

POLISH-CHINESE ART RELATIONS in the 19th and 20th Century

Polish-Chinese artistic relations in the 19th and 20th century have only recently become a subject of research. One of the events that significantly contributed to this was the I Conference of Polish and Chinese Art Historians “Poland-China. Art and Cultural Heritage” held in Cracow in 2009, as well as volumes of studies published in English (Cracow 2011) and Chinese (“古今波兰艺术和中波美术交流”, Shanghai 2012).

Polish-Chinese relations are, however, much older. The Chinese were supposed to have served in the Mongolian armies that invaded Poland three times in the thirteenth century. In the middle of the 13th century a monk from the Franciscan monastery in Wroclaw, Benedykt Polak (Benedict the Pole) together with papal legate Giovanni del Carpine travelled to Karakorum – the capital of the Mongolian khans. After returning to Cracow he prepared an account of the journey, one of the most important in the Middle Ages.

The origins of interest in the art and culture of China date back to the 17th century. Polish missionaries then began to reach China – Andrzej Rudomina (deceased and buried in Fouzhou in 1631), Mikołaj Smogulecki, and above all, an the outstanding scholar Michał Boim, author of scientific papers, such as *The Atlas of China*, featuring drawings inspired by Chinese painting. In Poland accounts were published of trips to China, while in churches appeared frescoes of missionary themes with images of China and the Chinese began to appear. At the end of the 17th century, the Polish king Jan III Sobieski tried to establish contact with the Chinese emperor Kangxi. At the time of his reign, Chinese motifs became fashionable in the decoration of palaces (such as the Chinese Cabinet in the king’s palace in Wilanow near Warsaw), with Chinese porcelain,

lacquer and precious works of craftsmanship. Polish kings and Saxon electors in Dresden in the 18th century, Augustus II and Augustus III, were prominent collectors of Chinese art. Also, the last Polish king Stanisław August Poniatowski collected works of Chinese art at his palace in Łazienki.

The early 19th century in Poland witnessed the first concepts of a general interpretation of the art world, including the art of Asia. Joseph Saunders, the first Polish professor of art history at the University of Vilna, an Englishman by birth, by 1811 had already lectured on the art of Egypt, Persia and India. Soon, however, another prominent creator of art history in Poland – Stanisław Kostka Potocki – a collector and owner of Wilanów, complemented a free translation into Polish of the classic work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* with its chapter *About the art in China* (published in 1815), which for the first time in European culture included the art of China within the universal history of world art.

Shortly after the anti-Russian uprising of November 1831 the Poles deported to Siberia began to contact the Chinese, among others, in the Buryat village of Chita on the then Russian-Chinese borderland. First of all, images of Chinese merchants, their customs and their homes appeared, among others, in the works of Jan Damel (1780–1840) *Chinese merchants in Maimachin* (1831–1835, Ill. 1) and Bronisław Zaleski (1819/20–1880).

In the 19th century Europe, when the black-and-white photograph was only just becoming a technique of visual communication, the attention was still attracted by the views from long journeys were still attractive – watercolours, drawings, colour chromolithograph, less often oil paintings, showing distant continents and cultures. One of the most important representatives of this type of art was a German painter originating from Gdansk, Eduard August Hildebrandt (1817–1869). He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin and under the eminent romantic painter Eugène Isabey in Paris. He settled in Berlin, maintaining close contact with Gdansk, his hometown, where he exhibited several times. He was a friend of the eminent explorer Alexander von Humboldt.

Under his inspiration, he began to undertake long journeys to South America and the United States, to Egypt and the Middle East. The works from this travels that he exhibited brought him fame throughout Europe. Between 1862–1864, Hildebrandt, as perhaps the first artist took a trip around the world. The route ran from Trieste through Suez, Aden, India, Tibet, Siam, Singapore, and the Philippines to China including Hong Kong and Macao. Then, via the Pacific Islands, Central America, and the United States he returned to Europe. During

the journey he made many watercolours, some of which were published in the form of chromolithography in the volume *Travel around the earth / Reise um die Erde* (1871–1874). Among the works from this trip are views of Macao, Hong Kong and Beijing (Ill. 2), full of light, perfectly capturing the atmosphere of Chinese cities., and also romantic views of the gulfs of the Chinese coast and presentations of Chinese fishermen. They were exhibited, among others, in London in 1868 at the Crystal Palace exhibition.¹⁾

More than 20 years later, a similar trip was undertaken by Julian Fałat (1853–1929), Polish painter, one of the most important figures in Polish art of the turn of the 20th century, a prominent reformer of the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts.

In 1885, at the behest of his friend Edward Simmler, he accompanied him in a trip around the world. Simmler, a young and prosperous banker, was a member of a Swiss family of cabinetmakers-ébénistes and industrial entrepreneurs, who settled down in Warsaw and pursued artistic interests. In the history of Polish painting an outstanding place is occupied by his uncle, Józef – author of historical compositions and portraits.

Fałat was the first and, possibly, the only Polish artist to travel all around the world. He recorded his impressions in *Pamiętniki* (Diaries), published posthumously in 1935.

Contact with Asia proved to be an impulse decisive for the artist's further development. This is how he recalled his first meeting with Asia: "We stop in Colombo, the main port of Ceylon, A new world, unknown, but already stirring our senses, forces its way in through the portholes. [...] The green hue of the palm groves, testimony of eternal summer, a certain ethereal fragrance, and the sunshine flooding this whole world induce to cry out: all is wondrous, extraordinary, different from that which my imagination would be capable of creating. The water is blue, the soil – red, and the palms – green. [...] We follow a track shaded by tall palm trees, [...] until we arrive at a small temple of Buddha. Having crossed the threshold, we are struck by the fragrance of the incense and flowers offered to the enormous Buddha [...]. I am blinded by the sunlight, the aroma of the incense, the view of the smoke-filled and flower-festooned temple, the people dressed in bright clothes [...]. I would like to paint, but this feat proves to be impossible; a veritable *embarras de richesse* – I do not know what is the most beautiful or the most characteristic, and take only a few notes."²⁾

¹⁾ Kossak (1879).

²⁾ Fałat (1987: 113); see also: Malinowski (1999: 189–176).

The travellers sailed from Marseilles via the Suez Canal, Aden, Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan to San Francisco. The next stage was a train trip across the United States and a return journey by ship to Europe. In Singapore, however, the paths of the two friends parted for several weeks.

Owing to his state of health, Simmler decided not to travel to Calcutta and Bombay, and made his way to Yokohama, whose climate “resembled that of Italy”, as Fałat recollected. The ship sailed via Saigon and Hong Kong. Prior to his departure from Singapore, on 15th of March Simmler empowered Fałat (in the offices of the Austro-Hungarian consulate) to withdraw funds from his bank account. In Hong Kong Simmler’s condition became so grave that on 24th of March he signed a notarial power of attorney warrant for his friend. The Fałat legacy in the Regional Museum in Bielsko-Biała also contains, apart from the mentioned plenipotentiary documents, letters and telegrams sent by Simmler to the artist.

Meanwhile, Fałat stayed on in Singapore, where a quest for picturesque motifs frequently led him to the Chinese quarter. After several weeks of intensive work, he became afflicted with malaria. The quinine treatment lasted for yet another few weeks, and the stay was prolonged by a further four months due to the lack of funds to continue the journey. Finally, having received the necessary sum, Fałat was able to set off for Hong Kong.

Upon arrival, the painter fell under the spell of traditional Chinese culture: “[I] was attracted by the extremely picturesque Chinese streets and lanes, and the life of whole Chinese families living on boats. Wandering around the Chinese quarter, I also came across a Chinese wedding.” In the local port, Fałat admired “innumerable picturesque boats, with sails resembling butterfly wings and ships of the most varied shape and colour.”

During the journey, Fałat sketched motifs, which he used for the execution of, i.e. a series of more than 50 watercolours, displayed upon his return, in Warsaw at the end of 1885 at a large exhibition held at the Aleksander Krywult Salon in 1888. Not much has survived of the Asian theme compositions in Poland; the most valuable works were incorporated into private collections in Germany and Switzerland. They included views from a ship (*Suez Canal, View of Aden, View of Singapore*) or scenes taking place in a port (*A Singhalese Bamboo Seller, A Malay Washerwoman from Singapore*) or on board a ship.

At the time, Fałat executed the scene *Loading a Ship in a Chinese Port*, with the figures of coolies mounting the deck with the aid of bamboo poles; this was a sketch for an canvas (today unknown), purchased for a private collection in Basel. Another scene: *Boarding a Ship*, showed boats carrying European

passengers to a ship. A distinguished extant watercolour, entitled *On Board Ship – Traders of the Island of Ceylon*, was painted (according to the signature) in Colombo. This composition, executed in an unhampered manner, probably under the impact of Impressionism, and maintained in cool white and blue tones, depicts a young woman sitting the deck of a ship and examining wares for sale. The Chinese parasol and folded fan clasped by her as well as the circular fans held by a merchant wearing a turban evoke an Oriental atmosphere. It seems worth drawing attention to Fałat's interest in Far Eastern calligraphy – one of the fans bears a sheet of paper with an inscription. The popularity of this watercolour was the reason why in 1887 the Cracow-based Society of Friends of the Fine Arts issued its slightly altered and reduced version in the form of a chromolithograph, in which the artist rendered the colour contrasts more acutely in order to produce the impression of southern sunlight. In Polish art, the watercolour *On Board Ship – Traders on the Island of Ceylon* initiated a current popular at the turn of the century, which sought inspiration in the art of the Far East – China and, predominantly, Japan. Other watercolours representing this trend include the scene entitled *Chinese Dice Players* (only the title is known) and *Two Chinese at Rest* (Ill. 3), in which the artist analysed minutely the facial features and costume of the portrayed men.

Fałat was probably the first Pole to visit Taiwan (Formosa). He came to Taiwan during heavy acute fights between the governor's Liu Mingchuan's Army of Northern Formosa and Colonel Jacques Duchesne's Formosa Expeditionary Corps. The artist recalled: "A correspondent for several French newspapers, traveling from Paris, a Swiss, Mr Weinschenk, carrying letters of recommendation to Admiral Courbet, offers me his patronage so that I could tour Formosa, the place of acute fights of the French with Chinese bands. With gratitude I use the Mr Weinschenk's courtesy, thanks to which I can see a beautiful admiral's ship "Bayard" and explore Formosa in great detail. We learn at the same time that the entire Chinese fleet is blocked by the French in the Yangtze-kiang gulf. We belong to the rare sort of travellers who are offered the opportunity to visit Formosa. An island extremely mountainous, full of volcanoes, sinking in the fumes produced through tropical hot and incredibly lush vegetation. Near the port of Keelung I watch two rocks protruding from the sea, similar to the famous cliffs of Capri; no bush whatsoever, covered in green mold, they look as if they were stretched over with shiny green plush. Under the supervision of a convoy of French troops we reach the last outposts where through the glasses you can see the lines on the bands and the heads of the Frenchmen killed in action tucked on long sticks. Officers tell us how in a harsh battle here they fight

against an elusive enemy, who knows the country well and may be lurking in any bush. I draw one post on the mound, among spiny thorns, through which hardly a pheasant can squeeze through. Near the harbour there are buildings of the French Catholic mission and a small cemetery where the dead French are buried.”³⁾

Fałat was the only painter in the Polish artistic community around 1900 who knew East Asia. Having left China, he spent half a year in Yokohama, visiting many Japanese cities, such as Kyoto or Matsue. His memories from the travel east exerted influence on artists and students of the Cracow Academy, and collectors.

In Polish painting of that period, next to a very strong Japanese trend, arose, albeit in much more modest forms, an interest in Chinese art. In Cracow, a prominent figure in the artistic community was the critic and collector Felix Jasiński. He was primarily interested in Japanese art, but Chinese art also was represented in his collections.

A symptomatic response to the European inspirations with East Asian art is a grotesque painting by an eminent painter, professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Józef Mehoffer (1869–1946) *Europe jubilans* (1905, Ill. 4). In Jasiński’s apartment, filled with Japanese and Chinese works of art, his young maid, putting aside her duster, sat on the couch between the manikin in the Japanese armour from the 17th century with an expressive mask of grimace and a dynamic sculpture of a Chinese dragon, leaning on its tail, made of bronze. In the background there were little Chinese figurines and statues of Buddha. This striking image with a maid serving as an allegory of Europe becomes a critical presentation of the European fascination with a culture which the Europeans cannot understand.

Temporary inspirations with Chinese art occurred after 1905 in the work of Tadeusz Makowski, Mehoffer’s student at the Cracow Academy, later a prominent member of the École de Paris. In the painting *Girl and Chinese Characters* (1906, Ill. 5), behind the portrayed character can be seen a Chinese scroll with a courtly scene in the garden. Perhaps another part of the same coil and a Chinese lantern the artist placed in the painting *My room* (1907). The use of Chinese motifs served to enrich the decorative structure of the work.

Simultaneously, the first Chinese porcelain decorative motif appeared in the paintings of Eugeniusz Zak (1884–1926),⁴⁾ a painter coming from Warsaw,

³⁾ Fałat (1987: 126).

⁴⁾ Brus-Malinowska (2004), Malinowski, Brus-Malinowska (2007: 45–67).

who settled in Paris in the beginning of the century. A Chinese teapot, jar and a plate made of Chinese porcelain created the decorative arrangement in the painting *Still Life with Chinese Porcelain* (1906). Zak acquired oriental inspirations probably from the Nabists, who were fascinated with Japanese graphics. Zak's interest in the East, however, was much broader, although the art world only realised the impact after the artist's death, pointing to the inspiration with Persian miniatures and Chinese painting. After the death of the painter, a critic from the Berlin magazine "Kunst und Künstler"⁵⁾ wrote that Zak painted "chinoiserie in the language [literally in the jargon] of the Expressionists". The widest comment on the issue came from Mieczyslaw Treter, a Polish critic, who wrote: "There are also landscapes, especially with interesting decorative qualities, which intersect the influence of old Persian miniatures, ancient Chinese paintings, and, partly, of Japanese colour woodblocks (despite a different cut, the analogous theme of, for example trees and branches, protruding above the water)."⁶⁾

The artist could acquaint himself with the art of Asia in the Louvre, the Musée Guimet, Musée Cernuschi or Bibliothèque Nationale. It was presented at the World Exhibitions in 1889 and 1900. The Paris artistic press devoted much attention to it, frequently publishing extensive studies and articles. The artist's interests focused primarily on Japanese ukiyo-e graphics, and later also on Khmer sculpture, which caught the interest of Gauguin. Artists (including James McNeil Whistler) were fascinated with the use of, as decorative motifs of works of Chinese, Japanese and Persian artistic craft, including ceramics, fans, screens, clothes or fabrics that offered an opportunity for a new colour orchestration of the image. In Zak's work, such a single example was the mentioned *Still Life with Chinese Porcelain* (1906).

Distant echoes of Japanese graphics can be felt in the representations of Breton women from 1908. Zak's first idyllic paintings from around 1911–1912 could be connected with Persian miniatures by their rich colour, sometimes the type of character style and motifs of nature – rocks and water (often indeed of Chinese provenance), and a way of presenting a meadow full of multi-coloured flowers, gathered in clumps, forming decorative, fantasy floral "carpet"; similar to the works of such 15th century masters as Kamal ad-Din Behzad (Bihsad; approx. 1460–1535). An eminent Polish aesthete and critic Mieczysław

⁵⁾ "Kunst und Künstler" (1927–1928: 112).

⁶⁾ Treter (1926: 4).

Wallis wrote in the introduction to the anthology of his reviews: "Zak sought inspiration in Persian miniatures and paintings of Chinese Song Dynasty".⁷⁾

Zak's interest in Chinese painting can be considered rare on the European scale. In his works, the very creationist concept of the ideal landscape seems to be an inspiration drawn from the paintings of the Song Dynasty (960–1279). There appear presentations of mountains and waters (in Chinese, the equivalent of the European concept of landscape is *shan-shui*, which translated literally means mountains and waters), as well as human characters (often fishermen) placed within it, initially little, then (since the 15th century) corresponding in relation to it. In Zak's work the motifs of rocks piled up over the waters, the outlines of the mountains on the horizon, as well as expressive silhouettes of trees indicate a Chinese influence. For the first time they appeared in *Old Castle* (1913) and especially in *Fisher* (1914, Ill. 6)).

They were particularly revealed in a dynamic series of Zak's idyllic series. From 1920–1921 come the paintings with a pair of lovers spotted only through expressive "Chinese" motives of rocks and trees (*Idyll – Awakening*, 1921; *Love Song*, 1920/1921). Around 1922 came the images of single men and women with similar motifs of expressively twisted trees, fragments of rocks and distant conical mountains against a hazy background (*Woman with a Basket of Flowers; Landscape with a Wanderer; Woman against Landscape*, Ill. 7, and a drawing *By the Water* with the figure of a fisherman). From 1924 come similar images with the figure of a fisherman with a fish caught on a fishing rod.

The most original example of the inspiration with Chinese art is the painting *Spring* of 1918, known from reproduction, showing a fisherman's family under a large, twisted tree growing on a promontory projecting into the lake. Two scenes come as a development of the image, including a large size panneau (*Idyllic Landscape with a Family*, 1923 (Ill. 8)). The arrangement of the same family with a child picking flowers is altered. In some of the mentioned paintings the background gradually took on a monochrome golden tone, as in the Song Dynasty time. The sun would ooze through the mist somewhere outside the frame of the image. Hence, Chinese artists, with Zak following them, did not mark the direction of sunlight, which therefore evenly diffused within the image.

The type of work that influenced the second cycle of Zak's idylls is rooted in the academic painting of the circle of the Imperial Academy of Painting in Hangzhou from the time of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). The

⁷⁾ Wallis (1959: 9).

genesis of this trend, however, derives from the work of an outstanding painter, recognised as the founder of the national landscape style of the period, Li Cheng (919–967), associated with the court of Northern Song Dynasty (960–1126) in Kaifeng. He introduced the previously mentioned theme of an expression, irregular tree with sharp, twisted trunks and branches to his monochrome painting of symmetrical composition, with motifs of the high rocky mountains and small, human characters. In the works of his successor, Fan Kuan, appeared the announcement of the new convention of asymmetric composition of the image. After the defeat by the Jin invasion in 1138, Emperor Gaozong moved the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty to Hangzhou, reconstructed the Imperial Academy of Painting, led by Li Tang, a student of Fan Kuan. His successors, outstanding academic painters Ma Yuan and Xia Gui created the basis for a new interpretation of the landscape. The location of Hangzhou – the most beautiful and the richest capital of the world at that time – between the sea gulf, river Fuchun, the great West Lake, the Yangtze delta plain and the mountains contributed to this development. The synthetic works of Ma Yuan, Xia Gui and the son of the former, Ma Lin, manifested an asymmetrical trend in the composition of the image. They possessed the ability to embrace broad water surfaces and air space. Instead of towering mountains, in their work we often encounter panoramic, stretching endlessly, misty sea gulfs with rocks in the foreground or mildly conical mountains in the background. They introduced dramatic motifs of sharply bending boughs and branches of trees, and sometimes in the background a figure of a sage contemplating the nature. (It is worth noting that Zak's painting was popular in Japan. One of the largest collections of the artist's works was the property of the Nakayama family).

The closest to Zak's paintings seem to be, however, the works of Ma Lin, the most aesthetically refined, "decadent", the last outstanding artist of the dynasty fallen in 1279, among them *The Listening to the Noise of Pines* (1246) with a figure of a sage under an expressively withered tree, *The Smell of Spring, Sage Resting and Watching Floating Clouds*, as well as views of the sea: *Rocky Shore* and *Landscape at Sunrise*. Common to the works of Ma Lin and Zak is the romantic lyricism, expressed through melancholic, misty landscape, diffusion of light, the type of contrast between the foreground and vast space of water, framed by mountains.

Zak's panneau *Idyllic Landscape with Family* is a work, which (as in the first series *In the Days of Young*) merges the themes of the second series of presentations. While in the former the artist created a neo-classical Arcadian land of the South, the latter featured stylised landscapes of the East transformed into

arabesque. In the composition of images from an earlier series of static idylls prevailed the symmetrical tendency prevailed, both in the foreground and in the landscape background (e.g. *Bathing Woman*). The second series is dynamic in character; dominated by an asymmetrical trend. In the former, the rhythms are arranged vertically. In the latter, the artist consolidated the dynamics of the images by using diagonal lines and dual, symmetrically distorted rhythms (e.g. *Awakening* or *Love Song*), which together with an expressive stylisation of rocks and trees created that a disturbing arabesque composition.

It is worth noting that Zak's idyllic paintings from 1920–1921 form a narrative sequence that consists of: *Courtship*, *Kiss*, *Awakening and Love Song*. *Awakening*, of stage structure, triangular in form, created by the rocks and rotten trunk of the inclining tree, into which “composed” are resting lovers and mythological figures. In *Songs of Love* dynamics was created by a rhythmicised, “musical” arrangement of figures, harmonising with elements of the landscape.

Zak, being the type of an artist-intellectual, became acquainted with the art of Asia in the museums of Paris and Germany. The studies of the Italian, byzantinising “primitives” evoked his interest in medieval paintings of the Song Dynasty shared by no other European artists. By introducing Chinese landscape motifs and new setting of space, Zak created an individual version of Art Déco before, thanks to the Paris Exhibition in 1925, the new style won general recognition.⁸⁾

During the interwar period there were three Polish painters residing in China: Karol Frycz, Dawid Haltrecht i Victor Podgoursky (Wiktor Podgórski).

The first to come to China was Karol Frycz (1877–1963), Polish diplomat, stage designer and painter, fascinated by Chinese art and theatre. He belonged to the first diplomatic mission of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which reached China in 1920, and then proceeded to Japan. Frycz watched the first performances of the Chinese theatre in Singapore and then in the Chinese district of Cholon in Saigon. He visited Hong Kong, Harbin, Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou. In Beijing he met an eminent intellectual Gu Hongming, with whom he discussed the Chinese and European civilisations as well as the history of Poland. In the cities he visited, he painted views of monuments. He left interesting descriptions of cities, the Chinese Wall, and Beijing and Hangzhou monasteries. He frequented theatres in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, studying costumes, props and visual setting of performances. During his stay in China, Frycz made many watercolours, drawing sketches and paintings with motifs

⁸⁾ Brus-Malinowska (2004: 69); Malinowski, Brus-Malinowska (2007: 61).

of cities and monuments: *Tea Room in Shanghai* (Ill. 9), *Temple of Heaven in Beijing*, *Interior of temple with Maitreya* and *Chinese interior*. Frycz was a distinguished stage designer, hence his paintings with accurately rendered shapes give the impression of being studies for theatrical design. In 1927 in the Polish Theatre in Warsaw he made costumes and stage design for the play *Mandarin Wu* by Harold Owen and H.M. Vernon. Having returned to Poland, he published 40 articles in the Polish press that constitute a broad picture of Chinese art, theatre and cultural tradition. He also lectured on Chinese theatre.⁹⁾

Dawid Aleksander Haltrecht (1880–1938), a symbolist from Warsaw, visited Persia and Central Asia for the first time in 1914. This trip changed the life and work of the artist. He then created his landscapes, portraits and genre scenes of Asian themes, which dominated his later work. Between 1925–1930 he went to China, Mongolia and Japan.

The National Museum in Warsaw preserved a collection of oil paintings and pastels from the journey through Mongolia and China. In Mongolia Haltrecht stayed in Urga, today's capital Ulan Baatar. From that time came the presentations of temples (*Gate of the temple in Urga*; *Abandoned city – Urga*; *Terrace of Chinese Temple in Mongolia*, Ill. 10; *Courtyard of Chinese Temple in Urga*) and portraits of Mongols (*Mongolian girl with a basket*; *Old woman with a basket*; *Head of Old Lama of Urga*), Tibetan (*Tibetan woman*; *Pilgrim*) and the Chinese (*Head of Chinese woman*; *Chinese Peddler in Urga*). In China he stayed in Kalgan, today Zhangjiakou, north-west of Beijing (*A Chinese from Kalgan*), possibly in Beijing, although there is no artistic output from there, in Tien-Tsin, today Tianjin (*Old nanny from Tien-tsin*, Ill. 11; *Girl from Tien-Tsin*, *A Hindu from the British Police in Tien-Tsin*, *A Port Coolie in Tien-Tsin*), and in Shanghai (*Comprador from Shanghai*, *Little Chinese Girls from Shanghai*). There are also some well-known depictions of temples (*The Inside of the Temple in Shan-Ti Mountains*).

Haltrecht usually painted in bright tones close to Impressionism. In 1930, the artist had an exhibition at the Oriental Institute in Warsaw. After his death his works were exhibited at the Salon of the Jewish Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Warsaw and then at the National Museum in Warsaw in 1950.

In 1923, a Polish painter, whose name could not be identified, had an exhibition of paintings and watercolours in Shanghai. Perhaps it was Victor Podgour-sky (Wiktor Podgórski, 1893–1969), born in Tomsk, Siberia, a descendant of a Polish exile after the anti-Russian January Uprising in 1863. After studying at

⁹⁾ Kuchtówna (2009: 149–158); Frycz (2012).

the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, in 1918 he went to China and from 1920 lived in Shanghai, working as a painter and interior designer in buildings, among others, erected on the Bund. Associated with the Russian community, he became one of the most prominent figures in the artistic life of Shanghai. He painted mostly genre paintings of Chinese themes, as *Musicians. Shanghai* (1930s), *Chinese tea break* (Ill. 12), *To the Street Market* (1937), *Street Restaurant* (1939), *Head of Chinese*, *Street Barber* (1938) and *Market in Lung-wah* (1940, Ill. 13), using realistic forms for reportage-like shots of scenes from the everyday life of Shanghai. He also performed a series of Chinese *types*, presenting the characteristic figures of Shanghai's streets. As a decorator he designed and crafted interiors in the oriental version of Art Deco style in the famous Cathay Hotel, built for Victor Sassoon by the well-known company P & T Architects Limited (Palmer and Turner) from Hong Kong (1926–1929). In 1933 he won a competition for a mosaic for the HSBC building in Hong Kong. In connection with these works, he moved to Florence. He was involved in the preparation of neoclassical decoration of the French Sports Club, today transformed into the old part of the Okura Garden Hotel. A mosaic panneau with allegorical representations of the Moon and the Sun, the twelve signs of the Zodiac, and views of cities, where there were branches of HSBC: Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo, London, New York, Paris and Calcutta has survived in the octagonal hall of the former bank. His solo exhibition in Shanghai in 1926 evoked great interest. He participated in group exhibitions, which he also organised, among others at the International Art-Club. In 1933 he had an exhibition in Florence. In Shanghai he taught painting at the Institute of Fine Arts (1923–1927) and Art-Club (1929–1945). The political situation after World War II made him go to the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁾

A separate unexplored problem is the artistic work of the Polish colony in Harbin, with the Polish Museum of the East, as well as that of Jewish refugees from Poland living in Shanghai.

In the interwar period, Poland and China maintained diplomatic relations since 1920. Many publications about Chinese art and theatre appeared in the Polish press. Poland was visited by Chinese artists and actors, including Mei Lan Fang in 1935. Exhibitions of Chinese art were organised, for example the exhibition of Chinese folk woodcuts at the National Museum in 1933.

Feliks Topolski (1907–1989), an outstanding draftsman and painter traveled to China during the Second World War. Educated at the Warsaw Academy of

¹⁰⁾ Lebedeva (2013: 147–164).

Fine Arts, he had moved to London in 1935. During the war, as a Polish officer, he became a war correspondent with the title of a “war artist” received from King George I. He traveled with the British army to the war fronts and in ship convoys. In 1944, he left the front in Burma to fly over the Himalayas to Chongqing, the temporary capital of the Republic of China ruled by Chiang Kai-shek. He also visited Kunming, the capital of the Yunnan province. The upshot of the journey was a painting showing the view of the city with the rice fields. On the second painting, a presentation of peaceful Chinese at work was confronted with a brutal depiction of a Japanese invasion. He made also many drawings presenting the life in China during the war (*Refugees* Ill. 14). Topolski’s memories and drawings from China were collected in his book “Three continents 1944–1945,” published in London in 1946. In 1958, the artist visited Hong Kong where he made drawings published in the series *The Chinese in South Asia*. The series was related to the popular *Chronicles* which Topolski had been publishing since 1953. Topolski was to return to China once more, in 1966, at the moment of announcement of the Cultural Revolution by Mao Zedong.

After World War II, the Polish People’s Republic was the first country to sign an agreement on cultural cooperation with the People’s Republic of China in Warsaw 3rd of April 1951. This sparked a very lively exchange of exhibitions, artists and theatres in the 50s. Already the Second World Congress of the Supporters of Peace in Warsaw in 1950 was attended by Chinese artists: a prominent sculptor Liu Kaiqu (1904–1993) – who became the President of the National Hangzhou Arts School, and later Vice President of The Central Academy of Fine Arts, and the caricaturist Hua Junwu (1915–2010) of the “Renmin Ribao” journal.

At the invitation of the Ministry of Culture and Art, many Chinese intellectuals and artists came to Poland, among others: in 1954 – an outstanding sculptor and art theorist Wang Zhaowen (1909–2004), professor of the Central Academy of Fine Art, vice dean of Chinese Arts Research Institute, vice president of China Arts Association; in 1955 – a famous painter Guan Shanyue (1912–2000), Jianfu Gao’s student, founder of the Lingnam School and a representative of the second generation of this school, whose artistic output is in Guan Shanyue Museum in Shenzhen which was opened in 1997, as well as the painter Liu Mengdai. Moreover, in the same year, in connection with the Exhibition of Chinese Art at the World Festival of Youth and Students came to Warsaw painter Cai Zhenhua (1912–2006), engaged in the propaganda art; in 1957 – painter and graphic artist Hu Yichuan (1910–2000), professor of Guangzhou Art Academy, and finally in 1958 – painter Chen Chih-fo, interested

in graphic design, and the creator of posters of Chen Yin, who accompanied the “Modern China Traditional Chinese Painting Exhibition”. It is not known yet whether their stay in Poland was reflected in their work.¹¹⁾

In the People’s Republic of China, there were many Polish exhibitions, among others, a very well received exhibition of Polish posters and books in many cities, including Beijing and Shanghai in 1957. In the same year, the exhibition of the greatest Polish historical painter Jan Matejko enjoyed vast publicity in China. Chinese publications and the memories of artists whom I met during my many visits to China since the early 90s confirm that Polish art and culture became the main link between world culture and China in the 50s.

The 50s brought numerous exhibitions from China in Poland, including “New China” – an exhibition of old and new art and crafts, opened in May 1951 in the National Museum in Warsaw. Later that same year, in October, the same venue hosted the great “Exhibition of the Art of the People’s Republic of China” from ancient times to the present. Poland was repeatedly visited by Chinese theatre groups, also performing works of classical theatre.

In the 50s a few famous Polish painters and graphic artists were in China, and their stay had a significant impact on their work. The first to come to China in 1952 the eminent graphic artist Tadeusz Kulisiewicz (1899–1988), professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. For Kulisiewicz, the eldest and already mature artist, this was his first trip outside Europe, an important and highly interesting, however not decisive experience; he came back to its memories once again 30 years later. Many signs of surprise and astonishment, many questions can be found in his Chinese notebook/drawing book; he also left independent drawings of the journey. Sketches in his notebook were made with black ball pen and usually accompanied by some notes. Many years later, they were transposed into the more “noble” techniques of ink in his atelier works – but always with the same strength and vivacity of experience.

While in many cities, he techniques human faces, sometimes strangers, but sometimes well-known people, such as Mei Lanfang. Sometimes sketches of old sculptures, were simplified, in soft lines. He visited, among others, Hangzhou, Guangzhou and Nanjing. During the six-week trip the artist made 205 sketches in pen with accompanying notes. The sketches from his journeys present landscapes, the culture of the visited country and the everyday life of its inhabitants. Only later, in the studio, on the basis of the drawings were the proper drawings, as a synthetic take of the records in sketchbooks.

¹¹⁾ Hu Guang Hua (2011: 211–216); Li Chao (2011: 217–222).

The artist also executed monotypes and drawings dyed with his own technique using gauze dipped in paint, which gave an interesting texture (a trace of “cloth”, as the artist would call it). He also used wash, and some works also include visible traces of the brush. The Chinese cycle consists of black-and-white drawings or works in sepia, but the fascination with colour is apparent from Kulisiewicz’s travel log: “Road to Guangzhou, Friday 17 October 1952. It is eight in the morning. Unusual landscape. Rice fields. The road full of blue people. They are pushing one wheel carts loaded with sacks. Vast valley, mountains far behind. Dense villages. Grey-white houses, surrounded by beautiful trees. Lakes, ponds, herons over them. Grey buffalos with large horns. Hawks circling over the fields. Red hilly land planted with small pines. Some trees like on the Chinese drawings, withered and dramatic. From a great valley we enter the mountains. People gather rice and thresh it on the fields. The grain is dried on mats in front of the houses. We ride along the Blue River. Green mountains of unusual shapes.” In the notebook we find, among others, descriptions of Beijing as the a new communist city: “Wednesday, October 1, 1952. Beijing, walled city in habited by 2 million people, inside there is another one, the imperial city, to which access has been denied to mere mortals; today it is available to the entire Chinese nation. [...] Now, in this imperial city there are museums and cultural centres. Beijing is full of people and sun. The streets are blue, almost all Chinese people are dressed in dark blue cloth uniforms. The level of cleanliness is unusual; having lit a cigarette I didn’t have the nerve to throw a match onto the sidewalk and put it my pocket.”¹²⁾ Among many drawings from China stand out the views of Beijing historic sites and parks, sometimes inspired by Chinese painting (*Beijing* – with the Baita pagoda, Ill. 15; *Lake in the Summer Palace*), views of towns and villages (*Township; Village on the Water*), presentations of work (*Digging a Channel – Struggle with Drought; Fishermen on the Lake*, Ill. 16), landscapes with river (*Junks on the River*), as well as portraits, usually of labour leaders (*Farmer Gen Chau-So; Woman Worker, a Student at the University of Beijing, Li Fu-li*, Ill. 17). Using the sketches from the travel, Kulisiewicz returned to the Chinese themes in 1982 and 1983, executing a series consisting of synthetically taken portraits and landscapes (*Portrait of a Girl ; Portrait of an Actor* – Tian Mio Sian from the Beijing Theatre).¹³⁾

In 1953, a year later, the renowned painter Aleksander Kobzdej (1920–1972) visited China, an educated architect, but whose main activity was painter. He

¹²⁾ Guze (1956: 19–20).

¹³⁾ Szelejejd (1984).

was one of most important representatives of Polish socialist realism as well as – since the late 50s – of abstraction and matter painting. Kobzdej was a professor of the Fine Art Academy in Warsaw since 1951. After his Asian travel he visited also Mexico, United States, Brazil and Soviet Union, and many European countries.

In 1953 he joined a Polish cultural delegation of 10 members who officially visited China – perceived at the time as one of the new socialist partner countries. There were two occasions: the opening ceremony of the Polish economical exhibition in Beijing (mainly presenting industry but also including artwork, posters, graphics, sculptures, folk arts, realist painting) and the 4th anniversary of the People's Republic of China. A journey through China was also planned, visiting both the achievements of new political and economic order and monuments of traditional culture, meetings with artist, workers and political activists. The head of the delegation was Włodzimierz Sokorski, then (1952–1956) minister of culture and since 1949 the main promoter of social realism in Poland, a strong advocate of communism but also a controversial figure and in many cases a patron of artists. Sokorski wrote a diary during his trip, which was published just after his return in 1954 and is now an excellent additional source and commentary on Kobzdej's drawings. These drawings were also used as illustrations of 1954 edition. In 1950, Kobzdej was officially recognised as a painter, presented on many exhibitions, official art reviews, awarded etc. He accepted the rules of social realism and the main lines of the ruling ideology. We can guess that what convinced him was its social background, directing the future of art in “social service” by presenting “socialist subjects in realist form”. The choice of objects drawn seems to be influenced by the political goals of the delegation to present the new, people's China of developing industry and social advance, to document places visited and people, as well as by the artist's interest in a fairly new environment, forms, landscape, architecture and human faces. Kobzdej, together with the Polish group, stayed longer in Beijing, and then in Tianjin, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hankou (now Wuhan), acquainting themselves with monuments, landscapes, and also contemporary art, such as the painting of Qi Baishi. Among the drawings there are realistic views of Beijing (*Gate in the Forbidden City*), Shanghai (*View of Shanghai*, Ill. 18; *Street in Shanghai*), Guangzhou (*Landscape from Guangzhou*, Ill. 19), views the countryside (*A Farm in the Village Shau-shan*), and also portraits (*School girl from Guangzhou*, Ill. 20; *Mo-Lu-I, a Girl from Guangzhou*).

The exploration of contemporary Chinese art was accompanied by discussions on socialist realism in a European format. Minister Sokorski asked the

question what exactly realism is in a country with such a different tradition. Sokorski wrote down a statement from the artist: “Hangzhou [...] is too beautiful [...] with beauty without contrasts, without edges [...]. The second day already, I wonder why I cannot paint here. Sky, lake, rain – lake, sky, sun – It’s not enough to guess yourself in this beauty. [...] I miss the contrast of ugliness, the human conflict.”¹⁴⁾ It is clear that it must have been a notable experience as this first contact with quite a different world of nature and culture impressed the artist very much. Many art critics point out that the change in his art began exactly after his travel to Asia, although in the drawings made during this journey we can hardly see any sign of it. On the other hand, they are realistic “notes” of the artist, a kind of reportage. A few years later, in 1957, Kobzdej created a series of works inspired by Chinese calligraphy with abstract, dynamic, black and white forms. They heralded a new period in the artist’s work.

A year later, in 1954, Andrzej Strumiłło (1928–) visited China, a student of Władysław Strzemiński, the greatest representative of the Polish constructivist avant-garde. The results of this long journey were realistic portraits, strong in articulation, including, *Weaver from Shanghai* (Ill. 21). In others paintings, like in *An Actress of the Classic Beijing Opera*, he used flat and decorative forms. However, of far greater interest was a series of synthetic drawn landscapes, inspired by Chinese monochrome painting, in which the artist built forms with flat wide patches, executed with broad strokes (*Landscape of Jiangxi Province; Beijing courtyards*, Ill. 22). The artist, committed to the importance of his stay in China in terms of creating his own distinctive style said: “I drew with Chinese ink on Chinese paper, having mainly a brush as a tool. I watched the living faces and autumn landscapes, visited museums and monuments, shook hands with labour leaders and ministers, I looked into the eyes of exotic women, I listened to the drums in monasteries, and Qi Baishi, standing on the threshold of his house and grave waved goodbye to me. From the perspective of forty years of I see clearly the importance of this adventure. I faced then difficult choices. One concerned the stylistics; it was a choice between the sacred calligraphy that was intuitively expected and a servile realism, demanded insistently by the times then. The second one concerned finding a proportion between action and reflection, or, between creation and contemplation. While the former dilemma I managed to resolve relatively luckily [...], the second one surpassed [then] my strength. [Only after many attempts in various countries and civilisations] Traces, remnants, scraps, splinters, touches of what I had saw and what I had felt

¹⁴⁾ Wasilewska (2009: 70.)

became my drawings”¹⁵⁾ Another, already artistically conscious stay in China in 1961 resulted in new formal experiments, transforming traditional landscapes takes into abstract, dynamic layouts of calligraphic forms (*Beijing Impression*).

In 1956 Jerzy Panek (1918–2001), an eminent graphic artist from Cracow, embarked on a two-month trip to China. He arrived in October, three days before the outbreak of political protests in Poland that resulted in a departure from orthodox communism and a profound liberalisation of social life, as well as the end of socialist realism in art. He stayed in Beijing, where he executed woodcuts, displayed in the Centre of Culture. He had contacts with Chinese artists. In the second part of the stay he visited, among others, Shanghai and Nanjing. The effect of the stay was 27 woodcuts and studies in the sketchbook. The artist was inspired by the work of Qi Baishi, whose paintings were presented to him as a token of appreciation for the exhibition. The stay in China and the contact with Chinese art, so different from the European art familiar to him, had a decisive influence on Panek’s work. As the artist recalled: “In China I have come across the greatest cult of wood. It was also there that I learnt to perceive black and white more profoundly. The Chinese see things differently than us. Their eyes work better. Apart from that, they have an instinct. They know everything about proportions, about coexistence of black and white. [...] I have also touched some incredible papers. [...] It was in China that I discovered paper for the second time”¹⁶⁾ As a graphic, Panek became fascinated with the Chinese tradition of wood engraving and drawing, being particularly interested in simple graphic forms, such as New Year pictures and folk graphics. As the Polish critic Danuta Wróblewska wrote: “He really got hold of paper, of the wooden block and ink, but he did so differently than in Europe. Buddhism, Taoism, the civilisation of ideograms, the coming into contact with the scroll as the philosophical concept, the silence of concentration as a threshold beyond which there is cognition”¹⁷⁾

For the Polish artist his stay in China opened a wide horizon of the world art and cultural heritage. It radically changed his work stylistically, rejecting any socialist realism tendencies. They were broken by the documentary nature of the work. Among the woodcuts were scenes and views from towns *Chinese Stalls – Beijing*, *The Roofs of Beijing in Winter*, *The Great China Wall*, from other cities – *Shanghai*, *Canton*, presentations of characters – *The Children of Shanghai* and

¹⁵⁾ Pokorska, Wasilewska (1993: 27).

¹⁶⁾ Grylewicz (2011: 277).

¹⁷⁾ Grylewicz (2011: 271).

The Chinese Cook – Beijing. After initially realistic works, Panek began to change his convention towards flat, synthetic forms with a high degree of geometrisation, as in the woodcut *A Man from Canton with a Buffalo* (Ill. 23), or expressive deformation in *The Nanjin Duck* and the portrait *A Woman from Canton* (Ill. 24). His work then became infused with inspirations from Picasso's Cubism, whom the artist met in 1948 at the Peace Congress in Wrocław. Probably Panek's most outstanding work from China is the woodcut *The Old Woman from Hangzhou* (Ill. 25), in which the artist transformed the face into a mask emerging from the black background. Gisela Burkamp, a German researcher of Panek's oeuvre, wrote about these works: "For *A Man from Canton* who is pushed to the external, right-hand side of the picture by a huge buffalo, and above all for the face of Chinese old woman, which may be regarded as the most beautiful and the most outstanding works of artists, Panek devises extremely expressive features made up from squares, diamonds and rectangles which divide, support and build up the image, making us look under the skin and thereby revealing the rhythm of muscles and organs, the strings of nerves".¹⁸⁾ Upon returning to Poland, Panek completely changed his graphic style. He based his works on Chinese aesthetics stemming from calligraphy and pictograms.

In 1957 and 1958 several outstanding Polish painters went to China. Their work was related to Post-Impressionism and the interwar Paris School (École de Paris): Jan Cybis, president of the Association of Polish Artists and professor at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts; a year later – Artur Nacht-Samborski and Leon Michalski, professors of the same academy. In the works of these artists of an older generation, however, we find no references to any journey to China.

Beyond the scope of this lecture, limited to painting and graphics, goes the last, however, most important artistic journey from Poland to China. It turned out to be one of the most important trips in terms of world culture of the 20th century. This was the journey taken in 1962 by Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999), one of the greatest reformers of the 20th century avant-garde theatre, the creator of the concept of the "Poor Theatre." It was discussed in the lecture from the eminent teatrologist Professor Zbigniew Osinski at the first conference of Polish and Chinese Historians of Art in Krakow in 2009, His text in English and Chinese was published in the post-conference volumes.¹⁹⁾

The proclamation of the Cultural Revolution by Mao Zedong in May 1966 changed the political and social spheres of China. Feliks Topolski was one

¹⁸⁾ Gryglewicz (2011: 275).

¹⁹⁾ Osiński (2011: 259–268).

of the few European witnesses of the commencement of the revolution. He went to Beijing on the invitation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and a poet Marshal Chen Yi, who soon was ousted from power. With the stay in China is related the expressionist painting composition *Chairman Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (Ill. 26) with a portrait of the Chinese communist leader and slender tower (resembling a pagoda) with a red star exhibited in the Gallery Topolski in London. Topolski returned from China with hundreds of drawings, which he subsequently published in the *Chronicles* as the series *New Cultural Revolution*. Among the drawings stands out a suggestive scene with figures in the interior (from Ill. 27; with illegible description in Polish), as well as the scene *Open Prison in Peking: prisoners read Mao Zedong's works in their unlocked cell between working shifts* (Ill. 28). In the books *Holy China* (Boston, 1968) and *Fourteen Letters* (1988), Topolski included some descriptions and drawings of Maoist China. Among them are interesting analyses of the visual propaganda of the revolution: "In Tien An Men Square, the POP realisation, the all-arts performance erupts limitlessly. The overlapping sights and sounds, bursting out from a million sources under an immense pyrotechnic sky, could reach such a pity only as ritual of devotion. I am sadly outside it all, but aware of the magnitude and made humble. Their banners, their posters, their 40-foot-high paintings of the four-headed Saint (Marx-Engels-Lenin-Mao) are POP ART. It is all aesthetically shocking to the Westerner, who melts in front of a Warhol. The great difference is this, that the Western POP is afraid of, or rather empty of, meaning – Chinese POP is as forthcoming as any religious art: it preaches".²⁰⁾

The gradual closing of the People's Republic of China to external contacts, combined with the repression against the people of culture, disrupted Polish-Chinese relations. Also in Poland, the period of "martial law" declared in 1981 also did not favour international collaboration. Only towards the end of the 90ties came a restoration of relations with the PRC. At this time the cooperation with Taiwan Republic of China started. Once again, Chinese exhibitions and Chinese artists, historians and art critics started coming to Poland, while Polish initiatives were realised in Mainland China and Taiwan.

²⁰⁾ Topolski (1988).

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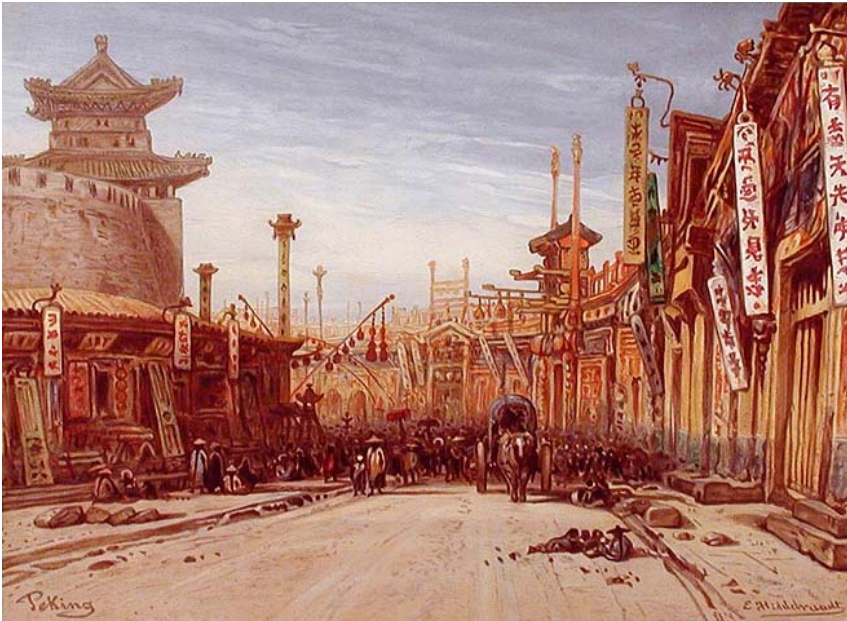
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Ill. 1. Jan Damel, *Chinese merchants in Maimachin*, 1831–1835



Ill. 2. Eduard Hildebrandt, *Hongkong Queen's Road*, c. 1864



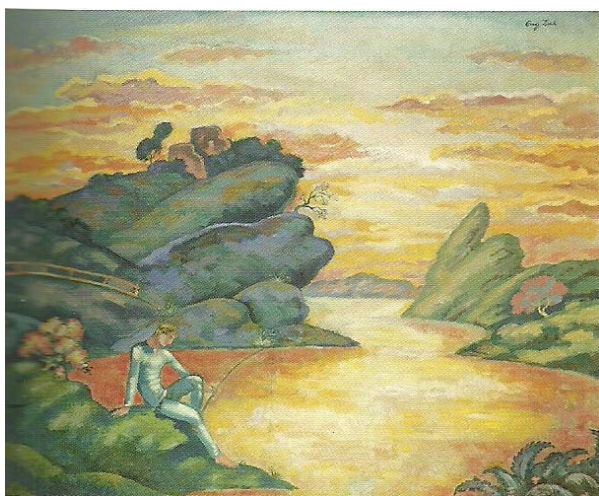
Ill. 3. Julian Fałat, *Two Chinese at Rest*, 1885



Ill. 4. József Mehoffer, *Europe jubilans*, 1905

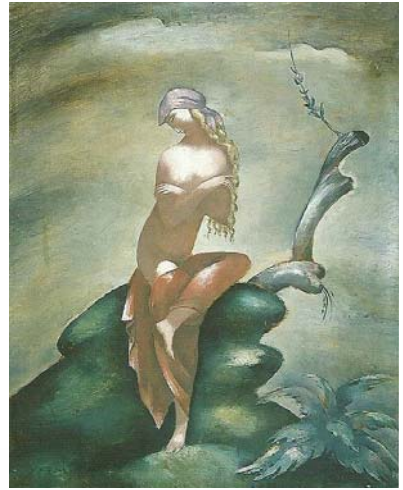


Ill. 5. Tadeusz Makowski, *Girl and Chinese Characters*, 1906

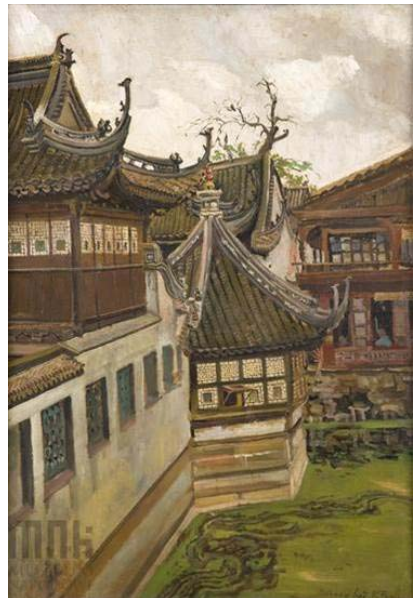


Ill. 6. Eugeniusz Zak, *Fisher*, 1914

Ill. 7. Eugeniusz Zak, *Woman against Landscape*, c. 1922



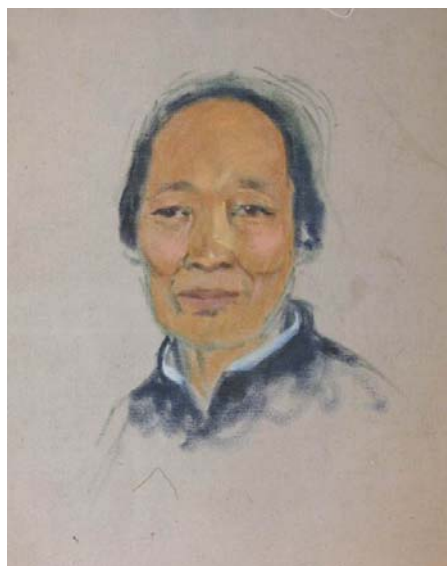
Ill. 8. Eugeniusz Zak, *Idyllic Landscape with a Family*, 1923



Ill. 9. Karol Frycz, *Tea Room in Shanghai*, 1920



Ill. 10. Dawid Aleksander Haltrecht, *Terrace of Chinese Temple in Mongolia*



Ill. 11. Dawid Aleksander Haltrecht, *Old nanny from Tien-tsin*



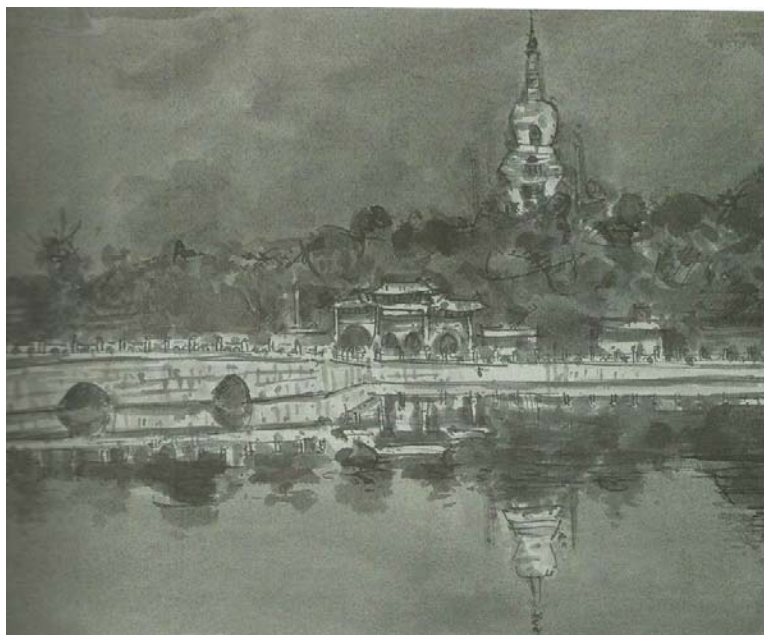
Ill. 12. Victor Podgoursky / Wiktor Podgórski, *Chinese tea break*



Ill. 13. Victor Podgoursky / Wiktor Podgórski, , *Market in Lung-wah*, 1940



Ill. 14. Feliks Topolski, *Refugees*, 1944



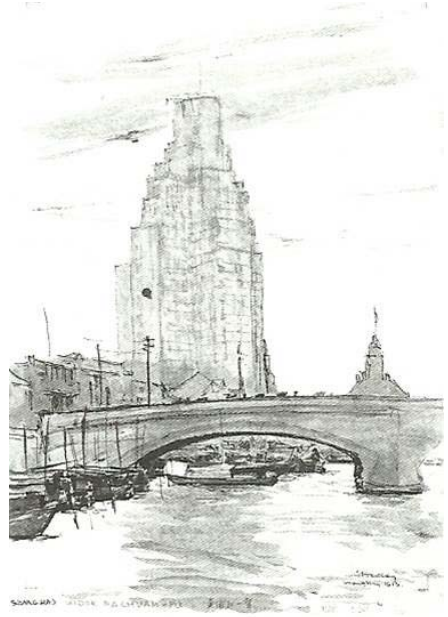
Ill. 15. Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, *Beijing – with the Baita pagoda*, 1952



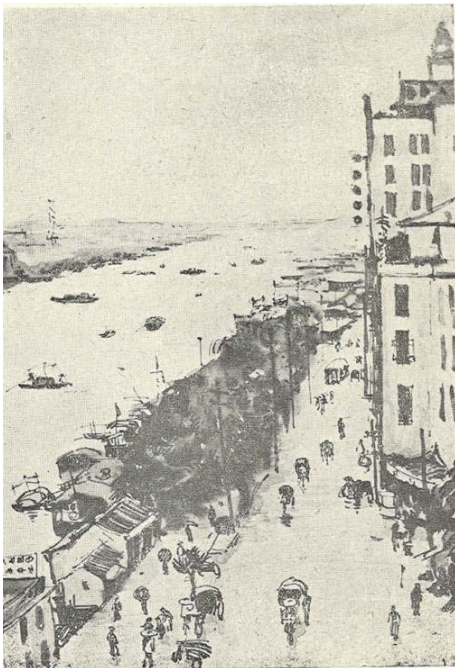
Ill. 16. Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, *Fishermen on the Lake*, 1952



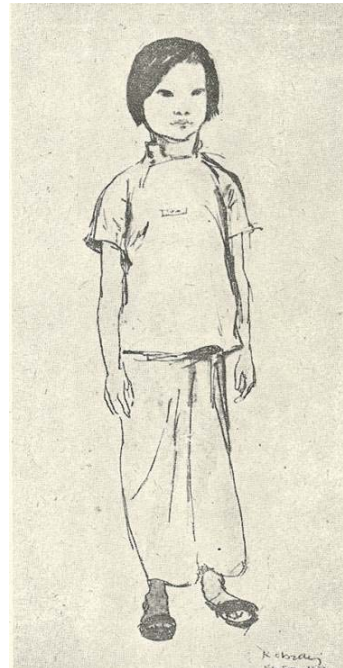
Ill. 17. Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, *Woman Worker, a Student at the University of Beijing, Li Fu-li*, 1952



Ill. 18. Aleksander Kobzdej, *View of Shanghai*, 1953



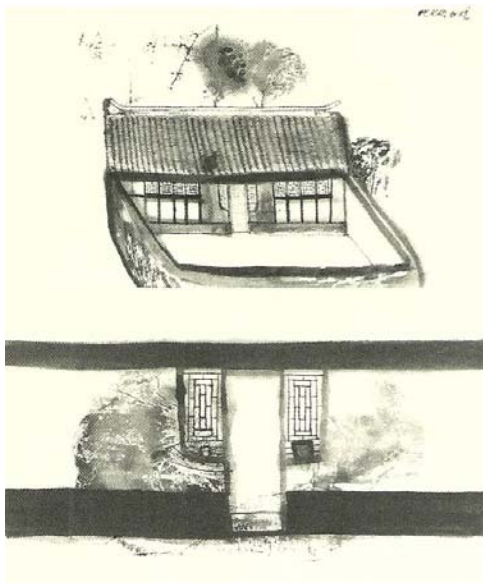
Ill. 19. Aleksander Kobzdej, *Landscape from Guangzhou*, 1953



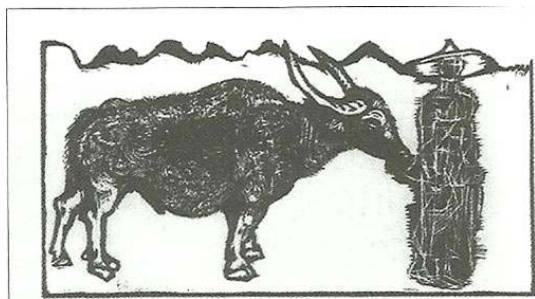
Ill. 20. Aleksander Kobzdej, *School girl from Guangzhou*, 1953



Ill. 21. Andrzej Strumiłło, *Weaver from Shanghai*, 1954



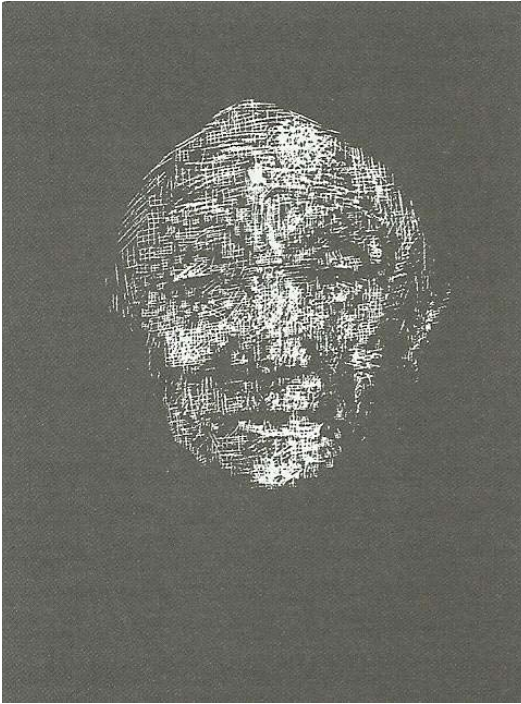
Ill. 22. Andrzej Strumiłło, *Beijing courtyards*, 1954



Ill. 23. Jerzy Panek, *A Man from Canton with a buffalo*, 1956



Ill. 24. Jerzy Panek, *A Woman from Canton*, 1956



Ill. 25. Jerzy Panek, *Old Woman from Hangzhou*, 1956



Ill. 26. Feliks Topolski, *Chairman Mao and Cultural Revolution*, 1966



Ill. 27. Feliks Topolski, From the cycle *New Cultural Revolution*, 1966



Ill. 28. Feliks Topolski, *Open prison in Peking: prisoners read Mao-tse-dongtung's works in their unlocked cell between working shifts*, 1966