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The Reception of Modernity in East Asia: Japan in China's Encounter with the West

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Abstract

This paper studies East Asia's reception of modernity, using Japan's mediating role in China's encounter with the West as a point of departure to explore what may result from the subsumption of the particular under the universal. How Japan influenced China in opening up horizons for modern literature will be examined at length. *The True Story of Ah Q* by Lu Xun (1881-1936) will be chosen to illustrate a translation-like situation China might have found itself in as it observed Japan shifting to the West for reference. I will use, in particular, the slides show incident in Lu Xun's student days at the Sendai Medical School to show how modern Chinese literature arose out of the vantage point of being at the intersection between Japan and the West in their engagement with modernity.

Keywords: modernity, East Asia, China, Japan, Lu Xun, Walter Benjamin, *The True Story of Ah Q*, translation

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Introduction

Modernity figured prominently in the encounter between East Asia and the West in modern times. The eagerness with which the West pried open the markets of China and Japan, the Opium War (1839-41) and Matthew Perry compelling the opening of Japan to the West in 1853 being two cases in point, was in keeping with the logic of modernity, that is, to subsume the particular under the universal. The trade war was touted as an endeavor to help spread out reason in a land where it was choked out, either by tradition or otherwise.[1] The stated goal of the project of modernity, as formulated in the eighteenth century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, was "to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic" (Habermas 9). The emphasis on science, universality, and logic went hand in hand with the privileged status of reason, as expressed in the motto Immanuel Kant used to characterize the spirit of the Enlightenment, "Have courage to use your own reason!"[2] With the particular of the West promoted as the universal, tutelage is used by the European to describe their relationship with the Oriental: "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (Said, *Orientalism* 40). By extension, as the particular subsumed under the universal, non-Western civilizations were destined to lose their particularity when pursuing modernization. The consequence of refusing to pay the price, however, was being locked out of modernity and unable to modernize. The reception of modernity in East Asia was thus riddled with hard choices, each of which would have complicated repercussions.

To the people in East Asia, modernity has been a difficult issue, alluring but threatening. Alluring because it offered a ray of hope in throwing off the shackles of backwardness and subjugation. Threatening because it posed a serious challenge to their tradition and existing value system. China and Japan differed in their response to modernity. China's backwardness and corruption, made evident in the Opium War and the subsequent developments, have provoked heated

[1] Underneath the facade of universality, however, was an attempt at solving the problem arising out of modernization. David Harvey, elaborating on a passage from Hegel's *The Philosophy of Right*, explicated that "the inner contradictions of bourgeois society, registered as an over-accumulation of wealth at one pole and the creation of a rabble of paupers at the other, drive it to seek solutions through external trade and colonial/imperial practices" (125).

[2] In his classic essay, "What Is Enlightenment?" Kant condensed the spirit of the Enlightenment into the motto: "*Sapere aude*!" quoted from Roman lyric poet and satirist Horace's *Ars Poetica*, meaning "Dare to Know!" as Kant explained in a footnote. It is followed immediately by an interpretation: "Have courage to use your own reason!" (85). From this it can be argued that non-Western civilizations were viewed not only as the objects of irrationality but also as the objects of knowledge.

debates over the courses of action the nation should take. On the one hand, it would be naive simply to brush Western modernity aside and stick to the traditional way, for it would at best mean business as usual, in fact only to get worse with a tradition unable to cope with new situations. On the other hand, an indiscriminate and unconditional embrace of modernity could end up losing the subjectivity of the nation. The option of finding something in between, like Zhang Zhidong's syncretism, "the Chinese learning as the core and the Western learning as its application," has turned out to get nowhere. On the side of Japan, its modernization drive was dominated by views like that of the well-known writer Yukichi Fukuzawa, who promoted the thought of *bunmei kaika*, or "civilization and enlightenment." Although greeted from time to time by concerns about significant erosion of tradition and its resultant consequences, Japan went full steam ahead with its modernization project. Kakuzo Okakura, among others, argued that Japan should stick to the tradition of Asia as one and try to recall Asiatic peoples to the pursuit of the common cultural inheritance which has constituted their greatness in the past, instead of following the lead of the West slavishly. During the modern times, as Harumi Befu observed, "the West replaced China as the civilization to contend with" and thereafter "the West became Japan's referent to look up to" (10). Japan followed the lead of the West to achieve the goal of modernization while China, as it appeared to the general public, was stuck in the quagmire unsure about how to confront modernity.

This paper studies East Asia's reception of modernity, using Japan's mediating role in China's encounter with the West as a point of departure to explore what may result from the subsumption of the particular under the universal. How Japan held sway over Chinese intellectuals in their debates over the course China should take and, more significantly, how Japan influenced China in opening up horizons for modern literature will be examined at length. *The True Story of Ah Q* by Lu Xun (1881-1936) will be chosen to illustrate a translation-like situation China might have found itself in as it observed Japan shifting to the West for reference. I will use, in particular, the slides show incident in Lu Xun's student days at the Sendai Medical School to show how modern Chinese literature rose out of the vantage point of being at the intersection between Japan and the West in their engagement with modernity. The significance of occupying a position where two vanishing points approach each other can be grasped from a passage of Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator": "Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details" (260). When two fragments are brought closer to each other, according to Benjamin, it is also the moment of illumination. I'll argue that, because of the insights gained in the process, translation makes it possible for the deleterious consequences of the

particular subsumed under the universal to be transformed into modern Chinese literature.

The choice of *The True Story of Ah Q* is made partly out of Lu Xun's profound admiration for Japan and his utter contempt of Chinese tradition. Lu Xun was deeply fascinated with the modernization drive of Japan while studying there at the Sendai Medical School. His seven years' stay in Japan (1902-1909) had gone a long way to firm up his resolve that Chinese tradition should be forsaken for the sake of progress. He recommended "to never read Chinese books, to emulate Western modernity through Japan, and to seek a universal culture of progress and evolution so that the Chinese people would become 'global humans,' not just Chinese" (Shih 84). This statement obviously followed the logic of modernity that the European relationship with the non-European is that of tutelage. In what might seem an unconditional acceptance of Western modernity from Lu Xun, however, the Japanese scholar Takeuchi Yoshimi saw a sort of resistance that "is either scarce or absent in Japan" (64). Based on the master/slave model, he interpreted despair found in Lu Xun as a sign of resistance: "He endures the pain of being 'awakened' (to the reality of being a slave) while struggling against the blackness (of the prison)" (72). By contrast, Japan was characterized by Takeuchi as "[i]gnorant of his own status as slave" and "remain[ing] trapped within the fantasy that he is not a slave" (72-73), while claiming to emancipate the backward nations. The praise heaped on Lu Xun may add a new dimension to China's anointed father of modern literature, but Takeuchi's view about Japan's slave status doesn't go unchallenged.

Japan's Response to Modernity

Before 1840, China was almost completely closed, allowing only limited trade in the city of Canton. Defeat at the first Opium War (1839-1842) forced China to open up its ports and markets to British traders and grant extraterritorial rights to foreigners in China. The subsequent developments drew it into a semi-feudal and semi-colonial state. The desperate need for national regeneration stirred up a long series of heated discussions about how best to negotiate between modernity and tradition. Japan was also forced to open itself to international trade but, unlike China, it soon grew into a Western-style regional strong power. In 1853, Matthew Perry, in command of an American naval squadron, intimidated Japan into an agreement to open its ports to foreign trade. A feudal society dominated by shoguns developed into a modern nation-state after the Reformation in 1868, rallying behind Emperor Meiji. Japan's modernization drive eventually shifted

into a full-scale westernization campaign while China was sunk in the quagmire of seemingly endless debates about how best to negotiate between modernity and tradition.

The sharp difference in the outcome of their responses to modernity has stirred up various comments and reflections, which in turn have long-term repercussions. The thought of *bunmei kaika*, or "civilization and enlightenment," as promoted by the well-known writer Yukichi Fukuzawa in the Meiji era, gave rise to the belief that "Chinese weakness and backwardness called out to the civilizing force of a more modernized Japan" (Calichman viii). Fukuzawa even urged Japan to extricate itself from Asia so as to become part of Europe. Japan's invasion of China first in 1895 and then again in the early twentieth century under the banner of the "Greater East Asian Coprosperity Sphere" could be viewed as following the dictate of this tenet, duplicating Western modernity in imposing its own reason on what it deemed as unreason. With a deep and enduring Chinese legacy before embracing modernity, Japan couldn't simply turn around to the West without first coping with this strain of its tradition. In *Japan's Orient: Rendering Past into History*, Stefan Tanaka traced the change in Japanese appellations for China, from *chugoku* (Middle Kingdom), a common name before the Meiji Reformation, to *shina* (China) during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, to explore "an adjustment in which objects and knowledge were made to correspond with a Japanese perspective" (3). As a contrast to *chugoku*, implying centrality and thus "represent[ing] a time when Japan was weak and imported the culture of China for its own development" (6), *shina* emerged as a word "that signified China as a troubled place mired in its past, in contrast to Japan, a modern Asian nation" (4).

In conjunction with the reorientation of Japan's self positioning, various racial statements on the Chinese were cropping up in Japanese newspapers, magazines and other occasions. At Sendai Medical School, Lu Xun one day saw in class news slides about a Chinese to be executed by the Japanese, with a group of Chinese onlookers witnessing the spectacle in apathy.[3] The intended stigmatization of Chinese by the Japanese instructor was glaringly obvious. Some Japanese newspapers and magazines even suggested that "the Chinese should be displayed as savages with tails in the 1903 Osaka World Fair" (Shih 76). The idea of using a world fair, itself highly symbolic of modernity, to showcase as

[3] The significance of this incident can be seen from the number of reviewers offering interpretations. Shu-mei Shih mentioned it in *The Lure of the Modern* (77-78); Leo Lee, *Voices from the Iron House* (17-19); Lydia Liu in *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (62-64), besides many others to be further explored. The source of *Leo Lee's story was Lu Xun Zopin Quanji* (*Complete Works of Lu Xun*) 1: 416-17.

savages members of a culture Japan had emulated for so long, together with other racial slurs and taunts, speaks volumes of a nation turning back against its cultural heritage and tradition while engaged in a future-oriented enterprise. The claim by some Japanese that they were Aryans, not of a yellow race like Chinese, went one step further toward the crux of the matter: Japan had to look to the West for "its essential reality" (Hegel 117). This would lead inevitably to a clash between its particularity and some accepted universal value. As China represented some of Japan's cultural heritage, its incompatibility with the European value might arguably prompt Japan's aversion and hostility. In the same vein, even Japanese national character was perceived by some as interfering with the nation's progress. One of the topics in Hakuson Kuriyagawa's *Outside the Ivory Tower*, for instance, was a critique of Japanese national character.

This pattern of development was warned against all along after the Japanese modernization project was launched. In *The Ideals of the East*, Kakuzo Okakura argued that Japan should stick to the tradition of Asia as one and try to recall Asiatic peoples to the pursuit of the common cultural inheritance, instead of following the lead of the West slavishly: "For to clothe oneself in the web of one's own weaving is to house oneself in one's own house, to create for the spirit its own sphere" (195-96). Stefan Tanaka repeated roughly the same idea in *Japan's Orient: Rendering Past into History*. "The various attempts of non-Western cultures to confront and adapt to modern (Western) civilization has been frequently recounted, almost always ending in incompletion or tragedy," for the epistemology that guided such attempts "ignores the limitations and contradictions inherent in such change" (1). Tanaka used an image from the London *Punch*, in which a Western gentleman in modern fashion received Japanese visitors in traditional samurai outfits, to show the dilemma facing Japanese: "how to become modern while simultaneously shedding the objectivist category of Oriental and yet not lose an identity" (3). The quaintness of the Japanese visitors in their traditional costumes alongside the Western host pointed to a mechanism within which the tradition of a non-Western culture was invariably turned into a stock of laughter. This tendency had a close affinity with the presumptuous ascendancy of the Western culture onto the status of universalism. In *Translation and Subjectivity: On Japan and Cultural Nationalism*, Naoki Sakai dismissed the claim of universalism as nothing other than Western "particularism thinking itself as universalism" (157).

The various criticisms of the Japanese modernization project revealed a case of the particular subsumed under the universal, with the particularity of a non-Western culture deleted in the process. Linked to it was the claim of the Western culture to the universal and the status of domination. But how did the claim get

accepted? Takeuchi Yoshimi used Hegel's master/slave model to explore the causes and the consequences of Japan submitting to a power relationship dominated by the West. "In its turn toward modernity, Japan bore a decisive inferiority complex vis-à-vis Europe. It then furiously began to chase after Europe. Japan's becoming Europe, as European as possible, was conceived of as the path of its emergence" (72). In Takeuchi's depiction, Japan followed the master's lead slavishly, failing to pluck up courage for a real fight. After examining various studies of Japan's modernization efforts, Naoki Sakai agreed that Japan's will to resist the West's dominion "was very weak" (172). As Hegel argued in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won" (114). Willingness to risk life is an act of turning to an otherness, thereby facilitating attainment of truth. The lord, as the person who attains truth, has "the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself" (115), while the bondsman, too obsessed with the preservation of life and thus unable to see beyond the immediate phenomenon, can only have "the lord for its essential reality" (117). As Japan was confined within the inferior rank of the master/slave model, it had to look to the West for "its essential reality." The consequence of this, as Takeuchi pointed out, was neglect of accommodating characters to the place. That is to say, Japan allowed the particular of itself to be subsumed under the universal of the West, resulting in its particularity being stripped off. When in Europe a concept becomes discordant with reality, accord is sought by overcoming that contradiction. But in Japan, as Takeuchi observed, when "a concept becomes discordant with reality, one abandons former principles and begins searching for others" (65). In Japan's turn toward modernity, there was a constant search for the new and the constant attempt to become the new. This view was somehow corroborated by Japanese literary critic Kobayashi Hideo in his essay "Literature of the Lost Home" (*Kokyo o ushinatta bungaku*, 1933). Hideo attributed "a pervasive spirit of homelessness and loss" he observed in contemporary Japanese culture to "a sense of disconnection from a shared tradition" and "the massive internalization of foreign culture . . . to the point that 'self' and 'other' can no longer be effectively distinguished" (qtd. in Lippit 3).

Among Japanese intellectuals' nearly unanimous complaints about the loss of particularity or tradition in their modernization drive, there arose voices from abroad about the integrity of Japan's cultural core. In what is called Japan's alternative modernity, it is argued that Japan attained modernization independently, tantamount to a rebuttal of the claim that Japan's relationship to the West is that of slave to master, or that the particular of Japan is subsumed under the universal the West arrogates to itself. As John Clammer says in *Japan and Its Others: Globalization, Difference and the Critique of Modernity*:

> If Japan is indeed the one society outside of the West that has independently achieved advanced capitalism and all of the industrial, technological and infrastructural elements that that status implies, this seriously challenges Western universalist assumptions about the nature of modernity. There cannot be a "universal history" of modernity if there is even one major exception to that modernizing process, and Japan does indeed seem to be the main candidate for being that exception. (2)

The suggestion of an independent modernization on the part of Japan finds itself contradicted by Naoki Sakai. In a chapter entitled "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism" of his *Translation and Subjectivity*, Sakai effectively presented Japan as a case of being intimidated by the West into modernity and thereafter unable to extricate itself from a framework of being subjugated to the universal. He singled out Koyama Iwao and Kosaka Masaaki from among the young philosophers of the Kyoto School during the 1930s for a close scrutiny of how they were trying to turn away from the Western-dominated monistic history, which would allow for only one center, to embrace a pluralistic history, which recognizes other histories, but ended up arguing that "The Sino-Japanese war is also a war of morality" (qtd. in Sakai 168). To Sakai's great surprise, "they could still talk not only about the Japanese nation's morality but also about its superiority over the Chinese at that stage" (168). Behind the logic of Koyama and Kosaka's argument for Japan's moral superiority was the view that "the stronger folk must conquer and subjugate weaker folks in order (for the weaker folks) to form the nation"[4] (qtd. in Sakai 168), quite in line with Fukuzawa's tenet of "civilization and enlightenment." The corollary of this thread of thought was that "Japanese morality will eventually prove its universality as well as the particularity of Chinese morality" (169). The irony of their argument lies in an attempt to prise open the grip of particularism/universalism while internalizing the Western perspective in its attitude toward China. "Even in its particularism, Japan was already implicated in the ubiquitous West," Sakai remarked, "so that neither historically nor geopolitically could Japan be seen as outside of the West" (170). This may be cited to rebut the view that Japan achieved modernization independently.

Although Japan couldn't possibly accomplish modernization without following the lead of the West, Clammer's argument may provoke reflections on its relatively smooth modernization as compared with the bumpy experience of China. In "World Literature in an Age of Multinational Capitalism," Fredric Jameson

[4] Indirectly quoted in Sakai's *Translation and Subjectivity* 168. A slightly different version was offered by Takeuchi Yoshimi: "The modern Orient was born only when it was invaded, defeated, and exploited by the West; that is, only when the Orient became an object for the West did it enter modern times" (Sakai 171), as it was paraphrased. Both show Japan's modernization was started by the West.

approached this issue from the mode of production and political system:

> Contemporary historians seem to be in the process of reaching a consensus on the specificity of feudalism as a form which, issuing from the breakup of the Roman Empire or the Japanese Shogunate, is able to develop directly into capitalism. This is not the case with the other modes of production, which must in some sense be disaggregated or destroyed by violence before capitalism is able to implant its specific forms and displace the older ones. (140)

This quotation stressed Japanese compatibility with modernity and Chinese incompatibility with it, thus a presumably needed destruction of the latter's heritage and tradition before capitalism could be installed there. From this we may move on to another critic in the field of the so-called Japan's alternative modernity. Marilyn Ivy marveled at Japan's power of assimilating nearly everything while "retaining the traditional, immutable core of culture" (1). In *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*, Ivy affirmed, "Japan appears ubiquitous, nomadic, transnational. Yet at the same time Japan seems to reinscribe the distinction ever more sharply between the West and itself" (1). Clammer and Ivy concurred on the view that Japan emerged unscathed in its core culture, remaining as distinct as ever from the West. But is it true that Japan's cultural heritage hasn't been adversely affected? I will turn to some major Japanese writers, besides the thinkers and critics quoted earlier as voicing opposition to an indiscriminate embrace of modernity, to examine this view.

The influence of the West on Japan was the utmost concern of the country's greatest twentieth-century novelists, Natsume Soseki (1867-1916) and Junichiro Tanizaki (1886-1965). Along with Ogai Mori (1862-1922), Soseki was considered the father of Modernism in Japanese literature. Several of his novels examined problems of the modernization of his country. He explored the confusion and estrangement of young intellectuals during a period of shifting values. Tanizaki also dealt with the influence of the West on the old cultural heritage of his native country. Beginning as a renegade Modernist infatuated with Poe and Baudelaire, Tanizaki first achieved breakthrough with the 1920s novel *Naomi*, about bright young Westernized dilettantes. But in mid-career he began to lament Japan's rapid changes, and his masterpiece, *The Makioka Sisters*, is a depiction of an aristocratic family struggling to preserve fast-fading customs. Haruki Murakami (1949-) was a contemporary writer focused in some of his novels on the portrayal of a Japan marked by a cultural and political void. In what follows I will give a little more detailed examination of his *After the Quake* (2002), a book about the general unease and uncertainty faced by contemporary Japan, to illustrate how modernization left in its wake long-term adverse consequences. The choice of this book is made mainly on its attempted reflections, after the

catastrophic 1995 Kobe earthquake, on Japan's response to modernity.

The six stories in *After the Quake* are set in the intervening months between the Kobe earthquake in 17 January 1995 and Aum Shinrikyo Tokyo Subway Gas Attack on 20 March 1995, making them strong candidates for an exploration of Japan's encounter with modernity. The catastrophic Kobe earthquake gave the Japanese psyche a shock so staggering as to cast a pall over the existing value system, revealing bleak pictures hidden behind the veneer of prosperity. Added to the urgency of the need for reflections were the deadly poison gas attacks in the Tokyo subway in the same year. A fanatic religious sect attacked what could be said the token of the modernity project, provoking waves of shocking responses. Spurred by these tragic events, Murakami decided to terminate his stay abroad and returned home in 1995. A close examination of the six short stories reveals the Kobe earthquake as invariably informing the consciousness of the protagonists at the critical moments of their lives. The tremendous impact of the catastrophic earthquake suspends the existing thinking pattern. To a nation that has long viewed Western perspectives as universal, the loss of fixed rules can cause serious disorientation, thus wreaking havoc. This may recall what Takeuchi has called neglect of accommodating characters to the place, thus losing the ability to overcome the contradiction between the new situation and the old.

In "UFO in Kushiro," the first of the six stories in the collection, the earthquake comes to Komura as something that jolts him out of a state of complacency, revealing him as "a chunk of air" with "nothing inside" (21). As a salesman at a top-of-the-line hi-fi equipment specialty store in Tokyo, Komura had a decent income at a time when "[t]he economy was healthy, real-estate prices were rising, and Japan was overflowing with money" (4). Marriage brought him a sexually fulfilling life with his wife,[5] and "his desire for sexual adventures simply—and mysteriously—vanished" (4). But what appeared as the triumph of modernity collapsed under the big quake. His wife left him after five days of total absorption with television images of the earthquake, with a note saying that he has nothing

[5] In the eyes of a great number of thinkers and scholars, marriage brings a variety of normative rules into a perfect configuration. In *Love in Action: Sociology of Sex*, F. Henriques held that "[m]arriage assures the sexual rights of the partners in each other, and ensures the creation and care of a family to inherit property and to help perpetuate the society" (190). In *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression*, Tony Tanner views marriage as "a means by which society attempts to bring into harmonious alignment patterns of passion and patterns of property; in bourgeois society it is not only a matter of putting your Gods where your treasure is . . . but also of putting your libido, loyalty, and all other possessions and products, including children, there as well" (15). A sexually fulfilling life in marriage may be argued to reflect the logic of modernity that Japan came to imbibe. Japan's lack of accommodating power to new conditions finds a symbolic expression in the failed sex attempts Komura is talked into by a girl he comes across in Hokkaido after the Kobe earthquake. The loss of the fixed rules embodied by marriage leaves Komura reeling about unable to find a proper way to deal with a new sex partner.

inside him to give her: "*You are good and kind and handsome, but living with you is like living with a chunk of air. It's not entirely your fault, though*" (5-6; original emphasis). The personal observation about Komura lends itself aptly to the interpretation of Japan's encounter with modernity. The sleek veneer of good looks and urbanity finds its correspondence in the reign of the logic of rationality with all its ramifications. The vacuity of his life, which can be traced in a way to the deskilling of the capitalist assembly line, finds its deeper root in the absence of resistance on the part of Japan in face of the master/slave model. "The absence of resistance means that Japan is not Oriental, but at the same time the absence of the wish for self-preservation (the absence of the self) means that Japan is not European," as Japanese scholar Takeuchi Yoshimi suggested. "That is to say, Japan is nothing" (64). In the short story, a pointed reference to Japan's experience with modernity is found in the box Komura delivered to a colleague's sister Keiko in Hokkaido. It was said to contain the something that was inside him: "You didn't know that when you carried it here and gave it to Keiko with your own hands. Now, you'll never get it back" (22). With the irrevocable loss of that precious something inside, Komura and, by extension, the nation symbolically, have to face their consequences.

The Role of Japan in China's Reception of Modernity

In the preceding section, I explored the consequences of Japan's reception of modernity, with an emphasis on its particular subsumed under the universal and, by extension, its confinement to the inferior rank of the master/slave model. It was also shown that Japan internalized the Western perspective in its attitude toward China. This section will turn to Japan's mediating role in China's encounter with modernity to see how the latter was affected in facing its tradition and the unprecedented impact. I will use Lu Xun as an example to ponder the unique situation China found itself in, caught between the Western modernity and the Japanese version of it, the intersection of which arguably has the function of translation.

The significance of occupying a position where two vanishing points approach each other, as stated near the beginning of the paper, can be grasped from the act of patching broken vessel pieces. But how is it that two fragments brought closer to each other can constitute a moment of illumination? We may turn to Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" for clues:

> Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a

> translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. (260)

The quotation may be looked into from two angles. The first perspective shows the emphasis on the literal in translation, instead of "imitating the sense of the original," for it does not take fragments of the same size to be glued together. The literal, as Benjamin put it, is referring to the intention of a language, which is "the way of meaning it" in contradistinction to "what is meant" (257). In plain language, it is not meaning or information that is involved in Benjamin's model of translation, but what is left of language after meaning is stripped off. The privileging of a language's special way of meaning it rather than what is meant holds promises of prising open the grip of the subsumption of the particular under the universal or the confinement to the inferior rank of the master/slave model. For the singularity of a language cannot be reduced to something as facile as information that may endlessly spread across borders or cultures. This interpretation finds a support in Benjamin's insistence that only the original can be translated, not the translation (258). From the second angle, which is closely related to the first, recognition of the kinship of languages may dawn upon the translator when a language fragment is brought close to that of another to fit together. As it is not a search for equivalence in meaning, translation does not go in the way of direct access but, rather, approaches indirectly via the attainment of enlightenment, with "the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language" (260). But how does illumination emerge in the barrier figuratively there between the original and the target language? Benjamin resorted to the center of the language forest vs. the outside for illustration of the mechanism:

> Unlike a work of literature, translation finds itself not in the center of the language forest but **on the outside facing the wooden ridge**; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one. (258-59; emphasis added)

Besides the vantage point where vessel fragments are being pieced together, here "on the outside facing the wooden ridge" we find another strategic place. It is a point to observe the original first elevated to "the particular intention" (258), that is, pure language,[6] and then finding its echo in the translation. What this

[6] Pure language is the language God used to create everything and that used by the prelapsarian Adam to name the creatures God brought before him. It is characterized by the absence of meaning and communicative function. As Benjamin put it in "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," pure language is medium, not tool.

quotation adds up to, besides the inaccessible barrier where illumination pops up, is the resumption of flow when enlightenment finds its reverberation. Earlier in Benjamin's essay, there was an explanation for the alternating "stop-flow" format, pointing directly to the intractable nature of "the foreignness of languages":

> [A]ll translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages. An instant and final rather than a temporary and provisional solution to this foreignness remains out of the reach of mankind; at any rate, it eludes any direct attempt. (257)

In a translation aiming for the inaccessible "particular intention," it is humanly impossible to domesticate "the foreignness of languages" involved in it once for all. Only in a temporary and roundabout fashion can it be expected to tame it, thus paving the way for an endless repetition of the "stop-flow" formula. The significance of the attempt at a realm beyond human reach, though with no way of a firm and final grasp, lies in the momentary flash of illumination that comes with "stop," followed at the next moment by a return to a target language that finds its reverberation as "flow" resumes. A pertinent expression of this can be detected in the well-known model of a tangent touching a circle. As Benjamin stated, "a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the law of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux" (261). Where "a translation touches the original" marks the meeting ground in which illumination emerges and at the next moment finds its echo. In what follows, I will argue that China's unique position between the Western modernity and the Japanese version of it gave it rare glimpses into the nature of modernity and its own bleak situation.

Japan played a prominent role in China's response to the Western modernity. Hu Shih, among others, cited Japan's whole-hearted acceptance of modernity to support his arguments that China should clear away hurdles posed by its tradition so that it could plunge into a full-scale Westernization campaign.[7] But Japan's influence over China's reception of modernity would be far more pronounced, if gauged from the case of Lu Xun and his writings. Lu Xun openly called upon Chinese to emulate Western modernity through Japan. He even went so far as to declare that Chinese tradition should be forsaken for the sake of progress. To delve into the formation of a mentality like his, we may turn to Lu

[7] In "The Road We Should Take," Hu Shih referred to David Starr Jordan, an American biologist, for the idea that Japan owed its Meiji Reformation success to 250 years of uninterrupted reign of peace. In his reply to Liang Shuming's counterstatement, Japan was once again cited to strengthen his stand. Hu reiterated his diagnosis of China's miserable state as arising mainly out of the internal problems of its tradition and its cultural heritage.

Xun's experiences in Japan for clues. His translation of Japanese writer Hakuson Kuriyagawa's *Symbols of Mental Anguish* brought him into contact with Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's conception of the writer as the poet-prophet has shaped his view of a superior being leading the masses with flawed characters into enlightenment. Added to this was the theory of Chinese national character to which Lu Xun was exposed, especially after reading Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* in a Japanese translation.[8] A second strand of his Japanese experiences could be sought from the news slides he watched in class at Sendai Medical School. His recollection of this incident deserves to be quoted at some length:

> One day in a slide I suddenly came face to face with many Chinese on the mainland, and I had not seen any for a long time. In the center of the group there was one who was bound while many others stood around him. They were all strong in physique but callous in appearance. According to the commentary, the one who was bound was a spy who had worked for the Russians and was just about to have his head cut off by the Japanese military as a warning to others, while the people standing around him had come to watch the spectacle.[9]

The news slide about a group of Chinese watching in apathy a fellow Chinese to be executed by the Japanese military must have shocked him into a recognition of his own people's depraved callousness. One of the consequences of the incident was Lu Xun's decision to drop his medical education in order to pursue a literary career, for he thought "people from an ignorant and weak country, no matter how physically healthy and strong they may be, could only serve to be made examples of, or become onlookers of utterly meaningless spectacles" (*Lu Xun Zopin Quanji*, 1: 417; translation by Leo Ou-fan Lee). The drastic decision can be attributed partly to his earlier exposure to ideas like those of Nietzsche and Smith, and partly to the pervasive discussions in Japan about national character and the widespread racial slurs on Chinese as an inferior race. But the catalyst that led to the big change was the shock of the translation-like situation in which the news slide was shown.

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[8] According to Lydia H. Liu in *Translingual Practice*, Smith (known to the Chinese as Ming Enpu), a missionary from North America, spent many years in rural North China during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and published a series of essays in the *North-China Daily News* of Shanghai in 1889, which later came out as a book in 1894. *Chinese Characteristics*, translated into Japanese by Shibue Tamotsu in 1896, first captured Lu Xun's attention during his student days in Japan when the theory of national character was being passionately discussed by Japanese nationalists. (51, 52)

[9] *Lu Xun Zopin Quanji* (*Complete Works of Lu Xu*n), vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chuban she), 1981, 416. The passage was quoted from the preface to *Outcry* (*nahan*, 1923). The English translation was adopted from *Voices from the Iron House* by Leo Ou-fan Lee, 17. Unless otherwise noted, other English translations in this paper are done by the author of this paper.

The shock of the situation drew its force, arguably, from the efficacious medium of visuality and the disciplinary setting of a medical school classroom, touching off a translation-like mechanism that left Lu Xun a lasting impression. Behind these two factors, or in coordination with them, was what Shu-mei Shih called "semicolonial cultural politics" (24) in *The Lure of the Modern*. With the news slides showing a group of Chinese watching in indifference their countryman about to be executed, all the disparaging talks of Chinese national character etched in the mind of Lu Xun could find themselves embodied forcefully in the filmic image. Rey Chow read the news slides incident, in her *Primitive Passion: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, from "the direct, cruel, and crude power of the film medium itself" (8). "In its projectional thrust," Chow added, "film intensifies the shock inherent to cruelty in the form of an attack: similar to the beheading about to be experienced by the victim, the effect of the film images on Lu Xun was that of a blow" (8). The unparalleled miracularity of the medium must have given him a shock of recognition never experienced before.

Added greatly to the intensity of shock was the effect of the disciplinary setting in which the news slide of the pathetic execution scene was shown immediately after slides of bacterial forms. Given the clinical nature of the bacterial form slides, coupled by a professor armed with German medical training, the ethnology of the ensuing news slide must have been endowed with the authority of medical science. As Michel Foucault argued in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison,* from the master of discipline to him who was subjected to it, there existed "a relationship of signalization" that "contained in its mechanical brevity both the technique of command and the morality of obedience" (166). In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri followed Foucault in defining the disciplinary power as "rul[ing] in effect by structuring the parameters and limits of thoughts and practice, sanctioning and prescribing normal and/or deviant behaviors" (23). Beyond "the technique of command and the morality of obedience" and the "prescribing [of] normal and/or deviant behaviors," the scene of projecting news slides, in the case of Lu Xun watching the slides with his Japanese classmates and the Japanese professor, pointed to what Rey Chow called "the position of spectator and observer" (6) and what Hui-Yu Zhang termed the "seeing of being seen," as shown in the topic of her paper, leading to the issue of Japan's role in China's reception of Western modernity. In a scene of what Shu-Mei Shih called "semicolonial cultural politics" (24), Lu Xun was experiencing an intense shock made up of the combined effect of visual medium, disciplinary setting, and the inferior rank Japan originally occupied in the master/slave model being turned around in the face of China.

Some phenomena arising out of this encounter calls for close scrutiny. It "would henceforth constitute the 'beginning' of his writing career," and "[t]he ingredients of his encounter with the unexpected slide show would become the chief concerns of his writings as well as the writings of his fellow intellectuals in the years to come" (Chow 9). Besides, Lu Xun emerged from the scene of "semicolonial cultural politics" convinced of the irrational and depraved character of his fellow Chinese in a Japanese-mediated Western perspective. Part of the effect of Japanese mediation can be felt from his emphasis on "the edification of the Chinese character so as to embody human dignity and values" (Shih 80), rather than on liberation of the oppressed Chinese from imperialism. In the familiar ring of Hu Shih's position on modernity, there was also a whiff of Japanese, taking the position of inferiority striving to be as European as possible. How is it related to the factors of shock and disorientation in Chinese modernist literature which Lu Xun launched? Besides, what effect did the gaze of the master, in this case Japan, work out in a third world subcolonial situation? In brief, what were the consequences of a Japanese-mediated modernity to China?

Shock, Disorientation, and Translation

The slides show incident was depicted by Lu Xun first in the preface to *Nahan* ("The Outcry," also translated as "Call to Arms," 1923), then in the preface to the Russian Edition of *The True Story of Ah Q* and "The Author's Autobiographical Sketches" (1925), and "Fujino Sensei" (1926). In the preface to *The Outcry*, the slides show incident was given a detailed account, winding up in a decision to drop medical education for a whole-hearted pursuit in creative writing. In the preface to the Russian Edition of *The True Story of Ah Q* and "The Author's Autobiographical Sketches," Lu Xun briefly mentioned the slides show incident to stress the importance of literature in curing the ills of China. "Fujino Sensei" describes the incident in a setting in which Japanese students held Chinese in utter despise. In the essay, Lu Xun, as he narrated, was forced by Japanese students to surrender one of his notebooks, for they intended to check if his fair score in anatomy class came from a prior knowledge of the examination questions hinted to him by instructor Fujino in the form of leaving marks on his notebooks. He was held in suspicion on the ground that a passing grade was beyond the capacity of a student coming from a weak country like China, who would supposedly have been made dumb by the backwardness of that country. Later on, the shouts of "Banzai!" by Japanese students punctuating the screening of the slides were made all the more shocking.

The significance of the incident, for our purpose, lies in its impact on Lu Xun's literary production, from which Japan's mediation in China's reception of modernity can be investigated. Scholars such as Leo Ou-fan Lee, Lydia H. Liu, David Der-Wei Wang, Marston Anderson, Yang Tse, Shu-mei Shih, Hui-Yu Zhang, and Rey Chow, among others, have studied the implications of this incident. In his "Bianyuan de dikang—shilun luxun de xiandaixing [Resistance from the Margin: On Lu Xun's Modernity]," Yang Tse pointed out that, "from the incident, Lu Xun found that the old China was unwittingly reduced to a state of being seen" (188). David Der-Wei Wang said, "Lu Xun occupied a narrating position to 'watch' the Chinese 'watch' the beheading scene" (138). Thus, "When he blamed the Chinese for ignoring the real and serious dimension of the beheading scene," Wang argued, "he was, in fact, perched on the uppermost position of the panopticon" (138). Here Wang obviously referred to Lu Xun as an enlightened writer speaking unfairly about the unenlightened public. In Marston Anderson's reading, Lu Xun participated in two groups of observers, but he might feel profoundly at odds with their responses to the slide. "The scene thus encapsulates a double sense of one observer's alienation and complicity: while, as a Chinese, he too is targeted as a receptor of the warning the act is meant to convey, for survival's sake he must share the delight of its authors" (78). In "The 'Seeing' of 'Being Seen' and Three Subjective Positions: A Post-Colonial Interpretation of Lu Xun's 'Slides Show Incident,'" Hui-Yu Zhang incorporated to her methodology the medium of visuality and the position of spectator and observer that Chow featured in *Primitive Passions*. Zhang aimed to uncover the three Chinese split subject positions: Lu Xun/I, onlookers, and the beheaded, while exploring the connection between "seeing" and "being seen" and the mechanism of transforming the external/Japanese gaze into an internal "seeing." These readings of the slides show incident, except Hui-Yu Zhang's, failed to pinpoint the shaping effect of the Japanese gaze on Lu Xun's exposure to modernity.

Zhang obviously owed her insights partially to Rey Chow, who has had the most inspiring reading of the incident so far. Chow emphasized the impact of filmic images on Lu Xun, seeing the visual encounter not simply as a part of the famous writer's autobiography about starting a writing career, but as "a story about the beginning of a new kind of discourse in the postcolonial 'third world'" (5). Shock, which assailed the young Lu Xun "in his unassuming perceptual security" (Chow 6) when watching the slide, was described by Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, and Gianni Vattimo as associated with a modernity specifically grounded in visuality. Chow perceived the subtle differences in the disorientation Lu Xun experienced from that felt in Europe about modernity:

> And yet this disorientation is not only about the meaning of art and creativity, nor is it only about the gratuitousness of human existence as has been generalized about the modern European metropolis. For the young Lu Xun, what are shocking and disorienting are the destruction that descends upon the victim, the apathy and powerlessness of the onlookers, and the meaning of these for China as a modern nation. (6)

Besides pointing out the difference between the West and China in regard to modernity, Chow broke ground in the studies of the slides show incident, connecting what is shocking and disorienting to "the process of magnification and amplification that is made possible by the film medium" (6). The significance of this can be grasped from the introduction of films into China in 1896 by agents of the Lumière Brothers[10] and the start of film making by Chinese roughly at the same time.[11] The slide projector brought to Sendai from Germany by the Japanese professor may give a twist, literally or metaphorically, to Chinese reception of modernity, especially when the machine was used to show the slide made by Japanese about the Chinese to be beheaded and the apathetic Chinese onlookers. The mediating role of Japan in Lu Xun's exposure to the shocking visual medium deserves close scrutiny because Japan was marked, in its attitude toward the West, by "that slave sentiment which lacks subjectivity" (Takeuchi 62), while snobbishly contemptuous of China. The ingredients of this encounter, as Chow said, "would become the chief concerns of his writings as well as the writings of his fellow intellectuals in the years to come," constituting "the 'beginning' of his writing career" (9). Though the word "beginning" may prompt an association with Edward W. Said's idea of it, Chow did not follow him in exploring the significance of beginning as "basically an activity which ultimately implies return and repetition rather than simple linear accomplishment" or as "making or producing difference" (Said xvii). Rather, it is more like the repeated agony that can be eased temporarily after retelling the tale, like the old sailor in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (7.578-81). But unlike the ancient mariner, Lu Xun was assailed by shock "in his unassuming perceptual security" (Chow 6), caught off guard in a way that, according to Sigmund Freud, might trigger neurosis. As Benjamin paraphrased the major drift of Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, "The more readily consciousness registers these shocks, the less likely are they to have a traumatic effect" (Benjamin, *Baudelaire* 115). In other words, if

[10] Allusions to this event can be found in the following sources: Lin Niantong, *Zhongguo dianying meixue* [The aesthetics of Chinese film],18 and 113; Jay Leyda, *Dianying: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, 1-2; Ma Qiang, "The Chinese Film in the 1980s: Art and Industry," 165-66; and Paul Clark, "The sinification of Cinema: The Foreignness of Film in China," 176.

[11] According to Lin Niantong, *Zhongguo dianying meixue*, films began to be made in China in 1905, but these films no longer exist (70).

a shock enters the subconscious without being defused in the consciousness, a trauma may result from it. In Chow's elaboration on the effect of the filmic images on Lu Xun, "shock," "blow," and "menace," all with traumatic effects, were the words she used to characterize what drove his literary production, from writing one short story after another.

The theoretical framework constructed by Rey Chow, nevertheless, shows some limitations in its interpretative power. Chow's reliance on traumatic effect may shed some light on Lu Xun's writing practice as this perspective views it as a series of activities to tackle the repeated onslaught of the menace. But what did the slides show incident really mean to him? Or, more pertinently, what did the incident reveal to him and how did that shape up his perspective? As he soon decided to drop his medical education in order to pursue a literary career wholeheartedly, the incident must have given him illumination. The big change wrought by the incident, therefore, has to be treated as an act of translation, for illumination is its centerpiece. In Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," illumination is seen in various dimensions of translation, from the shift of content into form, or from fragments of a vessel glued together, or from a tangent touching a circle lightly, to name just a few. The significance of illumination can be measured also from the metaphor of an iron house Lu Xun mentioned in the preface to *The Outcry*:

> "If innumerable people sleep profoundly in an iron house, windowless and too hermetically sealed to tear open, and would soon die of asphyxiation, without showing any sign of sadness as they are drifting from heavy sleeping into death, now you start to shout out, waking up a few sober people to endure the pain of unavoidable death. How do you justify your behavior?"
>
> "Now that a few people are waking up, there is no denying the possibility of breaking down the house." (339)

What gave rise to the image of an iron house might be attributed to the flash of illumination that came in the wake of the combined effect of shock. In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin declared that thinking includes the flow of thoughts and their arrest: "Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad" (262-63). According to this view, we may say that Lu Xun was disoriented when he was assailed by the efficacious medium of visuality, the disciplinary setting of a medical school classroom, and semicolonial cultural politics. Thinking suddenly stopped and a shock struck. As a result of the shock, the "configuration pregnant with tensions . . . crystallizes into a monad," prompting illumination. In translation, we can detect a similar pattern of stop and flow. An apt example can be found in translation calling

into the language forest "without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one" (Benjamin, "The Task" 258-59). Why does it have to be "on the outside facing the wooden ridge" (258)? Obviously because there is no direct access, it has to stop in front of the barrier. From the discussion in the earlier instance, we know that stop brings with it shock. As disorientation subsides, illumination flashes across the mind. Thus it is made possible to aim at "that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one" (258-59). Shock is arguably an integral part of translation before illumination is yielded.

The position Lu Xun found himself in during the slides show incident might be termed as "on the outside facing the wooden ridge" (258). The shock he experienced marked a state of feeling triggered by the arrest of thoughts. With a barrier blocking the internal goings-on of his mind, Lu Xun could be viewed as stationed in front of the language forest, waiting for the filmic image of the beheading scene to find its reverberation when disorientation turned into illumination. This reading valorizes the beheading scene as the original. As Benjamin stated in "The Task of the Translator," only the original can be translated, not the translation (258). When a language's special way of meaning it is privileged over what is meant, its singularity cannot be reduced to something as facile as information that may endlessly spread across borders or cultures. Contrary to the Derridean stand that signs substitute in an endless chain of signification, it is a return to the original that, as Benjamin prescribed, the singularity can be tapped and resuscitated. The significance of tracing the source of modern Chinese literature to this filmic image lies in the promises it holds in breaking apart the grip of the subsumption of the particular under the universal. Instead of finding the particular of one's culture deleted when subsumed under the universal, a revelation of a translation-like scene as the original may help explain why Takeuchi Yoshimi saw a sort of resistance in Lu Xun's literary works.

This argument, though, may not go unquestioned about the feasibility of images being used in a translation context. The issue may boil down to the question over the compatibility of language with image when it comes to translation. In the essay "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," one of his two essays on translation, Benjamin argued, "The existence of language . . . is coextensive not only with all the areas of human mental expression in which language is always in one sense or another inherent, but with absolutely everything" (62). This quotation not only confirms the coextension between image and language, but also envisions the interconnectivity among all things, sentient or not. From these two points, we can say that translation, on the one hand, doesn't have to be

limited to that between two different languages. On the other hand, however, translation is an activity couched in language because linguistic entity is inherently there in everything. When the prelapsarian Adam gazed at creatures God brought before him, he knew instantly the language God used to create each of them and he named accordingly. A perfect model of translation was thus established: "This creativity, relieved of its divine actuality, became knowledge. Man is the knower in the same language in which God is the creator" (68). The language in which a perfect translation like naming is done is a medium, instead of a tool. As Benjamin asserted in this essay, mental entity existed in everything: "If mental being is identical with linguistic being, then a thing, by virtue of its mental being, is a medium of communication, and what is communicated in it is . . . precisely this medium (language) itself" (66). By contrast, if mental being is not identical with linguistic being, it is "through the words by which he denotes a thing" (65). Then, language is a tool, not a medium. Judging by Adam naming the creatures God brought before him, contemplation, or gaze, obviously has a crucial role in matching mental being with linguistic being. This brings us back to Lu Xun gazing at the filmic images.

Without the environment for an ideal translation like Eden for Adam before he sinned, what prompted Lu Xun to have an experience like that could be attributed arguably to gaze. How did the image of the beheading scene transform into that of the iron house? Could it claim to rival the way God's creativity was translated into Man's knowledge? A closer examination of Adam's naming episode may reveal that an ideal translation hinges on an instant grasp of the linguistic being in contemplation and an instant naming accordingly, without allowing judgment to creep in in delay. Thus, as Benjamin argued, gaze in conjunction with naming is crucial for linguistic entity to match mental entity. In the slides show incident, Lu Xun was face to face with the filmic images of a group of Chinese watching in apathy their countryman about to be executed. Contemplating on the act of beheading about to descend on the victim, Lu Xun might be assumed to instantly apprehend its essence because of the vivid visual effect. As Rey Chow argued, "the effect of the film images on Lu Xun was that of a blow" (8). A shock arising out of this might preclude him from the habitual pattern of pondering and judgment, plunging him into an immediate and intuitive grasp. In the essay, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," Benjamin asserted, "the equation of mental with linguistic being, which knows only gradual differences, produces a graduation of all mental being in degrees" (66). We may thus argue that the slides show incident constituted a case of ideal translation. The support we can find for this reading is the image of the iron house in many of Lu Xun's works.

Most of the literary works by Lu Xun, as Hui-Yu Zhang argued in her essay, retell the allegory of the iron house (120). This may further affirm the relevance of translation to his literary production. The repeated image of the iron house brings with it two types of people: the enlightened and the unenlightened. The madman in "Diary of a Madman," Shaofu Lu in "In a Pub," and Lianyi Wei in "A Loner" belong to the group of enlightened and waking people. Ruentu, Tofu Sishi (the salegirl of tofu), Xianglin Xao (Sister-in-law Xianglin), and Ah Q are in the category of sleeping people, thus the unenlightened herd. In an afterthought-like essay, "Behind the Writing of *The True Story of Ah Q*," Lu Xun mentions the easy recognition of the protagonist Ah Q as a representative Chinese. During its weekly serialization in nine installments, readers recognized readily familiar traits of themselves in Ah Q. In his "World Literature in an Age of Multinational Capitalism," Fredric Jameson detected in the anecdotes about Ah Q "the allegory of a certain set of Chinese attitudes and modes of behavior" and "Ah Q is thus, allegorically, China itself" (147). As Paul B. Foster suggested in "Ah Q Genealogy: Ah Q, Miss Ah Q, National Character and the Construction of the Ah Q Discourse," "The literary character Ah Q was a product of the national character discourse begun in the later Qing and carried on into the May Fourth Period (circa 1915-25)" (243). Lu Xun's genius lay partly in reaching far into his own convention to see how it may emerge when "filled by the presence of the now [Jetztzeit]" (Benjamin, "Theses" 261). With insights gained from the slides show incident, he translated them, in a long series of "stop-flow" format, into Ah-Q, the unenlightened representative Chinese whom he has been trying to wake up without success. The execution scene in *The True Story of Ah Q*, as well as that mentioned in "Behind the Writing of *The True Story of Ah Q*," shows the lasting impression he had of the slides show incident.

Lu Xun's *The True Story of Ah Q* as an Allegory

A cursory glance over *The True Story of Ah Q* reveals lengthy episodes piling up one after another without falling into some form of causal relationship. Ah Q drifts into one thing after another without hitting upon a clear idea of his own situation or drafting a feasible plan to improve his own life. This may recall the English novel in the early stage of its development, in which episodes are seen lumped together. As the genre of the novel matures, episodes give way to plots in which causal relationship can be found among occurrences. But this is never the case with Ah Q. Jameson described the book as composed of "a much lengthier series of anecdotes about a hapless coolie," a text "never evolv[ing] into the novel

form" (147). As a genre growing out of capitalism and modernity,[12] the novel is arguably infused with their logic, which would be made apparent if the difference between plot and episode is placed alongside the modernist philosopher Kant's suggested hierarchy of cultures and races. In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant depicted the feeling of the sublime as "a feeling of pain arising from the want of accordance between the aesthetical estimation of magnitude formed by the imagination and the estimation of the same formed by reason" (96). At the same time there is pleasure "arising from the correspondence with rational ideas of this very judgment of the inadequacy of our greatest faculty of sense, **in so far as it is a law for us to strive after these ideas**" (96; emphasis added). Here Kant suggested that pleasure in pain comes about only when there is a mechanism to trigger the search for rational ideas, with a vague hint that races or cultures may be a factor in it. This stand is made clear some pages later: "In fact, without development of moral ideas, that which we, prepared by culture, call sublime presents itself to the uneducated man merely as terrible" (105). In plain language, what the well-educated Westerners experience as the feeling of the sublime may be reduced to that of the terrible when experienced by those without the benefit of Western culture. The distinction between the feeling of the sublime and that of the terrible may be used to tease out a key idea: Ah Q, unable to evolve from a long series of episodes into the novel form, signifies the absence of a mechanism to prompt the search for rational ideas. We may view the symptoms of racial and cultural inferiority as the vision Lu Xun gained from the slides show incident.

Consolation in self-belittlement is another feature of the text that shows an affinity with the incident Lu Xun encountered at the Sendai Medical School. In the novella, Ah Q never fails to find a cause of consolation even in the state of utter despair or in a serious defeat:

> Admit that you are not even human, they insist, that you are nothing but an animal, I'm an insect! There, does that satisfy you? In less than ten seconds, however, Ah Q would walk away also satisfied that he had won, thinking that he was after all "number one in self-belittlement," and that after removing the "self-belittlement" what remained was still the glory of remaining "number one." (13-14)[13]

This mode of responses must be shocking and puzzling to many as it signifies a rare combination of slavishness with a false sense of dignity, and resilience as well. The showing of resilience from a false sense of dignity tinged by servility

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[12] In *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*, Ian Watt argued that the sense of credibility, the hallmark of the novel, itself a privileging of reason over imagination, can be traced to the novel's origin in capitalism and modernity.

[13] The English translation appears in Fredric Jameson's essay, "World Literature in an Age of Multinational Capitalism" (147). It should be noted that the quotation is not a verbatim translation.

bespeaks, on the one hand, ceaseless attempts at emerging from the overwhelming buffeting of life and, on the other hand, clumsy futility of all these efforts. The bleak picture draws an analogy with the failure of episodes to evolve into the novel form as well as the incapacity for some non-western cultures, as Kant envisioned, to develop the feeling of the sublime. Involved in this vision could be the prevalent views on China held by the West and Japan that struck Lu Xun all the more shockingly because of the efficacy of the visual medium and the disciplinary setting of a medical school classroom. In *The True Story of Ah Q*, there are scenes that point to a doomed failure, with no way out and no change possible. The fighting scene between Ah Q and Little D, a poor and slim lad whom he despises, shows symbolically the futility of their struggle, as their shadows never register on the big white painted wall of the rich Qien family. In response to a curse, "The God-damned Ah Q shall die without issue" (27), from the Young Nun after being sexually harassed by him, Ah Q starts to think of reproducing himself and thus makes sexual advances to Maid Wu, a young widow working for the rich Zhao family. The episode ends up not only dashing a dream of having offspring, but also making life in his hometown more unbearable. Besides, attempts at joining the revolution are rejected, shattering any hope of changing the status quo. In the end, Ah Q is mistakenly arrested in a robbery case he never participated in, blindly misled to confess and to die eventually as a punishment. Ah Q lives a totally hopeless life, devoid of any way out.

The gloomy picture evokes the image of a windowless and hermetically sealed iron house, which is in turn derived from an analogous vision of China's situation as a modern nation. The sources of this vision could be, as demonstrated in the slides show, the destruction that would soon descend upon the victim, the powerlessness and apathy of the onlookers, as well as the shouts of "Banzai" from the Japanese students around Lu Xun in the classroom situation. The Western bigoted view of non-western cultures in general, such as Kant's stand on their incapacity of summoning sufficient reason to attain the feeling of the sublime, and Japan's discriminatory view of China in particular, must have lent some credence, unwarranted though, to the unflattering medium presentation of the Chinese onlookers. The efficacity of the visual medium and the disciplinary setting of a medical school classroom, the gaze of the master as part of it, finds its way into *The True Story of Ah Q*. Near the beginning of the book, when Ah Q claims to have the surname of Zhao, he is intimidated into silence by the wealthy Master Zhao (Zhao Da-ye): "Who do you think you are that you claim to be a Zhao?" (8). People in the village of Wei (Weizhuang) dismiss his claim to be a Zhao as ridiculous. They think he may not really be a Zhao and, even if his family name is Zhao, he shouldn't have claimed to be so, as Master Zhao has been hovering

around in the same village. Master Zhao's gaze and the villagers' echoing views constitute what Foucault referred to in *Discipline and Punish* as "the technique of command and the morality of obedience" (166). Ah Q is silenced and his attempt at identity, as his claim to be a Zhao seems to indicate, is crushed. If read allegorically, Ah Q's attempt at identity amounts to that of China to assert its particularity, to emerge from the universality imposed by the West. The mediating role of Japan in China's reception of modernity can be roughly compared to the villagers' echoing views which fortify the power of Master Zhao's gaze.

Closely related to this is Japan preying on China while taking a slavish position in its relation to the West. As Takeuchi Yoshimi depicted in *What Is Modernity?: Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*, "In its turn toward modernity, Japan bore a decisive inferiority complex vis-à-vis Europe" (72). But Japan's attitude toward China was that of utter contempt and discrimination. As some Japanese newspapers and magazines suggested, "the Chinese should be displayed as savages with tails in the 1903 Osaka World Fair" (Shih 76). The claim by some Japanese that they were Aryans, not of a yellow race like Chinese, went one step further toward the crux of the matter: Japan had to look to the West for "its essential reality." Ah Q's behavior arguably exhibits a similar pattern of perversion. His consolation in self-belittlement, on the other hand, reveals a pitiable mode of conduct as he often cowers before those who are stronger but bullies those who are weaker. This is demonstrated in a very pronounced fashion when, after receiving a beating from the Bogus Foreign Devil, he in turn bullies the Young Nun. In the final chapter of *The True Story of Ah Q*, he kneels before the judge who is to order his execution even when he is requested not to. It is a kind of unreflective brutishness that finds in a weaker object an outlet for one's sense of frustration.

In both cases, there is failure at summoning enough courage to confront squarely the major challenge facing them. The lack of courage, or willingness, to risk life for the sake of a cause or surmounting an obstacle wouldn't help change the existing master/slave relation. For, as Hegel argued in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won" (114). A slight difference from Japan's pattern of total submission to the West, nevertheless, may be detected in Ah Q's way of overcoming humiliation, though the weak attempt at dignity does little to reverse China's particularity being subsumed under the Western universality. But as Ah Q belongs to the category of unenlightened Chinese, his pattern of behavior may not fully reflect Lu Xun's vision of China's reception of modernity. The vigor with which Lu Xun's enlightened characters endeavor to waken up their fellow Chinese shouldn't be obscured by the case of Ah Q. When Takeuchi Yoshimi claimed to see the presence of resistance in Lu Xun's works, which he thought was rare or absent in Japanese literature, what he

had in mind was in fact the enlightened characters. He obviously had a point but it seemed he ignored the allegorical significance in Ah Q, who, though failing to emerge into a sort of knowledge, may point allegorically to the ontological dimension of truth.

As Benjamin noted in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, "Where man is drawn towards the symbol, allegory emerges from the depths of being to intercept the intention, and to triumph over it" (183). Here allegory is presented as something that blocks the emergence of the intention. As the object is "incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own," the allegorist can now speak through it of "something different and for him it becomes a key to the realm of hidden knowledge" (184). An allegorical reading of Ah Q's incapacity for anything more than amorphous ideas may find a support in the technique of literal translation Lu Xun and his brother Zhouren Zhou turned to when they translated Western literatures into Chinese. As they argued, "the incorporation of unfamiliar syntactical structures into Chinese might cause some annoyance at first but, once getting used to, those structures could become part of our own repertoire" (*Lu Xun zopin quanji* 4: 197, 199). Though the Zhou brothers[14] did not point out what might lie ahead with the accretion of vocabulary, there emerged from their talks the idea of what Benjamin called "the gaze of melancholy" in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (183), which renders impossible the production of meaning as syntactical structures are made unfamiliar. Literal translation is advocated in Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" to demonstrate the "innermost kinship of languages," for "how else can this be done but by conveying the form and meaning of the original as accurately as possible?" (255). Whether in "the gaze of melancholy" or literal translation, the effect of disorientation is meant to point to an ultimate sphere above any one individual realm. Likewise, in its utter despair, *The True Story of Ah Q* dangles the hope of transcending the master/slave model.

Conclusion

East Asia's reception of modernity was marked by a translation-like situation, with Japan playing a mediating role in China's encounter with the West. Japan's relatively easy transition to modernization, though provoking criticisms of losing its particularity, drew droves of Chinese intellectuals to study there, shaping their views about what course China should take to modernize itself.

[14] Lu Xun's family name is Zhou and his given name Suren.

Criticized by some Japanese thinkers for following the lead of the West slavishly, Japan internalized the logic of modernity and preyed on China. By contrast, China was hampered by a long and unwieldy tradition as it sought to find a way out of its semi-feudal, sub-colonial status. On the one side, the inexorable march of Western modernity cut China down to its size, forcing it to face up to new realities. On the other side, the remarkable success of Japan in shifting from a feudal society dominated by shoguns to a modern nation-state stirred up in China waves of self-reflection. China's position between Japan and the West found an apt analogy in the case of Lu Xun during his study at Sendai Medical School. The slides show incident caught Lu Xun in a position where Japan met the West in their modernity project.

As I argued earlier, the anointed father of modern Chinese literature, during the slides show incident, was put in a translation-like situation where the flow of thinking was brought to a stop at the intersection of two fragments. As Benjamin states, "Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad" ("Theses" 262-63). To Lu Xun, the "configuration pregnant with tensions" was made up of the destruction that would soon descend upon the victim, the powerlessness and apathy of the onlookers, both demonstrated forcefully on the efficacious medium of the slide, as well as the shouts of "Banzai" from the Japanese students around Lu Xun in the classroom. The shock arising out of the combined effect of these coincided with that occurring as "thinking suddenly stops," which occurs at the end of a fragment before its flow resumes at the beginning of another fragment. The shock that comes with the sudden stop of thinking brings along disorientation before illumination flashes across. In Leibniz's *The Monadology*, every monad "has relations which express all the others and that it is consequently a perpetual living mirror of the universe" (§56). The crystallization into a monad, as triggered by shock, thus bursts forth with illumination just as the gluing together of broken vessel pieces does: "making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel" (260). Illumination is an integral part of these cases.

In Lu Xun's literary works, the urgency of the impending disaster conveyed by the iron house was arguably the manifestation of the glimpse of insight at the moment of illumination. According to the "stop-flow" formula, the flow of thought resumes when disorientation turns into illumination. As it is inspiration flashing across from a realm beyond human reach, however, it has to be turned into humanly understandable medium before thought flows again. Viewed from this perspective, each literary work by Lu Xun was a manifestation of the illumination dawning on him during the slides show incident. But why did it take a series of

works, instead of a single one? Walter Benjamin's idea about translation in "The Task of the Translator" provided food for thought: "[A]ll translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages" (257). The impossibility of an instant and final solution compels repeated attempts at grasping something beyond human reach. A translation approach not only gives a meaningful interpretation for Asia's reception of modernity, with Japan's mediating role in China's encounter with the West, but also does so for Lu Xun's experience in the slides show incident and the repetition of the image of the iron house in many of his literary works.

An allegorical reading of *The True Story of Ah Q* also requires a translation perspective to give it full play. As Benjamin noted in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, "Where man is drawn towards the symbol, allegory emerges from the depths of being to intercept the intention, and to triumph over it" (183). Here allegory is presented as something that blocks the emergence of the intention. From Benjamin's remarks on translation, we find instances of stopping the flow of thought: a tangent touching a circle, calling into the wooden ridge without entering, a momentary grasp of the foreignness of a language. They have one thing in common: defying direct access. But it is in the disorientation arising from blockage of passage that a shimmer of illumination emerges. Allegory exhibits its immense significance only when understood from this angle: "[T]he object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy" and "melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains dead" (Benjamin, "*The Origin*" 183). It is by stripping an object of life or a passage of meaning that an allegory is created, according to Benjamin. Hence, "to intercept the intention" can be understood as grinding to a halt in the "stop-flow" formula, ushering in the moment of illumination. In *The True Story of Ah Q*, the piling up of episodes leads to nowhere, but on the interception of intention there rests the hope of attaining the ultimate truth it points to.

A major contribution of this paper lies in pointing out the source of resistance in Lu Xun's works. The Japanese scholar Takeuchi Yoshimi detected the presence of resistance in *The True Story of Ah Q*. In offering a translation approach, this paper suggests that the privileging of a language's special way of meaning it rather than what is meant holds promises of prising open the grip of the subsumption of the particular under the universal. For the singularity of a language cannot be reduced to something as facile as information that may easily be buried behind the facade of universality. Likewise, in its utter despair, *The True Story of Ah Q* dangles the hope of transcending the master/slave model, as shown in earlier analysis. This interpretation finds a support in Benjamin's insistence that only the original can be translated, not the translation (258).

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東亞與現代性：
日本在中西交流之角色

摘 要

本論文研究東亞與現代性的關係，探討日本在中國面對現代性衝擊時所發揮的中介功能，中國在接受現代性時面臨有如翻譯的情境，並從中解析其與中國現代文學興起之關聯。本論文從翻譯的角度探討魯迅之《阿Q正傳》，尤其是魯迅就讀日本仙台醫學院時發生的幻燈片事件，並由此事件切入西方現代性與日本版現代性之間的接觸點。本論文的主要論點是，兩個消失點接近處是出現洞見最可能的所在。

關鍵字：現代性，東亞，中國，日本，魯迅，班雅明，《阿Q正傳》，翻譯