

Colonization and Cultural Space in Wu Chuo-liu's *The Orphan in Asia*

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ABSTRACT

Wu Chuo-liu's novel *The Orphan in Asia* (1976) treats with great sympathy and sadness the issue of Taiwan's identity-confusion as a colony of Imperial Japan (1845–1945). The novel, set in Taiwan in the 1930's and 1940's, shows the degree to which Taiwan had been totally subjected to the imperial power of the Japanese empire, colonized by this hegemonic colonizing force. The protagonist Tai-Ming moves from an early sense of sympathy with the colonizers, an eagerness to be "assimilated," to an increasingly hostile stance toward the Japanese government, its agents and soldiers who are controlling his Taiwanese homeland. He comes to see that he can never, as he had once thought, "become Japanese," that as long as Japan rules Taiwan he must forever be a non-citizen, a no-self (because non-Japanese) from the perspective of the rulers. Here the novel's central issues of ethnic and cultural identity—particularly complex in the case of Taiwan, since the potential confusion of Taiwanese-Chinese identity had already existed, in this island province of China, for centuries before Japan took control in 1895—are interpreted in terms of current theories of identity as (or in relation to) space: individual, social and linguistic space, the space of the "body" (individual and socio-political), cultural space and colonized space.

KEY WORDS

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Anyone who has seen the brilliant Taiwanese film “A City of Sadness” (1989) by Hou Hsiao-hsien will know what a complex and disorienting period Taiwan went through between the end of World War II in 1945, when its Japanese colonizers were forced to begin leaving, and the end of the 1940’s—when what had been for several centuries an island province of China became officially the “Republic of China,” governed now by the recently-arriving officials and army of the *Kuomintang* (Chinese Nationalist Party) who, having been defeated by the communists on the mainland, were moving in increasing numbers to this offshore island. Watching the film one is especially struck by that “other” Taiwanese identity issue, not the Taiwanese-Chinese but the Taiwanese-Japanese identity issue, in an early scene showing young Taiwanese women dressed in kimonos and speaking fluent Japanese as they sit on tatami mats at a low table drinking tea, in what appear to be totally Japanese surroundings, in northern Taiwan in the mid-1940’s. Scenes like this are disorienting to the film’s viewers; one can only imagine what dislocations or disorientations of ethnic and cultural identity the Taiwanese people themselves must already have undergone.

Taiwanese literature in the 1930’s and 1940’s saw the emergence of what critics call “Big River fiction” and “*kominka* literature.”¹ Among the writers of this period, Yang Kuei, Lu Ho-ruo and Wu Chuo-liu all encountered a period of political censorship during which any literary work that went beyond the scope of the *kominka* would be persecuted (Chang 243). Furthermore, any writer who attacked the *kominka* discourse of Japanese imperialism would actually endanger himself. During the 50-year period of Japanese rule, *kominka* discourse

was avidly promoted by the Japanese colonizers (Chen F. M.159). Some writers, however, reacted against it. As Hseuh-ling Wang has commented, in the literature of this period the resolution of the old Taiwanese identity problem (“Are we Chinese or Taiwanese?”), now exacerbated by the pressure of Japanese imperial expectations “Are we Taiwanese-Chinese or are we Japanese?”), was the most recurrent theme (173). Critics have found in these writings the emergence of a local (Taiwanese) identity along with the traditional base of Chinese Confucian thinking; in the critical commentary on Taiwanese 1930–40’s fiction we also see great emphasis (by some) on the hegemonic force of Japanese rule in Taiwan during this period, as well as great emphasis (by others) on the rising consciousness or “cultural space” of the colonized Taiwanese. In either case cultural identity is seen in relation to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. It seems that in the interaction between the colonized and the colonizer, between local people and a “globally” imposed cultural environment, it is the space that is contested; the cultural identity at the core of power relations is a function of cultural space.

For in the human world space is a medium of power bound up not only with norms and expectations but also with cultures and identities. Social space, therefore, involves the reproduction of social relations; with its interdictions and bans, it creates and reproduces the identities of/within a specific culture. Cultural identity construction involves space, power and knowledge, because as Foucault has pointed out power is always expressed in and through the monopolization of space and knowledge (Sibley 1–3). Thus social space relies on the human symbolic order. In Lefebvre’s view social space comprises mental-linguistic space, the space of social practice and the “real” space of conceived essences (5). This means that our concept of space includes our social relationships and linguistic-logical thinking as well as (that which is signified by “space” in the traditional sense, namely) our perception of the physical world. In a colonized space, however, the relationship between an individual and his space is violated, and the cultural identity of individuals undergoes drastic changes. The hegemonic power of the colonizer appropriates the codes of spatial

practice. The colonized are in effect subjected by/within a “colonized space.” My object here, then, is to analyze the issues of cultural identity presented in Wu Chuo-liu’s novel, *The Orphan in Asia*. The discussion will focus on the forces involved in the construction of cultural identity, which include forms of social-spatial exclusion, the process of social segregation, and the process of boundary erection.

The society of *The Orphan in Asia* is one confronting the aggressive imperial power of Japan. It is also a society undergoing political exclusionary processes which problematize the ethnic and cultural identity of the Taiwanese. As Hsin-Chang Lu notes, writers in different periods reflect different conceptions of identity in their literary works. Taiwanese writers of the 1940’s were particularly frustrated, indeed traumatized by the system of Japanese colonial power; their traumatic experience dominates their literary writing (171–73). Japan’s colonization of Taiwan began in 1895, following the Ma-Kuan Treaty (*Shimonoseki*) in the same year, which legalized Japan’s dominion over Taiwan. The Japanese government realized that the Taiwanese would not accept losing their territory, so the ceremony of “transfer” took place not on the island of Taiwan but on a ship flying the Japanese flag (Grajdanzev 312). Thus Taiwan, previously tied for hundreds of years to a chaotic and disunified China, became a colony of an increasingly powerful and economically developed Japan.

During their fifty years of Japanese colonial control, the local inhabitants of Taiwan experienced the benefits of a relatively efficient colonial administration as well as its rigid and intrusive demands. However, in the context of their own conflicting warlords as well as Japan’s tense relationship with Russia, these Japanese colonizers had relatively little interest in the island’s people or their national identity. Like many imperial hegemonic powers of the western world, the Japanese imperial government of that time considered the colonial disciplinary system to be the essence of “assimilation.” This system was based on the tenet that institutions were constructed to ensure social stability; it required that governors and officers of higher rank be Japanese. The Japanese saw themselves as enforcing the law on behalf of their emperor; thus the Japanese government decreed that only

Japanese (not Taiwanese) officials should be able to enforce laws and statutes. Under Japanese rule, the Taiwanese were compelled to study and to speak *kokugo*, the national language of Japan. The Japanese language was regarded as the only official language; Taiwanese students at all levels were required to accept the Japanese culture along with the language. Language control and cultural assimilation were seen as means to establish a common consciousness among this populace that was yet to be unified into a nation. (This raises the issue—some might say the underlying issue, since it made possible Japan's colonization of Taiwan in the first place—of the ambiguous identity of "Taiwan" as a Chinese Province rather than an independent country for several hundred years prior to 1895; I will not further pursue this issue here.)

Fang-Tsu ("Release the bound feet") and Tuan-Fa ("Cut hair short") were among the Japanese government's "doctrines of cultural assimilation." The program of assimilation was based on the theory of a united imperial commonwealth that would comprise Japan and its colonies as a political entity. However, from the perspective of the patriotic local Taiwanese, the strategy employed by the Japanese imperial government to "recruit" local Taiwanese and bring them within the Japanese cultural sphere was like a sugar-coated pill, one that would coerce the colonized people to adhere blindly to the core of Japanese culture while the Taiwanese culture was being eradicated. People of the older generation worried that once the young people adopted the Japanese tenets and were assimilated by the colonizers, the traditional sense of Chinese-Taiwanese patriotism and Confucian teachings would be wiped out. In the "space" of this hegemonic, imperial power, the marginalized local inhabitants could barely understand the complexity of power relations or exclusionary discourses. Kevin M. Doak, in his illuminating article "Ethnic Nationalism and Romanticism in early Twentieth Century Japan," discusses the rise of the concept "ethnic nation" (*minzoku*). According to Doak the construction of a collective identity grounded in cultural specificity means a heightened appreciation of ethnicity; this required Japan to fuse together the ethnic nation and state into the nation-state

(*minzoku kokka*). This concept reinforced Japan's military expansion but also "alienated the Japanese from other Asians" (96); this then was the nature of the Japanese state that was engaged in assimilating the Chinese province of Taiwan.

Exclusionary discourse discriminates against a minority group or race through the force of signification: in being "signified" as an "imperfect" people, the Taiwanese were placed by the Japanese within a "colonized space." While they expressed their fear and resentment, their images were distorted and their bodies dehumanized under the strict system of surveillance. This social-spatial exclusion becomes a means to social control. Foucault noted the spatial configuration of power relations: "A whole history remains to be written of spaces—which would at the same time be the history of powers—from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat" (19). According to Foucault, a highly-controlled colonized space can even result in psychosis; the "mentally ill" (secluded in mental hospitals) are after all one sort of "colonized" people. For Homi Bhabha a colonized people may be either subdued or, by mimicking the colonizer, assimilated; they may also "subvert" the colonizer through more or less violent means. However, most people subjected to the forces of colonization will choose to adapt to the new norms and values of the colonizer's hierarchical system, to be assimilated, instead of risking physical harm by revolting. That is, they will choose to repress their previous values and assumptions in order to avoid further oppression and punishment. In the transformed panopticon of this colonized space,² the controller can after all remain invisible yet his/her control is intensified through an invisible, pervasive network of "communications." The distributed power of this system (this panopticon) is able to punish the "social body" of each individual because each individual is forced to internalize the "discipline" of the all-seeing, all-knowing system.

It is just such a colonized space that Wu Chuo-liu seeks to disclose in his novel *The Orphan in Asia*. One of the most significant works produced under the Japanese hegemonic system, the novel was written between from 1943 and 1945, during the period when the

Japanese were desperately fighting for a lost cause in World War II. This was also the period when the Japanese proclaimed *kominka* discourse to be the only valid literary form, and *kokugo* the only acceptable language in its colonies. Wu's masterpiece portrays the shocking truth that human beings are physically vulnerable to power and surveillance, and can easily be reduced to the mere "products" of codes and disciplines. In Wu's Taiwanese space, the Japanese not only colonized social life but also erected exclusionary boundaries between the normal and the deviant. Those were "normal" who were well-regulated and well-assimilated, while the "deviant" were the mentally ill, the disabled, the criminals and those who resisted the newly-established boundaries. As Eika Tai notes, *kokugo* provided a means for the linguistic assimilation of the subjugated people into the Japanese nation. This *kokugo* ideology implied universalism in the sense of potential application; it suggested that any person who mastered *kokugo* could become Japanese (503). In the discourse of Japanese imperialism, the essence of a Japanese is to belong to the *Yamato minzoku* (Japanese ethnic nation), to possess a *Yamato damashii* (Japanese soul), and have *chukun aikoku* (loyalty to the emperor and love of the country) (504). However, at that time the Taiwanese misunderstood the *kokugo* ideology and did not perceive its complex cultural significance, or its insidious, all-pervasive power.

Wu's protagonist Tai-Ming is a young man who grows up within this hegemonic system or social space constructed by the Japanese. While his parents are not ready to internalize the values of the colonized, Tai-Ming feels the control-system to be natural and identifies himself as a patriot devoted to the Japanese imperial power. In terms of cultural space, Tai-Ming does not have a sense of cultural borders or knowledge of social segregation. To him, anyone who is well-educated, works hard, and masters *kokugo* will surely hold an important position in the Japanese government, and any local inhabitant with ability will surely be promoted to a significant position. Tai-Ming's "self" (or "identity") is based on the praxis of mimicking-the-colonizer, that is the praxis of emulation and assimilation. According to Frances Gouda, this colonial mimicry may

be an extension of that biological mimicry in which organisms take on a superficial resemblance to other organisms or to a given environment, as a way of protecting or concealing themselves; Gouda thus equates mimicry with “camouflage” as defined by Lacan (2). Tai-Ming does not start to question the nature of his “difference,” of his “own” cultural identity until he takes a job in a local elementary school, where he witnesses and himself experiences segregation. Tai-Ming’s gradual process of self-understanding manifests the typical mentality of young people who have encountered a similar pressure to assimilate, mimic, “replicate” a given order or system when they are young, and who then begin to mature, to have more opportunities to talk with different people, to begin to more clearly see their own situation. That is, Tai-ming commences to question his earlier “fantasy” of being part of the great Japanese imperialist empire.

The core of Tai-Ming’s new perception is that he is not a Japanese and that he, as well as other Taiwanese people are indeed never treated—never will really be treated—as Japanese. He comes more clearly to understand the nature of his true Taiwanese-Chinese cultural identity in relation to the difference between himself (as Taiwanese-Chinese) and his Other (the Japanese), for he increasingly sees how (as Taiwanese) he is subject to exclusion by the Japanese, subject to their hatred and scorn. At one point in Wu’s long narrative, for instance, Tai-Ming encounters Japanese policemen who are destroying his ancestor’s tomb; he witnesses his old mother’s helpless resistance. On another occasion he sees a student get beaten by a Japanese educational supervisor. Tai-Ming is shocked to realize the true meaning of “boundary enforcement” as he observes the depth of the antagonism between the Japanese and local Taiwanese. He starts to see also that the Japanese colonizers have slighted and depreciated the cultural traditions of Taiwan. He finds that the boundaries which the Japanese have erected are only for their own benefit. Tai-Ming at this moment is a young man wandering on the edge, the threshold of Taiwan’s cultural heritage. He is caught between the thinking of his own older brother and cousin—who assert the superior value of Japanese culture and sneer at the stupidity of the Taiwanese—and that

of the Taiwanese patriots. He observes the worries of his parents; he witnesses the suffering of his neighbors due to their resistance to a new law imposed on them, and their attempts to protect their own property, the fruits of their work as farmers. He sees how local young men are forced to join the Japanese campaign in the World War, how some proudly sacrifice their lives because the Japanese imperial system has colonized their vulnerable bodies and minds and they imagine that they have sacrificed themselves for the benefit of *their own empire*. Tai-Ming sees also the primal terror embedded in the minds of the people of older generations, and guesses that what is most horrible to them is the realization of the dissolution of their own selves into nothingness.

Tai-Ming then falls in love with a Japanese woman who took a teaching position at his school, and is notified that he has been assigned a teaching job in another school. His Japanese supervisor informs him clearly that his relationship with the lovely Japanese woman needs to be stopped. Tai-Ming is shocked to realize that he, a person who had strived for Japanese values, could be defined as a threat to their own societal values and interests by the Japanese supervisors. He cannot believe that the Taiwanese are considered to be inferior, that a Taiwanese is not allowed to marry a Japanese. Moral panic always brings into focus the boundaries, the "liminal zone" (Sibley 39). Tai-Ming's "cognitive mapping" (Lefebvre) of his surroundings, of the world around him becomes more acute, for he now sees that the expansion of the Japanese empire is closely intertwined with the development of a capitalist world economy. In Wu's novel, labor, military forces and economic interests are, in fact, all represented as elements of power, of the desire for an (ultimately) world-wide hegemony, and his protagonist increasingly comes to see that the Taiwanese socio-cultural space was being appropriated and transformed by, through, according to the colonizers' desire.

Imperialism, like militarism, is after all a political phenomenon. While imperialism seeks size, militarism seeks strength. Imperialism is involved with the power of a nation, the passions of its masses; all these help to generate imperialist ambition and aggression. Cheng-Feng Shih,

in his article on the “national identity” of Wu Chuo-liu, claims that in order to discuss the author’s identity as an embryonic modern Taiwanese, a primordial Han-Chinese, it is necessary to trace four “channels” that are relevant to and for the protagonist of his novel: race, cultural heritage, the power structure and the collective cultural experience (42). All of these channels coincidentally involve the concept of space at the center of the subject, as well as the space between the subject and others (Pile 127). The space of the subjectivity of the colonized as the space of (an) “identity” always belongs to the colonizer. To Tai-Ming, however, the conditions of inclusion and exclusion differ. Sometimes he is included when the situation required his own contribution, and sometimes he is excluded when it involves his “identity” as a Taiwanese, one who chooses to treasure his parents’ cultural heritage. Tai-Ming had not realized that job promotion and marriage would require the “authentic identity” of a Japanese. The death of his younger brother, who was forcibly recruited by the “voluntary community services,” and the death of an old man who was mistaken as one of the rebellious, are regarded as trivial or private things by the Japanese civilians. The definitions of the public and the private, then, along with the allocation and distribution of power, are given by the class that dominates. Tai-Ming increasingly begins to fear that the oppressors’ hysterical oppression will stimulate a more uncontrolled, violent reaction by the Taiwanese, which in turn will allow the oppressors to legalize their oppression.

Tai-Ming’s sense of a “collective identity” continues to develop with his awareness of the socio-cultural space. Throughout his novel, indeed, Wu Chuo-liu presents Tai-Ming as a wanderer not only along the boundary or between two spaces, but also in and through different spaces. Discussing the relationship between the individual and space, Lefebvre noted that space is actually a series of experiences: in its depth and as duplications, echoes, and reverberations, which are engendered and endangered by contrasts (184). But the colonized or colonizing space that surrounds the Taiwanese “subjects” is also, in effect, a surrounding space of violence which can also become or enter into, as Foucault has already suggested, the space of an individual body.

Hinchcliffe says: "As the powerful body accumulates more power, the subjugated body simultaneously loses power" (220). Indeed the body itself *produces* space and becomes a site for "intensifying the articulation of power, desire and disgust, of the individual, the social and the spatial" (Pile 184), which may remind us of Zygmunt Bauman's assertion that the "human attitude"—we might almost think here of a "bodily attitude" or "posture"—in a colonized space is an intricate mixture of interest and fear, reverence and abhorrence, impulsion and repulsion (569–81). In any event, "the body can be a biological phenomenon and the body can be a social phenomenon, but in its power relationships it becomes a site of contestation in a series of economic, political, social and intellectual struggles" (Hall 144).

Wu Chuo-liu the novelist experienced a similar trauma as a young intellectual. His travelogue *Nan-King Tsa Kan* is a private discourse recollecting his experiences in Nan-King and his reflections on China's political crisis and turmoil. Ping-Hui Liao claims that *Nan King Tsa Kan* and *The Orphan in Asia* have an intertextual relationship (298). In Liao's view, Wu as a Taiwanese had to encounter the tension between the two antagonistic cultures (Taiwan/Japan and China/Japan, but in a certain sense also China/Taiwan). Like his protagonist Wu was disillusioned by his identity-searching experiences. From his knowledge of different cultural traditions he constructed an imaginary cultural identity. Wu, like Tai-Ming, was trying to locate the "I" in the field of the other, to use Pile's terms (161). However, this spatial dialectic separated him, in Liao's view, from a "real" socio-cultural space, that is, a real "Taiwanese identity," since the dialectic operates through an opposition between the fantasy of spatial relationships and one's (his) own "spectacular" (we might think here too of Lacan's "specular") place in the world (122).

But ultimately the "orphan" is a child who has lost its (her or his) mother and father. Taiwan, already in some sense "alienated" from the Chinese motherland also had to "lose," at the end of World War II, its *ersatz* or would-be "colonial father" (Japan); no matter how patriarchal and oppressive, how violent, how terrible the father who was lost, the loss still contributed in a certain way to Taiwan's sense of being, at that

particular and very confusing point in history, an abandoned and directionless child. Indeed, Tai-Ming begins to think near the end of the novel that the Taiwanese, dislocated and disoriented as they had become by the time their colonizers were forced to leave, no longer “moved in their own spaces” but rather found themselves enclosed in a space “where the rules were suddenly different once again, and all the markers had been changed.”

NOTES

¹ *Kominka* (imperialization) discourse is a term for the narratives produced during Japanese’s colonial rule over Taiwan. The function of this genre is to serve as propaganda. According to Chang Heng-Hao, *kominka* discourse emerged in the 1940s; it appealed to the psycho-political structure of the Taiwanese under the rule of Japan. See *Tai Wan T suo Chia Chi (A Collection of Taiwan Writers’ Works)* (Taipei: Chien-Wei, 1994) 243–44.

² The Panopticon, an invention of Jeremy Bentham, was a prison/factory designed to control. See Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979) 23–45.

³ According to A.J.Grajdanzev, ten families were to form one *pao* and ten *paos*, one *ko*. Each organization, *pao* and *ko*, elected its chief and the chiefs were assistants to the police. Their duty was to report to the police any movement of the population, especially the presence of any strange or suspicious characters. Anything that happens in this territory was charged to this organization, all members of which were held liable for collective punishment. See “Formosa Under Japan,” *Pacific Affairs* 15.3 (1942): 315.

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