Exchanges and Parallels between Italy and East Asia

Exchanges and Parallels between Italy and East Asia

Edited by

Gaoheng Zhang and Mario Mignone

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Exchanges and Parallels between Italy and East Asia

Edited by Gaoheng Zhang and Mario Mignone

This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-4249-1
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4249-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

GAOHENG ZHANG

Following a successful conference and exhibition focused on Italy and China at the University of Toronto in 2016, Mario Mignone at Stony Brook University and Gaoheng Zhang at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver) organized a new conference centered on Italy and East Asia at Stony Brook during October 11-13, 2018. Conference participants responded to our call enthusiastically. On October 11, Elizabeth Zanoni of Old Dominion University and Yong Chen of the University of California at Irvine delivered the keynote speeches which explained the global dimensions and local inventions of Italian and Chinese food cultures to an enthusiastic crowd. On October 12-13, more than 40 presenters gave talks on topics ranging from religion to creative arts, from translation to current affairs, and many more.

Titled "Italy and East Asia: Exchanges and Parallels," this conference intended to recapitulate and advance the scholarship on the many exchanges and parallels that exist between Italy and East Asia. The topic has already captured the attention of current English-language scholarship. In addition to special issues published in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* (2010, Vol. 15, Iss. 4) and in *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* (2014, Vol. 2, Iss. 1), several books appeared addressing topics as varied as China in Italian operas (Ward 2010), Italian colonialism in China (Smith 2012), modern Italian-Chinese international relations (Marinelli and Andornino 2013), and Chinese migration to Italy (Pedone 2013; Ceccagno 2017; Zhang 2019). Parallels in economy, fascism, and architecture have been the focus of recent scholarship on Italy and Japan (Boltho, Vercelli, and Yoshikawa 2001; Watanabe 2014; Hofmann 2015; Clementi 2010). Other new volumes compare Europe and East Asia in order to gain a global view of social and cultural issues ranging from democracy (Kim 2014) to book cultures (McDermott and Burke 2015). Italian- and East Asian-language scholarship on exchanges and parallels between Italy and East Asian countries and regions is even more extensive.

The main goals of our conference are to assess research interests and frames in existing scholarship on issues relating to Italy and East Asia,

to encourage interdisciplinary and intercultural research and collaboration, and to strengthen and expand an existing network in the field of study (https://mobilitiesitalychina.com). The research questions we asked participants to consider include: What is at stake for scholars in examining Italian-East Asian exchanges and parallels? How can we best examine the dialogical process in these crossings? What theoretical insights and policy recommendations can we yield from these intellectual endeavors?

The high rate of participation in the Stony Brook University and the University of Toronto conferences, as well as the quality and originality of papers presented, underscored once more that the research area on connections and networks between Italy and East Asia is vibrant and thriving. The current edited volume wishes to capture the excitement and the latest developments of researchers working in this area. In the rest of the introduction, I will briefly summarize the chapters.

The volume's first five articles address various aspects of travel and travel literature. In "Marco Polo on China and India: The Rhetoric of Otherness," Devika Vijayan and Miao Li analyze rhetorical strategies employed in Polo's descriptions of China and India, including amplification, enumeration, and analogy, in order to theorize a rhetoric of otherness in Polo's work. While Polo's China seems more realistically and euphorically represented, his account of India continues the medieval tradition in viewing it as a land of monsters. The authors argue that Polo's book's French title, *Le Devisement du monde*, is significant because it encapsulates both the desire to divide and the desire to describe, thereby signaling a discursive approach to the division and dialogue between the self and the other.

Miriam Castorina in "Italian Women in Chinese Eyes: An Analysis of Some Late 19th- and Early 20th-century Chinese Travel Accounts and Their Perception of Italian Women" surveys such accounts by Chinese intellectuals and diplomats who traveled to Europe and the United States. The author advances the hypothesis that the absence of Italian women in these accounts, as opposed to the more pronounced presence of French, British, and American women in similar texts, could mean that, to the Chinese eyes, Italian women seemed far closer to the conventional Chinese feminine ideal.

Titled "A Comparative Study of Goffredo Parise and Alberto Moravia's Travel Writings on China," Lin Yang's article characterizes Parise's account as inspired by intuition and that of Moravia as based on rationality. While Parise's writings can be compared to a novel, those by Moravia resemble an essay. The author places emphasis on Parise's depiction of Chinese women, revealing its complexity and simplicity. In her analysis of Moravia's book, the author identifies a more pronounced

comparison and analogy between the two countries as his narrative focus. Ultimately, Yang reflects on travel literature as a way to know the destination country and to know oneself.

Discussing the significant number of Japanese literary works in Calvino's post-1980 personal library, his editorial involvement in Einaudi, and his travels in Japan, Claudia Dellacasa in "Calvino in Japan, Japan in Calvino" probes the potential connection between Calvino's Japanese sensibility and his works such as *The Baron in the Trees* and *Mr. Palomar.* Dellacasa examines how certain Japanese authors and their interest in character projections, perspectives, and nature-human interactions may have conditioned Calvino's literary deliberations. The author disentangles the many references and connotations in Calvino's fiction that may be of Japanese origin, or may be the result of his digestion and reinvention of these elements. In the end, the analysis contributes to an ecocritical approach to his texts, one that intersects Japanese and Italian sensibilities.

In "Igort's *Japanese Notebooks*: Fragments of the Unsaid," drawing on semiotic theories by Roland Barthes and François Jullien, Elisa Attanasio contends that Japan influenced Igort's *Japanese Notebooks* on aspects ranging from the narrative design through the conceptual framework to the graphic component. Igort's long stay in Japan sensitized him to the Japanese art of suspension and viewing things from an oblique way, which he timely employs in the graphic novels. His dialogue with his Japanese colleagues equally nourished his artistic and philosophical practices.

The next group of five articles pertain to translation. In "Translating Sardinia into Chinese: How Indirect Translation Affected the Reception of Geographic and Culture-bounds Words in Deledda's Short Fiction," Renata Vinci observes that when translators introduced Deledda's works to readers in China in the early 20th century, they often resorted to other languages and did not translate directly from Italian. This led to inaccurate translations and impacted the conveyance of cultural views and values of Deledda's Sardinian, rural world.

Giovanni Borriello in "The Technical and Scientific Interchange between the Campania Region and Japan" uses newly discovered letters in the archives to investigate a series of exchanges of letters between Japanese and Italian persons working on marine science and volcanology.

In "Volcanoes and Brigands, Talents and Misrule: Visions of Italy in Writings of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China (1834-1839)," Federica Casalin focuses on several Chinese-language primary sources in reconstructing Chinese elites' views of Italy before the First Opium War. In these sources, Italy was a land of talents in artistic and literary professions, a land of cowards and brigands, and a land of volcanoes

(the eruptions of Etna and Vesuvius were vividly described in the sources). By way of conclusion, she suggests that the perceptions she examines may have conditioned later views by Chinese elites regarding Italy, and she calls for further research in this direction.

In his "Lost in Translation: Italians in early Meiji Japan and the Communication Issue: Focusing on Primary Sources by Italian Travelers to Japan (1860-1880)," Giulio Bertelli evaluates various means of communication between Japan and Italy in terms of diplomatic and commercial ties in their first contact in the mid-1860s. In particular, the author examines the Japanese language study undertaken by silk products traders, sailors, and diplomats, which was rather haphazard but became an interesting witness to the first contacts between the two people.

Stefano Benedetti in "Lorenzo Magalotti's *Relazione della China* and the First Italian Edition of a Confucian Classic" provides a history and a detailed and documented philological study of an important work focused on one of ancient China's most revered philosophers.

Next the volume proposes five articles about various aspects of creative arts, including advice books, art museums, anime, cinema, and literature. Titled "The Competition between Ruler and his Advisors: Machiavelli's *Virtù* vs. Han Feizi's *Shi*," Andrea Polegato's article dialectically links Machiavelli and Han Feizi's advice about the relationships between rulers and advisors in order to prove that contemporary readers can gain much from reading and thinking about them together. The author builds on his previous article on Machiavelli and Sunzi to expand his thesis into how military treatises can be analysed and compared by points of complementary.

Donatella Failla's article titled "A Bridge of Art and Culture Connecting Italy and Japan: The 'Edoardo Chiossone' Museum of Genoa" reconstructs the life and activities of Chiossone in Japan during the Meiji period and then links his collections of Japanese and Chinese art objects which were deposited in Genoa.

In "Japanese Anime Influences' on Italian Contemporary Artists from the 'Goldrake Generation'," Alessia Carpoca discusses the first wave of Japanese anime in Italy in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, and examines how Italian artists of the "Goldrake generation" (born between 1966 and 1984) absorbed specific aesthetic and visual elements from the Japanese to apply to their own works.

In "Cinematic Ruins: The Excavation of History in Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* and Gianni Celati's *Visions of Crumbling Houses*," Anna Botta argues that Jia's and Celati's films enact a philosophy of temporality, which is signaled and symptomized by cinematic ruins, that resists the narrative

time of the film and obliques ways of conceiving history as a progressive, linear phenomenon.

Valentina Pedone examines the three versions of a novel by Hu Lanbo in relation to the autobiographical genre in contemporary China and to Chinese women's writings in "Self-narration as a 'Social Action' in the Works of the Sino-Italian Author Hu Lanbo." Pedone examines the didactic voice of Hu who proposes her personal journey and China as a model for other women and countries to follow. Her literary choice is in keeping with Chinese literary conventions and represents a different configuration in Italian migration literature.

Our collection also includes articles about religion and politics pertaining to episodes of exchanges and parallels. In "The 'Roman Question' in Shanghai: A Gendered Perspective to Approach the Conflicts between the French Jesuits and the Evolution of Papal Diplomacy in Modern China," Wei Mo takes a French-built Catholic mission in Shanghai's Zi-Kai-Wei district as her case study to infer gender division within the mission and the larger strategic import of this mission in the French empire's competition with the Vatican in charting European states' religious presence in China.

Luigi Troiani's "Bipolar System and China: Pietro Nenni's Intuitions and China's Gratitude" gives a vivid history of how Nenni pushed forward Italy's formal agreement to enter into diplomatic relations with China since the 1950s and how Chinese politicians recognized his contributions.

In "Europe and China in the Ending Stage of the Cold War: The Case of Italy (1975-1989)," Lorenzo Capisani analyses the relationships and agreements between Italy and China during the later stage of the Cold War, giving particular attention to cultural and economic ties in this complex process.

The volume ends with a contribution from one of our keynote speakers, Yong Chen. "The Invention of the Chinese American Cuisine" synthesizes the high points of the invention process of the Chinese American cuisine, giving a fitting and delicious end to our exploration in the field of exchanges and parallels between Italy and East Asia.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Mario Mignone, co-organizer of the conference and director of the Center for Italian Studies, sponsor of the conference, and his staff, Josephine Fusco and Annette Palazzo for the assistance in the logistics and all the arrangements for the planning of the conference. I am very grateful to Annette also for the meticulous assistance in assembling and following the process of these proceedings. I am also grateful to Jun Liu, Vice Provost for Global Affairs, Dean for International

Academic Programs and Services (IAPS), for co-sponsoring the conference through the support of the China Center and the Confucius Institute.

Bibliography

Boltho, Andrea, Alessandro Vercelli, and Hiroshi Yoshikawa. Eds. *Comparing Economic Systems: Italy and Japan.* Bsingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001.

Ceccagno, Antonella. *City Making and Global Labor Regimes: Chinese Immigrants and Italy's Fast Fashion Industry*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Clementi, Alberto. *Architecture and Landscape: Italy/Japan Face to Face.* Barcelona, Spain: List, 2010.

Hofmann, Reto. *The Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1915-1952.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016.

Kim, Nam-Kook. *Multicultural Challenges and Sustainable Democracy in Europe and East Asia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Marinelli, Maurizio and Giovanni Andornino, eds. *Italy's Encounters with Modern China: Imperial Dreams, Strategic Ambitions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

McDermott, Joseph Peter and Peter Burke. *The Book Worlds of East Asia and Europe, 1450-1850: Connections and Comparisons.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015.

Pedone, Valentina. *A Journey to the West: Observations on the Chinese Migration to Italy.* Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2013.

Smith, Shirley Ann. *Imperial Designs: Italians in China, 1900-1947*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012.

Ward, Adrienne. *Pagodas in Play*. Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press. 2010.

Watanabe, Hiroaki Richard. *Labour Market Deregulation in Japan and Italy: Worker Protection Under Neoliberal Globalisation.* London: Routledge, 2014.

Zhang, Gaoheng. *Migration and the Media: Debating Chinese Migration to Italy, 1992-2012.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019.

CHAPTER 1

MARCO POLO ON CHINA AND INDIA: THE RHETORIC OF OTHERNESS

DEVIKA VIJAYAN AND MIAO LI

"No man is an island entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main[1]"
—John Donne

In his famous work of the Seventeenth Century, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation XVII*, John Donne refers to the interconnectedness between all human communities throughout history, including even groups that have been perceived as the "Other". Since the Middle Ages, much has been written about the image of the Other in both fiction and travel literature. In various humanistic disciplines, cultural encounters have usually been studied through dichotomous models (barbarians versus the civilized or East versus West)[2]. Moreover, John Pau Rubiès affirms that, during medieval times, the Church and the feudal society specifically articulated the identities of the Other[3]. Thus, as he rightly states, any group outside the limits of the Latin Christian world (Saracens, Jews, Idolaters and atheists) all represented "Otherness". In such a context, it would therefore be erroneous, as traditional scholars would lead us to believe, that the Orient was simplistically perceived to be a land of marvels and inhabited by monstrous races. In fact, some of the travelogues

[1] John Donne, *The Works of John Donne*, volume III. Edited by Henry Alford, (London: John W. Parker, 1839), 574-75.
[2] See Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*. See also Edward Saïd's definition of Orientalism: "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between the "Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" in *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978), 10.
[3] Rubiès, *Travel and ethnology in the Renaissance south India through European eyes, 1250-1625*, 35-84.

written during this period talk of novel experiences and foster original discourses on the East.

This article will present one such travelogue: Marco Polo's *Le Devisement du monde*[4], and his vision of alterity through the image of China and India. François Hartog's *The Mirror of Herodotus* will serve as a framework of our analysis. In his book, the French scholar reconstructs Herodotus' "rhetoric of otherness" by elaborating on the techniques that this historian used in order to explain non-Greek cultures to his Greek audience. Herodotus' description of Scythia, in particular, offers a stark contrast with the world from which he comes. In Scythian practices, manners, rituals and customs, Herodotus identifies characteristics that are contrary to those of the Greeks. This process of description allows him to give the Scythian world a coherence that appears to be the inverse of the Greek world. Hartog draws our attention to six rhetorical strategies that Herodotus uses to translate the unknown worlds to his readers: difference and inversion; comparison and analogy; miracles and the marvellous; translation and classification; description and representation (202-59). We will argue that, using similar rhetorical strategies to those of Herodotus, Marco Polo changed the image of Far East from being a place of curiosity and wonder, a mere symbolic site, to a real place: a site of adventure, profit and opportunity. Following Marco Polo's itinerary, this article will analyse the image of China and then that of India.

China

According to recent discoveries[5] made by the archaeologist Li Xiuzhen and the art historian Lukas Nickel, contact between China and Europe may have occurred between Hellenistic Greece and the Qin dynasty in the late 3rd century BCE, following the Central Asian campaigns of Alexander the Great. Later, the Han dynasty and the Roman Empire had extensive exchanges through missionaries, explorers and merchants travelling along the Silk Road. However, it was commonly understood that Marco Polo was the first[6] to present to his European readers a complete and

[4] *Le Devisement du monde* is the commonly used French title of Marco Polo's work. We will argue in the rest of this article how the French title reflects better Marco Polo's vision of the world.

[5] "Western contact with China began long before Marco Polo, experts say," *BBC News*, October 12 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-37624943.

[6] Before Marco Polo, the most famous European traveller to China is the French missionary and explorer Guillaume de Rubrouck who recorded in his work the life

detailed perspective of China through text rather than textile. His long stay of seventeen years at the court of Khublai Khan[7] allowed Marco Polo to observe this empire extensively. In fact, almost half of his book is devoted to China, the grand Khan, his court and policies, as well as over fifty cities and regions under his dominion. The chapter of China begins as such from Book II:

> I have come to the point in our book at which I will tell you of the great achievements of the Great Khan now reigning. The title Khan means in our language 'Great Lord of Lords'. And certainly he has every right to this title; for everyone should know that this Great Khan is the mightiest man, whether in respect of subjects or of territory or of treasure, who is in the world today or whoever has been, from Adam our first parent down to the present moment. And I will make it quite clear to you in our book that this is the plain truth, so that everyone will be convinced that he is indeed the greatest lord the world has even known. Here, then, is my proof. (1968 93)

The multiple use of superlative and hyperbole in Marco Polo's text underlines the narrator's admiration for the Great Khan. Despite the consistent use of the third-person observable throughout the book[8], in this particular paragraph, the narrator strategically uses the subjective pronoun "I" three times and the possessive pronoun "my" once, all of which undoubtedly refer to Marco Polo himself. The subjective observation of the narrator thus produces an effect of reality. The lexical field of authenticity ("clear", "plain truth", "convinced", "indeed" and "proof") further enhances

---

and customs of the Mongols. See the translation of his work *The Journey of William of Rubruk to the Eastern Parts*, Hakluyt Society, 1900.

[7] As our traveller was proficient in four languages and familiar with all the manners of Mongols, he earned the trust of the Khan and was offered the position of attendant of honor. Marco Polo was thus able to have not only a close observation of the Khan's court, but the privilege to visit various places for confidential tasks during his serving (1958 12).

[8] Upon Marco Polo's return to Venice in 1295, he was held in a Genoese prison subsequent a naval battle between Venice and Genoa. It was during his imprisonment that he met Rustichello, and the two collaborated on his travelogue (Florescu 253). The majority of editions of Marco Polo's work were written in the third person with Rustichello being the narrator, however, in a few editions such as *La description du monde* (Paris: Librarie C. Klincksieck, 1955), the text was written in the first person with constant appearance of the pronoun « je » and the verbs conjugated with « je ». For the purpose of this article, we cited mainly the two English editions (Orion Press and Folio Society).

the credibility of the text and therefore confirms Hartog's statement that the rhetoric of otherness seeks to produce the effect of belief (260). As the narrator promised, various rhetorical strategies are found to establish the image of China.

Accentuation

The narrator incorporates in his text Chinese and Mongolian terms, which are highlighted in italics. Immediately after this accentuation of exoticism, he utilizes paraphrases and provides a detailed description. For example, the narrator unveils the Mongolian term "*yamb*", which refers to the post-houses, described as large and handsome buildings having well-furnished apartments for ambassadors to lodge on their way, and for messengers to exchange in their jaded horses for fresh ones (1958 157-58). When it comes to the organization of the State, the Chinese terms *Thai* (枢密院) and *Sing* (中书) appear and are explained as tribunals in charge respectively of the affairs of the army and the superintendence of the provinces, a traditional division of functions among officials practiced since the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE).

Another type of accentuation is achieved through direct discourse and quotation marks. The author records a long dialogue between Marco Polo and the Khan, to reflect the latter's religious policy: "'The Christians say that their God was Jesus Christ, the Saracens Mahomet, the Jews Moses, and the idolaters Sakyamuni Burkhan, who was the first to be represented as God in the form of an idol. And I do honour and reverence to all four, so that I may be sure of doing it to him who is greatest in heaven and truest; and to him I pray for aid." (1968, 98). This is one of the rare occasions where direct discourse is employed in the book. It not only provides an efficient way of establishing the portrait of the Khan through language, but it also buttresses the credibility of the narrator. Here, the use of direct discourse substantiates Hartog's suggestion that travel writers seek to achieve credibility by appealing to the eye and the ear (260). Hartog argues that "the ear" ("I have not seen" but I have [myself] heard" from others, 270) is less credible than the eye ("I see, I say; I say what I see; I see what I can say, I say what I can see", 269) [9], since the traveller becomes the spokesman for

[9] According to Hartog, the visual testimony is the fundamental principle of the travel narratives, as he puts it, "to describe is to see and to show" (259). In the travelogues, the primary source is often the eyewitness account of the traveller, hence the preponderance of formulas of the type "I saw" to give credibility to the word of the traveller. However, once the "see" is not or no longer possible, the writer resorts to

knowledge of which he is no longer the guarantor. Significantly, in the dialogue between Marco Polo and the Khan, we notice the utilization of both the "eye" and the "ear", thereby bestowing on the narrative a greater power of persuasion.

Numbers and Enumeration

To reflect material abundance, such as the variety of species and products in China, the narrator resorts to the use of numbers and enumeration. He attempts to record local products and animals, trade and currency types systematically, although occasionally repetitively. Ginger, salt, wine and rice are the most commonly mentioned products, due largely to their frequent use in China, but probably also to their popularity in Europe. Silk, cloth of gold and taffetas were used for clothes in various parts of China. In addition to such descriptions, the narrator makes minute observations of the fauna found in these places, such as lynxes, musk deer, snakes, elephants and rhinoceros. Local and imported products can be found in various forms of markets across the country: boutiques, squares, markets, harbour, distribution centres, and merchant boats.

Besides the use of enumeration, we also notice the frequent presence of numbers, and occasionally examples of hyperboles, yet another way to reflect the population and material abundance. For example, in Kinsai[10], the metropolis of the province of Manzi, "upon three days in every week, there is an assemblage of from forty to fifty thousand persons, who attend the markets and supply them with every article of provision that can be desired" (1958 230-1). Polo uses the example of pepper to estimate the total quantity of provisions consumed in this city, the daily amount was 43 loads of 243 pounds[11] (234). From the omnipresent positive connotations in Marco Polo's description, we can easily decode his admiration for the sheer material abundance and variety present in this Empire.

Description and Amplification

To provide a good balance of catalogues and details, of persuasion and entertainment, the narrator utilizes description and amplification to

"I have heard" from men worthy of trust and of being cited. See Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, 261-73.

[10] Former capital city of the Southern Song dynasty before the conquer of Gengis Khan.

[11] These figures may not be accurate, but they are inserted to provide an overall rhetorical effect.

introduce the materialistic and mercantile aspects of China that are new to him. He is amazed by the charcoal (called "black stones" in the text) that burned during the night, producing continual heating and allowing the inhabitants of the province of Cathay to have a hot bath three times a week (1958 164-5). He provides a detailed description of how porcelain is made (254). Coming from the region where wine is part of everyday life, Polo is particularly interested in wine-making processes in China, and gives a detailed description of how it was produced with different ingredients in various places. However, it is the commonly used currency – that is to say paper money – which fascinated our Venetian merchant the most due to its capacity to be circulated in every part of the Khan's dominions. Polo uses the whole of chapter 18 in Book II to describe its production, function and circulation, which is described by him as "the secret of the alchemists" (1968 153):

> You must know that he has money made for him by the following process, out of the bark of trees – to be precise, from mulberry trees (the same whose leaves furnish food for silk-worms). The fine bast between the bark and the wood of the tree is stripped off. Then it is crumbled and pounded and flattened out with the aid of glue into sheets like sheets of cotton paper, which are all black. When made, they are cut up into rectangles of various sizes, longer than they are broad. The smallest is worth half a small tornesel; the next an entire such tornesel; the next half a silver groat; the next an entire silver groat, equal in value to a silver groat of Venice; and there are others equivalent to two, five, and ten groats and one, three, and as many as ten gold bezants.

Using vivid description of texture, colour and shape, the narrator makes the usual features of otherness – in this instance for the production of paper money – visible to his readers, as if the whole process happened under their eyes. The comparison to the Venetian currency gives European readers a better understanding of its value.

Analogy and Comparison

Through his meticulous descriptions, one can easily detect Polo's admiration for a famous city that he frequently visited – Kinsai. The city is, to quote Marco Polo, "noble and magnificent", and the name "signifies 'the celestial city', which it merits from its pre-eminence to all others in the world, in point of grandeur and beauty, as well as from its abundance delights, which might lead an inhabitant to imagine himself in paradise"

(1958 229). It is particularly significant that the Venetian traveller draws constant analogies between Kinsai and the celestial world. In his mind, this city is synonymous with Eden and an inhabitant would assume that they were in paradise. Here, through the strategy of translation ("signifies", "might lead an inhabitant to imagine himself in"), the use of terms related to heaven and a comparison of Kinsai to "all others in the world", Polo succeeds in establishing the magnificent image of Kinsai, the greatness of which derives from its grandeur and beauty as well as from its abundant pleasures.

Polo is first impressed by the extensive streets and canals in this city and its convenient transportation. He points out the functions of bridges, engaging in much hyperbole concerning their numbers:

> There are said to be 12,000 bridges, mostly of stone, though some are of wood. Those over the main channels and the chief thoroughfare are built with such lofty arches and so well designed that big ships can pass under them without a mast, and yet over them pass carts and horses; so well are the street-levels adjusted to the height. Under the other bridges smaller craft can pass. No one need be surprised that there are so many bridges. For the whole city lies in water and surrounded by water, so that many bridges are needed to let people go all over the town. (1968 180)

Here, the explanation of bridges' designs is easily achieved by establishing an analogy with objects with which his European readers were familiar with, such as "big ships", "carts", "horses" and "craft". He then reports the growing merchant and handicraft population in this city, and introduces the organization of the handicraft trades, with over 10,000 workshops. The city is equipped with capacious warehouses to provide accommodation to foreign merchants and storage for their goods, a strategy to promote foreign trade. Gradually, through similar landscape, rivers, canals, bridges, markets and workshops, the reader will decode a hidden analogy between Kinsai and Marco Polo's hometown Venice, an important port city during mediaeval times known for its financial and maritime powers.

The analogy goes beyond regional parallels and seeks next to discover commonalities between customs of the two peoples. For instance, when introducing the tradition of arranged marriage found in Kinsai and most parts of China, Polo specifies that no marriage is ever celebrated until an opinion has been pronounced upon it by an astrologer, through a careful

examination of the potential couple's birth notes[12]. A similar practice also existed in mediaeval Europe, although only among the nobility[13]. Here, as we see, instead of accentuating the alterity of the Other, the narrator implicitly draws parallels between China and Europe. It is then left to the reader's discretion to draw his or her own conclusion on their perception of the Other.

Another object of Polo's admiration is the desirable life, and especially the friendly way people treat each other:

> The natives of Kinsai are men of peace, through being so cosseted and pampered by their kings, who were of the same temper. […] They love one another so devotedly that a whole district might seem, from the friendly and neighbourly spirit that rules among men and women, to be a single household. This affection is not accompanied by any jealousy or suspicion of their wives, for whom they have the utmost respect. A man who ventured to address an unseemly remark to any married woman would be looked upon as a thorough blackguard. They are no less kind to foreigners who come to their city for trade. They entertain them in their houses with cordial hospitality and are generous of help and advice in the business they have to do. (1968 185)

The comparison of neighbours to a family ("might seem […] to be") and the expression "not accompanied by any jealousy or suspicion of their wives" serve as a contrast to (and an implicit critique of) reality in Europe. The parallel between how foreigners are treated and how natives are treated ("no less kind"), and the friendly lexical field "kind", "cordial hospitality", "generous" used to qualify the local people's attitude to foreign merchants highlight their open spirit.

What could have been our traveller's objective(s) in writing such a glorious account of Kinsai? Was it perhaps to improve mercantile relations between two parts of the world? Did he intend for this narrative to be seen as a manual and guide for his fellow merchants? Could it be considered as

---

[12] Upon the birth of a child, the parents immediately make a note of the date and time at which the delivery took place. They then inquire of an astrologer to record under what sign or aspect of the heavens the child was born. When he is grown up, and is about to engage in business activities, voyage, or treaty of marriage, this document is carried to the astrologer, who will weigh all the circumstances and pronounces certain oracular words, in which these people place great confidence. See Polo 1958 p.238.

[13] Emilie Amt, *Women's lives in medieval Europe: a source book* (New York, Routledge, 1993).

his implicit bridging of East and West? We are inclined to agree with the mediaevalist scholar Simon Gaunt, that Kinsai could be interpreted as "a vision for Europe's future" (181), based on the already existing similarities between this city and Venice.

Between Reality and Myth

Occasionally, Marco Polo would highlight certain exotic or strange facts about China: the darker skin tone of the people in Tholoman, men and women wearing gold and silver rings and bracelets in Amu (1958 206), and people having their bodies punctured all over in figures of beasts and birds in Kangigu and Zai-tun (205, 253). When comparing different editions of Marco Polo's work, we notice that certain unattractive eating habits and even cannibalism are inserted suddenly, although very briefly, in the descriptions of the cities of Kinsai[14] and Fuchou[15]. Due to the loss of the original archives, it would be hard to tell if these fragments came directly from Marco Polo, or if other editors inserted them as hearsay. However, when making explicit such unfamiliar aspects to his European readers, Marco Polo is rarely critical or subjective.

According to Hartog, all travel tales that claim to be faithful reports contain a category of *thoma* (marvels, curiosities). Evidently, Marco Polo did not fail to include this aspect in his report of China, although with a reduced "dosage" if compared to his description of India. The *thoma* is found in the chapter of the province Karazan, where he provides an extraordinary description of the gigantic serpents found in this region:

> Here are seen huge serpents, ten paces in length, and the spans in the girt of the body. At the fore part, near the head, they have two short legs, having three claws like those of a tiger, with eyes larger than a fourpenny loaf (*pane da quattro denari*) and very glaring. The jaws are wide enough to swallow a man, the teeth are large and sharp, and their whole appearance is so formidable, that neither man, nor any kind of animal, can approach them without terror. (1958 191)

[14] "As you much know they eat every kind of flesh, even that of dogs and other unclean beasts, which nothing would induce a Christian to eat." (1993 187)

[15] « […] You must know that they [inhabitants of Fuchou] eat all sorts of brute beast. They even relish human flesh, provided that the death was not natural. They all eat the flesh of those who have died of a wound and consider it a delicacy." (1995 222, translated by us from French)

The use of passive voice ("Here are seen […]") is intriguing. Has Marco Polo really seen these serpents with his own eyes? Or did he just report what he heard from others who may have seen them? Despite the use of comparison ("like those of a tiger"), a reference to his cultural context ("a fourpenny loaf"), and multiple appearances of qualitative adjectives, one may still question the credibility of this paragraph. However, if we replace "serpents" with "crocodiles" and read the text again, it makes perfect sense. This confirms the definition of *mirabilia* provided by Jacques Le Goff[16]: what appears extraordinary is only so due to our ignorance, since in Europe where Marco Polo came from, there are no native species of crocodiles. If ever the effect of miracle is produced, it is mainly due to his ignorance and the lack of vocabulary to describe the fauna alien to his part of the world.

In the chapter of China, the occasional appearance of appalling elements may challenge the boundaries of myth and reality, and produce an effect of entertainment. Nevertheless, through various rhetorical strategies, Marco Polo succeeded in establishing a detailed image of China. He not only revealed the unknown aspects of this country to his European readers through accentuation, description and amplification, but he also provided a vision for Europe's future through the hidden analogy in his description of Kinsai, and the use of numbers and enumeration which highlight China as a land of profit and adventure. Moreover, the objects and cultural practices in this work manifest a constant link to Polo's cultural and professional identities.

India

While Marco Polo is generally credited with providing the first comprehensive image of China to the Western world, it was commonplace that India was represented in the Middle Ages as a land of marvels and curiosities, one that was inhabited by monstrous races. Scholars such as Jacques Le Goff and Catherine Weinberger-Thomas are of the view that this mediaeval perception of the Other was influenced by classical authors like Pliny and Solinus and that Marco Polo's *Le Devisement du monde* is nothing but a continuation of this scholastic tradition where other cultures were seen

[16] In his essay « Le merveilleux dans l'Occident médiéval », Le Goff proposes the following definition for the two terms related to marvels: the *miraculum* would designate a miracle or an act of divine intervention and the word *mirabilia* would be translated as marvelous, a word that will be used in relation to all that is awe-inspiring in nature and the world we live in. The former refers to the divine omnipotence while the latter obeys the natural laws and appear as extraordinary only because of our ignorance, which supposes that one day we can explain them.

in binary opposition to the Christian Western world. To cite Weinberger-Thomas:

> From Herodotus, and even more from Cstéias of Cnidus, we witness the formation of stereotypical notions. The discovery of the Indian subcontinent does not impede the transmission of these ideas. It is as if the direct observation of the facts, the opening of the maritime route from the Tagus to the Ganges at the end of the fifteenth century and access to the great texts of Indian civilization through the birth of Orientalism three centuries later, had not altered in any manner or form the stereotypical image of India – a legacy bequeathed by the Ancients. (9)

Exactly what was this image of India bequeathed by the Ancients? Simon Gaunt answers this intriguing question by pointing us to Thomas de Kent's *Roman de Toute Chevalerie*[17] where he writes "He [Alexander] saw all the marvels of the Indian lands […] which are very little known among Christians. I will relate marvels to you according to pagan sources" (114). These lines are a preface to a section in which Alexander encounters (amongst other marvels) the "*Astomi*" or people who survived by smelling apples and flowers and lived on the banks of the river Ganges, the "*Bragmanni*" or the naked wise men who spend their days in caves. There were also the "*cynocephali*" or the dog-headed men who lived in the mountains of India.

Marvels and Monsters

In late Antiquity, the popularity of the above-mentioned exotic races was such that St. Augustine devoted an entire chapter of his *City of God* to the question of whether certain monstrous races were descendants of Adam. Augustine argued that these monstrous races were not very different from the disfigured individuals who lived in the Christian world: people deformed and mutilated by the circumstances of their birth or by illnesses. Therefore, it ought not to seem incongruous that, just as there are some monstrosities within various races of mankind, so too within the whole human race one could not deny the existence of certain monstrous peoples. India thus became synonymous with monstrous races.

[17] Thomas de Kent or Thomas of Kent was an Anglo-Norman writer of the twelfth century. *Roman de Toute Chevalerie* is an Alexander Romance, a collection of legends concerning the exploits of Alexander the Great.

Travel was much in vogue during mediaeval times as merchants, pilgrims and missionaries often felt the need to explore new lands. However, these personal observations do nothing to change old legends concerning these exotic races and marvels; the latter find their way into the encyclopaedias that flourished from the twelfth century onwards under the pen of Honoré d'Autun, Gauthier de Metz or Gervais de Tilbury as well as in some of the most important works of European travel writing of this period, including Marco Polo's *Le Devisement du monde*.

Polo's first love was undoubtedly China, which meant that he had relatively little to say about India in comparison. Scholars point to certain passages in his travelogue that corroborate their argument of him representing an important link in the continuation of the monster tradition. For example, while describing the inhabitants of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Venetian traveller uses an analogy between animals and humans to describe the physiognomy of the islanders:

> You may take it for a fact that all men of this island have heads like dogs, and teeth and eyes like dogs; for I assure you that the whole aspect of their faces is that of big mastiff. They are a very cruel race: whenever they can get hold of a man who is not one of their kind, they devour him. (1968 219)

This analogy between the human and the bestial world was undoubtedly influenced by the stories of the cynocephali[18] that circulated in Europe ever since Antiquity and belonged to the unchallenged stock of marvels to be found on the Indian subcontinent. The above-mentioned island is also presented as a place of erotic travesty. The inhabitants live a life of debauchery; they also believe in polygamy and incest:

> In this island, they have neither king nor lord but are like wild beasts. They have carnal relations as dogs in the street and respect neither the father of his daughter, nor the son of his mother, because each one does as he wishes and as he can. It is a people without law. (1968 218)

This passage reveals that Marco Polo had the lowest possible opinion of the population of Andaman Islands. They lived in a complete and utter state of barbarism. The islanders "have neither king nor lord" and therefore did not live in a "society". "They have carnal relations as dogs in the street" and were ignorant of all norms of societal behaviour and they "devour" anyone who does not belong to their race. But of all the above-mentioned

[18] Cynocephalus refers to humans with the head of a dog.

infringements, this "devouring" of others or cannibalism was the worst behavioural trait attributed by the Western world to non-Christian groups; here, it relegates the inhabitants of the Andaman Islands to a realm of extreme otherness. For scholars such as Weinberger-Thomas, these writings underpin their view point that the *Devisement* and other travel literature written during this time played a crucial role in the solidification of European ideas of "us" versus "them" in Europe. The East – and in particular India – is defined exclusively as a place populated by monsters, prodigies and cannibals, a land of "exorbitant otherness" (Gaunt 172).

One cannot deny the existence of these passages in Marco Polo's travelogue. In fact, encounters with the monster was the cornerstone of virtually all travel narratives produced during mediaeval times. As Claude Kappler would say, "[…] If you have not seen a monster, you have not travelled" [19] (115). There is, however, another side of this travelogue that one should not overlook: the fact that *Le Devisement* seeks to correct the received knowledge about India. This is the case, for example, of the griffin, a giant bird, with the head and wings of an eagle, and the body, tail, and hind legs of a lion. Marco Polo demystifies the bird and informs his readers that it was nothing more than an eagle:

> … But you must know that they are by no means such as men in our country suppose, or as we portray them -half bird and half lion. According to the report of those who have seen them, it is not true that they are a blend of bird and lion; but I assure you that these men, the actual eyewitnesses, report that in build they are just like eagles but of the most colossal size. What I have seen myself I will tell you elsewhere, since that fits in better with the plan of the book. (1968 256)

He also debunks the myth of the unicorn with a naturalistic description of what is obviously a rhinoceros. His text accuses earlier travellers of "grand mensonge" (outright lying) and "grande superchérie" (deception on a large scale) when they bring back embalmed monkeys from India and pass them off as « petits hommes » (pygmies). Men of such small stature simply did not exist:

> I would have you know that those who profess to have brought pygmy men from the Indies are involved in great falsehood and deception. For I assure you that these so-called pygmies are manufactured in this island; and I will tell you how. The truth is

[19] « […] qui n'a pas vu de monstres, n'a pas voyagé » (original quote was in French and translated by us into English, 115).

> that there is a sort of monkey here which is very tiny and has a face very like a man's. So men take some of these monkeys, and remove all their hair, with a kind of ointment. They then attach some long hairs to the chin in place of a beard…this is all a piece of trickery, as you have heard. For nowhere in all the Indies…was there ever seen any man so tiny as these seem to be. (215)

All of the above examples reveal that Marco Polo was a man of considerable insight. His detailed description of small monkeys clearly differentiates between the human species and apes. In fact, it is one of the first passages in European travel literature that clearly demarcate man from beast. The Venetian traveller's description of certain races, such as those living in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, may, to a certain extent, have been coloured by the literary tradition of Indian monsters that pre-existed in Europe. However, he quickly rejects traditional knowledge when the latter does not conform to his first-hand observations. Marvels of Indian fauna, for the most part, are synonymous with the differences in size, colour or, more generally, in appearance between Indian animals and their Western counterparts. Thus, Marco Polo speaks of black lions (panthers), peacocks or multi-coloured parrots[20]. We find no mention of monstrous animals like the "manticore", a creature that devours men and has three rows of teeth, ears identical to those of men, almost human eyes and a tail similar to that of a scorpion. Indian fauna remains circumscribed in the sphere of reality. The same goes for flora. He talks about precious wood and so-called exotic products such as pepper, dates, and rice, which were already known in the Western world.

Analogy and Comparison

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the fundamental differences in mediaeval European culture was to be found in the domain of religion. Learned writers were aware that Judaism, Christianity and Islam shared sacred texts and prophets, but this awareness did not prevent them from suggesting an absolute divide between Christianity and other religions. Marco Polo was a pious Christian despite the fact that he admired cross-cultural expressions of piety. Thus, with regards to Hinduism, he tries to create a rapprochement between certain aspects of this religion and those of Christianity. These analogies occur in a long chapter describing the

[20] Read his description on the south Indian city of Quilon, Book III chapter 22.

Brahmins[21] and other Hindu religious figures such as yogis[22]. He praises some of their religious practices like abstinence and certain other qualities such as honesty, peacefulness and general aversion to luxury. Several of their practices are likened to Christian rites. As an example, the Venetian traveller refers to the Hindu practice of anointing oneself with a paste made from ground cattle bone, an alien concept for the European readers. Marco Polo therefore draws an analogy between holy paste and holy water. "[…] they anoint various parts of their body with great reverence, no less than Christians display in the use of holy water" (Latham 238). Describing the "yogi", he says they eat leaves but not when they are green as this indicates that they are alive and therefore have souls; yogis will avoid sin at all costs. Yogis walk around naked and do not feel the need to cover their genitals. Even here what is striking is that the traveller does not try to draw the reader's attention to their nudity but rather to their devotion to chastity and celibacy, Christian practices that were much valued. Hindus go on pilgrimages just as Christians go to the shrine of Saint James (Latham 241).

Nonetheless, there are certain passages where he expresses considerable doubts about Hindu idolatry. For example, his description of Hindu idols reveals, yet again, his ambivalence with regards to India. He describes the statues of the Hindu gods as being half human and half beast[23]. Some deities had four heads and multiple arms. While Marco Polo's depiction is fairly accurate, he also intimates that Hindu practices are "diabolical in nature". How does one explain this dualistic attitude of the Venetian traveller? Hartog explains that when we try to understand an unfamiliar phenomenon, we normally proceed from the known to the unknown. The known in this case is to be found in the monstrous creatures inherited from classical Antiquity. The Indian gods are therefore identified with Christian devils and acquire malevolent characteristics[24]. Michel

[21] A Brahmin is class of people who specialise as priests.

[22] A yogi can be defined as someone who practices yoga. Marco Polo may be referring to the here to the "sanyasi" or an ascetic who has renounced the pleasures of life.

[23] Marco Polo describes the Hindu idols as being: « […] Et vous dis que ceux de ces îles, ainsi que les autres Idolâtres ont des idoles qui ont tête de bœuf, d'autres qui ont tête de cochon, d'autres de chien […]et telles autres de maintes autres façons. Il y en a qui ont une tête à quatre visages, et certaines ont trois têtes […] Les faits de ces Idolâtres sont d'une telle étrangeté et d'un tel travail diabolique, qu'il ne ferait pas bon le mentionner en notre livre, parce que serait trop mauvaise et abominable chose à ouïr pour les chrétiens […] » (2009 403-4).

[24] See Rudolf WittKower, "Marvels of the East. A Study in the history of monsters" in *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* vol.5, 1942, p.159-197.

Meslin [25] attributes this phenomenon to the presence of a monstrous iconography in the cathedrals of Europe from the 13th century. The illustrated bestiary includes, among others, gargoyles carved on turrets. Additionally, Indian marvels and monsters were a constant feature of the encyclopaedias and manuscripts of the mediaeval world. As Partha Mitter[26] rightly affirms, "Classical monsters and gods, Biblical demons and Indian gods were all indiscriminately lumped together [...] under the all-embracing class of monsters" (10).

It is, however, important to remember that it would have been impossible for a traveller like Marco Polo to escape such a powerful "monster" tradition that was present in almost all of the pictorial documents of his time and was buttressed by the Church and writers of Classical Antiquity. This presence most likely explains his skewed notions with regards to the Hindu deities. Overall, the negative analogies he makes concerning Hinduism are far outweighed by the positive vocabulary used throughout the chapter and the positive spin that is put on the asceticism and abstinence practiced by Hindu religious figures. As John Pau Rubiès concludes: "he [Marco Polo] places religious beliefs as part of a general ethnographic language based on the observation of behaviour and always defined in terms of human diversity" (54). We can therefore surmise that the essential theme of Marco Polo's book is to show the profound unity of this diverse world.

Conclusion

The title of Marco Polo's book *Le Devisement du Monde* is an intriguing one indeed. Simon Gaunt, in his book, shows that, in old and middle French, there was no distinction between "diviser" (to divide) and "deviser" (to describe). To quote from Gaunt, "to divide something also means to describe, in other words, to apprehend its diversity; this then gives sense to talk discursively and eventually, to converse." (150)

---

[25] Michel Meslin explains how monsters in the western Christian tradition were synonymous with paganism. He writes : « […] dans les rangs des armes païennes nous trouvons des cynocéphales, des hommes à la peau couverte de corne, d'autres cornus; leur corps est bien le reflet de leur âme que n'a pas encore touchée la parole divine. Ces monstres sont employés à des fins didactiques et religieuses : les tuer est un devoir, c'est servir Dieu et le droit » (99). Killing monsters was considered as a religious duty and service to God.

[26] See Partha Mitter's book *Much Maligned monsters: a history of European reaction to Indian art,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992.