

EDITORS' FOREWORD

It may seem ironic to write about mobility and cultural exchanges in the time of the pandemic and its aftermath. The COVID crisis has changed our travel habits and communication patterns, with the formal bans imposed on movement and social interactions resulting in an internalised distance from others. We have apparently become more secluded – and yet more desirous of contact. When one door closes, another opens, people say. That means that, where the usual paths for travel and communication are shut, with conferences suspended and airport gates locked, other means are found to reach out and interact. Thus the pandemic has brought about the rise of the online. For professional, including academic, as well as personal exchanges, the internet has become our new, enhanced environment. And this issue of *Linguaculture* comes to testify to the effectiveness of our new-found communication paths.

This thematic issue appears in the context of two conferences that were eventually held online, when it became apparent that in-person meetings were a thing of the past (and maybe of a not too distant future): EURASME – Eurasian Mobility and Intercultural Exchanges in 2020 and KORIWORLD – Korean Influences in the World in 2021. Both the conferences, and this issue are part of a project developed by the ROK Center for Korean Studies at UAIC that promotes studies on the mobility of people, artefacts and ideas between Europe and Asia. In spite of the times, this project managed to bring together authors who may have never met physically and yet successfully exchanged ideas, papers and a hopeful nostalgia for handshakes, via an online platform. The texts selected for this issue illustrate both the diversity, and the common points of this open exchange; their authors range from young researchers to senior academics, from Europe and Asia, all equally engaged in a dialogue about, between and beyond East and West.

In “THE CHINESE AS I HAVE SEEN THEM”: A DIACHRONIC ANALYSIS OF WESTERN PERCEPTION ON THE CHINESE IN THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES,

Valeria Franceschi uses corpus assisted-discourse analysis to explore how Western perceptions of China and the Chinese, as reflected in anglophone travel accounts, changed over the course of the 19th and early 20th century. Part of a larger corpus-building project aimed at diachronically tracing the perception of China by Western travellers, her study is based on a selection of 8 print texts, published between 1843 and 1919, and follows the changes in British discourse on China during and after the Opium Wars. Even with a small corpus, it becomes apparent that the Chinese are constructed by anglophone travelers as Other, exoticized and described in patronizing terms. While during the Opium Wars travel discourse abounds in terms related to warfare and administration, evincing a general focus on the military account of hostilities, in post-war discourse not only are keywords more heterogeneous, but also the attitude displayed towards the Chinese is more relativistic and contradictory, even self-contradictory, with authors expressing both positive and negative assessments.

In *FOLK PERFORMANCES AND THE EUROPEAN GAZE IN BENGAL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY – A STUDY OF THE FORMATION OF NORMATIVE DISTINCTION*, Sarottama Majumdar discusses how British colonial writings of the early nineteenth century describe the practices of indigenous folk in Bengal and Calcutta in their attempt to conceptualize the native ‘other’ as a cultural trope. More specifically, the article analyses European reports of the penitential performances during the Charak festival, held during the last month in the Hindu lunar calendar. Strongly aware of the post-colonial critic’s task of interpreting such reports in the light of existent power equation between the witness and the performer/initiator community, Majumdar maps the narrative strategy of several British travel accounts stereotypically depicting Charak performances; she finds that the gradual transformation in the nuances of reportage reflects the larger societal context and comes to influence the significance of the ritual for its performers as well, as Charak is relegated to a lower class practice and eventually banned. Thus, this particular folk performance and its internalized Western interpretation is shown to have contributed to the formation of mainstream colonial cultural rhetoric at a transitional phase in nineteenth century Bengal.

In *HWABYEONG, A CULTURAL SYNDROME: THE CASE OF THE VEGETARIAN* BY HAN KANG AND *KIM JIYEONG, BORN 1982* BY CHO NAM-JOO, Dana Ioana Budeanu refers to contemporary Korean literature in order to explore interdisciplinarily the controversial condition of *hwabyeong* or “anger illness”, a mental condition resulted from repressed feelings with a specific somatization in middle-aged women. This illness is considered to be culture-bound because it is assumed to arise from *han*, an untranslatable Korean notion that expresses a heart full of resentment, unfairness or sadness. Budeanu finds that, although *hwabyeong* is not specifically mentioned in either of the two novels discussed, the main characters show characteristic symptoms of the disorder such as suffocation,

burning stomach, insomnia, anger, etc. In *The Vegetarian*, the protagonist wants to give up on eating meat and become a plant as she feels suffocated by violence on animals – and on herself, while in *Kim Jiyeong, Born 1982*, the heroine does not feel like herself anymore so she occasionally takes the identity of other women from her life, displaying irrational and aggressive reactions. As the novels gradually reveal the insanity of the characters' acts is accounted by untold traumas, repressed feelings and the pressures of everyday life; consumed by their family conflicts and gender roles, the female protagonists become alienated from themselves. The author concludes that, since *hwabyeong* is a culture-bound syndrome, societal changes are needed in order to cure the women who suffer from it.

In WHEN WEST MET EAST AND BLOOMED ITS CHERRIES, Simona Catrinel Avarvarei approaches the cultural phenomenon of “sakura” by tracing the incredible journey of the iconic cherry trees from and back to Japan. Starting from the book *The Sakura Obsession – The Incredible Story of the Plant Hunter Who Saved Japan's Cherry Blossoms* (2019) by the journalist and non-fiction writer Naoko Abe, Avarvarei follows the progress of Collingwood Ingram, a British botanist and ornithologist who became an authority on Japanese flowering cherries. After his first visits to Japan, in 1902 and 1907, Ingram was fascinated by the natural kinship between the two countries and began to find and collect Japanese cherry tree varieties, thus spreading the cherry tree throughout the UK; when after the Second World War the cherries in Japan vanished, the British-grown varieties were transplanted back, providing a fortunate example of intercultural (re)encounters. As the author emphasizes, Collingwood ‘Cherry’ Ingram was not only the man who saved some of Japan’s species of cherries, but also a builder of bridges between nations, having helped to preserve and exchange an item of cultural heritage.

In CULTURAL IMAGES OF THE EAST AND WEST IN ELIF SHAFAK’S NOVELS, Mihaela Ichim examines how Oriental, more specifically Turkish, culture is depicted in relation to the West, as Shafak both represents and challenges stereotypes on the East/West divide in her fiction. Using David Katan’s logical levels of culture, Ichim analyses the depiction of environment, climate, space and built environment, dress, attitude towards time, culinary tradition, behaviour and practices, communication style in three of Shafak’s novels, namely *The Bastard of Istanbul*, *Three Daughters of Eve* and *Honour*. She finds that, at the level of narrative structure, characters and images, the East is consistently presented in parallel to the West. Nevertheless, the novels are replete with cultural images specific to Turkey as a country whose identity escapes categorization because of its constant oscillation between East and West. The author concludes that Shafak’s novels provide cultural translations of the East, namely Turkey and Istanbul, for

Western readers by bringing forth stereotypes and highlighting their subjectivity and underlying complexities.

In INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE WORK OF LESLIE MARION SILKO, Irina Chirica turns to the New World to discuss multiculturalism, with reference to the Native-American author's life and work, as a quality of belonging to two different cultures which has both positive and negative implications. In this literary-cultural study, Chirica emphasises that Silko, who uses an English literary form to communicate her Pueblo heritage, is herself situated between two cultures and her work serves as a means of (intercultural) communication between the two worlds in which she navigates. Her fiction as well features protagonists whose liminal condition allows them to become cultural mediators. The outcast, mixed-blood hero of *Ceremony* is the one who brings about change to his people by gaining access to the spiritual tradition. And the apparently immoral, eloping heroine in *Yellow Woman* actually serves a mythical function; upon crossing the border between community and wilderness, conscious and subconscious, she too becomes a messenger and an agent of change. Thus the author concludes that Silko represents in her work a contact zone between different cultures, a space for intercultural communication that allows Western readers to access an archetypal world.

In SOUVENIR PHOTOGRAPHY: DOCUMENTING A FOREIGN CULTURE FOR THE WESTERN AUDIENCE, Eduard-Claudiu Gross explores a medium other than literature that provides representations of the East for, and by, the West: souvenir photography. The article focuses on the life and work of photographer Felice Beato, a pioneer of this photographic genre, and on the manner in which he depicted the perceived exoticism of Asian culture. Souvenir photography, which was popular in the 19th century especially in Japan, was intended for export around the world and featured works that were replicated and copied over time, making it difficult to identify the original. As photography was slow to reach Japan for reasons of geography and superstition, Westerners were not only the first producers of images capturing Japanese life, but also the main consumers of such photography. In this context, war photographer Felice Beato would be among the first to immortalize not only the commissioned scenes of conflict, but also architecture, religious sites, and people, producing albums that provided Western audiences with a rare visual record of Japanese culture. Beato's talented use of panoramic photography and hand-coloring helped establish the genre of souvenir photography, which had a significant impact on the representation of Asian culture in the Western world. Nevertheless, the author concludes, his albums of photographs provided manipulated images that catered to the expectations of a specific Western audience rather than attempting to capture the actual life of their Eastern subjects.

In ORIENTALISM AND THE EASTERN EUROPEAN PERIPHERY, Mihaela

Mudure offers a critical analysis of Westcentric orientalism and pleads for exploring alternative, Central and Eastern European (CEE) orientalist discourses, relevant through their geographical and cultural proximity to the Oriental Other. While Said's referential definition of orientalism as a discourse of power is a staple of literary and cultural theory, Mudure challenges the imperialistic perspective it engenders and subsequently proposes an overview of orientalist discourses from Central and Eastern Europe, illustrating a multiplicity of ethnic, political and personal perspectives. Thus an early founder of orientalism *avant la lettre* is the Romanian prince and scholar Dimitrie Cantemir, whose *History of the Ottoman Empire* and other works were a main source of Oriental information for the Western general public and specialists. Cantemir's documented, rich and lively account carried a political agenda typical of the Balkan cultures and its author, though torn between the Ottoman and Russian empires, identified with a moralist Western gaze. Ienăchiță Văcărescu's *History of the Ottoman Empire* provides another example of an insider's perspective and points to a more benevolent representation of the Other, supported by religious and cultural arguments of tolerance and diplomacy. Yet another perspective is offered by Transylvania-born Kelemen Mikes, whose exilic letters to an imaginary aunt construct a picturesque image of the Oriental difference, while expressing a sense of being at the edge (and end) of Europe. Further examples from Polish and other CEE contributions come to support the conclusion that this geographical area in-between created Orientalist discourses that reflect its cultural ambiguity and frame the Other in ways that are not necessarily adversarial, but multiple and accommodating. Mihaela Mudure's article provides the necessary conclusion to our dialogue about, between and beyond East and West, shifting focus from the imperialist eye and reverse gaze and inviting us to look in the mirror of our otherness.

In the book review *Sir Gawain and the Grene Knyght* | *Sir Gawain și Cavalerul cel Verde*, Mihaela Buzec refers to the means of intercultural communication that is translation and discusses the recent Romanian version of the Middle English text provided by Mircea Tomuș and published in bilingual edition at Editura Școala Ardeleană in 2021. Buzec salutes the translator's choice and ability to produce a verse text that matches the tone and rhetoric of the original and highlights the strategies used to render both the form and the content of the story with exceptional loyalty. Thus the translation preserves the specific cultural difference of the text, while also making it accessible across time and place. Actually, cultural exchange is characteristic of translation, which involves a transfer between and beyond cultures as it creates a new space where author, translator and reader can meet to communicate interculturally. It is this kind of space beyond that this volume, too, aspires to create.

Then it is not so much ironic as hopeful that this issue of *Linguaculture* insists to focus on mobility and cultural exchanges between Europe and Asia. The past and present movement of people and ideas, at the level of individual experiences or at a larger societal scale, is worth examining in all its traditional and newer forms. It is a source of education on our nature as *homo viator*, literal and figurative travelers. Be it travel journals or photographs, novels or translations, letters or screens, the means for moving out of our selves and encountering the other, whether with enthusiasm or apprehension, are ever changing and yet always there, available for us to shape our (inter)cultural selves.

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