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ORIENTALISM AND OCCIDENTALISM: WHEN THE TWAIN MEET

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Abstract: *The article reviews and discusses terms and notions that were historically linked with civilizational and, more narrowly, image-based interactions between the conventionally understood “West” and “East”, beginning with the terms denoting barbarians in Ancient Greece and Ancient China. The author proposes to expand the vocabulary traditionally employed by historians (art historians in particular) by augmenting it with the notion of Occidentalism. Here, the term is stripped of its associated controversy and placed strictly in culturological context, where it designates a fascination with the culture of Western Europe that was manifested by the Chinese elite in the 18th century – and in this narrow meaning it contrasts with E. Said’s socio-politically-loaded Orientalism. To define Occidentalism as a phenomenon, the article looks at the way it partly mirrored Orientalism, which as an art movement existed in European culture and art since at least the 16th century, only earning its present name in the 19th century (care is taken to differentiate between the ways Orientalism and Occidentalism are understood in sociology vs art history). The two trends are compared by looking at their origins; similarities; differences in scope; and a noticeable asymmetry demonstrated in the interest of one part of the inhabited world towards another. Still, even though Far Eastern (and in particular Chinese) Occidentalism was a far less pronounced cultural phenomenon than European Orientalism, it was not through some historical inevitability. The author reviews a historical episode illustrating how Ancient Chinese statesmen pursued potential contacts with Ancient Rome and gives her view of why, ultimately, it was the Western interest that prevailed as a vector of intercultural inquiry. The article also touches upon the modern tendency to see the East–West interface as having much older roots than previously thought, and highlights some questions within the domain of this Orientalist–Occidentalist discourse that seem to point towards productive areas of research.*

Keywords: Orientalism, Occidentalism, Chinoiserie, Edward Said, Oriental Studies.

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ОРИЕНТАЛИЗМ И ОКСИДЕНТАЛИЗМ: МЕСТО И ВРЕМЯ ВСТРЕЧИ

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Резюме: *Статья посвящена обзору и определению терминов и понятий, связанных с цивилизационно-имаджинологическими взаимоотношениями условного «Запада» и условного «Востока» в исторической ретроспективе (начиная с возникновения термина «варвары» в Древней Греции и древнем Китае). Материал ставит перед собой цель расширить искусствоведческий терминологический вокабуляр, для чего автор вводит в обращение понятие «оксидентализм». Понимание этого явления, выразившегося в ограниченном и весьма элитарном увлечении культурой стран Западной Европы в Китае XVIII в., располагается в культурологической плоскости (в отличие от параллельной Саидовскому «ориентализму» социально-политической). Для определения оксидентализма как явления в статье ставится задача разобрать его неполное зеркальное соответствие направлению «ориентализм», существовавшему в европейских культуре и искусстве с XVI в. и обозначенному этим термином лишь в XIX в. Уточняются различия социологического и искусствоведческого понимания терминов «ориентализм» и «оксидентализм», даны характеристики основных сходств и различий этих явлений культуры – причины их возникновения, разница масшта-*

бов явлений, неполное соответствие самой сущности интереса к другому полюсу обитаемой ойкумены. В статье разбираются некоторые исторические прецеденты заинтересованности древнекитайских политиков в контактах с Древним Римом и высказываются предположения по поводу причин, приведших к преобладанию направленности вектора интереса с Запада на Восток, а не наоборот. Рассмотрена набирающая обороты современная тенденция удревянять контакты между Западной и Восточной цивилизациями. Отмечены актуальные и по-прежнему ожидающие исследования вопросы, связанные с комплексом проблем, очерчивающих «ориенталистически-оксиденталистический» дискурс, и приведены причины возникновения и характеристики «оксиденталистского» направления в культуре стран Дальнего Востока, в частности, Китая, заметно уступающие по масштабу европейскому ориентализму как культурному феномену.

Ключевые слова: ориентализм, оксидентализм, шинуазри, Эдвард Саид, востоковедение.

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Mutual penetration, influence, and any at all interaction of notions that have been traditionally (sometimes for centuries) used to define East and West – as well as their ways of learning about each other – is a great body of problems that touch upon the whole range of humanitarian knowledge and interweave in the most frustratingly multi-disciplinarian way possible. The present work aims, however modestly, to add another one to the plethora of terms that describe the study of the East in the West and the West in the East – the notion of *Occidentalism*¹. Partly it mirrors (the already commonplace) *Orientalism*, popularised by Edward Said [see, e.g.: Alaeв, 2018; Schimmelpenninck, 2010]; but here, we suggest that it be utilised in a narrower scope limited to the domains of Culturology, Art History and Criticism. It is plainly evident from recent conferential talks and frequent publications [see., e.g.: Volynskiy, 2019] that academic community is keenly interested in this interdisciplinary topic. To achieve the goal in question, therefore, the author will try to make a short survey of the relevant terms used in historiography and art history.

The East's and West's ambitions to comprehend one another, immortalised by Kipling as early as 1889 in his abundantly cited *Ballad of East and West*², were always quite painful. As a problem it was first attested in European historiography probably during Greco-Persian Wars (499–449 BC) in their depiction by Herodotus (484–425 B.C.) and his younger contemporary general Thucydides (460–400 B.C.), and in the East – China being this author's traditional focus – during the times of the first centralised dynasties (Qin and Han 221 B.C. – A.D. 220). The reason for this *painfulness* is quite clear. The two great civilisational cauldrons – Europe, which birthed the first Western empires (the Hellenistic Empire of Alexander the Great and Ancient Rome), and the East with its gentleman's set of great imperial formations, ranging from Neo-Assyrian Empire and Alexander's contemporary Persian Empire of the Achaemenides to the Far Eastern civilisational hub of Ancient China beginning from Han (206 B.C. – A.D. 220), eventually recognised each other's existence on the other pole of the *oecumene*. And

¹ A more (although not excessively) familiar usage of Occidentalism in social and civilisational studies is to understand it simply as enmity towards the Western world (the Occident), seeing it in terms of dehumanising stereotypes. Such ideological perceptions of the West can be found in, e.g., [Carrier, 1995], [Xiaomei, 2002], and [Buruma, Margalit, 2004 (with critique to the latter work in [Jacques, 2004])]. As such the term is often understood as a counterpart of Said's *Orientalism* (admittedly more mellow). However, as stated elsewhere, the present author's ambition is to capitalise on the term's novelty in art historical and culturological studies, and use it net of any ideological encumbrances.

² “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,

Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;

But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,

When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!” Rudyard Kipling. *The Ballad of East and West* // *Bartleby.com*. – URL: <https://www.bartleby.com/246/1129.html>. Accessed 01.08.2019.

while this realisation readily extrapolated to the realm of legends and myths, palpable artefacts (such as silk or works of applied arts) as well as less material but no less factual things (like beliefs, gods, fantastic beasts, and graphic motifs) were also in ample evidence. These couldn't be easily discarded, nor easily reconciled with the existing fabric of life. Similarly, the Great Migration Period (4th to 6th centuries A.D.), when whole peoples from the East re-settled to the West, effected a radical change in the European civilisational paradigm.

It dawned on thinkers and potentates of the West rather early, therefore, that differences between civilisations in the opposite ends of the Earth were many and momentous. And, despite all the attempts to work out at least some *consolation vocabulary*³, they were acutely aware of the fact that from the East came not only light (*Ex Oriente lux*), but also darkness (Russian word *t'ma* / *тьма*, both meant “darkness” and denoted Mongol hordes in Turkic and Russian languages). As a result, the space in the European thought discourse reserved for Eastern countries and peoples was drastically different from the Western space, where, despite all controversies and wars, people and events were perceived as «our own». Already in this setup we discover the roots of the phenomenon which Edward Said would immortalise by appropriating the word more commonly found in the thesaurus of historians of art and culture – *Orientalism*.

This appropriation, while apt, gives rise to an important difference. We should distinguish between Orientalism as a term for Westerners studying East (and all the complex attitude problems inherent therein), Oriental Studies, which we owe to Edward Said⁴ (1978), and Orientalism as an art movement.

This latter phenomenon became easily discernible around late 15th – early 16th century, when Europe encountered the Ottoman Empire. It was then that artists like Gentile Bellini (c. 1429–1507) not only painted great rulers – like Mehmed II Fatih, the captor of Constantinople (1432–1481) (*Fig. 1*) – but also provided pictorial evidence of various events (diplomatic, anthropological, and genre) to European spectators in the West [see: Nefedova, 2009(1); Nefedova, 2009(2)]; finally, around the 19th century, this artistic fascination with remote alien subjects at last got its own umbrella term. Now, if we try and decompose this *Orientalism* in art into notable movements that succeeded one another, we will see that, in Europe, the most prominently represented ones were *turquerie* (since 16th c.); then *chinoiserie* (the movement existed in European culture since the middle of the 17th century); and lastly, *japonisme* – a term introduced originally by the French art critic Philippe Burty (1830–1890) in 1872, and one to which even Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890) paid tribute (*Fig. 2*).

Still, the way art history sees *Orientalism* is not without its faults. To give just one example of such a terminological hodgepodge, a number of Western, Turkish and Russian researchers are locked in an argument whether Osman Hamdi-bei (1842–1910) – a famous Turkish archaeologist and painter, founder of the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul and disciple of one of the leaders of European Orientalism in painting, Jean-Leon Gerome (1824–1904) – whose famous painting *The Snake Charmer* (*Fig. 3*) became an iconic representation both of Said's Orientalism and of Orientalism as an artistic movement, was an *Orientalist* himself... or just a faithful native Turkish artist [Vyazemskaya, 2019] (*Fig. 4*).

In a somewhat symmetric process, in 18th c. Qing China (by then conquered by Manchus) developed a notable interest for the West – and, as was habitual for the Celestial Empire, this

³ The word *barbarians* (βάρβαρος) was, of course, coined in Ancient Greece around the times of Greco-Persian Wars (499–449 B.C.) independently from Ancient China; the latter had a whole collection of names for non-Han peoples already since the times of Confucius (551–479 B.C.). Moreover, Confucius didn't anticipate that the people he so clearly distinguished from barbarians – to him people of Zhong Guo (Middle Kingdoms, plural) in the era of Eastern Zhou (770–256 B.C.) – would in future be called *Han*.

⁴ Said claimed that in the works of Western academics “...the Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual)” [Said, 1978, p. 73].

new fashion originated at court, in our case the court of a foreign, non-Han dynasty. However, by the time of the so-called Three Great Reigns – those of the Emperors Kangxi (1661–1722), Yongzheng (1722–1735) and Qianlong (1735–1796) – this dynasty had sufficiently mastered and domesticated the Han Chinese culture via *Chinoiserie in reverse* (中國風; *zhongguo-feng*), called so by [Neglinskaya, 2015], to begin reaching further – *plus ultra* – to the West. And the Emperors were omnivorous, interested not only in mathematics, astronomy, calendar reforms, cartography, and mechanical wonders and machinery (see, e.g., [Spence, 1988]), all of which were introduced to the court by Western missionaries (first of all by the Jesuit brothers), but also in Western art. This fascination with the West's theoretical and practical achievements in architecture and painting bore assorted fruit. For example, it led to the creation of the Xiyang Lou (西洋樓) palace and park complex, executed fully in Western style within the Emperor's gigantic Yuanming Yuan (圓明園) residence (Fig. 5). It manifested itself in numerous works of painting, etching, and applied arts where European linear perspective was implemented as *xian-fa* (*hua*) (線法 (画)) technique [see: Dubrovskaya, 2018 (1)]; in chiaroscuro modelling and *tromp-l'oeil* paintings [Dubrovskaya, 2018(3)]; in oil paints applied on the paper base, and nature studies [Dubrovskaya, 2018 (2)] (Figs. 6–7). It was, in other words, a phenomenon complementary to the Western *Orientalism*, and one that we believe should be appropriately named *Occidentalism*⁵.

Occidentalism was a broad and permanent trend that was bigger than just the interest in the West, introduction of some features of Western painting techniques, or utilisation of new media. It developed its own thematic repertoire, widely exploited costumed events and change of wardrobe, created specific subject ideas and of course romanticised images imported from the West [Dubrovskaya, 2018 (4)] (See: Figs. 8–11). Yet sadly, Occidentalism cannot boast of a list of works or artists quite as exhaustive or impressive as Orientalism; and even despite our wish to see in it a full-fledged movement that somehow mirrored Orientalism, the two nevertheless remained quite asymmetrical. The reason is simple (and ultimately tragic): on both sides, and throughout the Three Great Reigns, it was clear that the existential doctrines were very different for the East and the West. West preferred to expand, often at the expense of East's territory; East remained encapsulated within said territory. Unsurprisingly, soon a bizarre marriage arose, and concurrently with the elitist, court-inspired Occidentalism came *Occidentophobia*, manifesting itself most famously in the Boxer (Yihetuan) Rebellion (1899–1901), Qing China's grim and gory greeting to the 20th century.

But there were notable exceptions. For example, a well-known casus of the famous Chinese general Ban Chao (班超; A.D. 32–102), who in A.D. 97 tried to send to Rome (Chinese Daqin; 大秦) an embassy headed by one Gan Ing (甘英; ?–?). Gan Ing failed to reach the city (even though all roads led to it) because he was stopped by the more Western (relative to China) Parthians, and feared to undertake a voyage across the Persian Gulf [Hill, 2009, p. 5–25]. There are a few conclusions here, besides the obligatory ones that habitually concentrate on transit trade in silk along the Silk Road between the Country of *Seres* (where, according to the Roman beliefs, people would comb down silk from trees) and the Western world. Firstly, Ancient Rome *knew* about Ancient China (no matter how the latter was called); secondly, Ancient China *knew* about Ancient Rome; thirdly and more importantly still, Ancient China *wanted to know* about Ancient Rome more than it had already known – through diplomatic means at that – and initiated the contact⁶. Here, therefore, cultural Occidentalism was in evidence, and it

⁵ This author intends to disabuse the term of any biases or undesirable connotations, and, as stated originally, to limit its use solely to the territory of culture and art history.

⁶ One cannot resist the temptation to recall William Golding's brilliant 1956 novella *Envoy Extraordinary*. Set in Ancient Rome, it tells the story of an inventor called Phanocles, who, at the court of an Emperor, labours against a background of court intrigues instantly recognisable to anyone who read Suetonius. Phanocles invents things far ahead

clearly preceded Orientalism; but overall this doesn't, of course, disprove the general observation that the vector of vivid exploratory interest for the most part was always pointed from the West to the East⁷.

In a somewhat provocative summary, this author believes the thought space that pertains to the mutual permeability of Western and Eastern histories, arts, and cultures needs to be rather thoroughly cleansed of both victimisation and oppressor's guilt. The relationship between the studying and the studied – 'Western' and 'Eastern' civilizations respectively (see., e.g., [Dubrovskaya, 2018(4), Dubrovskaya, 2019 (1–2)]; Fig. 12) – was never one-sided, as the whole phenomenon of Occidentalism shows. Indeed, the way the East assimilated the West's achievements, improved upon their shortcomings, and then exported them back is a field of study straddling many disciplines and offering valuable insight not only historical, but also strategic. We would not be too surprised to see, in some foreseeable future, the academic community hotly debating some new revolutionary theses of an Art History monograph titled 'Occidentalism'.

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of his time (like cookers, steam engines, and explosives), but the Emperor, realising that these inventions are likely to destabilise the empire, sends him to be the ambassador to China. The reader is thus gently led to the conclusion that the reason these wonderful things were first invented in China (= East) and not in Rome (= West) was simply a lapse of strategic judgment on the part of a Westerner. An *Orientalistic* approach, indeed!

⁷ It is unfortunately beyond the scope of a small article – although within the scope of this author's ambition – to study the intricacies of this mutual interest throughout its history. And so we do not comment here, for example, on the recently popularised theory that the Terracotta Guard of Emperor Qin Shihuang (reign 221–210 B.C.) was heavily influenced by Hellenistic art that spread in the East after the conquests of Alexander the Great [Montgomery, Cammack, 2016]. Still, such an idea alone speaks volumes about the contemporary tendency to see the chronology and geography of the East-West interface as much older and broader than is normally thought.

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