

Cultural triangulation in Romanian travelogues to China under Communism

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By analyzing three Romanian travelogues to China, what this article primarily sets out to achieve is to identify and substantiate the applicability of the cognitive model, which I will hereinafter refer to as “cultural triangulation”, in comparative cultural studies and to follow the tentative analytical vocabulary that might derive therefrom. I believe that such an approach is justified particularly because contemporary comparative cultural studies – a generic label under whose umbrella I include a wide range of disciplines and theories, from postcolonial studies and polysystem theory to comparative imagology and certain versions of world literature – tend to judge interliterary and intercultural relations solely in terms of binary pairs, which leads, in turn, to an imminent limitation of such perspectives.

Thus, of all the aforementioned disciplines and theories, postcolonial studies stand as the most illuminating example as they continue to firmly rely on the colonizer-colonized dichotomy. Take for instance the primary opposition between “Orient” and “Occident” set forth by Edward W. Said (2003), Gayatri Spivak’s analyses of the relations between “imperialism” and “subalternity”, and even Homi Bhabha’s more nuanced concepts of “in-between”, “ambivalence” and “mimicry” (1994). Yet, binarism appears to also permeate theories where intercultural contacts do not necessarily imply colonial relations, as in the case of “interference”, a polysystem concept put forward by Itamar Even-Zohar to account for the interaction between “source cultures” and “target cultures” (2010, 55–59). Moreover, binarism is also witnessed in imagology studies under the guise of the renowned opposition between “we” and “others”, which, in turn, triggers the dissociation between “auto-images” and “hetero-images” (see Leerssen 2007). Last but not least, as I have shown in a previous study (Terian 2013), binarisms continue to prevail in the recently established field of world literature – or, at least, in its most popular versions and concepts: David Damrosch’s “elliptical reading” (2003, 283), which posits the existence of a relation between two foci, the “source culture” and the “host culture”, Pascale Casanova’s distinction between “pacified” and “combative literatures” (2011, 133), and Franco Moretti’s opposition between “core” and “peripheries” (2013, 132).

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WHAT IS CULTURAL TRIANGULATION?

However, previous considerations evince a particular issue: oppositions, dissociations, and comparisons – all these involving binary relations – are fundamental patterns of thought and, hence, they are a recurrent phenomenon across different types of research, literary endeavours included. Therefore, why would one consider them insufficient or counterproductive? My answer is simple: binarisms should not be relegated per se, since they are and will be relevant in a multitude of explanatory contexts where they may significantly contribute to a better and more accurate understanding of certain cultural phenomena and processes with a very specific (“local”) character. However, in my view, such a multitude accounts to but a small degree for the complexity of interliterary relations.

Thus, to mention a specific example that I have recently analyzed in an article published in *World Literature Studies*, the shift in Romanian writers’ perception of the Tatars, which occurred in the latter half of the 19th century and the early twentieth century, fails to be accurately understood unless we take into consideration the attitude of Romanians – writers included – towards the Turks as well. Throughout the aforementioned timeframe, the Romanian people had been faced with constant threat from the Turks, waging two wars against them, while the Tatars, deprived of any form of state organization, had become a loyal minority within the young Romanian state. Against this background, Romanian writers came to portray the former as the arch-villainous Other, whereas the latter – who played a similar role until mid-19th century – would trigger their compassion and solidarity (Terian 2018).

To put it in more abstract terms, we must acknowledge the instrumentality of cultural triangulation in understanding the condition of the so-called “minority literatures” such as the Hungarian literature produced in Romania or Slovakia, which find themselves in a relation of double dependence, both on the “national” culture of the state wherein they were produced and the culture of the state with which they share some form of ethnic congeniality. Moreover, cultural triangulation proves useful in assessing and explaining two symmetrical phenomena triggered by the struggle for autonomy that marked the second half of the 20th century in both (post)colonial and (post)communist literatures: if the former – most notably the literatures produced in Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America – extensively adopt, starting with the 1960s, the Soviet socialist realist model in pursuit of emancipation from the domination of the former Western metropolis, the latter – produced in East-Central Europe – embarked on an accelerated process of (re)westernization in an attempt to overcome socialist realism and the legacy of the Soviet rule. Similarly, it is arguable that cultural triangulation has contributed not only to the emergence of minority literatures, but also to the development of “minor” literatures, since at any stage in their evolution, they have come into closer contact with certain cultural models, and thus, have inescapably departed from others. Furthermore, since minor literatures represent the overwhelming majority of world literatures, it is not too far-fetched to assume that cultural triangulation is a “universal” phenomenon – or, at least, one that might be encountered in any major change affecting the world literary system, even when its presence is not particularly noticeable. After all, the most significant

historical, geographical, and cultural event of the previous millennium was the result of a cultural triangulation: didn't the European Christopher Columbus "discover" the Americas having in mind the image of the Indies?

Despite the numerous previous counterexamples, it is only fair to mention at least two situations when theorists have called attention to the limitations of binary approaches and highlighted the relevance of ternary relations in comparative cultural studies, though in neither of these two cases has cultural triangulation been construed of late as in the following. For instance, it is worth mentioning here the concept of "inbetween peripherality" set forth by Stephen Tötösy de Zepetnek in the late 1990s, when he noted that "in the post-World War II literature and culture of (East) Central Europe, there have been three main origins or centers of influence: 1) The Marxist/Socialist center ('filtered' through the colonialism of the USSR); 2) The indigenous center (which itself contains earlier foreign influences); and 3) The Western centers (with varied German, French, or other influences)" (1999, 92). Yet, should the hypothesis outlined by the Hungarian-American comparatist be accurate, the problem with it is that the author himself limits its applicability, relegating it to what he calls "comparative Central European studies" (2002). However, as is evident from above, cultural triangulation is not confined to a particular geopolitical area.

A more ambitious theoretical project was undertaken by the French researcher Michel Espagne, who further developed the concept "cultural transfer". In a relatively recent essay, this is defined as "any transition of a cultural object from one context to another" (2013), with the nuance that, in most cases, the term "context" refers to what we commonly call "national culture". Another aspect Espagne highlights is that a cultural transfer "almost always involves a third party" (2013). This claim is best supported by one of the chapters of *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* devoted to "triangular cultural transfers" (Espagne 1999, 153–178), and by a collection of studies dedicated to this phenomenon (Dmitrieva – Espagne 1996). All the same, Espagne and his disciples' analytical approach regard triangulation as an exception rather than a component part of cultural transfers. As a matter of fact, not a single mention is made of the terms "triangular" and "triangulation" in the latest volume edited by Espagne on the French-Chinese intercultural relations (see Espagne – Li 2018). On the other hand, it should be noted that the concept of "cultural transfer" does not even remotely account for the whole range of intercultural relations, mainly due to its "objectifying" nature, despite the effectiveness of this instrument in analyzing some cases such as the one regarding the status of "Bessarabian" literature (see Mironescu 2016).

For this reason, the present endeavour only accidentally follows the lines of the theories put forward by Tötösy de Zepetnek and Espagne. Likewise, except for a mere terminological coincidence, my understanding of the concept of "cultural triangulation" is not compatible with Martin Raymond's, who construes it as a method of sociological analysis of trends relying on associations between "interrogation", "observation" and "strategic intuition" (2010, 119–146). Finally, the mechanism advanced herein is programmatically opposed to the dominant, albeit reductionist trend in comparative cultural studies which the following formula best summarizes: (*culture*)

A “sees”/constructs/influences/dominates (culture) B. Unlike this approach, cultural triangulation postulates that *all* (inter)cultural processes are ideologically filtered and imply the existence of an intermediary C between A and B, which takes various roles, mainly of camouflaging/altering/compensating/overturning certain power relations that are by no means perceptible or inescapable. Hence, cultural triangulation involves, in my view, three “peaks” corresponding to just as many members from different “national” cultures; of course, these members are not the cultures themselves, although they aspire to *represent* them by virtue of an allegedly legitimate metonymic substitution. Given the topological nature of any geometrical projection, I will further denominate and define these “peaks” in spatial terms (the three “S”).

Thus, A is the *Scout*, standing for the “lookout” culture and its perspective, but not necessarily the individual who records it, since A’s position might be reenacted and described by a foreigner, too – for instance, a Brazilian researcher who performs a study of the British travel memoirs to the Middle East. In any case, what matters here is the motivation – unexceptionally ethnocentric – behind the Scouts’ exploring another culture by means of travelling or reading; through a close examination of foreign cultures, their goal is to contribute to a more favourable positioning of their own culture, either by identifying a particular course of future action or by arguing in favour of rewriting the cultural past.¹ Then, B is the *Scape*,² the culture open to contemplating and reading by the Other, which functions as a basis for comparison with culture A. It should, however, be noted that B is not merely “inspected”, but also construed by A in an attempt to provide answers to questions regarding its own culture. Lastly, C is the *Scale* or the “Hidden Third”,³ the culture operating as an implicit yardstick for the evaluation of both A and B. In fact, it is not C itself that is hidden – quite to the contrary, as it may appear as an explicit basis for comparison between/for/to A and B – but the power relations underlying it. Therefore, in closing the triangle, it is evident that, in the process of cultural triangulation, (a representative of) culture A contemplates culture B, compares culture A with culture B and subsequently assesses them both against the perspective of culture C. Certainly, this happens at the starting point of the triangulation as the dynamics of the process may subsequently trigger numerous changes in the values and functions of the three cultures involved. For instance, sometime along their entire interaction, the relation between cultures A and B may shift from inferiority to superiority, neutrality or incommensurability. Or, even more surprisingly, culture B may gradually change its status from *Scape* to *Scale*, from construed object to instrument of measuring cultural development.

Naturally, all these changes are conducive to a rich taxonomy of triangulation types and an equally comprehensive conceptual apparatus. However, for reasons of space and given the limited scope of this article, I will not further elaborate on such aspects. Nonetheless, before embarking on a case study, it is essential to clarify a couple of points. The first of them is the novelty of my approach. For, apart from the theories advanced by Tötösy de Zepetnek and Espagne, deploying a triangle to account for the complexity of interliterary relations is, after all, reminiscent of the original technique used in comparative literature, whereby a *tertium comparationis*

is evaluated with a view to highlighting the similarities between two literary works or phenomena. However, there are at least two marked differences between *tertium comparationis* and cultural triangulation. On the one hand, as is evident from the prototypical example of *tertium comparationis*, Aristotle's analogy between "the shield of Ares" (*primum*) and "the cup of Dionysus" (*secundum*), with "instrument" thereby operating as a *tertium* (Saussy 2011, 61), "the third" is an implicit concept, more abstract than the other two submitted for comparison, and in relation to which the latter notion is, semantically speaking, a hypernym. Conversely, in the case of cultural triangulation (which may refer to three countries, cultures, literary trends etc.), all the three elements are explicit, palpable, and distributed along the same axis. On the other hand, if – in theory at least – the scope of *tertium comparationis* is to explain/account for two related phenomena, cultural triangulation takes on a transformational role, and an alignment of the other two "peaks" of the triangle with the normative level of *the Scale* is endeavoured.

The other point is the faithfulness of the cognitive model to the phenomenon. It is evident that a series of intercultural relations is, in fact, a complex network consisting of not two, three, or four "threads" and "peaks," but dozens, hundreds, and even thousands of such formations. Yet, a hypothetical attempt at describing them at length would render the subjects explored by comparative cultural studies utterly incomparable. As a result, a certain degree of abstractization – and, implicitly, simplification – is unavoidable. Therefore, it is not its legitimacy that one may be tempted to question, but the extent to which it functions as an effective instrument. What is the reason behind my proposing three "peaks" instead of two or four as a relevant approach to cultural interactions? The answer to this question lies in geometry itself: when connecting two straight lines, the result is never a triangle, but, at best, a broken line or two crossing lines; yet, when connecting two triangles, what could result is not only a quadrilateral, which is the minimal result of this operation, but also a dodecagon such as the Star of David. Consequently, reducing a cultural "triangle" to its component sides is tantamount to oversimplifying its complexity, whereas perceiving a quadrilateral as being formed by two conjoined triangles yields a much more detailed picture of the subject matter. In other words, triangulation is the most effective non-trivial instrument for investigating literary relations.

ROMANIA AND CHINA – UNLIKELY AFFINITIES

Before I start my analysis, a brief overview of the Sino-Romanian political and cultural relations is in order. Firstly, it should be noted that China has always enjoyed a special place in the European (especially in the Western) imagination – one so ambiguous that some researchers argue that "to the present day the European image of China has reflected not actual facts, but historically varying perceptions and shifting cultural self-conceptions among Europeans" (Schweiger 2007, 126). What accounts for this particular status is what came to be known as "China's ulteriority" (Kerr – Kuehn 2007, 2), that is the Westerners' belated interaction with China as opposed to other parts of the world. As, at the beginning, China had for long remained unknown to them; then, on many occasions when they attempted to establish a connection,

they were denied access to it; and when they were allowed to, they did not have the necessary instruments to make its acquaintance. That is exactly why “[f]or the West [...] China as a land in the Far East becomes traditionally the image of the ultimate Other” (Longxi 1988, 110). For the same reasons, China came to symbolize the imaginary antipode of the West, prompting many to state more or less seriously, from Henry David Thoreau onward (1971, 58), that if a Westerner were to dig deep into the bowels of the earth, China would emerge on the other side.

Symptomatic for this perception of China – and of the entire “Far Orient” as “the same, but more East” – is that, in his seminal work, Said leaves out of discussion this part of the world without much regret, confident that an analysis of the “Near Orient” would provide enough data to draw conclusions that apply to the entire Orient (2003, 17). Such forced substitution re-emerges in other, more recent works such as *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, where China fails to rank among the top five travel destinations, while Arabia, Amazonia, The Pacific, Africa and Ireland appeared to have secured their position (see Hulme – Youngs 2002). In fact, substantially less academic studies have been published on the travelogues to China than the Middle East, India or Africa. At work here could be the same “ulteriority”, if we take into account that, for example, around the year 1800, the Europeans were more familiar with the so-called “New World” than they were with China. The country only started opening itself to the world in the early 19th century and this would last for about a century (c. 1840–1940), as in the mid-twentieth century, precisely when there was an unparalleled democratization and development of the means of transportation, the country isolated itself again from the West, as a consequence of a policy whereby “travel to China by foreigners [...] was severely restricted” (Strassberg 2003, 248).

As opposed to Western European countries, Romania found itself in a privileged position, occasioned by both its foreign policy and cultural tradition. Thus, it should be noted that in spite of the distance between the two countries and the differences between the two peoples, a description of China is the first systematic account of a country – of *any* country! – made in writing by a Romanian. Appointed ambassador to China by Czar Aleksey I Mikhailovich of Russia, Nicolae Milescu “The Steward” (1636–1708) wrote two travelogues on this journey upon his return: *Book Describing the Journey through Siberia, from the Town of Tobolsk to the Border of the Kingdom of Kitaya, Year 7183, Month of May, Day 3* (1675), and the *Description of China* (1676). Most notable is the latter, which features a detailed description of Chinese history, mythology, geography, administration, and culture (see Crețu 2018). It was only four decades later that the first systematic account of his own country, Dimitrie Cantemir’s 1716 *Descriptio Moldaviae* (Description of Moldova), was published and no less than a century and a half later that the first description of the West authored by a Romanian, Dinicu Golescu’s 1826 *Însemnare a călătoriei mele...* (My Travelogue), was issued. It is then hardly a wonder that China has elicited constant interest among the Romanians, since one of the main works lying at the foundation of Romanian culture was devoted to it.

On the other hand, the political relations between Romania and China suggest an underlying cordiality between the two, which, in spite of some temporary “drifts”,

has never turned into adversity. Communist Romania was the third country after the Soviet Union and Bulgaria to officially recognize the existence of the People's Republic of China on October 3, 1949, and establish diplomatic relations with it (Budura 2005, 33). Moreover, ever since the 1950s, many delegates from China and Romania have mutually visited each other's countries, with which they shared a common ideology. However, the strained relations between the Soviet Union and China, triggered by the debates surrounding "revisionism" that marked the late 1950s, caught Romania in their crossfire. On the occasion of the Third Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party (1960), Romania sided with the Soviet Union in its critique of the Chinese delegation, which was all the more unnerving as the Romanians were hosting the event (Budura 2005, 37). In spite of this, over the following two decades, not only did Romania succeed in avoiding a further drift from China, but also came to see the country ruled by Mao Zedong as a model of independence from the Soviets, which the former would attempt to replicate in the mid-1960s. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the two major shifts in the Romanian communist regime's policy that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s – the Theses of April 1964, when Romania officially declared its autonomy from Moscow, and the Theses of July 1971, when Nicolae Ceaușescu, drawing on the Chinese Cultural Revolution, tightened the Party's leash over culture – have been preceded by visits to China. In any case, the political closeness between China and Romania appears to have reached its climax in 1968, when, following Ceaușescu's condemnation of the Warsaw Pact troops' invasion of Czechoslovakia, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai promised to lend Romania military support should it be subjected to similar aggressions on the part of the Soviets (Budura 2005, 43–44). Furthermore, the 1960s and 1970s had seen an unprecedented increase in the mutual economic and cultural exchanges between the two countries. However, after 1979, "Romania and China undertook different paths" (Chiriu – Liu 2015): if Deng Xiaoping's China experienced a series of economic reforms and gradually opened itself to the world, Ceaușescu's Romania sank even further into isolation, a phenomenon to which the Party's increasing control over society would contribute to a large extent.

ORIENTALISM, OIKOPHOBIA, ANTICHRONISM

In what follows, I will illustrate the mechanism of cultural triangulation by analyzing three travelogues to China written by Romanian authors during the communist period: George Călinescu's *Am fost în China Nouă* (I Was in New China, 1955), Eugen Barbu's *Jurnal în China* (China Diary, 1970), and Paul Anghel's *O clipă în China* (One Moment in China, 1978). The three memoirs were singled out neither randomly nor solely to support my thesis. Firstly, I have chosen them because they were written by representative authors of postwar Romanian literature or, at least, one particular trend of this age. The more recent travelogue writer in my sample is Paul Anghel (1931–1995), a renowned member of the "protochronist" movement, which, in the national communist period of the 1970s and 1980s, opposed Westernization and supported the theory of anteriority and superiority of Romanians in all areas of science and culture. Eugen Barbu (1924–1993) was one of the most acclaimed

Romanian prose writers of the early postwar decades until sometime around 1970 when he fashioned himself as the shadow leader of the protochronist movement and a proponent of Ceaușescu's cult of personality. Last but not least, George Călinescu (1899–1965), extolled by Barbu as the “divine critic” (1970, 210), was perhaps the most influential critic in the history of Romanian literature, which explains why protochronists attempted to claim him as their forerunner.

Beyond these real or alleged ideological affinities, travelogues are also interconnected through various generic and intertextual ties. For instance, all three travel memoirs combine direct observation with scholarly considerations of Chinese civilization, despite their widely varying ratios. The most balanced in this regard is Călinescu's, which brings together a chronological overview of his itinerary (Beijing – Tianjin – Nanjing – Shanghai – Canton, etc.) and a thematic account of the Chinese world, ranging from its landscapes, monuments, cities and villages to its art, clothing, and cuisine, to only name a few. In contrast, in Barbu's memoir, the thematic criterion takes precedence over the chronological, whereas in Anghel's case, the chronological perspective is so underrepresented as compared to the thematic that the author subtitled his book an “essay” instead of “travel diary” (Anghel 1978, 12). Nonetheless, both Barbu and Anghel make frequent references to Călinescu's memoir, to whom the emergence a new sub-genre in modern Romanian literature, the “Chinese travelogue”, appears to have been thus attributed.

Moreover, it should be noted that the three journeys occurred somewhat symmetrically, about 12–13 years apart: Călinescu's in 1953, Barbu's in 1965, and Anghel's in 1978. All of them took place at a time when Sino-Romanian political relations were on excellent terms (which is perfectly understandable) and record certain significant landmarks in the evolution of the communist regime in the two countries: the peak of the Stalinist age (1953), the beginning of the so-called “liberalization” (1965), the era of the new dogmatism (1978) in the case of Romania; the transition period prior to the First Five-Year Plan (1953), the years between the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution (1965), the end of the Cultural Revolution and the proclamation of the Four Modernizations (1978) in that of China. However, these events aside, the common denominator between all three travelogues is the mode in which they project cultural triangulation: all three were authored by Romanian writers (the *Scouts*), who visited China (the *Scape*), which was invariably compared to the Western/European cultural model (the *Scale*). This last term is essential here, as it bears witness to a former inferiority complex on the part of the Romanians toward Western civilization, which comparatist Adrian Marino named after the author of the first Romanian travelogue to the West (the “Dinicu Golescu complex”) and characterized as being marked by three defining traits: “1. Awareness of widely varying differences in terms of civilization, culture, economic powers, morals (‘organization’); 2. Continuous critical comparison (‘not as it is here’); 3. Drive toward great progress and reform through imitation and emulation, in profound patriotic spirit (‘enlightenment’, ‘emancipation’, ‘benefit of the people’)” (Marino 1976, 5).

Although the three diaries share the same premise, their perspectives and systems of value differ considerably. For instance, Călinescu emphasizes China's ulteriority,

along the lines of so many other travellers before him: “[T]he fundamental feeling is that of landing on another planet” (1955, 14); yet he goes on to compare the “new” planet with the “old” one, more precisely its Western component and praises not its specificity, but those elements that bear close resemblance to the Western world. In his words, “[i]n Nanjing, the Blue River runs as large-scale Canal Grande” (16); “[t]he great square of Hangzhou is a wonderful lake, a Chinese Lago di Como” (40); in Tianjin flicker “the lights of a smaller New York” (41); Shanghai is “an American-like city” (43); “Canton is a white city, very much like Naples, with narrow streets full of peddlers and shops” (44), etc. On the other hand, whenever the critic notices major cultural discrepancies – in terms of architecture and painting, two art forms that, to him, appear as highly embedded in Chinese folklore (32, 71) – he does not shy away from extolling, albeit in mild terms, the superiority of Western culture over some Chinese aesthetic products he perceives as mere exercises:

The European painter would artistically convey the idea of a burgeoning local landscape and economic opulence by depicting a bustling atmosphere. The Chinese artist cannot move past instances of partial beauty, painting successively one duck after another, one fish after another, one flower after another [...] As a merchant unfolds roll after roll of iridescent silk, so does the painter unravel nature in its component parts, creating a, so to speak, studio landscape (70–71).

What transpires from Călinescu’s perspective is an unmasked Orientalism, which despite his curiosity and amiable attitude toward his hosts, does not admit too many nuances. Quite to the contrary, the critic’s Eurocentrism remains that of an undeniable *Scale*, most noticeably when he comments on Chinese religion, which he compares (and implicitly belittles) through a telltale metaphor, with European mythology: “Chinese cults evince a case of extreme obsolescence in that a modern Chinese individual appears not that far removed from a European venerating Jupiter and Hephaistos” (112).

Where does Romania sit in this equation? Călinescu refrains from an outspoken expression of the European dimension of Romanian culture and is rather reluctant to draw any parallels between Romania and China. Why is that so? Weren’t the two countries on the same side? Isn’t the very imposition of Communism in China the reason why the Romanian traveller visited this country? A seemingly obscure statement on the first page of the book foregrounds the critic’s stance: “The new China is nothing more than the usual China, but at a particular revolutionary stage in its history” (5). The actual meaning of this statement reveals itself 150 pages later into his memoir, when Călinescu argues that the Chinese Revolution is actually “an application of Marxism to China’s specific context”, that is “a new form of bourgeois democratic revolution” (158). To put it differently, China lags behind Europe even in terms of implementing communism, which, in turn, betrays a certain level of superiority on Romania’s part, despite its solidarity with China: “All the themes our literature approaches also constitute the endeavors of writers in the new China. There, however, they have a local colour. The Chinese individual has been subjected to a millennial philosophy of inertia, and the man of letters has long remained confined to the cedar tower of classical language. The Chinese writer must find within a source of violent

force in order to depart from the all too fine china and move toward the more naive, though more popular, terracotta” (167). Therefore, Călinescu’s journey to China does not appear to have changed his perception of the cultural values and functions he triangulated. At most, this experience served to strengthen his orientalist perspective and perhaps even encouraged him to believe that Romania, far more advanced in its implementation of communism, could actually act not only as a *Scout*, but also a *Scale* for China.

Barbu’s attitude towards China, on the other hand, is entirely different. He appears to experience a major cultural shock during his journey, brought about by the realization of the host culture’s superiority over European culture. Chinese painting, for instance, which Călinescu deemed but mere instances of studio exercise, Barbu praises and gives as an example of suggestiveness, which the Europeans ostensibly lack: “Chinese painters are masters of suggestion and of stopping short at the right moment. Their art, in contradistinction with our European practice, is one of extreme vigour, of graveness manifested in painting. Chinese painter’s greatest concern is to leave something to the imagination! Westerners pursuit the female element, whereas the Chinese, nature” (1970, 181). Barbu encounters similar instances of superiority almost everywhere, from Chinese people’s faces to their cleanliness, from their monuments to their cuisine. However, art still takes center stage, because what elevates the Chinese above the Europeans is, first and foremost, “a rare refinement in the art of living” (92) or, to be more precise, their ability to aestheticize their mundane existence.

From this perspective, Barbu tends to equate the relationship between China and Europe with the antinomy between the beautiful and the practical, remarking incessantly on the primacy of the former: “Gazing time and time again at the perfection of these palaces and temples, testimony to labour intertwined with art, harmony with ineffable artistry, I cannot help but deplore our hurried existence, the modern men who erect cities and cage-like houses, enormous barn-like rooms where practicality instead of the all too architecturally necessary artistry dominates, defiant of the fact that architecture too is an art, not a practical skill” (104). As is evident from this statement, Barbu himself, as a Romanian, does not exempt himself from Europe’s limitations, prejudices and faults, acknowledging them openly. Consequently, as opposed to the Orientalism of Călinescu, who cannot depart from his European values, Barbu’s position amounts to a form of *oikophobia*, which Roger Scruton defines as “the disposition [...] to side with ‘them’ against ‘us’, and the felt need to denigrate the customs, culture and institutions that are identifiably ‘ours’” – in short, “the repudiation of inheritance and home” (2006, 36).

Such an attitude yokes together “a feeling of inferiority in the European” (Barbu 1970, 57), mixed with the boundless admiration for Chinese civilization, whose products sometimes engender “a sense of levitation” (107) in the Romanian writer. This situation generates, within cultural triangulation, an interchange of functions between B (the *Scape*) and C (the *Scale*), so much so that the European culture is ultimately evaluated against the Chinese cultural yardstick and not the other way around: “I remember the Parthenon and those grand ruins of the ancient Greek civ-

ilization, I picture to myself Rome with its small quarters and I set them against the Great Wall [of China]. The proportions are overwhelming. Had I seen the cradles of European civilization after this journey, I would have been left with a bad taste in my mouth. This way, what quivered and enflamed then, now ardently defends itself” (54). For this very reason, progress does not entail for Barbu, as it does for Călinescu, China’s Westernization or even communization, but rather Romania’s Sinicization – if not of the entire West: “I am experiencing a sense of pioneering. From here, sooner or later, a wind of change will blow toward our ancient places which we hold so dear. In China I have learned more about what simplicity, balanced living, rest and work mean, to gaze rather than to glance, to think rather than accept; to strive to mend rather than amend” (259–260).

Anghel confesses to a similar admiration for China. In his memoir, the process of cultural triangulation and, conversely, the shift of the visited country from *Scape* to *Scale* are spelled out in the very first pages: “[My] travelogue does not relate to a single universe – the Chinese universe – but to two others, the European and the Romanian, the last two relaying flashes of reconnaissance to the first. However, the last two are here but cursory landmarks, with the Chinese remaining the principal measuring unit of the human” (Anghel 1978, 9). Anghel, like Barbu for that matter, believes that a defining trait of Chinese culture is the aestheticization of living, since under “art” the “whole system of life” may be subsumed (106). Much along Barbu’s lines, Anghel also maintains that China is superior to the West in all facets of its civilization, including the most mundane aspects of life such as humour: “The first attitude, the European one, assuming a separation from objects, from the world as object, implies a concessive outlook, compassionate at best, lenient towards things, a way of saying: I could destroy you, but I will spare you, I will take you lightly. The other is a participative attitude, congeneric with things, revealing them as they reveal themselves to the world, with a genuineness which represents, for things even, an act of self-understanding” (144).

Nevertheless, unlike Barbu, Anghel no longer speaks from the standpoint of a representative of the European culture, reminiscing that “few moments after my arrival, I felt like a citizen of Peking, forgetting and not forgetting where Europe sits on the map” (8). It is not just his personality, but the whole culture he belongs to (the Romanian culture) that exempts itself, the writer notes, from Western mindsets, evincing instead surprising parallels with and connections to the Chinese culture. What explains these similitudes is that, according to Anghel, the Romanians and Chinese alike, apart from the seemingly anachronistic evolution of their societies, have, in fact, put forward equally unconventional points of view, or to use the term coined by the Romanian mathematician Solomon Marcus, “*antichronic solutions*” (224) to the great problems of world science, technology, and culture. Chen Jingrun’s successful approach to the “Goldbach conjecture” and Emanoil Bacaloglu’s deciphering of the “Gauss formula” are “the manifestation of a very old and at the same time very fresh reasoning” which allows for “a free play with the infinite, devoid of all fear, in which no side of the past-present-future triangle excludes or opposes itself from or to others” (225).

This *antichronism*, which differs from both Călinescu's Orientalism and Barbu's *oikophobia*, lies at the heart of Anghel's acutely intimate, yet not necessarily verisimilar interpretations, of the history of Romania and China, with a view to finding similarities between the two peoples. Primary among the numerous similitudes he identifies between the Romanian and Chinese folk cultures is the one between the "Carpathian wall" [sic] and the "Chinese Wall" (36), which he deploys to emphasize the Romanian people's role as defender of civilization and, implicitly, their right to be acknowledged, like the Chinese, as *Scales* of humanity:

The functionality of clay ramparts or of the *trojan* in Dacia in relation to China is relative, what matters is their strategic similarity only. Foes are alike and, in some cases, identical. They all come to destroy the universes thus enclosed. Ancient China had fought the nomadic Xiongnu invaders for several centuries, rebuffing and eventually redirecting them towards Europe – just as floods are deflected –, where they would eventually arrive around the fourth century and come to be known under the fright-inducing name of the Huns. In 375, the Huns, forgetting their Eastern defeats at the Great Wall, attacked Dacia and temporarily set camp there before setting out for the Pannonian plains where they established a settlement and wherefrom, under Attila's lead, they would undertake numerous incursions on the Western Roman Empire, producing significant casualties on some occasions. Defeated by the Chinese in Antiquity, the Huns played their last card in Europe when, following their defeat at Nedao (454), the sinister invaders would "vanish from history" (36).

Consequently, undertaken and published in the name of ideological "friendship" between two socialist states, the Romanian travels and travelogues to China become, less than a quarter of a century later, an instrument for legitimizing the anti-Western and nationalist tendencies assumed by a part of the Romanian cultural elite in late communism. It is true that this stance is by no means shared by the entire Romanian intelligentsia of the time and that, in order to gain a more capacious perspective of that literary field, the analysis of the three works mentioned above should be accompanied by an analysis of Adrian Marino's and Eugen Simion's travelogues to the West. However, such an undertaking would exceed the remit of the present article. What is worth noting, however, is the diversity of attitudes cultural triangulation can account for. From Călinescu's Orientalism, whose positive belief in the superior Western values supports the standard arrangement Romania (*Scout*) – China (*Scape*) – Europe (*Scale*), through Barbu's *oikophobia*, whereby China radically shifts to become a *Scale* from whose height Europe and Romania are charted unapologetically, to Anghel's *antichronism*, which attempts, against a strong anti-Western background, to divorce Romania from Europe and to elevate it to China's level of *Scale* – we encounter a multitude of relations, functions, and values, which, in my view, convincingly show that cultural triangulation is an efficient instrument in explaining the dynamics of intercultural relations.

NOTES

- ¹ See, in this respect, the opposition between “legitimizing (or retrospective)” and “pragmatic (or prospective) strategies” that I advanced in Terian 2013.
- ² The term is used here in Arjun Appadurai’s acceptance, even if the fivefold classification (in *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *technoscapes*, *financescapes*, and *ideoscapes*) put forward by the Indian-American theoretician is not particularly relevant to my approach: “The suffix *-scape* allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles. These terms with the common suffix *-scape* also indicate that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements (whether religious, political, or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighborhoods, and families” (Appadurai 1996, 33).
- ³ The “Hidden Third” is a concept set forth by the Romanian philosopher Basarab Nicolescu (2012) to overcome the distinction between subject and object. I will further employ this concept merely as a cognitive pattern, without sharing all other aspects embedded in Nicolescu’s theory of transdisciplinarity.

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This article highlights the heuristic usefulness of “cultural triangulation”, a concept attempting to exceed the dominant schemata for the analysis of intercultural relations in current comparative cultural studies, which are generally limited to binary mechanisms of the type (*culture*) *A* “sees”/constructs/influences/dominates (*culture*) *B*. In contrast to this reductionist tendency, I argue that all (inter)cultural processes have an ideologically filtered nature and consequently imply the mediation of the relationship between *A* and *B* via an intermediary *C*, to which various roles are assigned (e. g., to hide/alter/compensate/reverse various power relations, which are under no circumstances obvious or inevitable). My study explores the dynamics of this mechanism of cultural triangulation by analyzing some of the most representative travelogues to China written by Romanian authors during the communist era: G. Călinescu’s *Am fost în China Nouă* (I’ve Been to New China, 1955), Eugen Barbu’s *Jurnal în China* (Chinese Diary, 1970), and Paul Anghel’s *O clipă în China* (One Moment in China, 1978).

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