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CONFUCIUS, A  
YUGOSLAV NATIONALIST  
- REPRESENTATIONS  
OF CONFUCIANISM IN  
PRE-WWII SLOVENIA

Helena Motoh

“The story about baby Jesus in the barn is already well known to everybody,” runs the opening sentence of the newspaper article entitled “The Christmas of a Yugoslav Nationalist”, published in the 1935 issue of the political newspaper *March* [Pohod],<sup>1</sup> only to urge the reader to ponder alternative possibilities of engaging his thoughts in pre-Christmas days: What should a Yugoslav nationalist think about instead of baby Jesus? It takes a few more sentences for the answer to become clear. He should, surprisingly enough, think about Confucius.

The combination of a Yugoslav nationalist, Confucius and Christmas makes for a very odd mix, sounding more like the beginning of a bad joke about at least two of them walking into a bar. The idea behind the article, however, is not at all for amusement. It starts with a bitter reflection on the “sad times” the generalized “Yugoslav nationalist” found himself in. What follows is a several-paragraph-long summary of Confucius’ life. In it, Confucius is presented as a politically active sage, who tries to persuade the rulers to govern more successfully, to make China more unified and the Chinese nation more prosperous. According to the article, one of the biggest obstacles Confucius aimed at overcoming were the tribal conflicts within China, which destabilized the country and only gave an advantage to its outside enemies.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes of this article from: “Božič jugoslovenskega nacionalista,” *Pohod*, 23. 12. 1935, vol. 4, no. 36.

This image of Confucius as a protagonist of Chinese unification and national strength, who is then being pushed aside and ushered into exile by his short-sighted contemporaries, hints at a topic which has markedly less to do with a Confucian or even Chinese context than with the Yugoslav political circumstances, which the article is addressing. “The actions of a Yugoslav nationalist and those of Confucius are completely alike,” it states bluntly, going further in falsifying the Confucius’ alleged biography. “Both struggled, suffered and died a violent death.” Presented as a martyr of early Chinese political history, Confucius is said to have “endured numerous disappointments”. Ultimately, he was even “abandoned by his own emperor”. The Yugoslav nationalist, we are told, suffers a similar fate of animosity and rejection, while finally even being “abandoned” by his ruler. This “abandonment”, of course, hints at King Alexander Karadjordjević’s assassination in Marseille in October 1934.

The style of the article, clumsy and pompous as it is, yet leads us to a very important question. How is it possible that the three not even loosely related notions of Yugoslav nationalism, Christmas expectations and Confucius, end up – so to speak – walking into a bar together? What narrative contexts enable the (anonymous) author of a 1935 article to casually combine them in his openly political statement?

The aim of the paper is to analyse the intellectual framework within which such an article was made possible. The analysis of the status of the image of Confucius and the representations of Confucianism in the early 20th century Slovenia provide a backdrop for this discussion, together with a number of seemingly external factors. Among these, historical and political events of the time play a crucial role, alongside other Yugoslav internal and external political developments, social and economic changes, and, importantly, the rise of what is often called *Kulturkampf*, the harsh opposition between two political and cultural spheres in pre-war Slovenia. In the virtual absence of books on the topic, the main source for assessing the representations of Confucianism in Slovenia at the time are journal and newspaper articles. These form a rich depository of more than 500 texts<sup>2</sup> in a varied host of genres, including marginal genres such as jokes and satire.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [www.dlib.si](http://www.dlib.si) (Digitalized library of Slovenian language publications).

The material analysed is limited by the time of publication to encompass the last two decades of the 19th and the first four decades of the 20th century. The reason for this selection is mostly historical. An important breakthrough, which can also be understood as a starting point of the new or revived interest in the East Asian cultures, is a book published in 1893 by Josip Stare, *Kitajci in Japonci* [The Chinese and the Japanese]<sup>3</sup>. Politically a liberal, Stare as a publicist was not a specialist on Asian topics at all, but he took on the task to provide an introduction to these two East Asian peoples, their histories and their cultures. The second half of the 19th century is also a period of proliferation of journal and newspaper publications in the Slovenian language. Many major publications were started in those decades, such as *Slovenec* in 1873, *Slovenski narod* in 1868, *Ljubljanski zvon* in 1881, *Zgodnja Danica* in 1848, *Učiteljski tovariš* in 1861, and *Dom in svet* in 1888. In addition, this period coincided with the Sino-French war of 1884–1885 as one of the first series of events in Chinese history which was regularly and extensively represented in the Slovenian press. The choice to end the period of research in 1941 hardly needs explaining. The onset of the Second World War and the occupation of Slovenian territory by the Italian and the German armies caused an almost complete stasis in the cultural sphere, resulting in a radical transformation of the journal and newspaper landscape. Many of these publications stopped completely, while others were under close scrutiny by the occupying forces with their political agendas. On the other hand, the newly formed resistance movement was producing its own publications, but much of this material was lost or is not easy to reconstruct. The analysis of wartime publications on this topic would require extensive separate research.

Spatially, my focus in this paper will be exclusively on Slovenian territory, insofar as this term can be used anachronistically. In the mentioned period, except for a stint from 1920 to 1922, the political entity of “Slovenia” did not as yet exist. Before 1918, the territory of present-

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<sup>3</sup> Josip Stare, *Kitajci in Japonci* (Celovec: Družba sv. Mohorja, 1893). This book formed a part of a larger plan to write similar introductory texts for other topics in geography and ethnography that Stare made together with colleagues.

day Slovenia belonged to three administrative units of the Austrian Empire; i.e., Carniola, Styria and the Littoral. In inter-war Yugoslavia, the administrative unit of Slovenia only existed between 1920 and 1922, while before and after this short period, the administrative divisions were again different. Since the administrative and political history of the territory is rather complex, for the needs of this paper the criterion for the selection of publications is primarily linguistic and, secondarily, regional. It includes newspapers and journals published in Slovenian and on the territory of today's Slovenia (excluding for example, German language local publications as well as the newspapers and journals of the Slovenian overseas communities).

So far the topic under consideration has not received any scholarly attention or been researched in its own right, though studies on the representations of Confucius in earlier periods are many. A great number of them<sup>4</sup> focus on the period of the most intense exchange between Europe and China in the 17th and 18th century, where the Jesuit Chinese mission was playing an important role as "cultural translators" or mediators between the two sides of the continent. Some of the key texts focus in particular on the representations of Confucius and Confucianism in Europe, such as Rule's *K'ung-tzu or Confucius* (1986)<sup>5</sup> or Jensen's 1998 *Manufacturing Confucianism*<sup>6</sup> (along with the critical comments in Standaert's 1999 review<sup>7</sup>). The topic of the 20th century representations, however, has been much less explored, although some of the works touch upon the topic of the 20th-century representations of Chinese thought as well<sup>8</sup>. The discontinuity between the Sinophilia of the Enlightenment period and the fascination with East Asia in the late

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment, The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London/ New York: Routledge, 1997); Julia Ching, Willard Oxtoby (eds.), *Discovering China, European Interpretations in the Enlightenment* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1992); and Charles E. Ronan, Bonnie B. C. Oh (eds.), *East Meets West, The Jesuits in China* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Paul A. Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius, The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism* (Sydney, / London, Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions & Universal Civilization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Nicolas Standaert, "The Jesuits Did NOT Manufacture Confucianism". EASTM 16 (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Most notably Clarke in *Oriental Enlightenment* (op. cit.).

19th and the early 20th century also makes analogies and trajectories riskier and more problematic. By analysing the 1884–1941 representations of Confucianism and Confucius in the Slovenian press, the present paper aims to partly fill in this gap, while also exploring a host of external factors which had an impact on the type of discourse produced about Confucius and Confucianism during the period.

The motivations behind the representations of Confucius and Confucianism were, however, two-sided. Many of them were indeed intended to help the reader better understand China and the functioning and potential role of this immense but little-known country in the changing world of the late 19th and the early 20th century. Many others were serving a different purpose – in a fashion not unlike the appropriations of Confucius and Confucianism in the previous centuries. As seen in the example where the anxious Yugoslav nationalist is being comforted with the biography of Confucius, the intent of these representations was often not to aid our understanding of China, but rather to be in the service of problems and dilemmas that societies and people were facing *here*, be it in Yugoslavia, Europe, or the loosely defined “West”.

For structural reasons, the paper will follow this duality by dividing the analysis of Confucius and Confucianism into two parts. In the first part, I focus on the representations which were stimulated by historical events or situations, provoking a wider discussion of Confucianism and its role in China’s past and present. I will also make a mention of other, perhaps less political and more educational attempts to extend knowledge about China. The second part of the paper will focus on the representations of Confucius and Confucianism which were made with the intention of helping solve local problems, tackle difficult topics via an intellectual bypass or simply provide an inspiration to open new possibilities of thinking about pressing issues. The final part of the paper reflects upon the connection between the two and considers the narrative structures deployed and which can be seen to hold wider purchase in analysing similar phenomena.

## Understanding China through Confucius

As mentioned before, the last two decades of the 19th century were the first period in which events in China were represented in up-to-date reports in the Slovenian press. The first of these events to be extensively reported upon was the conflict between China and France resulting in the Sino-French war of 1884–1885. Most of the reports were favourable to French attempts and several tried to explain away the strong resistance of the Chinese armies in terms of a particularly sturdy Chinese national character, which they related to the Confucian tradition. In one of these we read:

Everybody knows that Chinese are stubborn – and how very stubborn! For a whole year they were playing tricks with the French and who knows for how long they would continue if the French had let them. The French, who in Cathay represent not only French trade but educated Europe as a whole, will not let them do that, because they know these Confucius' relatives too well and they understand that they must be spoken to in a harsh tone.<sup>9</sup>

The Catholic journal *Zgodnja Danica* was even more specific in describing the type of religious imagination peculiar to the Chinese and linking it to their behaviour in military conflict:

The Chinese does not like to think about things that do not bring profit. He does not care much about God or the soul (...) Such were the teachings of the sage of the Chinese, Confucius. It is the teaching of the people who are completely buried in the secular: they think good and right is what brings them profit. Therefore, the Chinese are difficult to deal with. Missionaries have big problems with them, as we have reported. Let us hope that the French army wakes them up a little and makes them interested in the teachings of the Christian faith. Hopefully, the French soldiers will behave in a Christian way as well.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from the interesting turn in the last part of the quoted section, the equation is simple and straightforward. Chinese are an utterly pragmatic and this-worldly people, for whom transcendental concerns

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<sup>9</sup> "Vnanje države," *Slovenec*, 05. 07. 1884, vol. 12, no. 153: 2.

<sup>10</sup> "Modroslovje," *Zgodnja Danica: katoliški cerkveni list*, 12. 09. 1884, vol. 37, no. 37: 294.

of religion have no value whatsoever. Confucius is seen as the source of such an all-pervasive worldview and practice.

While the Sino-French conflict was developing, the newly provoked interest in China also led to a number of publications on China and the Chinese culture in general. Most notable and extensive of these was a feuilleton partial translation<sup>11</sup> of *Les Chinois peints par eux-mêmes*, a book published in Paris in 1884 by a Chinese diplomat in France, Chen Jitong (陈季同), presenting the Chinese and their culture in a seemingly unbiased attempt at intercultural translation.

The next historical event reported on was the First Sino-Japanese war a decade later (1894–1895), although not nearly as much as the Sino-French conflict, perhaps because it did not involve any European powers. The subsequent Boxer uprising, on the other hand, attracted much more attention. Especially religious press, most notably *Zgodnja Danica*, reported on how the Boxers attacked Christians in China. It is interesting to note the shift in interpretations, when compared to how the Sino-French conflict was reported on in the same journal only a decade and a half earlier. In a September 1900 article on the topic,<sup>12</sup> they stressed that the reason for the violent actions of the Boxers should not be sought in the fact that they were either Buddhist or Confucian. Instead, they identified the source of their hatred towards the Christians in their anti-foreign sentiments. These, according to the *Zgodnja Danica* article, are a consequence of the colonial politics of the European powers in China and have nothing to do with religion itself – either of the Boxers or their victims. According to the article, the revenge of the Boxers against the missionaries is also nothing but an extension of anti-European sentiment, since the Chinese cannot distinguish between European missionaries and European merchants.

Nevertheless, the news on the anti-Christian actions of the Boxers seemed to have resulted in some of the earliest attempts to understand the religions of Asia in order to be able to discern the intentions of the people who followed them. A surprisingly long and systematic account

<sup>11</sup> “Kitaj in njegove naprave,” *Slovenski narod*, 03. 09. 1884, vol. 17, no. 203: 1.

<sup>12</sup> “Vojska in preganjanje kristijanov na Kitajskem,” *Zgodnja Danica: katoliški cerkveni list*, 28. 09. 1900, vol. 53, no. 39: 307.

on the topic by Přemysl Hájek was published in *Ljubljanski zvon* in 1901.<sup>13</sup> The text “Leaders of the Chinese Spiritual Life” was divided into three parts, dedicated to Confucius, Mencius and Laozi respectively. The interest in studying Chinese thought, says Hájek, springs from two sources. One reason to study the philosophical ideas of these great men is to better understand “China and its vast population”<sup>14</sup>. This point on its own is typical of the turn of the 20th century, when the Boxer rebellion and the changes in China awoke the awareness of the role that this large country might potentially play on the world stage. Hájek adds a meaningful quote, saying that “tout comprendre, c’est tout pardonner”. Confucianism especially, says Hájek, is “a practical morality (...) originating from the Chinese nation, morality that has influenced and continues to influence the nation as its civilising element”<sup>15</sup>. The second reason why one would want to know Chinese philosophy better, however, has more to do with Europe than with the Chinese – but I will return to this point shortly.

Hájek starts with Confucius’ biography and continues with some of the semi-mythological accounts of his life - e.g., the episode of meeting with Laozi - and touches upon Confucius’ alleged role in the composition of the classics. Then he presents some of the key aspects of his teachings, the central role of the ideal of *junzi* and the correct relations between husband and wife, parents and children, and among friends. He closes the presentation of Confucius’ teachings with his views on political ethics – the obligation of both the ruler and his subordinates to be moral and act first and foremost for the benefit of the people. Hájek’s conclusion of the section about Confucius is interesting in its “nationalist” implications as well as being far more thorough than those of the other two thinkers, Mengzi and Laozi. For Laozi, for example, he only mentions that he was the speculative counterpart of Confucius’ practical philosophy. For Confucius, though, he states that his “practical but elated philosophy” was enough for the nation of 400 million people to:

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<sup>13</sup> Přemysl Hájek, “Voditelji kitajskega duševnega življenja,” *Ljubljanski zvon* 21, no. 11 (1901).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 688.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



peacefully work on its own culture, slowly and diligently, always looking back. While this was going on in China, beyond its borders and far away, in the West, deathly weapons were used, thrones were overthrown and countries fell apart – while philosophical systems were constructed in a senseless and mindless fashion, only to be a toy and fun for a few in search for some spiritual indulgence.<sup>16</sup>

The practical philosophy of Confucius, continues Hájek, taught how to let things be as they were, instead of constantly trying to change them as is done here, in the West. Prevention of regrettable phenomena, such as “inquisition and anarchism”<sup>17</sup> would have been another side benefit of practical thinking, a mindset which according to the author was not limited to select intellectual circles but characterised the Chinese people as a whole.<sup>18</sup>

Another semi-scholarly article was published on the topic of Chinese (and in this case, Japanese) thought in the 1911 edition of the *Čas* [Time] journal, published by a Catholic scientific society. On the other side of the political spectrum from the previously mentioned *Ljubljanski zvon*, they published an article by Franc Terseglav with the title “Buddhism and East-Asian National Religions”.<sup>19</sup> Although allegedly focused on Buddhism, this topic is covered in less than a quarter of the text, while the main stress is on presenting the indigenous religions of the Chinese and the Japanese. For the Japanese, this means Shinto, while for the Chinese Terseglav presents a complex picture of syncretically interconnected religious traditions as they would all form part of the same system. Daoism, for example, is interpreted as part of the Confucian religion as well, and the whole religious system of the Chinese he interprets as a type of “natural philosophical monism”, or, elsewhere, as “monism with socially practical implications”. When explaining the role of this “Confucian” religion for the Chinese society, he stresses similar points as Hájek in the previously analysed text. “Confucianism

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 696.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Franc Terseglav, “Budizem in vzhodnoazijska nacionalna verstva,” *Čas* 5, no. 4/5 (1911): 145–161. As the main source for his writing he lists De Groot’s *Religious System of China* (1906 edition).

is a morality of social solidarity” and the “sense of social responsibility is what the Chinese traditionalism and conservatism are based upon.”<sup>20</sup> The religious form which informs and shapes this traditionalism is to be found in ancestral worship, claims Terseglav, who continues that Confucian morality is “in all aspects adapted to the agrarian nature of the Chinese state”<sup>21</sup>, using the rituals to ensure good harvest and to prevent natural disasters and epidemics.

The most interesting equation Terseglav draws, however, is that between religion and matters of the state. “The history of the country is the only divine revelation that a Chinese knows. The state is his God.” Hinting at the agrarian past of the Chinese political organisation he explains that the birth of the religion was closely connected to the aspirations that religious rituals would help prevent natural disasters. This religion which Terseglav equates with Confucianism, had an “immense impact on the development of the Chinese nation”. It made the country incredibly enduring throughout the centuries, stable without being stagnant, and provided it with good prospects for the future. In a fashion, surprisingly similar to authors such as Liang Shuming<sup>22</sup>, Terseglav compares Chinese culture with those of India and of the West.

Enduring and persevering, the Chinese progresses slowly, but surely; the future of Asia belongs to him. Indians, this dreamy and feeble, self-absorbed nation, was never able to create a country. The Chinese, on the other hand, this prosaic being who does not even know epic poetry, but only dry historical chronicles, established one of the strongest countries in the world that stands as stable today as it has been standing for centuries.<sup>23</sup>

The power of Confucianism to hold the country together is what Terseglav seems to admire the most, although to claim its stability and endurance in 1909 was hardly historically accurate. However pragmatic the Confucian religion might be for the Chinese political and social prosperity and its expansion in Asia, there is still something missing in it compared to Europe. According to Terseglav, the main reason for the

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Liang Shuming, 东西文化及其哲学 [Dongxi wenhua ji qi zhexue], Shanghai renmin chubanshe, Shanghai 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Terseglav, “Budizem in vzhodnoazijska nacionalna verstva,” 153.

slow development of the Chinese nation is that the otherwise efficient political religion is “utterly positivistic and materialistic”, preventing it from attaining the rapid progress achieved by the Christian nations of Europe. At the time of Terseglav’s text, the continuous development of the Chinese state was only a few years away from its radical break. Surprisingly enough, the end of the imperial rule and the establishment of the republic did not resonate in the Slovenian press at the time.

An interesting article was also published in *Edinost* [Unity], the journal of the Slovenian political society in Trieste, on November 13, 1911. Inspired by what was apparently a fairly up-to-date report about the revolutionary movement in China, the article is entitled “Revolts in the Heavenly State”.<sup>24</sup> It describes the despotic and outdated Manchu rule and relates it to the fact that under the Qing dynasty, the Chinese are effectively ruled by “Tatars”. A cultural difference which seemingly makes this rule unjustified is then justified by recalling the long literary tradition of the Chinese, the classics and Confucius. Surprisingly, the argument then goes into the justification for the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty with what can be discerned as Mencius’ theory of the Mandate of Heaven (天命). Presenting it in the wider framework of Chinese culture and Confucianism, the article purports that revolutions are viewed differently in China:

In China, revolutions are not uprisings in the sense of rebellion as interpreted by European laws. The Emperor (or his temporary regent) rules with an absolute power, but the rule over his nation is that of a father over his family. He has to obey the will of the nation, which according to the sacred books is the same as the “will of Heaven”. In China, every revolution is therefore justified by this claim in the sacred books and has the right to overthrow an emperor if he opposes the will of the nation.<sup>25</sup>

Surprisingly, it takes a whole decade after the May Fourth events for the Slovenian press to catch up with the political and cultural changes of post-imperial China and to notice that the role of Confucius has radically changed. In January 1929, the *Jutro* [Morning] newspaper brought out a long article on how “the nationalist government of China

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<sup>24</sup> “Revolte v ‘nebeški državi,’” *Edinost*, 13. 11. 1911, vol. 36, no. 315: I/II.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

threw Confucius' teachings out from schools". "We cannot imagine a more far reaching change in the conservative Far East,"<sup>26</sup> the author comments before proceeding to present the teachings of Confucius, and, for good measure, also those of Laozi and Indian Buddhism. Finally, the article seeks to provide an explanation regarding why the nationalist government decided to undertake such a radical cultural and educational reform:

What happened to Confucius is the same as what had happened to the Kur'an. It has not developed the idea of progress the way Christianity did.<sup>27</sup>

In the idea that Asian religions and Islam alike (Buddhism and Daoism are not even mentioned in this vague claim) are characterized by some kind of innate ahistoricity, we may trace some echoes of the orientalist paradigms of the 19th century. From this viewpoint the westernisation of China and its rejection of Confucianism-based traditions can only be seen as a logical move. On the other hand, however, we can find differing views on how China could navigate the relation between its tradition and Western influences. The article "Chaos," published in *Slovenec* [Slovenian] in April 1930,<sup>28</sup> describes the political crisis in the period of disintegration of central rule and the widespread corruption and usurpation of power. The description of Confucian teachings which follows to present the traditional way of thinking of the Chinese, emphasizes especially the role of family, close social ties and strict hierarchy. On the other hand, claims the article, the Confucian framework causes the "mental horizon of a citizen to be limited to the narrow circle of family, municipality or, at the utmost, province." Because he is not made responsible for the country as a whole, "his feelings for the country are limited". The only one responsible for the country is the emperor, and without him, the state system falls apart into a network of local and family alliances. Because of this rigid system, China was late at adapting to the influx of Western ideas and resisted them with uprisings such as that of the Boxers, the text continues. China was thus in a state of crucial delay compared to Japan, where a "genius emperor"

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<sup>26</sup> All quotes from this article: "2400-Year-Old Traditions Are Falling," *Jutro*, 16. 1. 1929.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> All quotes from this article: "Chaos," *Slovenec*, 11. 4. 1930, vol. 58, no. 84.

managed to “quickly accomplish the assimilation to Western culture, by planting it into the healthy and genuine substratum of the national essence.” It was only with Yuan Shikai that the Western influences were invited, but they were planted in a rootless substratum where all Chinese traditional culture had previously been abolished and destroyed.

Interestingly enough, it only takes few more years for the comparison between Japan and China to turn the other way. Just three years later, a year after the official establishment of the puppet state Manchukuo in the Japanese invaded Manchuria, the same newspaper paints a completely different picture of the peaceful Chinese people, compared to the war-loving Japanese. In the article “Peacefulness – the foundation of the Chinese nation,” we read that the Chinese are the most peace-loving people in the world, due primarily to their moral philosophy, which allegedly teaches them that “all people between the four big seas are brothers”. Moreover, the article claims that “this can be the starting point for working on a new world peace”. The peacefulness is said to be a result of the doctrine of Confucius “which completely matches the teachings of Christian love”, namely “that you should not do to the other what you do not want done to yourself”.

### The global role of Chinese thought

In the article quoted above, the familiarity between the basic premises of the Christian (and thus “Western”) ethics and those of the Chinese is seen as an incentive for building a cosmopolitan alliance toward world peace. The form of this argument is of course hardly a novelty. Asserting an inherent similarity between Chinese and “Western” thought is a philosophical and popular trope which can be traced back as far as the writings of the Jesuits upon their surprising discovery of what they believed was the original monotheistic Chinese religion and related ethics. In these cases, the similarity between Chinese and Western traditions serves as a reinforcement of the belief in the universality of ethics and of religious ideas. On the other hand, Confucianism was also interpreted the very opposite way in Europe – using the example of the traditional Chinese thought as a direct opposite – as an antidote that provides an inspiration for the

“West”. Both attitudes can be found in the writings of the pre-WWII Slovenian press.

The 1901 text by Přemysl Hájek is an example of the latter. Although written during a time of increased anxiety about the Chinese attitude towards the outside world stimulated by the Boxer rebellion, Hájek’s text paints a surprisingly positive image of China. Moreover, it sees China as an inspiration for change in the spiritual and moral collapse of the modern mind.

I dare emphasize the importance of Chinese philosophy and the study of old philosophical views for the modern people of today, who only read the most modern things and are inclined towards the most eccentric views (...) And the results: relieved from “old” views the modern soul roams aimlessly in feverish confusion (...)<sup>29</sup>

In order to save the soul from threats of nihilism, a return to “old books” is the only solution, and Hájek sees his own contribution in presenting the “old books” of the Chinese tradition.

If the view of Chinese philosophy as a remedy for the nihilist disease of the modern “Western” mind may seem surprising for 1901, attempts to look to Asia for inspiration become much more commonplace in the decades after the First World War. The times of political instability in China after the war coincided with the renewed intellectual interest in the role of Asia in the world and in Asian religions and traditions. In the press of the 1920s a lot of journal and newspaper articles focus on what could potentially be called the “Asian issue”, the strategies and ideas regarding how the different cultures of Asia and Europe could or should work together in the new globalised world. The intercultural reality, which seemed more distant and theoretical before the First World War, was becoming more politically prescient, especially in the wake of political changes in China and the rising power of Japan in East Asia. In 1922, an article in *Socialna misel* [Social Thought] posits:

In many ways, the West and the East are coming closer together than ever before in human history, and the task of serious cultural workers is to transcend the great conflicts this clash of two worlds might cause and to seek

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<sup>29</sup> Hájek, “Voditeljki kitajskega duševnega življenja,” 689.

foundations for their future peaceful coexistence on the basis of great common cultural principles.<sup>30</sup>

Confucius is noted in this remark as the main source of Chinese social ethics that the West could also learn from. Similar to the quoted statement in *Socialna misel*, throughout the 1920s the speculation and fear about the developments in East Asia were commonly present in the press, although not all of the suggested solutions were as conciliatory as the quoted one. In 1922, the journal *Tabor* published a translation of the text "Humanity" [Človeštvo] by E. Rade,<sup>31</sup> which discusses the demands by the nations of Asia and Africa for equality:

Now Indians and Chinese (not to mention the Japanese) want to have a say; they want to contribute to and decide on the fate of humanity. We (the West) only have one duty: to draw consequences out of our democratic ideal and give all people the full right to enter the family of humanity with their rich past and their ideals about the future.

The problem, however, is that the size of Europe compared to the great nascent powers of Asia puts the West in a potentially risky position. "Will we be forced to sacrifice our culture and what will we get in return?" asks Rade. What follows is an interesting set of arguments and a predictable conclusion. "People talk about 'yellow peril', but in the East I saw no signs of that danger," says Rade, although the "ideals of the Indians", the "life of the Chinese" and "the inspirations of the Japanese" can lead to such an issue. The ideal of the new common humanity, he then goes on to speculate, does not mean that the West is wrong in relying on the ideals of the Greek, the Roman and the Christian world. We should not replace Greek culture with its Chinese equivalent. If a tolerant or even relativist view might now be expected, Rade on the other hand, is surprisingly straightforward in his final answer to the problem of what we today might call intercultural dialogue:

The new humanity, whose foundations were laid by the world war, will develop under the influence of Western culture and only those who will reach and develop this culture will have a role in the future of the new humanity!

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<sup>30</sup> V. Šarabon, "Največji socialni eksperiment narave," *Socialna misel* 1, no. 10 (1922): 283.

<sup>31</sup> All quotes from this article: E. Rade, "Človeštvo," *Tabor*, 29. 08. 1922, vol. 3, no. 194: 2-3.

Similarly, in 1925, in an article “Asia Is Waking Up”,<sup>32</sup> the journal *Socialist* interprets the uprisings and the political instability in China and in Asia as a whole as a sign that “Asia is waking up” and is prepared to modernize and free itself of the shackles of backwardness imposed upon it by the colonial rule of the European powers. In a more conservative paper, *Slovenec* [Slovenian], the “yellow peril” theme soon reappears. In a 1931 article under the title “Chinese Danger”,<sup>33</sup> the Bolshevik Soviet Union and the different anti-colonial movements in India, Burma, the Philippines, etc., are all summed up as dangerous developments in Asia and are all said to pose a threat to Europe. The more recent topic, however, that has motivated the author of the article, is more specific – the catastrophic floods in the Yangzi river basin. The issues of refugees from these areas and the large population migrations in the wake of these floods have led the author to finish on an alarmist note:

A nation that lives such an unspeakably pathetic life is doubtlessly a great threat. When we read about large-scale invasions of “barbarian” nations into Europe in history we have to be aware that they were led by hunger and economic crisis. In the 13th century Mongols stormed into Europe (...) Who knows if Europe will not face a similar invasion again?

### Frameworks and misunderstandings

When trying to review the different ways in which Confucius and Confucianism were represented in the pre-WWII Slovenian press, the rather small sample of articles and the variety of different newspapers and journals with their different political agendas make it difficult to discern any set pattern. What is, however, clear from even such a small sample is that the views on China and its culture and how they might impact international politics and European culture depended greatly on the political views of the publisher or the author of the text. It is also interesting to note that both views related to the importance of Confucius for China and those related to the impact of Confucian China on Europe seem to follow

<sup>32</sup> “Azija se probuja,” *Socialist*, 12. 06. 1925, vol. 3, no. 26: 2.

<sup>33</sup> All quotes from this article: “Kitajska nevarnost,” *Slovenec*, 02. 10. 1931, vol. 59, no. 223: 1.



a similar general trend. Following the conflicts between China and European powers in the second half of the 19th century and all the way to the Boxer rebellion, the first three decades of the 20th century seem to witness a turn towards a more profound and detailed interest in Chinese thought. Perhaps indirectly aided by the parallel rise of Japan as a serious military and political power and the political weakness of the Chinese state, China is seen as an inspiring locus of philosophical and religious traditions, ethics and universally translatable and/or understandable worldviews. Especially in the 1920s, the complexity of political changes and their impact on the modernisation and Westernisation of Chinese thought are understood with much more refinement than they had ever been previously. For a brief decade after the great political changes in China, the Slovenian press seems to have become aware of the complexities of the relations between Confucius, Confucian tradition and Chinese politics, the temporal dimension of these, and the development of Chinese religions and traditions of thought. A mere decade later, a progressively militarized image of the world in general and Asia in particular (especially after the Japanese invasion of north-east China), seems to have had a regressive impact on the information presented about China and its traditions of thought. The 1930s articles flatten this awareness back into a monolithic and anachronistic portrayal of the Chinese character and culture, where the ancient traditions and current developments seem to follow the same unchanging principles of 'Chineseness'. However mismatched the message to the Yugoslav nationalist cited at the beginning of this paper might seem to the critical reader today, it nevertheless engages both strands discussed; namely, it provides some information about Confucius while using this very information to express a position on the current Yugoslav political situation. The representations of Confucius and Confucianism were reflective of the larger rhetorical frameworks in which they appeared, while also providing some information about this tradition of Chinese thought. The accuracy of the information was of varying priority to the writers – and perhaps also to the readers – of these texts. The inaccuracies and falsifications are nonetheless valuable, since they tell us a lot about the time

and the contexts in which they were written, other texts with which they were in communication with, and the agendas of the writers, the editors, and the journals.

What brought the three unlikely fellows, a Yugoslav nationalist, Confucius and Christmas expectations, into the proverbial bar together might be a mere historical coincidence, the fact that all three needed the drink at the same time, although perhaps for different reasons. The drinks they drank were mismatched, the debate they had was confusing at best and most of what they each said was not entirely true. They also left early, for the next day in their corners of the world they had a war to fight, a tradition to keep and a religion to defend – none of them being exactly successful in doing so. The next time they met, however, they found it much easier to strike up a conversation.

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