

distinctly European genealogy. After all, nearly all modern motifs and arguments of anti-Eurocentric critique were forged by Europeans in their critique of Imperialism and modern colonialism, of their very own capitalism and racist politics; and they were appropriated by Post-Colonial Theory from the self-critique of Eurocentrism.

And maybe this elliptical movement could point to the possibility that we are in the midst of a much longer historical cycle, and that the project of World Literature will be resuscitated by others, in a *ricorso* that will start where Europeans and their heirs left the project and the corpus of non-Eurocentric World Literature unfinished. Provincialising Europe, we

should not be afraid to acknowledge its ancient weakness and marginality. For before and after Eurocentrism, this is where the tasks of translation and travelling and of documenting the corpora of non-European languages and literature originated. »In the beginning is the void, in the middle is the sounddance, and thereafter you are in the unbelieved again« (Joyce 1966: 378.29f.).<sup>1</sup>

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## Responses

### Colliding Circles

#### Haun Saussy

»European culture was not ›Eurocentric‹ [...] for a very long time – roughly from the fall of the Roman Empire in the West to the global rise of modern European Empires«

»Rather than Eurocentric, medieval and early-modern European culture was ›allocentric‹«

The critical force of these observations can hardly be overstated: Europeans had to learn to be Eurocentric. They were not, so to speak, born that way. A tension in contemporary discourse about identity and power is thereby revealed. We easily agree that all knowledge is an affair of social construction, but go on to talk about ›situated‹ and ›located‹ subjects as if their subjecthood and its placement had not needed to be constructed, as if they were logical, topographic or natural givens. If your subject-position is European, so goes the assumption, then Eurocentrism must be your default attitude unless a long and deliberate process of education changes it. Although epistemological

narcissism is certainly widespread, and Europeans and their inheritors give daily evidence of it, there is more to a subject position than a pin dropped on a map. Were we to think of the subject as constituted by desire, in this case a geographical, temporal desire, we would not be so quick to attribute to it a delusive stability. What if Europeans were those who *wanted* to be Eurocentric?

Conceiving of the subject as constituted by lack and desire brings into play a number of passions and plots the historical development of an identity as a result of contingencies and symptomatic illusions. Under this new construction, over much of their history Europeans' relation to the rest of the world will not simply have been one of domination. The shift to Eurocentrism is the dramatic moment of transformation. Some economists have pointed out how the Europeans entered the global market: first as hitchhikers on the Asian inter-country trade,

then as gamblers operating with New World silver, eventually as armed monopolists (Frank 1998). No longer the ›self-made man‹ of history, the European is a creature of such mixed feelings as envy, resentment, competition, emulation, devaluation, and jealousy. The attitude of superiority will be seen as built on the denial of certain obtrusive realities, rather like the sudden adoption by ancient Athenians of a language of ›autochthonous‹ citizenship that erased previous narratives in which Athens was renowned for her hospitality to immigrants (Detienne 2003: 48–59). In so transparently counterfactual a subject-position we must recognize a ›deep unrest‹ due to ›basic impossibilities‹, a ›basic insecurity, hidden under an appearance of self-evidence, which can so easily lead to violence‹ (Geschiera 2011: 331, 339).

No one will deny the injustices done by Eurocentric ways of thinking. Here it is a matter of tracing differently the origins of such thinking. Integral to the Europeanisation of Europe was the acceptance of Roman law and Christianity, a process that took centuries. It located real cultural authority in the past and in remote parts. Dante combines two reputable *loci* of such authority in book II of his *De Monarchia*: ›Regarding the question at issue, I say that the Roman people acquired legitimately, not by usurpation, that Monarchy over all humanity which is called ›imperium‹. This is shown by the following reasons: it is appropriate for the most noble people to take precedence over all others; the Roman people was most noble of all; therefore it should have taken precedence over all others [...]. I say moreover that if the Roman imperium was not such by right, then Christ, by being born, intended an injustice; but as the contrary of the premise is true, the consequence must be false‹. (Dante 1965: 270, 289; my translation).

Dante wrote, of course, at a time when the city of Rome commanded only a few square miles of territory and Jerusalem was in the control of *infidels*. Unification

of all Europeans under one monarch was needed to reverse both conditions in his view, expressed here and frequently in his *Comedy*. A revival of Empire would put solidier political ground under ›quella Roma onde Cristo è romano‹ (›that Rome of which Christ is a Roman‹, *Purgatorio* xxxii, in Dante 1965: 612, my translation).

While such schemes awaited their realisation, other means could be found to close the gap. Travel accounts brought Jerusalem before the imagination of readers (Whalen 2011). Architectural installations restaged the holy places in the Italian, French, German, or Spanish countryside (Kühnel 2012). Cloistered nuns asked well-travelled priests to aid their visualisations with verbal accounts (Beebe 2007). One bedridden visionary visited the Holy Land without leaving her room and witnessed the crucifixion in all its horror through time-travel (Brentano 1854, 1864; Landfester 2005). She was also able to fly in thought to Ephesus and identify the house of the Virgin Mary there. These shamanic phenomena were, if I may use Harbsmeier's words, ›more or less dramatic and traumatising experiences of alterity [that] could be domesticated and transformed into a kind of cultural reintegration capital‹ – but diversely according to their receivers. While Emmerich's visions from abroad were taken as fact by pious antiquaries who established a Marian pilgrimage-centre at the house in Ephesus that most closely corresponded to her descriptions, Brentano's reports of her revelations were not allowed to be used as evidence in her beatification process. They were considered too free and too reminiscent of other famous mystical writings. ›Reintegration‹, in other words, means different things for different communities: for believers, Emmerich's visions were a classic travel narrative (à la Harbsmeier) that deserved to be answered with return and welcome, but Brentano's transcriptions of them could only be exiled to the twilight realm of the imagination, in other words, to literature. And for literary readers, their unclear relation to fictionality leaves them as a hybrid and embarrassing part of his corpus.

This series of examples exhibits a range of devices created to fill in the gap between the distant *loci* of authority and the yearning European subject. Their dates, as the reader will have noticed, run from the 1300s to the 1860s, long enough to establish a trend. Collectively they could be called a testimony of the power of words to overcome, in imagination and momentarily, the isolation of Europe.

Granted, for a period Europeans could go anywhere and do anything they could imagine. Their ships entered every port, their armies were victorious. But even during that time a profound spiritual displacement, an allocentrism as Harbsmeier terms it, stayed on from the medieval and early-modern condition. The identity-politics of Eurocentrism's rising affirmation asked for more. Watching from afar the turbulence of the French Revolution, the young Hegel asked why the Germans had for so long adopted the foreign tradition of *Heilsgeschichte* as their own: »What is the historical knowledge of our people? A genuine national tradition is absent; their memory and imagination are full of the creation of man, the history of a foreign people, the deeds and misdeeds of their kings, that have nothing to do with us« (Hegel 1971: 1:45; my translation). National consciousness balked at such alienation, seemingly the first in a series of alienations needing to be overcome. *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*, a fragment written in Hegel's hand and dating from his days in the Tübingen seminary, seems to have been a joint effort of Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin. Before breaking off, the fragment proposes »a new mythology [...] a mythology of reason« that will enable »the enlightened and unenlightened to join hands« and »eternal unity to reign amongst us« (Hegel 1971: 1:236). A home-grown contemporary mythology is here summoned up to replace the social divisions of the past rooted in allocentrism, and Beauty (*Schönheit*) is expected to reconcile the sensuous with the intellectual and the local with the universal. Is this not the program

for literature, once it has split off from the domains of rhetoric, history, and reportage? In any case, the mission awaits its fulfillment.

Yet the habit of nostalgia dies hard. In Hölderlin's poetry the gods of Greece favor Germany with flickers of their presence. Beyond Greece is Asia:

»Anfänglich aber sind  
Aus Wäldern der Indus,  
Starkduftenden,  
Die Eltern gekommen«.

»But in the beginning the elders  
From the perfumed  
Forests of India  
Came«.

(*Der Adler*, Hölderlin 1983: 3: 110; my translation)

And Hölderlin seems aware of the then-recent linguistic investigations linking the languages of Europe with Sanskrit and a hypothesised proto-language: witness the etymological puns and assonances in *Brot und Wein*:

»Vater Aether! So riefs und flog von Zunge zu Zunge  
Tausendfach...

Vater! Heiter! und hallt, so weit es gehet, das uralte  
Zeichen, von Eltern geerbt, treffend und schaffend  
hinab«.

»Father Aether! The call rose and flew from tongue  
to tongue  
Thousandfold...

Father! Brighter! The age-old sign echoes, wherever it goes,

Handed down from the elders, it strikes and sparks where it lands«.

(*Brot und Wein*, Hölderlin 1983: 1: 169; my translation)

»Vater Aether« becomes, on German soil, »Vater! Heiter!« – a call to unity under the all-encompassing

sky of Jupiter, Dyauspitar, or whatever »uralt / Zeichen, von Eltern geerbt« »hallt« (»age-old / sign inherited from the elders« »echoes«), showing it can give our language its fullest resonance. Hölderlin needed Asia to give Europe a proper dwelling-place. Comparative philology celebrates a new Pentecost.

By revisiting these strategies for overcoming allocentrism I merely mean to make recognizable the need they met. Europeans in the medieval, early modern and romantic periods knew quite well that their culture was a patchwork, that it was zigzagged with seams and *ad hoc* resolutions, and they sought to overcome its provinciality by re-appropriating the ancients, by affirming extra-European origins, by calling on the heavens or the People to give new foundations. Eurocentrism had to be invented; it was anything but self-evident.

Is there a culture that is not allocentric? A properly centro-centric culture? One might look to China, *Zhongguo* 中國, the Middle Kingdom (or »Central States« – for China has not always been unified). Even there, though, the repose of sitting at the centre of the earth was never total. Buddhist missionaries brought news of a cosmology for which China was just one of a number of outlying territories: educated Chinese, like educated people everywhere, learned to make room for this alternate universe. Those who paid little attention to Buddhism, too, found unrest in their conceits of centrality and canonicity. The founders of Chinese civilisation themselves had been, so said an ancient tradition, aliens: »an Eastern Yi 夷 tribesman«, a »Western Yi tribesman« (Mencius 1983: 317), living a thousand years apart. Genuine orthodoxy in rituals, music, measurement, ethics, taxation, and any number of other domains of concern had been lost and could be recovered only by strenuous study and effort. Moreover, although few liked to admit it, the debts of Chinese civilisation to its »barbaric« neighbors were many – debts of a cultural or technological nature, but also debts of blood incurred in

the countless border conflicts that defined »China« in relation to those neighbors.

Perhaps there are no autocentric cultures, only differently allocentric ones. But the differences among the latter must count for something. Future study and comparison will bring the shades and types of allocentric being to light. To have shown the »manque à être« (»lack or failure of being«, Lacan 1966: 623) at the centre of Eurocentrism is already quite an accomplishment.

In all branches of knowledge, a new explanation, if successful, puts previously known facts into a new context. By making Eurocentrism a recent and willful phenomenon, the historian of ideas supplants a simplistic, essentialistic *mise-en-scène*. Let us consider the difference this would make. »Decolonial« historiography and pedagogy insinuates (successfully enough at least for the humanistic academy of my country) that Europeans, Westerners, Christians, or white people (terms treated as synonymous) are and have always been engaged in an unequal cowboys-and-Indians struggle with black and brown, non-Western, Third World, subaltern people. Critical scholarship is tasked with reversing this injustice by exalting the inherent virtues or the bold resistance of those so oppressed. An identitarian fable and morality tale of this kind allows one to forget that the Europeans were not always on top; that the ruses of empire were not invented by them; that the Euro-American episode in world history covers at most five hundred years, and more accurately two hundred; that every culture contains domination, injustice and conflict, though efficient killing technologies greatly magnify those flaws. The decolonial repudiation of Eurocentrism imports the distortion of history that makes Eurocentrism possible. And if we correct for that distortion, we will know Europe in a wider ensemble of languages, territories, religions, epistemologies, ontologies, and forms of life, dispensing once and for all with »the West and the rest«. It is good to meet fellow travellers on that road.

## Comment on Harbsmeier's and Schüttpelz's Essays

**Harry Liebersohn**

The central argument of Michael Harbsmeier's essay seems to be that travel accounts are best understood as a ritual of departure and return: to paraphrase from his comments, the travel account permits the returning traveller to reintegrate into the community to which he temporarily did not belong and from which he was temporarily separated. A second argument follows fast upon the first (although the links between the two are not spelled out): travel accounts – in all times and places – alternate between ›dynamic-narrative‹ and ›static-descriptive‹ sections, with the static sections putting experiences of otherness on display. Third, a frequent feature of travel writings is that they work through dichotomies, using terms such as ›barbaric‹, ›pagan‹ and ›savage‹ to separate the peoples observed abroad from society at home.

Throughout all three of these assertions, Harbsmeier gives the impression that travel accounts in general operate through clear-cut dichotomies between separate worlds, the ones encountered abroad and the familiar ones at home. For an example of a traveller who completed the reintegration of return through his travel account, Harbsmeier turns to Hans Staden, a mid-16th-century traveller who wrote about his experience among the Tupinambá Amerindians of Brazil. However, in their 2012 monograph on Staden, Eve M. Duffy and Alida C. Metcalf (2012) portray a more ambiguous Staden, a ›go-between‹ who tries to fit into Tupinambá society before returning and trying to do the same in his native Hesse. An even more striking example of mediation between worlds (rather than separation of them, as in Harbsmeier's interpretation) is the travel account of his contemporary Jean de Léry, who was also captured by the Tupinambá. Although, as a Huguenot minister, Léry was appalled by some of his captives' practices and beliefs, he nonetheless admired their courage, their rhetorical powers, their

brilliant costumes, their women's modesty. Léry returned to a France of terrible cruelty, torn apart by civil war; he thought back with nostalgia to the better features of Tupinambá society. For him there was no more than an ambivalent reintegration.

Anyone who has read early modern travel accounts will recognize Harbsmeier's description of their static and dynamic components: the lists of vocabulary, flora and fauna alternating with the voyage story. But it is hard to understand why this should be viewed as universal or, as Harbsmeier suggests, the mark of a golden age of travel writing. Georg Forster's narrative of his voyage around the world on the second circumnavigation of Captain Cook (1772–1775) is arguably one of the outstanding travel accounts of the past five centuries. It captures the world of Oceania at a moment when its island societies were still intact and fresh for the European visitors, who made a shimmering tour of New Zealand, Tahiti, and Easter Island as well as Melanesian islands outside the Polynesian triangle. Forster's narrative is conceptually acute throughout its descriptions comparing the different degrees of hierarchy and equality across Oceania; he evokes friendship as well as foreignness in his nuanced portraits of islanders. I find it hard to imagine how separate lists of information would have improved this masterful travel account.

Finally, there is the matter of the polarities which structure observations of foreign places. They have indeed been a frequent and, in retrospect, disturbing feature of European travel writing. Yet such rigid oppositions have hardly been universal. On the contrary, many accounts have been characterised by a complexity and ambivalence at odds with Harbsmeier's assumption of rigid separation of the familiar and the foreign. Take the case of Baron

Lahontan (Louis-Armand de Lahontan), who went as a soldier to French Canada in 1683. Disgusted by the bureaucrats and creditors of his native France, he felt at home on hunting expeditions with his Native American friends. He not only enjoyed the hunt and the male camaraderie, but also praised his companions for their high powers of reason and ability to create a well-ordered society. Lahontan's account was important in its own right as welcome reading for the *philosophes*; it is also an example of the widespread attraction of Native American society to European – especially French – settlers.

In their different ways, the stories of Jean de Léry, Georg Forster, and Baron Lahontan are reminders of the complexities of identity in travellers' experiences and the accounts they write of them. Travellers are often not the same after their return; I am not persuaded by Harbsmeier's model of the travel account as performance of reintegration. While some may reintegrate, others remain somewhere between worlds, their writings an attempt to translate between them.

Erhard Schüttpeitz offers a sweeping tour of *Europe Before and After Eurocentrism* by surveying the relationship of Europeans to the rest of the world from the early modern era to the present. He provides few dates or specific examples for his succession of theses about the de-centring of European civilisation before the 19th- and 20th-century age of imperialism. The focus of his essay is the project of world literature: it was doomed from the start, he argues, for linguistic barriers, among other differences, could not be breached (or if so, then only by specialists), even in the prominent case of Sanskrit.

In order to judge the idea of world literature, one needs to define it, and that requires going back to its historical beginnings. The phrase World Literature was given wide currency by Goethe in the years 1827–1831. Recent research by Hendrik Birus, Anne Bohnenkamp and others has emphasised that Goethe did not have in mind the creation of a static taxonomy of literary greats. Rather, world literature

referred to a dynamic process of exchange between the representatives of different literary traditions, which would take place through dialogue and translation. How did world literature as a process of communication actually look in the age of Goethe?

There is no single answer to cover an entire epoch. With regard to Sanskrit, we can point to one prominent case, the play *Sakuntalā* by the Indian playwright Kālidāsa (fourth century CE?). A work of transcendent wisdom and insight, alternating between eros and the sacred, personal feeling and social duty, the play enjoyed tremendous admiration among German readers after Georg Forster published a German translation in 1791 and Herder added a discerning review of Forster's translation the following year. Goethe was among the smitten readers and may have used its prologue as a model for the prologue of *Faust I*.

How it reached Germany is instructive for our understanding of World Literature. Sir William Jones, a British judge in late 18th-century Calcutta, arrived knowing Persian and quickly turned his attention to Sanskrit. As Michael J. Franklin observes in his 2011 biography, Jones was an agent of British rule, but was also a critical political observer with republican sympathies and a profound interest in Indian culture. Conversation with a Hindu scholar led him to *Sakuntalā*, which he translated into English in 1789. Forster discovered it two years later when he and Alexander von Humboldt visited London. Schüttpeitz states that Europeans pressed foreign works into European genres, which would already be a debilitating fall from a world literature that broadens horizons. Yet one section of Herder's 1792 review takes up precisely the question of genre across cultures, noting that Kālidāsa's play does not follow Aristotle's prescriptions and rebutting objections to it on that account. Herder accords the play an aesthetic value at least equal, if not superior to, European theatre.

As Goethe's formulation and the example of *Sakuntalā* suggest, the conception of world literature

took shape in the late 18th and early 19th century with considerable self-consciousness about the difficulties of mediating between cultures. Translation took place in this era; so did reflection on structural differences between European and Indian literary forms; so too did influence on European literature. As for *Sakuntalā*, reception of the play continues to this day. Fine recent commentaries by Romila Thapar, Dorothy Figueira, and other scholars await the interested reader, as does a fresh and winning English translation by W. J. Johnson.

Travel, translation, sympathetic reception and commentary: the story of *Sakuntalā* is but one example of the broad movement toward world literature that has continued, with ebbs and flows, from Goethe's time to today. Despite Schüttzel's scepticism, we are the inheritors of generations of worthy texts and contextualisations. The work of translation should and probably will continue. Our main challenge today, however, is a different one: how can readers be persuaded to take up and read, with the enthusiasm and open-mindedness of Europeans two centuries ago?

## Other Allocentrisms

### Alexander Beecoff

Europe came late to its own Eurocentrism, as Erhard Schüttzel elegantly demonstrates – caught up as it was in its extra-European faith, in a Christianity derived from Judaism and therefore bound to a notion of history and salvation for which Europe was inescapably a periphery rather than the core. He goes as far as to suggest that this belated ethnocentrism (civilisation-centrism?) is a distinctively European phenomenon, perhaps even *the* distinctively European phenomenon.

Certainly, the project of historicising Eurocentrism is vitally important, and essential to the understanding of the contemporary phenomenon. But we should not rush to assume that this ›centring-elsewhere‹ is uniquely European without first examining other cases. In fact, other centrisms have their own histories, their own inconvenient and unexpected eccentricities. Perhaps the most familiar of the non-European ethnocentrisms, and one especially salient in our time, is Sinocentrism. Famously, the indigenous name for China is *Zhongguo*, often translated as ›the Middle Kingdom‹. An odd translation, actually: China is not

a kingdom in our time, nor was it, strictly speaking, a kingdom at any time in the recent past, but rather an empire, whose power always covered a multiplicity of language families, of faiths, of cultures however defined. *Zhongguo* very deliberately names a space and not the people who live within it, whose name(s) have been as fraught historically as those of their land. In its origins, in fact, the *guo* of *Zhongguo* is neither kingdom nor state, nor yet empire, but sometimes ›walled city‹, sometimes ›territory of a local ruler‹. The *Zhongguo*, then, as Peter Bol and Victor Mair have reminded us, were the central states of what Mair refers to as the ›East Asian Heartland‹, that is, the valley of the Yellow River, particularly in the so-called era of the Warring States (475–221 BC). Plural rather than singular, the term identified neither an ethnicity nor a specific polity, nor even the complete set of polities linked by kinship ties among their rulers and by shared ritual practices. When imperial dynasties began to exert power over large territories, those territories were referred to by the names of their ruling houses: the Qin, Han,

Tang, Song, Ming, and so on, with the first of these, the Qin, providing via Sanskrit the source of our European ›China‹, while the Han lent their dynastic name as one of the most common autonyms for the people we might, in European languages, refer to imprecisely as ›ethnically Chinese‹, as distinct from the minority peoples such as the Tibetans, Uighurs, Mongols and so on. Similarly, of course, one speaks before 1867 of the ›Habsburg Empire‹, rather than of Austria-Hungary, naming the territory after its most significant unifying feature, yet no one would make the mistake of imagining the Habsburgians as a people or a nation.

Lydia Liu has shown that *Zhongguo* only emerges as the name for something like a nation-state through the translational practices necessitated by treaties with European powers, beginning with the Sino-Russian Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1683, and that the term was embraced by nascent nationalists in the late 19th century, painfully aware that their language lacked an agreed-upon name that could withstand changes of ruler or system of rule, as ›France‹ continued to signify something recognizable after 1789, and even after 1815, 1830, 1848... ›China‹ thus only becomes *Zhongguo*, the ›Middle Kingdom‹ through a process mediated by Eurocentric and indeed European actors, and to use terms such as ›China‹ or ›*Zhongguo*‹ to refer to earlier periods is an ideological act designed to assimilate that past to the present.

This etymological excursus does not, of course, mean that there was nothing like Chinese cultural exceptionalism prior to 20th-century nationalism, even if we might better describe that exceptionalism as ›Ming-centric‹ or ›Tang-centric‹ as appropriate. But a good history of the family of Sinocentrism, and their complex relationships to one another, remains to be written, just as the full and rich history of Eurocentrism described by Schüttelz still eludes us. Full account would need to be taken of the complex role played by Buddhism as an allocentric faith reshaping

the geographical imaginary of the central states. As just one example of the complexities inherent to this project, Victor Mair notes that Chinese translations of Buddhist texts in Sanskrit and Pali will translate the *Madhyadesa*, the upper Gangetic Plain, with the near-exact calque of *zhongguo*. The pilgrim Faxian, to whom we will return, similarly refers to *Madhyadesa* as *Zhongguo*. We would want to think, too, about the relationship of the East Asian periphery (Japan, Korea, Vietnam, the more fleeting empires of the steppes) to the central states, whose written language they adopted and whose cultural practices they often emulated. Buddhism is again important here: Wiebke Denecke has shown, for example, that Japanese intellectuals, self-conscious of their belated acquisition of central-states culture, sometimes found in Buddhism a way of de-centring China, through recourse to the true origins of the faith, on the other side of the Himalayas. *That* land, in turn, known to Europeans by the name of the Indus river, which flows mostly through another nation (Pakistan), and indigenously as *Bharat*, a name derived from ancient myth, has of course its own subtleties of onomastics and of sacred geography, which I will leave to those with the necessary specialist knowledge.

This trans-Himalayan circuit of Buddhism provides, of course, important early examples of allocentric travel writing, as Chinese pilgrims made that perilous journey in search of the texts that they would translate on their return. Michael Harbsmeier's observations on the allocentrism of European travel writing, particularly that by pilgrims to the Holy Land, uncovers an important aspect of that travel writing, and nicely complements Schüttelz's historicising observations on Eurocentrism in world literature. Once one begins to look for it, though, one finds allocentrism in all sorts of places, and not in Europe alone. Consider, for example, the famous account by the monk Faxian (AD 337–422) of his journey to India in search of Buddhist manuscripts to copy and ultimately to



translate. Not only does Faxian identify the Gangetic plain homelands of Buddhism as *Zhongguo*, he takes the important additional step of self-othering. Xiaofei Tian, in her *Visionary Journeys. Travel Writings from Early Medieval and Nineteenth-Century China* (2012: 97–99), discusses a passage in Faxian's work in which the monk visited the Jatavana monastery, whose inhabitants marvelled that there could be monks from the borderland who had obtained holy orders and now sought Dharmic law at its source. In his own self-reflections in the same episode, Faxian similarly identifies himself as born in a borderland (*bianguo*), and feels awe that as such he has been able to visit a place where the Buddha himself lived. Faxian's companion, the monk Daozheng, goes a step further and vows never again to set foot in, or be reborn in, a borderland, opting to remain in India for the rest of his life. Tian pointedly compares Faxian's self-othering here to that of the Christian pilgrim Egeria, whose journey to the lands inhabited by Jesus likely took place about fifteen years before Faxian's own journey.

If Buddhist pilgrims at times adopted an allocentrism strikingly similar to that of Christian pilgrims, other kinds of Chinese travel writings explored even more complex forms of insideness and outsideness. Particularly interesting in this regard is the travel writing of Fan Chengda (1126–1193). Fan was a prominent official during the Southern Song dynasty, a continuation of the Northern Song, who had been expelled from their capital in Kaifeng in 1127, at the hands of the Jurchen-speaking Jin dynasty. The Jin controlled most of what we would now call northern China, including the entire territory of the *zhongguo* in the Yellow River basin, where Kaifeng itself was located, and therefore also controlled the Song dynastic family tombs, while the Southern Song were confined to the Yangtze and points south, outside the heartlands of Chinese dynastic history, with their capital at modern Hangzhou. In 1170, Fan Chengda was sent on a diplomatic mission to the Jin capital

of Zhongdu (›Central City‹), better known today as Beijing (›Northern Capital‹), both to allow the Song to regain access to their ancestral temples and to free the Song emperor from the humiliating obligation to remain standing before Jin ambassadors. Fan was unsuccessful at meeting these objectives, in a clear sign of the Southern Song's weakness. He did, however, compile two memorable works of travel writing about his journey from Hangzhou to Beijing via Kaifeng. The first, the *Lanpei Lu*, or ›Account of Holding the Reins‹, is in terse prose, and describes the journey in terms mostly suitable for official dispatches, though omitting any detailed discussion of the substance of the negotiations, and including at times melancholic reflections on the faded glories of the cities he passes through, especially Kaifeng. This work, in other words, emphasises more what Harbsmeier, citing Troubetzkoy, calls the ›dynamic-narrative‹, rather than the ›static-descriptive‹, aspects of the story. The second, a series of 72 poems, has a much more personal tone and is written with much greater emotional intensity – highly static-descriptive. In these poems, Fan reflects on the many tombs and monuments he passes by, expressing both elegiac regret at the passage of time and anger that these *lieux de mémoire* are under alien rule. Fan's poems represent this territory of the old *zhongguo* as still very much the central region, the heartland of his culture and history, but he cannot for a moment forget that that landscape is now under foreign rule, perhaps forever.

By contrast, when Fan arrives at the Jin capital, his poems ignore the monuments there, all built by the Jin themselves – prior to the Jin, the site of Beijing had been a city of regional importance only, but proximity to the roads to both Mongolia and Manchuria ensured its increasing significance in later imperial history – a re-centring, in fact, of ›Chinese‹ power that will also see the lower Yangtze and the Pearl River Delta assume ever-greater economic clout, spreading culture, politics, and wealth much more broadly over

the map of the modern nation, and marginalising the former central lands. For Fan himself, however, the landscape of Zhongdu is without meaning, capital of an alien kingdom, its temples and towers mere imitations of the monuments of the Song and its precursors, the product of cruel *corvée* labour which destroyed ancient tombs (as he describes it in his prose treatise). In the poems, his interest in Zhongdu is mostly in the illiteracy and coarseness of the Jin officials he meets, whom he mocks in hyperliterate terms. Chinese culture for Fan is very much allocentric, rooted in the same territories as ever, but now sundered from the Song.

It's not possible, of course, to do justice to the complex history of Sinocentrism in a few words, nor am I capable of telling the whole story by myself – it would take a significant collaborative effort among many scholars to tell the whole tale. I hope, however, to have at least shown that there is a history here to be told, one as complex and as unexpected in its details as that of Eurocentrism, and that, in fact, the two might profitably be studied in close comparison. As I have long argued (2010), it is through such acts of comparison that we are able to understand at last what is most truly distinctive about the cultures we know the best.

## Some Qualifications

### Erhard Schüttpelz

The infrastructure of modern World Literature is a scholarly accomplishment. Both the European competition of a *translatio imperii* and that of a *translatio studii* were accompanied by an expanding philological knowledge of the world, eventually encompassing the research program of documenting and investigating all known and unknown languages and literary corpora. The infrastructure for non-Eurocentric historical scholarship was created in the age of European Imperialism, and, as most historians would say, as part and parcel of that Imperialism. How should we characterize the logic, or dialectic, behind this double expansion of power and knowledge? To answer this question, we need to conduct, on a world-wide scale, further comparative studies of literary cultures and their power relationships, to assess the interplay of ›violence and lack‹ (to paraphrase Haun Saussy's apt summary) in the European way to Eurocentrism. It seems that all those European philological obsessions and globalized aspirations originated in the desire to supplement the knowledge of antiquity and the Bible,

of the Orient and the Roman provinces, the desire to add something to the material and verbal heritage of the two ›centres out there‹. It likewise seems that Europeans developed their philological curiosity based on an attitude of self-conscious epigonality, an attitude that motivated the documentation of unknown languages, the writing of meticulous travel reports, which developed into questionnaires and the art of prosaic description; or it was based on missionary zeal only to find sounds and gestures, grammars and mythologies that defied any European model.

Was there any non-European empire that entailed similar tasks and obsessions of translating, documenting, and commenting on foreign languages and their literary corpora? As Alex Beecroft points out, Chinese history, too, is characterized by profound allocentrism that gave rise to translations, editions, and pilgrimage. Thus, there are indeed parallels in other imperial cultures, and lest we forget that the European genres of literature, philology, and philosophy are not European in any simple sense but owe their genesis

to several intercontinental entanglements, especially to Hellenism and its adoption by Arabic and Persian cultures. After all, the Hebrew Bible is not a European text either, and the Christian concept of salvation was (and in certain respects remains) centred on a Jewish community of both the past and the present. Further, modern European philosophy is a consequence of the long phase in which Greek philosophy was reframed into the alien ontology of a world created by God, regarded accordingly as a handmaiden of theology, and molded by a series of Arabic and Latin controversies about what is human and divine, secular and sacred, eternal and fugitive. We may doubt that the modern pairing of ›subject and object‹ and our Romanticisms, Idealisms, Materialisms, Logicisms would exist without these theological controversies in Arabic and Latin.

So, how European are the philosophical preconditions of modern literature? Indeed, as Haun Saussy points out, fighting 2,500 years of European ›Eurocentrism‹ and ›Western metaphysics‹ is futile, especially given the ironical fact that those bogeymen were forged by people like Heidegger in their war with an imaginary ›West‹ (and an imaginary ›Semitic East‹) in order to restore a Graeco-German *axis mundi* (in correspondence to what is very probably the most Eurocentric version of philosophy that ever existed). There never was a European indigenous culture (or closure) in literature or philosophy. And during most of European history, nobody claimed there was, for this claim is distinctly modern – it seems to be raised somewhere between Francis Bacon and Heidegger. Peter Burke pointed out long ago that Europeans only started to claim ›Europe‹ as a common denominator and distinguishing feature in the context of the global imperial competition of the 17th century, that is, through their invasion of non-European territories on the one hand and their fear of Ottoman invasions on the other. Eurocentrism only evolved in that competition, by rationalising internal and external conflict.

Tracing the circum-Mediterranean *longue durée* of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literacies and their constantly changing controversies about secular and sacred power and expertise, one may regard European literature and philosophy up to that period as re-embedded in a circum-Mediterranean ›ecumene‹, as in Karl Bertau's magisterial reading in *Schrift – Macht – Heiligkeit* (a unique book about European literature from a non-Eurocentric perspective). Bertau's book is full of surprising terminological inventions, not all of which are equally convincing. Reading the comments by my fellow travellers, I begin to understand why. Historians and anthropologists know that the task of articulating differences and similarities leads either to stereotypes or to the multiplication of qualifications. In political terms, for instance, in most empires, exotic substances, people, skills have to travel to courtly centres and to be assembled there, be it in the form of tribute, exotic expertise, or treasure. In this sense most empires are ›-centric‹ and the most important political rituals are performed in the centre – as they were in China. And in this (political) respect, former European would-be empire rulers were not able to operate from their respective centres. To be crowned as Emperors, they had to go on a pilgrimage to Rome (and thereby acknowledge a superior sovereign), and likewise the *mappa mundi* did not show Europe in the centre. In this respect, European rulers may have more closely resembled the local kings of East Asian ›galactic polities‹, where Indian Brahmins served as counsellors of kings or local usurpers and rulers sought to secure their place in the ›galactic‹ system by replicating and personifying a normative cosmic order. The European competition related to *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* may have started from similar ›galactic‹ preconditions. Of course, Stanley Tambiah coined the term ›galactic polities‹ in the South-East Asian context and with explicit reference to mandala cosmograms, but why should we not try to apply such a Eurasian socio-political concept to West Eurasia?

Which goes to show that allocentrism is a strong force, in fact, the strongest, in each culture. For all pilgrims, wherever they are, the centre of the earth is a ›centre out there‹. And pilgrimage, or *peregrinatio*, was and remains a role model before, beyond, and within Eurocentrism. Benedict Anderson even recognized it at the core of non-European nationalism and its ›imagined communities‹ under the guise of the administrator's pilgrimage from the provincial outskirts to the capital. Once the career move to the capital overseas is denied, civil servants and politicians, converts and believers, poets and intellectuals create their own territorial centre or an allocentric heavenly kingdom, thereby, in either case, denying that denial. And allocentrism is bound to the wish to start from scratch, to begin in the centre or to decentre a false order by returning to or erecting the true *axis mundi*. At the moment, we find this wish in the passionate debates about the future of anthropological museums and their colonial past: the urge and the impatience to start from scratch, to undo the injustice of modern imperialism. I do not agree with the simplifications of this movement, nor with the political illusions to which it may lead. But I have to acknowledge the iconoclastic force of this movement, and I wish we had an equally iconoclastic movement in our literary scholarship and especially in our literary ambitions: an urge to transform the archive into a repository for new genres of knowledge available to anyone who wants to know. Harry Liebersohn's question remains our caveat: ›Our main challenge today, however, is a different one: how can readers be persuaded to take up and read, with the enthusiasm and open-mindedness of Europeans two centuries ago?‹ To all faithful workers.

## Literature

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Korrektur: Auf S. 220 ist es im Druck zu einem Satz-Fehler gekommen, der hier korrigiert wurde.  
Correction: We have corrected a mistake in type-setting found in the print version of this issue on p. 220.