From Normative Chauvinism to Cultural Relativism

–Stages in the Reception of Foreign Cultural Systems in

German Thought and Literature

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Abstract

It is the aim of this paper to examine how art – especially literature – as a system within the cultural system has been used in German literary texts starting from the Baroque era not only to depict society and the Lebenswelt as such but also to provide a means of cultural education and protection against potentially "dangerous" foreign cultural elements asumed to have a harmful effect for the whole system of Western culture. The way foreign cutures – especially Oriental cultures – have been presented in German literature over the centuries shall be examined in order to show that significant changes have taken place not only in the depiction of foreign cultural elements but also in the way how literature has worked as an educational system for Western society providing protection against exotic cultures that were suspected of having a destabilizing effect on Western culture.

Keywords: Cultural systems; Inter-cultural communication; German literature; Modernism; Cultural stereotypes; Exoticism

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It is the aim of this paper to examine how art —especially literature— as a system within the cultural system has been used in German literary texts starting from the Baroque era not only to depict European society and the *Lebenswelt*[1] but also to provide a means of cultural education and protection against foreign cultural elements assumed to have potentially "dangerous" effects on the whole system of Western culture. The way foreign cultures, especially Oriental cultures, have been presented in German literature over the centuries shall be examined in order to show that significant changes have taken place not only in the depiction of foreign cultural elements but also in the way literature has worked as an educational system for Western society and provided protection against exotic cultures that have been suspected of having a destablizing influence on Western culture.

First of all, I will lay down the theoretical basis of this paper. Günther Dux explains the particular characteristics of a cultural system's *Lebenswelt* —the world within which the individual moves and acts:

"1. Das, was sich als Umwelt darstellt, ist systemspezifisch

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1   Throughout this study Alfred Schütz' following definition of Lebenswelt will be used: "Die alltägliche Lebenswelt ist die Wirklichkeitsregion, in die der Mensch eingreifen und die er verändern kann, indem er in ihr durch die Vermittlung seines Leibes wirkt. Zugleich beschränken die in diesem Bereich vorfindlichen Gegenständlichkeiten und Ereignisse, einschließlich des Handelns und der Handlungsergebnisse anderer Menschen, seine freien Handlungsmöglichkeiten." (Schütz & Luckmann, 1979, p. 25) (English translation of German quotations will be provided throughout this paper: "The everyday life world is the region of reality which man can influence by his/her body's interference. At the same time the things and occurances present in this realm including other individuals limit his/her opportunities to act at liberty.") A person's Lebenswelt is taken for granted – its inner logic is not questioned. It is only when interfering with other cultural systems that doubts about the logical coherence of one's own cultural system and the legitimacy of one's Lebenswelt might lead to reconsidering the "truth" of the system one has grown accustomed to.

strukturiert. Das kann nicht anders sein. Dem Menschen stehen nicht zwei Logiken, eine für das hauseigene System, eine andere für die Umwelt zur Verfügung. 2. Das, was das System wirklich übersteigt, ist diskret gar nicht faßbar."[2]

<div align="right">(Dux, 1982, p. 152)</div>

It could be added that everything not included in one's own system inevitably appears as illogical. Thus every system operates with its own particular logic that quite often exclusively provides meaningful coherence within that one specific system. Wittgenstein famously remarked that in some systems an illogical logic can be observed:

Suppose you had all done arithmetic within this room only,' Wittgenstein had hypothesized. 'And suppose you go into the next room. Mightn't this make 2+2=5 legitimate?' He had pushed this apparent absurdity further. 'If you came back from the next room with 20x20=600, and I said that was wrong, couldn't you say, "But it wasn't wrong in the other room"?

<div align="right">(Edmonds & Eidinow, 2001, p. 11)</div>

The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann points out this problem and sheds light on the belief that only one's own system with its specific *Lebenswelt* offers a legitimate logic: "Psychische und soziale Systeme sind im Wege der Co-evolution entstanden. Die jeweils eine Systemart ist notwendige Umwelt der jeweils anderen."[3] (Luhmann, 1987, p. 92) Every system main characteristic is compartmentalization and differentiation from other systems:

"Systeme setzen (1) gegen eine Umwelt Grenzen, die als Sinngrenzen zwischen System und Umwelt vermitteln, also sowohl auf Internes als auch auf Externes verweisen und beides füreinander zugänglich halten. Sie grenzen damit (2) einen Bereich von Ereignissen (Handlungen) ab, deren Aktualisierung

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2   "1. What presents itself as environment is specifically coded by the system. It oculd not be any other way. Man does not have two different kinds of logic at his/her disposal—one for his/her home environment and one for a different environment. 2. That which transcends the system cannot be discreetly grasped."

3   "Psychic and social systems have evolved in a process of co-evolution. The one kind of system is necessarily the environment of the other."

sie sich selbst zurechnen. Mit den Interdependenzen zwischen diesen Handlungen entsteht (3) eine Komplexität, die im System symbolisiert und als Einheit (des Systems) reflektiert werden kann; die insofern für das System in der Form von Sinn zugänglich bleibt, die aber operativ nicht mehr nachvollzogen werden kann. Entsprechendes gilt (4) für die Umwelt des Systems, die nur jeweils für und durch ein System eine Einheit ist."[4]

(Luhmann, 1993, p. 65-66).

Within a cultural system there are numerous subsystems that communicate with each other. Luhmann writes about art as a system and the role of literature in it: "Daß Literatur als Kommunikation verstanden werden kann, wird niemanden sonderlich überraschen. Was sind Schreiben und Lesen anderes als Teilnahme an Kommunikation?"[5] (Luhmann, 2008, p. 372) This communication via literature enables the writer to entertain and even educate the audience. Fictitious realities are created. Neverthelesss, they are not conveyed as

"halbe Welt, sie wird als andere Welt erfahren und der Ausgangswelt, in der man immer schon und immer noch lebt, in der Modalform des Möglichen hinzugefügt – unter der Voraussetzung, daß die fiktional erzeugte Welt als geschlossene Welt ihre eigene Möglichkeit garantiert."[6]

(Luhmann, 2008, p. 277)

The aim of presenting this alternative reality can be seen as serving an educational purpose within the system of the arts which themselves are in the position of providing moral and educational guidance for a

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4   "Systems set (1) borders against an environment which represent semantic borders mediating between the system and its environment. Thus, they point at internal as well as external factors and keep both accessible for themselves. Thereby, they separate (2) a realm of occurances (actions) whose actualization they credit themselves with. The interdependence of these actions leads to complexity (3) which can be symbolized within the system and be reflected as unity of the system; which, insofar, remains available for the system as meaning which cannot be grasped, though. The same is true for (4) the environment of the system which only represents a unity for and due to the system."

5   "Nobody will be surprised that literature can be understood as communication. What else are writing and reading but participating in communication?"

6   "half a world, it is experienced as other world and is added to the reference world in which one has always lived as mode of the possible—based on the prerequisite that this fictionally created world guarantees its own possibility as closed (complete) world."

large audience.[7] Luhmann's contention that literature does not present a "half" world but a "different" world is crucial for this paper because the emphasis of the (biased) cultural narratives discussed here lies on convincing the audience of the reality—the truth—of the narratives created.

The two categories I will use in order to classify German literature that deals with foreign cultural elements are Martha C. Nussbaum's concepts of *normative chauvinism* and *normative arcadianism*. Nussbaum defines normative arcadianism as follows:

> "The non-West as seen by the Arcadian frequently has many of the features associated with images of Arcadia in pastoral poetry. It is a green, noncompetitive place of spiritual, environmental, and erotic values, rich in poetry and music, and lacking the rushed, frenetic character of Western life. Like the classical image of Arcadia, the normative image of "the East" is often a reverse image of whatever is found impoverished or constraining in one's own culture."
>
> (Nussbaum, 1998, p. 134).

Normative chauvinism, the belief that one's own culture is superior to other cultural systems, represents the exact opposite of *normative arcadianism*. (Nussbaum, 1998, p. 134) Edward Said famously showed how Western cultures not only used stereotypical images to depict Oriental cultures but went even further in his criticism by pointing out that the East in Western literary discourse was merely an image invented by Western culture. Said coined the term *Orientalism* to decribe the Western perception of the Orient. He distinguishes between three meanings of *Orientalism*: the first an "academic one" defining

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7   Literature in connection with the printing press, furthermore, played a crucial role in establishing communication system based on a particular language which ultimately lead to the formation of nations based on national identity: "Fakt bleibt, daß die Utopie des deutschen Vaterlandes gerade für die Autoren und Drucker handlungsleitend und orientierungsrelevant gewesen ist. Tatsache ist weiterhin, daß diese Utopie die Schaffung der skizzierten großräumigen und demokratischen typographischen Informations- und Kommunikationssysteme beflügelt hat." (Giesecke, 2006, p. 389).

anyone researching the Orient as an "Orientalist", and what he or she does is "Orientalism". (Said, 1994, p. 2) The second "a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." (Said, 1994, p. 2); and the third "as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." (Said, 1994, p. 3) In the context of this paper the second meaning of Orientalism is the most important one because it is here where Martha C. Nussbaum's categories of *normative chauvinism* and *normative arcadianism* parallel Edward Said's concept. I will now use these three categories in the context of Niklas Luhmann's definition of literature as communication system for the analysis of the role of foreign cultural elements in German literature.

In order to show the changing attitudes towards exotic cultures in German literature it is worth looking at medieval illustrations of foreign countries and cultures to get a more vivid understanding of the predominant view on exotic lands at a time when cultural communication with non-European cultures started. The role of the arts as media to inform and educate a broader audience about the dangers of foreign cultures must be seen in the context of Luhmann's definition of art as providing a true image of a different world – a reality different *from* and, ultimately, socially, physically, and morally inferior *to* the Western hemisphere: "Many medieval thinkers took an active and favorable interest in *monstra* only because they served as an illustration of God's desire to instruct people or set them in a place of honor in the hierarchy of creation." (Friedman, 2000, p. 121) A good example of how non-European and, even more importantly, non-Christian cultures were depicted as physically inferior to the Europeans is Marco Polo's illustration[8] of monstrous Siberians:

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8   The description of exotic animals and humanoids in the classic *The Romance of Alexander the Great* shows the same bias towards foreign cultures: "And among them there were scorpions a cubit long, and sand burrowers, some white, others red, and a great fear gripped us. And the sudden cries and lamentations of men and youths dying affected us greatly. And four-legged animals began to come to the lake to drink water as was their custom. And among them were lions larger than bulls in our land, and great rhinoceroses came forth from the forest of reeds. So, too, boars larger than lions, with teeth a cubit long; and lynxes, leopards, and tigers, and scorpions, and elephants, and wild oxen, and bull elephants and barefooted men with six feet; and dog partridges and many other kinds of wild animals; and we could not resist feeling a terrible horror." (Wolohojian, 1969, p. 126). Alexander left Greece for India. As soon as he and his army entered the unknown land they became aware of the potentially lethal environment

Figure 1

Marco Polo. Men of Siberia (Eco, 2007, p. 123)

Although physically similar to humans, these inhabitants of the exotic Asian hemisphere show strange features that define them as physically and therefore also morally different from people of Western origin. The physical features depicted seem like deformities that prove Western superiority over these poor beings, hence revealing the underlying *normative chauvinism* as a driving force behind this illustration.[9] The main focus is on emphasizing the oddities and therefore the ugliness of the exotic human beings. In the context of medieval mentality ugliness

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featuring monstrous creatures.

9   In this context of using physical features as a criterion by which people of foreign cultures are judged as inferior it is worth looking at Friedrich Nietzsche's interpretation of the word melas (black) as having originated from malus (bad): "Im lateinischen malus (dem ich μελας zur Seite stelle) könnte der gemeine Mann als der Dunkelfarbige, vor allem als der Schwarzhaarige ("hic niger est —") gekennzeichnet sein ..." (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 263) ("In the Latin malus (which I compare with μέλας) the common man could be depicted as black-haired man ("hic niger est –")". A dark complexion automatically makes a human being inferior and morally questionable or simply "bad" in the eyes of white Europeans. Adorno goes even further than Nietzsche when he writes: "Die Entrüstung über begangene Grausamkeiten wird um so geringer, je unähnlicher die Betroffenen den normalen Lesern sind, je brunetter, "schmutziger", dagohafter. ... Die stets wieder begegnende Aussage, Wilde, Schwarze, Japaner glichen Tieren, etwa Affen, enthält bereits den Schlüssel zum Pogrom." (Adorno, 1969, p. 133) ("The indignation about committed atrocities decreases the less similar the victims are to the common readers, the more brunette, "dirtier", dago-like. ... The recurring claim, savages, blacks, Japanese resemble animals such as monkeys already contains the key to the pogrom.")

usually indicates evil.

Regarding these (fictional/imaginary) physical features of people in exotic cultures as monstrous and totally different from the *Lebenswelt* of Europeans is one way to display the moral superiority of Western culture and to stress the moral inferiority and danger of foreign cultures. Illustrations like the one shown above are a vivid method to convey an image of a stable and morally superior Western culture in contrast to a chaotic and bestial foreign culture. Matters become more complicated, though, when translating a different cultural system including its customs, canonized texts, and pieces of art into a cultural system with different values and traditions.

1 Disregarding the Other —Cultural Chauuvinism and Its Discontents

When dealing with foreign cultures, comparisons can become extremely difficult because of differing concepts or traditions that are communicated via art. Umberto Eco (2007, p. 10) points out this circumstance:

> "In the case of other cultures, with a wealth of poetic and philosophical texts (such as Indian, Chinese, or Japanese culture), we see images and forms but, on translating their works of literature and philosophy, it is almost always difficult to establish to what extent certain concepts can be identified with our own [...]."

The most common ways to deal with those differences are the above-mentioned *normative chauvinism* and *normative arcadianism*. The recipient either rejects a foreign concept as inferior and emphasizes the values of his or her own culture or turns the concept into a role model for his or her own culture and presents it as an example of what an ideal culture should be like.

Martha C. Nussbaum's two categories become extremely relevant when looking at the first contact of Western scholars and artists with Chinese culture. The characteristics of Chinese culture most appreciated by Europeans were usually those that resembled elements also found in Western culture, elements Europeans could relate to.

An early example of how Western observers saw China and its exotic culture is Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*, a book in which the author attempted to use a scientific view on China. Nevertheless, he was a child of his time and, therefore, looked at China and its marvels through contemporary Western morality. The result is a rather biased interpretation of China using Christian moral standards. Although Kircher tries to be as objective as he can and gives valuable insights into the Chinese writing system and its complex tradition, he presents China as a culture where not only social mores are different, but where Western logic and even the laws of nature and physics work in peculiar ways:

Figure 2

Flying Turtle (Kircher, 1987, p. 196)

The exotic environment contains not only plants unknown to Europeans but even weird animals like flying turtles can be seen in the sky. Mysterious beasts also appear on mountains:

Figure 3

Tiger and Dragon (Kircher, 1987, p. 166)

Exotic dangerous beasts are seen throughout Kircher's examination of China. According to Kircher, terrifying creatures like this bat with grotesque human features are not rare in the exotic East:
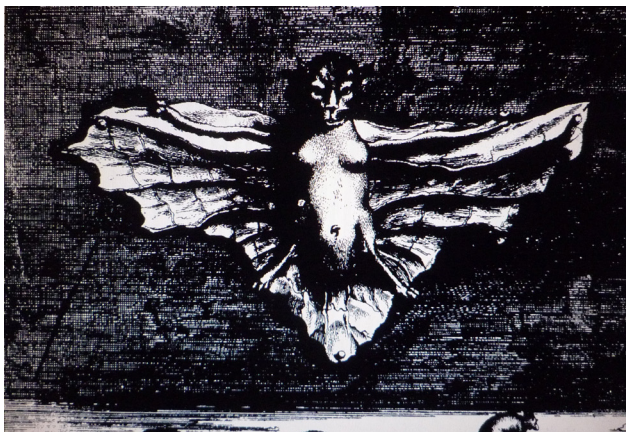

Figure 4

The Bat Called a Flying Cat (Kircher, 1987, p. 76)

This monstrous animal looks like a hybrid with the face of a cat and a woman's body. The motifs of cat, woman, and bat represent the combination of elements with traditionally sinister connotations in the Christian religion.

But not only nature is dangerous and threatening for the unprepared visitor from Christian Europe: the people in Asia and especially their religious beliefs have to be taken as serious threats to every unprepared Westerner:

Figure 5

Pagode, a Divinity of the Indians (Kircher, 1987, p. 126)

Kircher comments on a picture of gruesome religious practices of the Indians: "**So** that the reader may better see these Satanic inventions [...]." (Kircher, 1987, p. 125) The pyramid of severed heads clearly serves to illustrate the barbaric nature of religious practices in Asia.

For Kircher as a Catholic scholar of the seventeenth century, it goes without saying that every culture contrary to Christian culture was inferior. By giving illustrations of the "true" nature of exotic Asian countries he "proves" how dangerous exotic non-Christian cultural

systems actually are. That the land itself is potentially lethal for Western visitors becomes clear when Kircher points out the abundance of poisonous snakes as a special characteristic of China.[10] The reason for this abundance of venomous reptiles lies in the soil of China itself: "Poisonous animals know how to draw into themselves the poison of the ground, just as if into living purses." (Kircher, 1987, p. 196) The image of the snake is a classic metaphor for everything evil in this context of the opposing forces of a dangerous foreign culture and the Christian belief system. Kircher thus uses Asian cultures in order to demonstrate the virtues and the superiority of Christian European culture. European culture is shown against the foil of exotic cultures in an attempt to stabilize the integrity of Kircher's own cultural system. Helmut Willke points out the relevance of stabilization in any cultural system:

> "Das erste Erschrecken gilt immer dem Fremden. Fremdes signalisiert Störung, Verstörung, Unordnung. Und umgekehrt befremdet Unordnung, weil sie unseren Erwartungen den Boden entzieht und wir ohne bestätigte Erwartungen die soziale Orientierung verlieren."[11]
>
> (Willke, 2003, p. 7).

Walter Benjamin defines Baroque literature and its main theme as follows: "Mit Vorliebe wandte man sich der Geschichte des Ostens zu, wo das absolute Kaisertum in einer dem Abendlande unbekannten Machtentfaltung begegnete."[12] (Benjamin, 1991, p. 248). This obsessive identification with the rule of absolute power has its origin in the attempt to eliminate chaos and achieve utmost stability: "Aus dem reichen Lebensgefühl der Renaissance emanzipiert sich ihr Weltlich-Despotisches, um das Ideal einer völligen Stabilisierung, einer ebensosehr kirchlichen als staatlichen Restauration in allen

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10 Interestingly, Kircher's text shows a parallel to the Romance of Alexander the Great in which the author also informs the reader about the fact that the protagonist and his army "traveled on many days through the waterless lands and snake-infested ravines." (Kircher, 1987, p. 88).

11 "The first shock is always about the unknown. The unknown sigalizes disturbance, consternation, disorder. Vice versa, disorder is unsettling because it disrupts our expectations and makes us lose our social orientation due to the lack of confirmed expectations."

12 "The history of the Orient was popular and widely used because in the east the prosperous empires displayed a prosperity and power unknown in the West."

Konsequenzen zu entfalten."[13] (Benjamin, 1991, p. 246).

The logic behind Kircher's approach to Chinese culture is simply that the two systems of Europe and China are incompatible due to the differences in their moral disposition. Therefore, the Chinese system has to be Christianized. The motif of the Orient is in itself ambivalent. On the one hand it functions as a role model for extreme power in its most pompous form. On the other hand, it also has to be interpreted as a warning that any power that has not been legitimized by the Christian ideology must be regarded as treacherous and doomed to end in tragedy

Kircher's China Illustrata indeed provided the foil that many Baroque novels set in Asia used as a blueprint for their depiction of the Orient: "Darumb bekenne ich selber / daß ich mir in diesem Buch / was die Geographica &e. belanget / ... des Kircheri Chinam illustratam und etliche Holländer wol zu Nuzen gemachet ..."[14] (Happel, 1673, p. 6).

In this context of *normative cultural chauvinism*, it is not surprising that a similar (chauvinistic) attitude towards the Orient can be found in the works of Heinrich Anselm von Zigler und Kliphausen, a Baroque writer who, as a true child of his time, also had a penchant for Oriental settings. In his famous adventure novel Die Asiatische Banise he presents the exotic Orient as a place of meretricious beauty because of the intrigues and constant wars over power and earthly riches—wars between kings and the emperor Xemindo, who eventually loses his empire. All these elements highlight Oriental culture's barbaric nature, a morally questionable nature that inevitably breaks through the beautiful surface. When the emperor Xemindo is to be executed he makes a speech that is typical of contemporary Western mentality:

> "Dann als sich Xemindo mit einem Portugieesen in ein Gespräch eingelassen / und unter andern Worten diese dallen ließ: Ich

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13   "From theRenaissance's rich sense of life its secular-despotic element emancipated itself in order to find prosperity in a total stabilization—a restauration in ecclesiastic as well as republican terms with all its consequences."

14   "Therefore I admit / that, in this book, / concerning the geography etc. / … I made use of Kircheri Chinam illustratam and various Dutch sources …"

muß gestehen / wann es GOTT gefiehle / möchte ich ietzo noch eine Stunde leben / um zu bekennen / die Vortrefflichkeit des Glaubens / welchem ihr andern zugethan seyd. Dann nach dem ich vormals schon habe reden hören / so ist euer GOTT allein der wahre / u. alle andere Götter sind Lügner." (Happel, 1673, p. 192).[15]

The underlying attitude in von Zigler's novel is very similar to the one Kircher displays in China Illustrata: Both texts emphasiyes that the main flaw of the Orient is that it has not found its way into Western culture by converting to the Christian religion, yet. The dominating mentality of the Baroque era towards Chinese culture had already changed from an initial fascination to a rather critical view:

> "Die europäische Neuzeit beginnt mit einer gewissen Heftigkeit das bis dahin zum politischen und moralischen Vorbild erhobene China wieder zu annullieren. In dem Maße, wie die Europäer nach und nach das Erstaunen oder den Respekt vor der „alten Kultur von China" und ihrer „unveränderten Ursprünglichkeit" verlieren und sich eigener Überlegenheit bewusst werden, wandelt sich das Land der urchristlichen Offenbarung, die sowohl in seiner moralischen Herrschaftsform als auch in seiner seltsamen antiken Schrift vermutet worden war, zum Land der heidnischen Riten mit einem despotischen Herrscher."[16]
>
> (Kim, 2013, p. 151-52).

The conversion of Xemindo makes *Die Asiatische Banise* end with an Oriental barbarian, who has worshipped false idols all his life, finally finding salvation through Western culture —a spiritual victory after he has lost the war and his empire. The author then removes the

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15 "Then, when Xemindo engaged in a talk with a Portuguese / and, among other words, uttered the following ones: I mjst confess / if GOD liked it / I would like to live one more hour / in order to confess / the greatness of the creed / which you and the others have chosen. Because, from what I have heard, / your GOD is the only true and real one. / All other gods are liars."

16 "European modernity, quite rigorously, begins to annul China which had previously been turned into a political as well as moral role model. Just as Europeans lose their wonder and respect for the "ancient culture of China" and its "unchanged originality and become aware of their own Christian superiority, the land in which ancient Christian revelation was expected is transformed into a land of pagan rituals ruled by a tyrant."

corrupt power of the Orient personified by Xemindo by sentencing it to death, thus leaving the Christian West victorious. Von Zigler's novel is *normative chauvinism* at its most obvious. The arcadian elements are only decorative ornaments showing the superficial character of Oriental beauty based on illegitimate power.

2 Embracing the Other —The East as Idealized Version of the West

In the eighteenth century writers such as Johann Wolfgang Goethe showed a growing fascination with Chinese culture. Chinese motifs started to make their way into architecture and art in general. The Prussian king Friedrich II. was an admirer of the Chinese Emperor Qianlong and liked to think of himself and his country as similar to the Chinese head of state and the vast empire in the East:

> "Friedrich war Qianlong, China war Preußen, Peking war Sanssouci. Kein Wort fiel über den Handel mit China, kein Gedanke ging an die Gründung von Kompanien, an die Ausrüstung von Schiffen für die Fahrt nach Kanton. Der Handel war in den Hintergrund, das Spiel der Phantasie, der Ironie, des gelegentlichen Sarkasmus und des spöttischen Zweifels in den Vordergrund getreten." (Eberstein, 2007, p. 87).[17]

As a supporter of the enlightenment and reason in general, Friedrich II, saw a role model in the Chinese emperor: "Der Qianlong-Kaiser eignete sich allerdings besonders gut für diese Geistesspiele, galt er seinerzeit doch in Europa generell und eben auch in Preußen als gütiger, bescheidener, gerechter und weiser Kaiser."[18] (Eberstein, 2007, p. 87) Values that the Prussian king found admirably personified in Qianlong, values that were similar to his own, became more appealing because they were found in a completely foreign cultural system. It seems that by

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17   "Friedrich was Qianlong, China was Prussia, Beijing was Sanssouci. Not a word was mentioned about the trade with China, not a single thought was wasted on the founding of companies, about the the preparation of ships for the travel to Canton. The trade was in the background, the play of fantasy, irony, occasional sarcasm and spitting doubt stepped into the foreground."

18   "The Qianlong emperor fit those imaginary games perfectly, though, since he had the reputation in Prussia of being a benign, modest, just, and wise emperor."

finding them in an exotic culture they gained more credibility and lent authority to Western values by proving their merit on a global scale.[19]

Johann Wolfgang Goethe shows an attitude towards the Orient that is quite similar to the one of his enlightened German contemporaries. In his collection of poems on an imaginary trip to Asia, *Der west-östliche Divan*, the author starts with the following verse:

> "Gottes ist der Orient!
> Gottes ist der Okzident!
> Nord- und südliches Gelände
> Ruht im Frieden seiner Hände."[20]
>> (Goethe, 1965a, p. 10)

Although many of his "Asian" poems show arcadian elements, Goethe manages to present Eastern and Western culture as versions of the same moral background. Nevertheless, Goethe was fascinated by the Orient, and he employed Chinese elements in various poems, one of the most widely known being "Sag' was könnt' uns Mandarinen":

> Sag', was könnt' uns Mandarinen,
> Satt zu herrschen, müd zu dienen,
> Sag', was könnt' uns übrigbleiben,
> Als in solchen Frühlingstagen
> Uns des Nordens zu entschlagen
> Und am Wasser und im Grünen
> Fröhlich trinken, geistig schreiben,
> Schal' auf Schale, Zug in Zügen.[21]
>> (Goethe, 1965b, p. 387).

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19   It needs to be pointed out that one popular belief was to view all religious and cultural systems as different versions of the same original system because all human beings adhere to the same "moral law". Immanuel Kant's famously contemplated this enlightened belief: "Zwei Dinge erfüllen das Gemüt mit immer neuer und zunehmender Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht, je öfter und anhaltender sich das Nachdenken damit beschäftigt: Der bestirnte Himmel über mir, und das moralische Gesetz in mir." (Kant, 1998, p. 300) Arthur Schopenhauer follows Kant when he compares Western and Oriental religious practices: "Bei so grundverschiedenen Dogmen, Sitten und Umgebungen ist das Streben und das innere Leben Beider ganz das selbe." (Schopenhauer, 1999, p. 500).

20   "God's is the Orient! / God's is the Occident! / Northern as well as Southern lands, / Rest in peace in his hands."

21   "Tell me, what could us mandarins, / Fed up with ruling, tired of serving, / Tell me, what else we could do, / Than in such spring days / Head for the North / And at the water's edge and the in the green / Drink merrily, write thoughtfully, / Cup after cup, train after train."

The strong arcadian overtones of this poem and the image of Chinese officials evoke a rather exotic atmosphere. The comparison of himself and contemporary Western poets with Chinese officials is similar to the playful employment of Chinese motifs of Friedrich II quoted above. Goethe takes this *ironic arcadianism* even further in "Fräulein See-Yaouh-Hing" (1827), a parody of a Chinese poem:

> "Du tanzest leicht bei Pfirsichflor
> Am luftigen Frühlingsort:
> Der Wind, stellt man den Schirm nicht vor,
> Bläst euch zusammen fort.
>
> Auf Wasserlilien hüpfest du
> Wohl hin den bunten Teich;
> Dein winziger Fuß, dein zarter Schuh
> Sind selbst der Lilie gleich.
>
> Die andern binden Fuß für Fuß,
> Und wenn Sie ruhig stehn,
> Gelingt wohl noch ein holder Gruß,
> Doch können sie nicht gehen."[22]
>   (Goethe, 2009).

The ironic remark that the beautiful women with their small feet are not able to walk but only greet the stranger in a graceful manner shows that the author already views the scene from a more rational angle. The arcadian atmosphere of the pond in spring combined with the motif of water lilies and the transfiguration of the woman into a lily evokes an image of such exaggerated idyllic beauty that it inevitably becomes its own caricature. The cliché of exotic Oriental beauty turns out to be a parody of stereotypical views of the Orient as a sort of paradise where treasures unknown to the Western eye can be found. Ultimately, this beauty turns out to be mere decoration that is in itself not very practical,

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22   "You dance softly in peach gauze / At the airy spring place: / The wind, if not stopped by a shield, / Will blow you all away. On water lilies you jump / towards the motley pond; / Your tiny foot, your tender shoe / Are like the lily themselves. The others bind foot for foot, / And when they stand still, / They mange to utter a pretty greeting, / But walk they never will."

merely attire pleasing to the eye.

What Goethe evokes here can be seen as a satirical approach to the contemporary image of the Orient in which exotic details are only superficial decoration with no deeper meaning. Goethe, therefore, creates a parody by projecting the rational view of enlightened thought onto the arcadian imagery. At the same time, the cold rationality of enlightened discourse is also satirized because it destroys the beautiful scene with its practical and logical perspective. In the context of the Baroque and the enlightened attitude towards the Orient, Goethe stands between the both poles, taking an ironic look at both of them.

3 The New Exotism —Modern Art and Cultural Relativism

The attitude towards the Orient and its exotic elements has changed in the twentieth century as a growing number of Western authors started to employ motifs of Chinese culture in their works. Alfred Döblin, Bertolt Brecht, Franz Kafka, later extreme modernists such as Arno Schmidt, and, more recently, W. G. Sebald have dealt with Chinese culture in their literary works. What changed in comparison to the attempts of Baroque writers to represent Oriental culture in their prose was that the knowledge of China and Chinese culture had increased greatly over the centuries.

In Arno Schmidt's *Die Schule der Atheisten* (1972) the author invents a rational utopia. The story of the text unfolds in the year 2014 after the world has been destroyed by a nuclear war. The two dominant remaining powers are the USA and China. Schmidt foresaw the rise of China to a superpower and depicts the Chinese delegation meeting with the female president of the USA in the "Kulturreservat" Germany. The Chinese are presented as culturally superior to their American counterparts because China is still aware of its long history and tradition whereas the USA are presented as country without history and which is now, to make matters worse, ruled by amazons. China is moreover described as a victim of Western aggression: "Taiping=Aufstand. (Und

anschließend der Krieg gegen Engländer & Franzosen: Taku=Forts; ›Plünderung des SommerPalastes‹ ...)"[23] (Schmidt, 1994, p. 155) In Abend mit Goldrand Schmidt identifies himself with Chinese culture by incorporating Chinese elements in his text. The main character, Alexander Ottokar Gläser (A&O), repeatedly refers to his father's military service in Qingdao in the German colonial army: "... er meldete sich zum KolonialDienst; und zwar nach China, wo er bis zum 12.8.09, zweieinviertel Jahre lang, beim OstasienDetachement, 3. Komp. in Tsing=tau gedient hat;"[24] (Schmidt, 1993, p. 225) Schmidt emphasizes A&O's identification with Chinese culture: "... der Name Kon=Fu=Tse war mir früher geläufig als Christus; (war auch gut so)."[25] (Schmidt, 1993, p. 225) In Schmidt's case the employment of Chinese motifs serves the purpose to introduce an alternative cultural reference system that the author uses to devalue Western culture and the Christian religion, both of which Schmidt strongly criticizes in all of his literary works.

In the writings of W. G. Sebald a more rational and objective view of China can be found. Although Die Ringe des Saturn includes a detailed description of the Taiping Rebellion and the gruesome acts of the British in China, it also presents the measures of the Chinese against the Taiping sect as equally gruesome.

He writes about the destruction of the Yuan Ming Yuan:

> "Ihrerseits nun in einem Zustand der Unschlüssigkeit über das weitere Vorgehen, stießen die Truppen der Alliierten zu Anfang des Monats Oktober anscheinend zufällig auf den nahe bei Peking gelegenen, mit einer Unzahl von Palästen, Pavillons, Wandelgängen, phantastischen Lauben, Tempeln und Turmbauten bestückten Zaubergarten Yuan Ming Yuan, wo an den Abhängen künstlicher Berge zwischen Böschungen und lichten Gehölzen Hirsche mit fabelhaften Geweihen weideten

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23   "And after that the war against Englishmen & Frenchmen: Taku=Forts; ›Plundering of the SummerPalace‹ ..."
24   "... he signed up for the colonialService; and went to China, where he served in Qing=dao in the 3. Comp. For two and a quarter years until 8.12.09;"
25   "... I was earlier familiar with the name Kon=Fu=Tse as Christ; (and it was good that way)."

und die ganze unbegreifliche Pracht der Natur und der von
Menschenhand in sie eingebetteten Wunder sich spiegelte in den
dunklen, von keinem Lufthauch bewegten Gewässern."[26]

(Sebald, 2003a, p. 173-74).

The motive given for this unreasonable outburst of aggression against
a beautiful garden is the inability of the British to understand how such
an arcadian place could exist in an inferior culture:

"Der wahre Grund für die Brandschatzung des Yuan Ming Yuan
lag, wie man annehmen muß, in der unerhörten Provokation,
welche die aus der irdischen Wirklichkeit geschaffene, jede Idee
von der Unzivilisiertheit der Chinesen sogleich vernichtende
Paradieswelt darstellte für die selber unendlich weit von zu
Hause abgekommenen, an nichts als Zwang, Entbehrung und die
Abtötung ihrer Sehnsucht gewohnten Krieger."[27]

(Sebald, 2003 a, p. 174)

In this scene Sebald confronts *normative chauvinism* with the sudden
realization that a culture regarded as inferior to Western culture is able
to produce a rather utopian place of beauty unknown to Western eyes.
The frustration resulting from this challenge to their former view of
Chinese culture leads to an extreme reaction.

Although Sebald presents the British colonizers in a negative light, it
is not his intention to evoke a picture of an arcadian China subdued by
Western chauvinists. Indeed, Sebald makes it quite clear that it is not
Western violence that the great evil is not Western violence but human
nature, which causes history to be a constant struggle for domination.
This becomes obvious in his depiction of the Taiping rebellion:

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26 "On their part uncertain how to proceed, the allied troops, seemingly coincidentally found the
magic garden Yuan Ming Yuan with its multitude of palacs, pavilions, arbors, fantastic summerhouses,
temples and towers near Beijing. In this place were artificial mountains between landfalls and open
forests where deer with grand antlers were grazing and the incomprehensible splendor of nature and the
wonders put there by humand hands were mirrored in the still waters unstirred by air."

27 "The true reason for the bruning of Yuan Ming Yuan was, as one must assume, the insolent
provocation which the earthly paradise that destroyed every notion of the uncivilized culture of the
Chinese represented in the eyes of the warriors who, far from home, had to get used to a life that offered
them nothing but hardship."

"Als Gegenleistung erwiesen sich die westlichen Mächte bereit, ihren Beistand zu leisten zur Erhaltung der Dynastie, das heißt bei der Ausrottung der Taiping und bei der Niederschlagung der Sezessionsbestrebungen der muslimischen Bevölkerung in den Tälern von Shensi, Yunnan und Kansu, in deren Verlauf verschiedenen Schätzungen zufolge zwischen sechs und zehn Millionen von ihren Wohnplätzen vertrieben beziehungsweise ums Leben gebracht wurden."[28]

(Sebald, 2003a, p. 175-76).

 "As counter offer the Western powers agreed to help maintain the dynasty which means to assist with the extermination of the Taiping and the sesession movement of the Muslim population in the valleys of Shensi, Yunnan and Kansu in which, according to various estimates, between six and ten million people were evicted from their homelands or killed."Here the Chinese and the Western forces work together to eliminate the religious fundamentalists of the Taiping, who themselves murdered millions of people who refused to convert to Christianity.

Sebald's approach to China and Chinese history and culture must therefore be seen as a different category. *Normative chauvinism* and *normative arcadianism* do not suffice to explain Sebald's position. His *cultural relativism* or even *normative cultural relativism* can be more appropriately defined by terms like inter-cultural communication and competition.[29] What Sebald sees are the casualties of human history— "einer beinahe nur aus Kalamitäten bestehende[n] Geschichte."[30] (Sebald, 2003a, p. 350)

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28   "As counter offer the Western powers agreed to help maintain the dynasty which means to assist with the extermination of the Taiping and the sesession movement of the Muslim population in the valleys of Shensi, Yunnan and Kansu in which, according to various estimates, between six and ten million people were evicted from their homelands or killed."

29   See in this respect Sebald's much criticized view on the bombings of German cities in World War II. The author sees them just as unjustified and immoral as the German killings of millions of people and demands a revision of the war against German cities: "Der wahre Zustand der materiellen und moralischen Vernichtung, in welchem das ganze Land sich befand, durfte aufgrund einer stillschweigend eingegangenen und für alle gleichermaßen gültigen Vereinbarung nicht beschrieben werden." (Sebald, 2003b, p. 17)

30   "a history that almost exclusively consists of calamities."

4 Conclusions

The way a particular cultural system deals with a different one gives valuable insight about how that particular system views itself. The West's predominant attitude to non-Western cultures has changed over the last few centuries. What happened during the Baroque era can be defined as a duplication of reality putting the superiority of the Western Lebenswelt into question for Western observers:

> "Es handelt sich sozusagen um eine vertikale Realitätsvervielfachung, die man von der inzwischen bekannten "horizontalen" Gliederung in vielfältige Lebenswelten, Subsysteme oder abgegrenzte Sinnausschnitte unterscheiden muß. Es handelt sich nicht um verschiedene Teilgebiete einer einzigen Realität, sondern weitaus radikaler um einen regelrechten "Realitätspluralismus", so fiktiv jede Realität für sich auch sein mag."[31]
>
> (Esposito, 2007, p. 68)

Since only one reality – the reality of Christian Europe – is desired, this pluralism of realities posed a threat to defenders of a mono-cultural society like Kircher. Contemporary literature reacted to this threat by warning against foreign cultural influences. The way foreign cultures used to be depicted in the texts of Kircher and of Baroque authors like von Zigler and Happel shows that contemporary intellectuals saw Western culture as god-given and therefore correct. The common *Zeitgeist* provided the conviction that exotic cultures could only be saved by converting their people to Christianity thus stabilizing the absolute power of Western ideology. The foreign environment itself was viewed as dangerous and potentially poisonous. Religious rituals were viewed as gruesome and wrong. Most people of Western origin were convinced that Christian culture was the only right one, and scholars and writers used literature to spread this view to a wider audience. Coming back

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31   "They represent a vertical multiplication of reality which can be distinguished from the "horizontal" structuring as dvided into multiple life worlds, subsystems and separate segments of menaing. They represent not only different parts and regions of one single reality but, much more radically, a true plurality of realities, no matter how fictitious each reality might be in itself."

to Luhmann's definition of literature as a system of communication the role of texts was to protect and stabilize the Western cultural system by warning against the terrible circumstances in exotic lands that could prove lethal to Westerners. The strong normative chauvinism displayed by scholars and writers discussed in this paper prevented intellectuals from questioning their own culture.

Over time this *protective chauvinism* gave way to a milder attitude towards foreign cultures. The enlightenment brought a different understanding of rationality, and foreign cultures, especially the ones showing characteristics similar to Western cultures, were seen with fascination. People were amazed by the size of China and developed a craving for exotic attire from the Orient. Even the Prussian king Friedrich II liked to think of himself as a Chinese emperor. The former *normative chauvinism* of the Baroque era gave way to *normative arcadianism* which led people to imagine the Orient as a place of great wonders. Goethe must be seen as mediator between the two positions. He was also fascinated with the exotic but he was able to see the irony in the superficial view of China and its fascination with outer appearances. All in all, he was convinced of the equality of the Orient and the Occident. He makes it clear in his ironic poem that the fascination with exotic traditions is just as unreasonable as unquestioningly assuming the superiority of one's own culture.

W. G. Sebald shows a view that can be called *normative cultural relativism*. In his eyes no culture shows superior traits. Violence and destruction are what defines human cultures in general. True superiority is always due to military power. The fact that the British helped to end the Taiping rebellion makes it clear that in this case Western culture turned against itself by eliminating a fundamentalist Christian movement while at the same time destroying Chinese culture – a culture that had already begun to turn against itself and ist traditional values.

Eventually, it all comes back to Niklas Luhmann and his definition of the arts as a system. A work of art has a certain function: "Die Herstellung eines Kunstwerkes hat ... den Sinn, spezifische Formen für

ein Beobachten von Beobachtungen in die Welt zu setzen. Nur dafür wird das Werk "hergestellt"."[32] (Luhmann, 2008, p. 115) Literature as a system aim to communicate certain observations about the world. In the case of the works of literature discussed in this paper, these observations concern cultural systems different from the West's and reveal the strongly political motivation of the authors and the works themselves.

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32   "The creation of a work of art intends to put specific forms for an observation of observations into the world. Only for that purpose is the work of art "created"."

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umbschweiffender Ritter vorgestellet / nächst dessen und andere Asiatischer Prinzen Liebes-Geschichten und ritterlichen Thaten / auch alle in Asien gelegene Königreiche und Länder / sampt seren Beschaffenheiten / Ordnung ihrer Regenten / und deren vornehmsten Thaten kürzlich mit eingeführt werden. Hamburg: Joh. Naumanns / und Georg Wolff.

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