to those who come into contact with the so-called Other, "alien" to us, and more or less even exotic (although we should be cautious when using this term). Two ideas are worth noticing concerning this Other, which is different from what we are accustomed to in our culture: "Every committed interest in Japan has to evoke conflicts in us since various value systems enter into tense relations (when confronted with us, M.G.)."² The second idea is even more weighty: in a situation like this, is "intercultural understanding"³ possible at all? I mean here, the era we live in: the world of hatred, local wars, religious intolerance, fundamentalist strains, nationalistic tendencies? The third idea or rather a significant theme has not been mentioned in the book, is: what is exotic after all, what is it for, where does it lead human beings to? The answer to these are not the aim of this short study which is intended to be a mere prolegomenon to further and deeper musings.

¹ HIIJIYA-KIRSCHNEREIT, I.: *Das Ende der Exotik*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp 1988.

² Ibid., p. 21.

³ Ibid., p. 22.

Yet I am alerted to some question concerning the history of the exotic, its development, particularly in connection with creative art and literature elsewhere.⁴

Following François Jost, the Swiss-American literary comparatist, I shall give a brief explanation of the word "exotic": "The term *exotic* originated in Greece, where the adjective *exotikos* generally meant 'foreign' and was applied to what was outside the limits of the state - a meaning close to that of *barbaros* or *barbaricos*... The epithet obviously designated something outside the pale of the home and its customary experiences. But the word often assumed a much more exclusive sense: only that which pertained to *faraway* places could properly be called exotic. Thus Plautus uses the phrase *exotica unguenda* and speaks of *exoticum* with reference, among other things, to clothing worn in foreign nations."⁵

The word "exotic" has a variety of meanings, if judged not as a term but as a concept, i.e. when perceived more widely and even more deeply. Exotic as a concept means much more than I have labelled probably imperfectly as "alien", or that which is often characterized nowadays as Other (*l'Autre, das Andere*), etc.: it is not only pleasure in, or a fear of what is distant from us, or around us but it is not "ours"; however, it always must be in some relation to "us". Of course, it can hardly become completely our own, or only after a very long historical period as we have often witnessed in the history of the exotic. The exotic is ontologically diverse: it is not only the little known or even unknown and remote that attracts us (on the other hand it can also be repulsive); that which is full of poetic inventiveness; it can have a particular unconventional erotic impact on us, it is aesthetically different, it is often a subject-matter of ethnography or ethnology. To many observers it is also what is much in vogue in the area of feminist discourse, and is associated with real or fictitious suppressing of female element and womanliness as a whole in the male-dominated society. As we shall show later, this last has entered the area of the exotic through a kind of misunderstanding. Then the exotic expresses also psychological relationships and bearings, it may help to delineate the author's subjectivity, his efforts at his own self-projection. The limits of exotic have not been elucidated. We have a long way to go before we exhaust all the possibilities of exotic.

In the history of interliterary or intercultural process we observe the exotic from the very beginning: it was evident already in the creation of the epic *Gilgamesh*,⁶ some time during the 18th cent. B.C. But nearly every area of social being or con-

⁴ GÁLIK, M.: *The Exotic and Creative in European Cultural Area*. Graeco-Latina et Orientalia (Bratislava), XXI-XXII, 1993, pp. 117-130.

⁵ JOST, Fr.: *Introduction to Comparative Literature*. Indianapolis and New York. Pegasus: A Division of the Boobs-Merril Company, Inc. 1974, p. 110.

⁶ *Istoriya mirovoi literatury* (A History of World Literature). Vol. 1. Moscow, Nauka 1983, pp. 108-110.

sciousness, in fact all "other spheres of human expression",⁷ like religion, philosophy, linguistics, arts, also fashion, life styles, tourism (e.g. ill-famed sextourism) can become and often are the domains of the exotic.

The exotic is epistemologically not full-value. Although much has been written about exotic and exoticism (we shall try to explain this term), theoretical contemplations were quite rare. One of the exceptions was Victor Segalen. As happens from time to time, Segalen had been forgotten in his homeland and it took almost four decades before his work was rediscovered. Segalen's works such as *Essai sur l'exotisme. Une esthétique du diverse*⁸ and *Equipppé. Voyage au pays du Réel*,⁹ became milestones in the research of the exotic and exoticism. According to the young sinologist Heiner Frühauf, exotic is the overall atmosphere of the alien, foreign, faraway, and exoticism is creativity based on this atmosphere and embodied in works of art or literature.¹⁰ This scholar came with an idea that as far as the relations between Europe and the Far East are concerned, the route of everybody who is interested in exotic and exoticism should be directed towards Paris because this metropolis was its birthplace.¹¹ I do not know whether Professor Jost would fully agree with the last idea. Before launching the analysis of the French exotic scene (even that one concerned with the Far East), Jost has first turned his attention to the England of the 18th cent. As to "the most fertile terrain in the Enlightenment for the exotic novel, we should turn to England, and if we want to discover, during the same period, the most hospitable habitat of philosophical exoticism, our choice would be France."¹²

Frühauf hit the nail on the head in one important point: France developed into a country where literary exoticism became the most poetic. It was not a mere tendency which would enjoy the dissemination of the knowledge of remote lands and adventures which can be experienced during their discoveries. France produced poets and writers of various calibres as far as the relationship between the exotic and the creative is concerned, e.g. Charles Baudelaire and Pierre Loti (pseudonym of Julien Viaud). The former became *magnus parens* of modern world poetry and the latter the most typical representative of exoticism which though created on the

⁷ Here I use the words of Professor Remak from his study: *Comparative Literature. Its Definition and Function*. In: STALLKNECHT, N.P. and FRENZ, H. (eds.): *Comparative Literature. Method and Perspective*. Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press 1971, p. 1, although Remak would never accept some parts of the "exotic domain" into his broad concept of comparative literary studies.

⁸ Paris, Le livre de poche 1986.

⁹ Paris, Gallimard 1983.

¹⁰ FRÜHAUF, H.: *Sehnsüchte unter sich. Literarischer Exotismus in Ost und West* (Amidst the Desires. Literary Exoticism in East and West). OAG aktuel Nr. 33. Tokyo, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens 1988, p. 1.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹² JOST, Fr.: op. cit., p. 118.

basis of his own experiences, was artistically not tempered enough, and doubtful from a human and ethical point of view.

A considerable part of Segalen's work was directed against Loti's apprehension of the use of the exotic in writer's work serving the colonial idea, racial discrimination, intolerance between nations and cultures. Loti was for Segalen a "pimp of exoticism".¹³ The choice of the words indicates ethical and aesthetic condemnation.

Segalen's ideas outlasted their times; they were predestined for the present and probably also for the future, when better understanding of the Other, intercultural communication and the opening of the new horizons in this domain, will become one of the most important demands in our times. E.g., 13th Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) in Tokyo (1991) ended with a plenary panel discussion entitled *Visions of the Other*. Panel speakers and participants representing Asian, European and American countries, expressed their opinions concerning this serious but so far not studied and understood enough issue. In Segalen's approach the most important issue is aesthetics of the different (*diverse*), the concept of "otherness, understanding of the other, cognition that there are things that are not my own and the capability of understanding something different."¹⁴ Of course, the comprehension of the phenomenon or the essence of the "otherness", of "difference", is not enough. One has to work towards the stage when writers and artists are able to be above their own aesthetic codes or principles or at least not to consider themselves to be absolutely right, perfect or canon-forming, to overcome prejudices and stereotypes of their own ethnocentric milieu, and by way of a complicated process of intercultural communication, including the self-awareness and the awareness of the others, perception of the Self and of the Other, mutual appreciation, trust and growth of intercultural understanding. This may also in the domain of exotic help towards mutual enrichment. This is de facto the goal which should be at the end of the interliterary and interartistic process at least. The insertion of the exotic in its creative form into the new receiving structure of our European situation should be one of our creative endeavours. It is not always as successful as in Baudelaire's or Hermann Hesse's work. Even such a profound knowledge of the exotic milieu as that of Segalen's when writing the novel *René Leys* about Chinese life at the Emperor's court between 1898 and 1900, cannot guarantee the writer's ability to desist from the temptation for a certain *flair exotique*. The narrator in this novel comments on the deed of the protagonist who made his way into the bed of the Chinese Empress as follows: "Your penetration into China was much more successful than that of any European whatsoever... You

¹³ Quoted according to GEIGER, W.: *Victor Segalen's Exotismuskonzeption und ihre Bedeutung für die heutige Forschung* (Victor Segalen's Concept of Exoticism and Its Significance for Contemporary Research). Paper read at the international symposium entitled: *My Image in Your Eye. Sino-German Mirroring in the 20th Century*, Bonn University, May 21-23, 1990, p. 5.

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

approached the heart of the centre, or, better to say, something that is more important than the heart..."¹⁵ It is impossible to equate the declarations of a writer and the character of his work. But in the analysis of similar ideas at different level, e.g., at an ethical or that of the feminist discourse, the message of the work of art might be misunderstood, although it need not have agreed with the author's intention.

Segalen's aesthetics of the diverse should be seen in their systemo-structural integrity without taking the individual elements out of context and should be prized highly as as an attempt in the field of literary and art, and today, also intercultural communication. It is certainly comparable to what Bertolt Brecht did in the world of drama and poetry of European, Chinese and Japanese literature.

The extensive area of the activities which the exotic represents has not attracted theoreticians although the number of articles and monographs dealing with practical matters is indeed high. Greater attention has in recent years been devoted to exotic things in Germany as compared to other countries. This may also be due to the fact that the part of social awareness represented by exotic and exoticism is today more important for German psyche than for the French or English. The interest there is very wide and except for those domains mentioned above, it also includes other areas like architecture, gardening art, exotic plants or animals, fashion in all its manifestations, perfumes, souvenirs, posters, advertisements, film, TV, art photography, etc. Although Wolfgang Geiger maintains that in Germany little has been done in the field of "exoticism and ethnocentrism and ethnology in comparison with France and USA",¹⁶ a look at the bibliography attached to the catalogue of the exhibition entitled *Exotische Welten – Europäische Phantasien*¹⁷ (Exotic Worlds – European Phantasies), illustrates the number of German scholars studying this problem.

When the chief organizer of the exhibition mentioned, and the managing editor of the catalogue, Hermann Pollig, wanted to provide a brief characteristics of art exoticism, he referred to the American *Encyclopaedia of World Art* and not to a German source: "From the point of view of aesthetics, 'exoticism' may be defined as the imitation of elements in alien cultures that differs from the native tradition. The taste for the exotic feeds on cultures that are experienced as distant and different, whether remote in space or in time..."¹⁸ With the aid of François Jost's description of the exotic, we see that both in the encyclopaedia and in the Jost's book, essential signs are at issue related only to that part which lays emphasis mostly on the already acknowledged, old, well-known. In the last decades we have witnessed, however, a new development in the field, although not of exoticism but only of the

¹⁵ Quoted according to German translation: René Leys. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp 1982, p. 150.

¹⁶ GEIGER, W.: op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁷ *Exotische Welten – Europäische Phantasien*. Stuttgart, Edition Cantz 1987, pp. 511–533.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 16. Quoted from the original American edition, New York 1958.

exotic. The exotic, as we have seen, is related to the "alien" but now it is often put into the relation with our "own", only less known or unknown.

In recent years, part of that which belongs to contemporary usually militant feminist discourse, has been introduced into the domain of the exotic. It is in reality a kind of misunderstanding. The problems with the study of the subconscious date back to the era of Sigmund Freud. It had been a necessary and very meritorious exploration but soon came troubles which accompanied this research. Christa Rohde-Dachser's monograph on the feminine in the psychoanalytical discourse has a metaphoric title: *Expedition in den dunklen Kontinent*¹⁹ (Expedition to the Dark Continent). Freud is a black sheep in this book. A wave of unending criticism raised against him and his followers. The dark (or black) continent represent both femaleness and femininity. Ways out are incessantly sought: ethnographic, historical, artistic, psychological and other materials which could remove "woman's puzzle" are collected, thus following Freud's well-known remark: "I do not ask you, women, since you yourself are this enigma."²⁰

Some feminist discourses in this area reach out for myths or they create new ones which remind us of some features of the exotic but they lack one property: they cannot be included in the category of alien, distant or remote, furthermore they usually concern the most intimate matters of contemporary American or European women and their problems. Another woman writer is Luce Irigaray, who, following faithfully in the steps of Jacques Lacan and his idea of the so-called *jouissance* beyond phallus²¹ elaborated a theory of female gender "that is not one" (*qui ne'en est pas un*) and consists in a modern myth of "two lips" in intimacy of their "taciturn, multifarious and dispersed touch"²² and of absolute (even inactive) auto-eroticism of a woman who sexually appeases herself, without being forbidden or without being seen by anybody. "Her sex is dual. It rubs one against the other, it cannot be separated so as to make it belong to one (woman, M.G.) and to the other (man, M.G.)."²³ This is a self-deceit, though of the talented authoress who is searching for a solution of "woman's enigma" at all costs.

I think that similar theories or their hypostases in individual spheres of social consciousness do not belong to the realm of exotic itself, although they are often placed there. Of course, there are works which are at least partial exceptions, like

¹⁹ ROHDE-DACHSER, Chr.: *Expedition in den dunklen Kontinent*. Berlin, Springer Verlag 1992.

²⁰ FREUD, S.: *Gesammelte Werke* (Collected Works). Vol. 15. Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Verlag 1975, p. 120.

²¹ JARDINE, L.: *The Aesthetics of Impenetrability*. In: BRENNAN, T. (ed.): *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. London and New York, Routledge 1989, p. 64.

²² IRIGARAY, L.: *Das Geschlecht, das nicht eins ist* (Sex that Is Not One). Berlin, Merve 1977, p. 29.

²³ Ibid., p. 23.

*Die nahe Fremde – das Territorium des ‘Weiblichen’*²⁴ (A Close Stranger – the Territory of ‘Womanliness’). Partial – because apart from the valuable material pertaining to the relationship between a noble savage (*bon sauvage*) and a woman from the period of Enlightenment (18th cent.), there is a sufficient amount of modern feminist mythology just with regard to the exotic. The original and serious exploration becomes purely metaphorical and serves the study of “new womanliness”.

In my opinion, it is not correct to make out of exotic a boundless problem. If this is really practiced, exotic becomes axiologically and critically unidentifiable. It is, for example, incorrect to associate with the exotic everything that has been labelled as decadence, *fin de siècle* or symbolism by literary scholarship. The exotic elements are sometimes encompassed there, sometimes not.²⁵ This introduces chaos into the complicated classification system of these two areas of the humanities.

Jost was correct when arguing that exoticism as the “literary trend”, “differs from a literary movement or current, such as the baroque, romanticism, or naturalism, because it is not restricted to either a particular period or a specific geographic area. It follows neither a homogenous pattern of development nor a logical sequence, and its history is characterized by irregularity and discontinuity.”²⁶

Every sphere as a subject of study must have its object, aim, and methodology of research. It is known from the theory of science and research as a whole that the object affects the methods of study and vice versa. If the exotic really expressed the overall atmosphere of the alien, foreign, faraway, pertaining to the Other, and it occurred (or still occurs) in diverse spheres of the material and spiritual world, it may be studied within the spheres to which it belongs. In the study of *turqueries* or *chinoiseries*, other methods must certainly be used than in exploring “exotic islands” or the exotic in opera or in film. The same is valid for exoticism but in a slightly different measure. It follows from the nature of exoticism as a creative effort at exploiting the exotic, at expressing certain systemo-structural reality, e.g. in the fine arts and in literature that one has to start from concrete characteristics of individual spheres in which the exotic is applied. Jost’s methodological instruction on exoticism cited above is probably universally valid: exoticisms resemble ebb and flow in broader and longer-lasting cultural movements. They come and go as women’s fashions but on a less regular basis. The exotic is deeply rooted in human psyche and enables at least imaginary routes to other civilizations or escape from

²⁴ WEIGEL, S.: *Die nahe Fremde – das Territorium des ‘Weiblichen’*. In: KOEBNER, Th. and PICKERODT, G. (eds.): *Die andere Welt. Studien zum Exotismus* (The Other World. Studies in Exoticism). Frankfurt am Main, Athenäum 1987, pp. 171–179.

²⁵ FRÜHAUF, H.: op. cit. and his *Das Fremde im Eigenen, das Eigene im Fremden. Exotische Ästhetik am Beispiel Paris/Shanghai* (Foreign in His Own, One’s Own Among the Strangers. Exotic Aesthetics in Paris and Shanghai). *Minima sinica* (Bonn), 1, 1989, pp. 1–38.

²⁶ JOST, Fr.: op. cit., p. 109.

one's own commonplace milieu or efforts at real self-assertion in adventurous, conquering or other acts of political, military, discovering or diplomatic character.

When the exotic becomes part of the *Weltanschauung* of an individual or a group of people, then it is possible to speak of self-exoticization. For instance, Theofil Gauthier and his daughter Judith, Pierre Loti, Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac, Ludwig II, Karl May, Japanese writer Tanizaki Jun'ichiro or Chinese writers Zhang Ruogu and Shao Xunmei behaved self-exotically in their life.²⁷

The whole Japanese nation has in past decades enjoyed a certain kind of self-exoticism. In the last two-three centuries, as a result of confrontation with many nations and countries of the world, the Japanese realized the uniqueness of their spirit²⁸ (Maruyama Masao); it was Japanese "self-complacency" versus the European spirit of self-criticism²⁹ (Löwith). After the Meiji Revolution in 1868, and, particularly after the cruel defeat in 1945, they realized their wonderful ability of adaptability to the new political, economic and cultural conditions. The successful jump out of the depth of feudalism, likened to rats on the *ukiyo-e* (pictures of the floating world),³⁰ to the prosperity of a capitalist society, is like a tiger's leap, and certainly strengthened Japanese self-confidence. We can add "hermeneutic innocence"³¹ of Japanese literary scholars (Hijiya-Kirschnereit) and very superficial awareness of the "unification of Eastern and Western cultures" (Maruyama Masao), according to which the ethics of German philosophical idealism is akin to the Japanese kind of Chinese Neo-Confucian school of Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and what this school has been teaching for the centuries, or the assertion that poetry of Mallarmé coincides with the poetry of Basho (1644–1694) or American pragmatism is identical with the philosophy of citizens of the Edo Era.³² Tokyo was Edo by 1869.

This way of thinking which the Japanese took over from the Chinese Confucian philosophy where the point was not a strict judgement according to the premises of Aristotelian logic but trust in associative impressions,³³ in the fictitious ability to comprehend problems immediately, intuitively rather causally, or so as required by the object studied, led to the phenomena that such ideas as presented in a study of

²⁷ Cf. FRÜHAUF, H.: *opera cit.* and MARQUART, A.: *Aus Ardistan nach Dschinnistan* (From Ardistan to Djinistan). In: *Exotische Welten – Europäische Phantasien*, pp. 78–84.

²⁸ MARUYAMA, Masao: *Denken in Japan* (Japanese Thought). Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp 1988, p. 22.

²⁹ LÖWITH, K.: *Sämtliche Schriften* (Complete Works). Vol. 2. Stuttgart 1983, p. 533. Quoted according to MARUYAMA, Masao: *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³⁰ UTAMARO, Kitagawa: *Schatzkammer der Liebe* (Treasury of Love) (in original: *Ehon takara gura*). With commentaries by Franz Winzinger. Dortmund, Harenberg 1980.

³¹ HIJIYA-KIRSCHNEREIT, I.: *Was heißt: Japanische Literatur verstehen?* Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp 1990, p. 161.

³² MARUYAMA, Masao: *op. cit.*, p. 31.

³³ Cf. *The Shorter Science and Civilisation in China: 1. An Abridgement by Colin A. Ronan of Joseph Needham's Original Text*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1978, pp. 161–168.

Tsunoda Tadanobu about the peculiar brain of the Japanese were proposed: the Japanese users of language "had to read too much in foreign languages and therefore the left cerebral hemisphere was so overburdened that there was no space left for the development of the right hemisphere",³⁴ where the centre of creativity is situated. Such an absurdity became popular and was disseminated even by the well-known and otherwise credible Japan Foundation, supporting the studies of Japan, its science, culture, literature and arts. It was translated into English and published in Tokyo in 1985 under the title *The Japanese Brain, Uniqueness and Universality*. On the basis of the assertion which has no trustworthy basis and does not correspond to biological reality, Tsunoda put forward a requirement that the Japanese language should become another official language at the United Nations and the need to deprive the Japanese of the necessity to use foreign languages in the process of communication.³⁵

Another example: when the Japanese read about themselves, they mostly read the articles and books of such foreign authors who praise their successes in various fields, in economy, politics, education, in struggle against criminality, etc. The book by American Japanologist Ezra Vogel entitled *Japan as Number One. Lessons for Americans* resulted in more than one million copies. Another book, quite critical of Japan, *Shadows of the Rising Sun. A Critical View of the "Japanese Miracle"* by Jared Taylor, was not translated by the Japanese.³⁶

And the third example represents one of the summits of the Japanese self-exoticization. According to Asahi shimbun, the well-known Japanese newspaper from December 19, 1987, the Japanese have longer bowels than the Americans and this is why the beef meat consumption from the American import cannot be increased. Needless to say the Japanese continued to eat expensive meat of their own production.³⁷ This self-exoticization had mainly one aim: to thoroughly convince with might and main their people as well as foreigners of their Japanese uniqueness and, if possible, of their first place in various fields of life in the world; if it is not so, then the Japanese consider themselves as the least understood nation in the world.³⁸ This extolling of their own "virtues" alienates the non-Japanese. It is nothing new under the sun in Japan or China. China considered itself to be the centre of global civilization for more than three millenia,³⁹ and in Japan, at least from the era of Tokugawa, notably from the times of Yamaga Soko (1622–1685), conviction dominated that as far as essential ethic virtues (wisdom, humanity, bravery)

³⁴ HUIYA-KIRSCHNEREIT, I.: *Das Ende der Exotik*, p. 14.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 177.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁸ Loc. cit.

³⁹ FAIRBANK, J.K. (ed.): *The Chinese World Order. Traditional China's Foreign Relations*. Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press 1968.

are concerned "Japan greatly excels China in each of them and undoubtedly merits the name of middle kingdom (*chuchō*) far more than China."⁴⁰ Such a statement is directly followed by another demand: i.e., that the Japanese language must become *lingua franca* for the countries to which Japan exports and where these exported products are sold.⁴¹ The Japanese vanity (*vanitas*), their not always substantiated self-complacency pertaining to their own, often fabulous abilities, plays here certainly a role associated with efforts to recognize these "priorities" or "uniqueness", which is not always the case. The vain is here connected with self-exoticizing, both being insufficiently epistemological.

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Professor Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit called the introduction to her book mentioned at the start of this paper *Nutzen der Exotik* (On the Usefulness of Exotic) and introduced it with an epithet from the poem of O.J. Bierbaum, representative of German literary exoticism:

Du schienst mir putzig, schienst
ein Ding zum Lachen,
Doch ernst, o Japan, ernst nahm ich dich nie.⁴²
(You seemed small to me, you seemed
a funny thing to me.
I never took you, oh Japan,
I never took you seriously.)

The poem was written in 1906 and in Hijiya-Kirschnereit's book appeared some eighty years later. This book was written as a commentary on the Bierbaum's poem with the difference that Hijiya-Kirschnereit had always taken Japan very seriously. It is a long way from the usefulness of the exotic to its end, and, in my opinion, it is impossible to reach the end of the exotic. I understand the state of mind of the Japanologist who is aware of her mission and responsibility, a woman scholar always excellently representing the role of the engaged mediator, sensitive to typical Japanese matters as well as perfectly understanding specific European and capable of getting all together to systematically write the work created so far and reflecting intercultural process. She had the courage to become probably the most severe

⁴⁰ HAROOTUNIAN, H.D.: *The Functions of China in Tokugawa Thought*. In: IRIYE, Akira (ed.): *The Chinese and the Japanese. Essays in Political and Cultural Consciousness*. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press 1980, p. 14.

⁴¹ HUIYA-KIRSCHNEREIT, I.: *Das Ende der Exotik*, p. 18.

⁴² Quoted according to SCHUSTER, I.: *China und Japan in der deutschen Literatur 1890-1925* (China and Japan in German Literature 1890-1925). Bern-München, Francke Verlag 1977, p. 64.

critic of Japanese literary scholarship. This is not the place to point out the aspects of this not very complimentary but praiseworthy work. As for the exotic, Hijiya-Kirschnereit considered the exotic to be useful but certain experiences from Japan persuaded her about its end on these very contradictory "islands of the blessed" and forced her to place question mark after "intercultural understanding" as we saw at the beginning of this contribution. I do not know how her opinions have developed as far as the former is concerned, namely the questions of exotic after 1988 but in the latter case, she did not give up and her book of essays of 1990 entitled *Was heißt: Japanische Literatur verstehen?* (What it Means to Understand Japanese Literature) is considered by the author herself as the "building stones"⁴³ of this understanding.

I do not intend to speak about the issue of intercultural understanding which, in my opinion, has not been elaborated on a sufficient theoretical basis nor has it been satisfactorily tested in social practice. I will, however, refer to the two known works which directly touch the Japanese reality just from the exotic aspect: *Lecture barbare* by Etienne from the collection *Deux "Lectures" du Kyoto de Kawabata*⁴⁴ and the booklet *L'Empire des signes*⁴⁵ by R. Barthes published two years earlier. Both these French *maitres* show exotic, the former almost on a programmed basis, e.g. when he writes about ethics and sensitivity of the Japanese in the fourth chapter. It is completely clear in the *Supplement* where, as a comparatist and "lecteur barbare", he addresses all those who do not speak Japanese or they even have no idea of Japan. "Fioritures exotique",⁴⁶ Kawabata's *Kyoto* is filled with, and can only be understood with the aid of a "lecture barbare", elucidating the unknown by making proper acquaintance with architecture, religion, art, theatre, tea ritual, food, holidays, folklore customs, etc. of traditional and of contemporary Japan.

The first pages of Barthes' booklet show the exotic manner of author's apprehension of Japan and its spiritual and material culture. The sign *mu* (Chinese *wu*), written with Indian ink and a brush at the end of the first chapter, Barthes translates as *le vide* (emptiness) to be able to connect it with Zen-Buddhism. Not only this sign but the whole Japanese script: "The script is as a whole a peculiar kind of *satori*. *Satori*, as an experience of Zen, is a stronger or weaker earthquake (yet not sublime) which leads cognition and its object to uncertainty; it causes *emptiness* in speech. The script is created around this emptiness; from this emptiness

⁴³ Hijiya-KIRSCHNEREIT, I.: *Was heißt: Japanische Literatur verstehen?*, p. 12.

⁴⁴ ETIENNE, R. and ORIGAS, J.J.: *Deux "Lectures" du Kyoto de Kawabata*. Paris, Centre de Documentation Universitaire 1972.

⁴⁵ Genève, Spira and Genève, Flammarion 1970. It appeared in English under the title *Empire of Signs*, New York, Hill and Wang 1982.

⁴⁶ ETIENNE, R.: op. cit., p. 65.

then follow traits in which Zen, freed of senses, describes gardens, gestures, houses, bunches of flowers, faces and violence."⁴⁷

R. Barthes certainly wrote better books than this one. It was created on the basis of experiences from a single journey and not on the grounds of a profound study. *Mu* means in Japanese nothing, nothingness, nought, nil, no, nihil, and not very often voidness or emptiness. Zen-Buddhism (and Buddhism in general) uses a sign *ku* (Chinese *kong* or Sanskrit *sunyata*) for the last meaning. Philosophically there is a considerable difference between *mu* and *ku*. *Satori* (Chinese *wu*, Sanskrit *bodhi*) has nothing in common either with script or with normal or philosophical (conceptual) cognition, although it is semantically derived from the verb *satoru*, i.e. to comprehend, to perceive, or to be aware of. The point of issue is the inner understanding of emptiness which is both within and outside us, the understanding of the illusionary essence of all existence.

Barthes' example is not an exception. The story of the novel by Günter Grass *Kopfgeburten* (Born of Head) takes place in China but the readers learn more about India, because there were no "slums" in Peking, Shanghai and Guilin and that "great Die" was "put aside and the too great Be got under the control with difficulty only."⁴⁸ In Grass' allusion to Goethe one can see in principle an exotic approach to the subject-matter described. China did not satisfy Grass' "horizon of expectations" in 1979 and therefore became a pretext to present his vision of the "dying-out German nation and also to find an occasion for principal contemplation of both German states".⁴⁹ This is only one of many examples of the 20th century European literatures representing the escape from civilization and the realization of writers' subjective dreams.⁵⁰

In the end, I am for the first time forced to disagree (at least partially) with Jost. It concerns his opinion that "exoticism is inevitably destined to die out during the centuries to come, unless it is transferred to space. One grows accustomed to everything. As soon as all countries know one another, exoticism will disappear, for it is founded on ignorance."⁵¹ I think that undue emphasis is here laid on the force of human knowledge, on its worldwide extent and the "variety of psychological attitudes" were forgotten, although Jost was fully aware of them. The forms of the exotic and its manifestations in future exoticisms will certainly change but I think

⁴⁷ BARTHES, R.: op. cit., p. 10.

⁴⁸ KUBIN, W.: *Die fremde Frau, der fremde Mann. Zum Bild Chinas in der neueren deutschsprachigen Literatur* (Alien Woman, Alien Man. On the Image of China in the New Literature of German Speaking Countries). In: MENSEN, B. (ed.): *China, sein neues Gesicht* (China. Its New Face). Nettetal, Steyler Verlag 1987, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Loc. cit.

⁵⁰ Cf. REIF, W.: *Zivilisationsflucht und literarische Wunschträume. Der exotische Roman im ersten Viertel des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Flight From Civilization and Literary Dreams. Exotic Novel in the First Quarter of the 20th Century). Stuttgart, Metzler Verlag 1975.

⁵¹ JOST, Fr.: op. cit., p. 125.

that the end of the exotic will not be reached as long as mankind will be able of creative development. Here I shall mention my own little unforgettable personal experience. During the 13th ICLA/AILC '91 Tokyo Congress, I had the opportunity together with hundreds of participants, to see the performance *Hamuretto Yamato-nishiki-e*, Kabuki version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In this adaptation which had its premiere more than one hundred years ago, in 1886, Hamura Maru (Hamlet) wildly laughs and dances when he recites his most typical statement: "to be or not to be" and the following lines. This question was not so important to the Japanese script-writer as the duty to revenge the death of his father and thus obey the prescription of filial piety, the high Confucian and samurai virtue. The play does not contain Hamlet's musings over transience of all human and great above Yorick's skull. The opinions of the relation between life and death in Japan differed from those in Europe. Why should we look so seriously at both if:

Dies Erdenleben
Wem soll ich es vergleichen?
Wie wenn von Booten,
Früher hinausgerudert,
Keine Fährte zurückbleibt.⁵²
(To what I compare
the life on this earth?
It is like when from the junks
that set sail earlier,
no one left behind.)

The exotic, whether within the different form of exoticism, or outside them, represent for us something new, let it be as it may, at first glance. And when later, after complete acquaintance with it, we shall be able to shape it in creative ways and integrate it into the systemo-structural entities of our European culture, then we shall enrich our spiritual and material world. A deeper research into the exotic and exoticism, and the new spirit that characterizes efforts at impartial and mutually beneficial intercultural understanding of the last years, may be a good sign for the future.

⁵² Quoted according to OEHlke, W. (ed.): *Seele Ostasiens* (Far Eastern Soul). Berlin, F.F. Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung 1941, p. 117. Poet Okura (also Ogura, 660-733), to whom this poem is attributed, was one of the most important authors from *Manyoshu* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves) from the year 760. He was a Buddhist, and for some time served as Ambassador to China and was regarded as half Chinese.