

“Too Long in Foreign Parts”?: An Asian Reception to Cosmopolitanism in Henry James’s *The American*
and *The Portrait of a Lady*¹

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Abstract

The works of Henry James with their attention to cosmopolitanism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provide valuable insight into contemporary expectations of cultural hybridity and globalism. This paper assesses the ways students studying English as a foreign language in Taiwan read the cultural exchanges between Americans and Europeans in James’s *The American* (1877) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). It places the main attention upon how students evaluate James’s characters based upon their own attitudes toward cosmopolitanism, work and leisure, and women’s independence. Informed by the travel theory of Mary Louise Pratt (2008) and Homi Bhabha’s (1994) concept of the third space, it studies the negotiation and subversion of meaning in postcolonial and reverse-colonial contexts. The analysis of student responses reveals that in this culturally hybrid reading site, the limited consciousness technique of James generates judgments of characters’ potentialities based upon the students’ own values. Reconciling the cultural oppositions in the self to become a citizen of the world remains an ideal they do not see fully realized in James’s highly conflicted characters, and, as their own partial views attest, not realizable in their own lives.

Keywords: Henry James, cosmopolitanism, Taiwan, reception studies, travel theory

Introduction

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The transatlantic theme developed by Henry James in novels set in the late 19th century has long provided readers a vicarious travel experience. The developing cosmopolitanism of the late-19th century in such works as *Daisy Miller: A Study* (1879) and the early novels *The American* (1877) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881)² mirrors the more geographically widespread globalism of the 21st century when travelers from Taiwan,³ as well as other Asian countries, are making their own journeys to Europe for business and pleasure. Economically secure, these new travelers now follow in the footsteps of the American travelers in James's novels to find intriguing personalities caught in negotiations involving differing cultural values in an effort to become citizens of the world.

The meaning of the word "cosmopolitan" during the late 19th century could be either negative or positive. In the pejorative sense, as Jessica Berman points out, it indicated the lack of roots and even vagrancy. In the positive sense, it was a kind of post-Enlightenment idealism in the search for universal humanism and a harmonious world community. It supported national interests, both economic and cultural, abroad. As interest in cosmopolitanism increased in the United States, the family magazine *Cosmopolitan*, containing an article by James, started publication in 1886. The aim of the magazine was to promote the development of women's public self and their interest in the world outside of their home and country. The meaning of the title emphasized "the paired virtues of community and worldliness as evidenced in the body, attitude, and especially the voices of its women" (Berman 2001, p. 31).

While focusing on James's realistic "studies" of various social conditions and the consequences of the 19th-century transatlantic travel phenomenon, readers become aware that James is an astute literary

² Hereafter, the shortened form of *Portrait* will be used to indicate *The Portrait of a Lady*.

³ According to the Executive Information system of the Tourism Bureau of the Republic of China, the numbers of travellers from Taiwan to France in 2010 and 2011 rose by 21.6% in the months from January through August. In 2011, 20,837 persons from Taiwan travelled to France with an increase of 26.96% (<http://admin.taiwan.net.tw/statistics/month.aspx?no=135>).

ethnographer and social critic. Influenced by the realism of Gustav Flaubert and the naturalism of Emile Zola, French writers who meticulously scrutinized the social milieu of their times (see Fussell 1991), James uses an “autoethnographic” type of writing as he documents the lives of Americans in Europe. This orientation makes James’s works reflect a “reverse colonization” as Europe during the late-19th and early-20th century was being reinvented by colonial others, a concept put forward by Mary-Louise Pratt (2008).⁴ The history of Americans going to the “mainland” or “the continent” is analogous to the return of Taiwanese businessmen who engage actively in business ventures in China, the mainland from which their ancestors migrated. The reverse colonization trend parallels the American business ventures in Europe in the late 19th century that James wrote about.

This article studies the first encounter of a group of graduate student readers in Taiwan with James’s *The American* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. It examines the interpretive responses of these readers to the judgments on travel, work and leisure, and independence hidden just under the surface of the rich intercultural conversations in the novels. In the social and cultural encoding⁵ of these Jamesian conversations, students encounter a wide array of models for global interaction in the burgeoning globalism cultivated in East Asian countries where many have been reaping the rewards of capitalistic growth. For these readers keenly interested in cosmopolitanism and “cultural exchange,”⁶ what the postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha has defined as a “third space” is created. In the *Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha has posited an interstitial space between a colonizing culture and the colonized. In this space between cultures in a post-colonial context, the language signs of the former may be mimicked

⁴ To her postcolonial scrutiny of the European conquest and anti-conquest literature written by travellers to South America and Africa, Pratt adds an analysis of the later reverse discovery travel of later generations of colonists and mestizos back to Europe (Pratt 2008, p. 237-38).

⁵ The pragmatics of conversational speech acts in James’s highly-charged interchanges between characters with different backgrounds show conflicting viewpoints in varying linguistic registers.

⁶ Jana Gohrisch in ‘Cultural Exchange and the Representation of History in Postcolonial Literature’ adapts the concepts of Peter Burke on cultural exchange to the postcolonial novel and views the author as a mediator: “The novels themselves are part of cultural exchange processes in which their writers act as cultural mediators” (Gohrisch 2006, p 234).

or subverted. The meanings of words and the values of institutionalized social forms are negotiated and re-negotiated. Adopting the stance of a formerly colonized American, James, through his sometimes rather stereotypical fictional American characters, not only mimics but also subverts European customs and mores in a complex negotiation of values. This culturally hybrid “third space” of interpretation in James’s novels becomes an even more complex hybrid meeting place when read in an Asian context; that is, not only American and European ideologies and values are negotiated, but the readers’ own Asian concepts come into play. In their acquisition of language and culture, students from Taiwan adopt and adapt the signs of American and European cultures they are learning to deal with. When reading James, the Taiwanese readers whose views are recounted here entered Bhabha’s space of negotiation, comparing their own values with those already being negotiated in the novels. That is, in reading, an individual’s own multi-perspectival “partiality” is brought into an affective relationship with the partiality in others.

The Asian readers in this study mainly⁷ included graduate students in two of my classes at Providence University, a private Roman Catholic university in Taiwan. One course was a graduate special topic seminar on the works of Henry James while the other course focused on modernism in poetry and considered the influence of Baudelaire and the *flâneur* lifestyle on American modernist poets. Most of the students were Taiwanese; however, one of the students was Korean. One of the women works as a teaching assistant in a grade school and has two children of her own; the Korean student has grown children living abroad. Having lived in Taiwan for a number of years, she was able to provide insights on the experience of both travel and living in a foreign country. The other students, four male students and five female students were between 23 and 25 years old. I asked the students to respond in writing to excerpts from James’s two novels based upon their own understanding of the texts. They also each wrote a final term paper for the course on James’s novels. In the course on modernist poetry, I asked

⁷ Besides analyzing the graduate students comments, I also refer briefly to ideas on “Daisy Miller: A Study” from undergraduate students in a class in American Literature at National Taipei University.

the students, most of whom had also taken the course on James, to specifically comment on the flâneur lifestyle in James and on a selected group of poets from the early 20th century. For the following reception study, I have selected comments from the students' writings and class discussions which illustrate the kinds of negotiations they are making with James's texts.⁸

The readers' evaluative judgments of character upon which this reception study is based are divided into three areas of cultural exchange value. They show how the students evaluate James's characters based on their own attitudes toward (a) cosmopolitanism, (b) work and leisure, and (c) women's independence. As readers encounter the multiplicity of views and prejudices that emerge in the plots of the novels, one also discovers that behind the characters' desire to achieve experience and personal fulfillment is James's insistence on the concept of freedom, an idea that remains appealing to students whose acquisition of English promises to empower them with a means to explore the world beyond their own culture.

The Man-of-the-World

In *Daisy Miller: A Study*, (1879), the character Winterbourne makes the pithy comment that he has "lived too long in foreign parts" (James 1984, p 50) to fully appreciate the fresh naïveté of the American girl Daisy. Some undergraduate students attempted to interpret this phrase in an extraordinary way that offered a secondary meaning to the word parts used in this passage. Literally, the word parts means foreign countries or places away from America, both Winterbourne and James's homeland; however, under a deconstructive reading 'parts' may also indicate that the speaker is a person who has a divided identity, he has been living a life composed of native and foreign parts. Taking their lead, I further deconstruct the phrase to perceive Winterbourne's versatility in adapting to the manners of several cultures. As the common idiom describes such persons, he could be considered "a man of many

⁸ I am grateful to the editor for suggestions concerning the discussion of the students' reception to James's works and the development of other concepts in the paper.

parts.” That is, having lived abroad, Winterbourne is a self-made cosmopolitan. The underlying negative tone of Winterbourne’s comment could reflect the emotional reaction to the cultural hybridity and inner conflict experienced both by Winterbourne and James himself: both collect, study, and learn from national “specimens”⁹ of European society and Continental traditions while at the same time they strive to break free of cultural constraints and conventions. This contradiction is especially poignant in *Portrait* where Isabel’s “determination to see, to try and to know, attracts her towards European civilization, yet her moral integrity guarantees her immunity” (Lee 1978, p. 36). Such a culturally divisive condition and vacillation may be a result of partial assimilation to a foreign culture, the adoption of values and codes of behavior that alienate oneself from another self.

The vacillation between perspectives in James’s characters is found first in *The American* and then is developed to its fullest extent in *Portrait*. In the latter half of the 1890’s James “explored a kind of radical perspectivalism, the question of what can one see and—since that is never the whole picture—how one fills in the gaps, in ways that may be tested against others’ equally partial perceptions but never against an objective standard” (Peter Brooks 2007, pp. 99-100). The depictions of character in the works of James that provide limited and shifting points of view¹⁰ are thus an in-between site or third space of cultural mixing where the language and values of more than one culture coexist and undercut one another even within one person, who may be seen as divided, like Winterbourne, into native and foreign parts.

For readers, the affective responses to such partially defined and changing characters are also divided

⁹ The word “specimen” is often used to indicate a person from another culture in *Portrait*. The narrator says that Isabel is prone to use it often. It occurs in Chapter VII as Lord Warburton is described by Ralph as “A specimen of an English gentleman” (*Portrait* 1991, p. 92). Also, Osmond in Chapter XXIV is thought to be a “specimen apart” (*Portrait*, p. 291).

¹⁰ Brooks likens the limited consciousness in James to “perspectivalism” in impressionist painting and claims that the late novels of James are “highly perspectival” in that “they depend on the play of seeing and the unseen, of knowledge and ignorance” (Brooks 2007, p. 2).

and subject to a similarly partial recognition. Gilles Deleuze, in his *Cinema I*, examines the power on the audience, or the affect, of the close-up in film, relating it to how the portrait in painting is partial in the viewer's perception. The close-up focus or a sequence of close-ups upon parts of the self allows an author to provide a virtual dimension or conjunction to a character, and the reader must fill in the gaps. The face of the represented figure or character is both "turning toward" the viewer and "turning away" (Deleuze 1986, p. 104) at the same time. The turning away allows for all sorts of sensations:

The expressed - that is, the affect - is complex because it is made up of all sorts of singularities that it sometimes connects and into which it sometimes divides. This is why it constantly varies and changes qualitatively according to the connections that it carries out or the divisions that it undergoes. This is the *Dividual*, that which neither increases nor decreases without changing qualitatively. What produces the unity of the affect at each instant is the virtual conjunction assured by the expression, face or proposition.

(Deleuze 1986, p 104-105)

In Winterbourne's gaze on Daisy and in the reflexive gaze, we have the possibilities or virtualities of the multicultural individual in a cosmopolitan or globalized situation. The partiality of each of the characters draws the reader into the potential "becoming" of that character. Moreover, in James's ethnographic sketches, many of the characters' singularities are culturally embedded, the uncertainties allowing for the play of affect between characters and the readers. The partially conceived cultural singularities add mystery to the affective power of the image. As the students' mis/interpretation verifies, Winterbourne has for too long been divided into parts and partialities because of his partial assimilation to foreign cultures and the ever-turning away figure of the American Daisy evades his gaze. When reading such interactions between characters who only have partial views of one another, the readers, who are also limited by their own individual and cultural singularities, boost the becoming of the character to produce varying interpretations.

While Winterbourne's "man-of-the-world" image suggested a multifaceted perspective of events in the novella to undergraduates, intercultural seminar discussion in the graduate class allowed for a deeper level of analysis. Here, students came up with varying views on the cosmopolitanism of characters in *The American* and *Portrait*, questioning how these characters were internationalized. In *The American*, James introduces a striking national contrast through the friendship of the discovery-making American, the innocent Newman, or "new" man, and Valentin de Bellegarde, a Frenchman, who is to serve as a "specimen" of James's cosmopolitan "man-of-the-world." The younger Bellegarde's family heritage is mixed: his mother is of English nobility while his father's family is French aristocracy going back to the ninth century. The novel attempts to join the American entrepreneur with the French family when Newman wants to marry Mme de Cintré, the sister of his friend Valentin, but Newman's romance is doomed to failure. As James W. Tuttleton puts it:

How such a family, as James conceived them, could have permitted themselves even for a moment to suffer the lounging, slangy, socially illiterate American manufacturer of wash-tubs and leather goods is a nice question—one that James does not really wish us to ask. (Tuttleton 1980, p. 111)

Tuttleton sees here a lapse in realism, noting that not only were American readers uncomfortable with Newman's sloppiness but that the corruption and decadence of the French aristocratic family was also too much to bear. In their own negotiation of meaning, however, the Taiwanese graduate students appreciated Newman's naïveté, by contrast with the sophistication of the French family whom they saw as a vivid example of aristocratic decadence. Even though he "has no taste in art," one student observed, Newman can afford a journey in Europe, where he can buy art objects to take back to America and perhaps "find a suitable bride to decorate his life."¹¹ The older Taiwanese woman in class

¹¹ The students in the class gave their written consent to be quoted anonymously.

reflected that “The European culture is focused on form and ceremony while the American is focused on utility; the European culture is focused on art while the American is focused on nature.” She further claimed that Newman wanted to “show his frankness to Valentin. He is busy looking for a wife [. . .] James was trying to judge Newman in a different way, straight but impolite.” Giving a higher value to frankness than to politeness, the student judged Newman’s behavior as acceptable to her. Other students agreed that he should not be blamed for “lounging” about Europe in his bungling attempt to become a “man-of-the world.” His searching for a wife is, for them, an understandable purpose for his journey.

A male student was particularly interested in James’s corruption theme in regard to Newman, in which the character is said to be innocent until he encounters the corruptive influence of the continent of Europe. The student created the alliterated phrase “corruptive continent” for his term paper in which he wrote: “James gives the Europe he portrays a power to affect the human mind, and victims are endangered by Europeans or Europeanized foreigners.” The student further commented upon how Newman gradually becomes more “aggressive.” The “dark effect the Continent has posed on Newman simply turns him toward evil,” but all he suffers is a cancelled engagement with Claire de Centr . In the end, he keeps “his freedom from the Continent’s gloominess.”

The Frenchman Valentin was even more attractive to the students than the innocent Newman. The students read him as a modern man in rebellion against his own corrupt family. In fact, James’s description of him as a “man-of-the-world” means that he should be able to transcend class and tradition to find his own freedom of expression. First, two readers noticed that Valentin speaks English fluently; so here, they surmised that being a “man-of-the-world” first of all should involve knowing another language. Their attitude expressed here echoes the common refrain in Taiwan and in the university that English is a lingua franca they need in the globalized world. Second, another student remarked on the maturity in Valentin’s conversation: “Newman knows he [Valentin] isn’t just a

traditional Frenchman. His speech is full of passion and reason.” A very sympathetic response from a female student even went so far as to note that Valentin is “lonely in spirit.” Having had no close friends before meeting Newman, he has to endure criticism for striking up the friendship with Newman from his own family of strict French aristocrats molded by unbreakable traditional rules. The student sees Valentin as an enterprising individual, who, in spite of his overbearing family code, has acquired his own personality and freedom, which is “dangerous to aristocratic social virtues.”

Thinking that Valentin has developed a “modern mind,” for some students similar to their own aspirations or in rebellion against time-honored Asian traditions held by the family, the readers in the class were generally shocked by the way James set up Valentin’s death scene in a duel. The reversion to a past code of honor was out of keeping with the sympathetic changing portrait they had been constructing of Valentin from their various subjective viewpoints. The duel, the result of his affair with Newman’s artist friend, showed that the “man-of-the-world” was obviously conflicted between his outdated aristocratic values and his friendships with the enterprising modern American and a lower class French woman, who was an artist. For the Taiwanese students, Valentin’s death involved an adjustment of values that they were reluctant to accept.

When the aristocratic Valentin, who has fallen in love with the bohemian artist, finds out at the opera (Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*) that she has another paramour, he arranges a duel to settle the matter. The events of the novel then take a turn for the worse, which left many students baffled. First of all, the romance of Valentin with the artist, which reflects the bohemian life of the “Belle Epoque,” does not coincide very well with the students’ earlier concept of Valentin as being in a just rebellion against his traditions. Although there is a similar Chinese tradition in literature of the “Flowery Gentleman,” such a figure is usually condemned for his profligate behavior. Second, students would agree with Newman that a duel to settle a matter of romance is not the best option. When Newman challenges Valentin with “You are too good to go and get your throat cut for a prostitute,” Valentin responds “one’s

honour hasn't two different measures. It only knows that it is hurt; it doesn't ask when, or how, or where" (James 1965, p. 238). In order to explain Valentin's behavior, one class member insightfully related Valentin's problem to the Asian concept of "face." To keep face is to keep one's reputation free of blame from others: "The French are very complex and veil their mind behind their smile because of social honors and face. Valentin can't change his aristocratic background," she wrote. As long as the aristocratic Valentin can keep his pride and honor, even the association with the bohemian artist is acceptable. The duel over the lady's attentions will allow him to keep his honor or face.

However, the duel itself has two dimensions, perhaps not very well understood in the students' reading. In fact, the duel was not taken so seriously by Valentin. It is a part of his dandy or *flâneur*¹² spirit. He explains to Newman, "Quite apart from the goodness of the cause in which a duel may be fought, it has a kind of picturesque charm which in this age of vile prose seems to be greatly to recommend it. It's a remnant of a high-tempered time; one ought to cling to it." It is only an out-dated, "picturesque" fashion that brings about Valentin's death because Valentin's opponent, the rich son of a German businessman, does not share the same lightminded, or in Newman's words "theatrical," viewpoint about duels. Whereas Valentin's pistol shot only intentionally grazes his opponent, in a second shot, the more serious German aims for and hits close to the heart of the Frenchman.

The opinions among this group of students on the comparative cultural differences between the characters of Newman and Valentin were rather consistent with one another. They realized that being a "man-of-the-world" in James's realistic work does not lead to an idealistic state of harmony between

¹²Valentin is the character who most resembles Baudelaire's *flâneur*; certainly more than any of the American colonists or discoverers in the novel who are only just learning to be leisurely and artistically inclined and doing this far too self-consciously. Benjamin (1999) in fact does mark the behavior of the *flâneur* as being "modern" (p79). As Baudelaire defined the *flâneur*, he must be a person of means, one who does not need to work for his daily sustenance and who can be free to paint or write.

the various national characteristics. Valentin's aristocratic upbringing and economic dependence upon his family are at odds with his freedom-loving nature. In conflict with his flâneur spirit, it would be potentially impossible for Valentin to accept Newman's offer to find him a job in America as a banker. Likewise, it is equally difficult for Newman to become the true cosmopolitan he would like to be even though Valentin calls Newman a "man of the world with a vengeance" (James 1981, p. 97). Just as Newman and Valentin understand each other only partially and from their own points of view, the students tended to see the text as making sense to them from the perspective of the values of their own time and place. They made their value judgments relevant to their own experiences and were put at a distance by some of the period aspects in James's novel.

Negotiating between Work and Leisure

The success in industry and hard work by Newman-like entrepreneurs and their employees in the United States after the Civil War produced a new leisure class under capitalism¹³ to join the upper crust of American society from New England. The journey to Europe allowed these travelers a view of alternate ways to spend their money. Some travelers chose to remain in Europe, and their lives are part of a history of reverse colonization. The children of this generation could well become dandies, with characteristics in common with the French flâneur lifestyle with the leisure to travel and engage in pleasurable modern pursuits.

Having become rich, Christopher Newman in *The American* is a would-be flâneur who wants to travel around Europe and view the sights and stroll the streets of Paris. He is described as a loafer by a missionary from America whose congregation has supported their minister's trip to Europe to see the grand architectural and artistic achievements (James 1981, p. 71). In *Portrait*, the old man Touchett, a

¹³ The conspicuous consumption of the American colonizers of Europe in this period is to be explained in the theory of the leisure class by Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (1899), which was contemporary with James's early novels.

retired international banker who has worked hard all of his life, complains, “all you young men are too idle. You think too much of your pleasure. You’re too fastidious, and too indolent, and too rich” (James 1991, p. 37). And yet his son Ralph is unable to enjoy the active life of the flâneur because he is seriously ill. The newly arrived Isabel also criticizes the other Americans she meets in Europe rather openly: ““You all live here this way, but what does it lead to?” she was pleased to ask. ‘It doesn’t seem to lead to anything, and I should think you’d get very tired of it’” (James 1991, p. 240). One of the women that Isabel first sees as a model of leisure for her to follow is Mme Merle, who travels around to the homes of her friends, cultivating the arts of piano playing and drawing. But, given the chance to travel around the world with this lady, Isabel doesn’t particularly enjoy the journey or learn as much as she had hoped to.

In Walter Benjamin’s insight, “basic to flânerie, among other things, is that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labor” (Benjamin 1999, p. 453). He then explains that poets and writers find inspiration for their works from such a lifestyle. In order to determine how students felt about the flâneur lifestyle, I asked the students in the modern poetry class, most of whom were also in the Henry James course, to give their opinions on Benjamin’s illustration of the role and its relation to cultural production. Interestingly, they gave somewhat gender-distinctive opinions. A very precise response from a male student was that

Sadly, this kind of life style cannot be tolerated in Taiwan as a business island. Life needs to be tight and we are required to make contributions every day to different aspects. The city could be a very good place to proceed with a flâneur lifestyle if we avoid our obligations which traditional society asks us to do. Life can never be so easy.

Another male student stated that “Artistic works provide pleasures, but that is the problem. Pleasures can’t be seen. We’re always being asked to provide something for profits in this era; we have to have

money, houses, and so on.” He says that he actually would like to become a hermit; stay away from people and live in the mountains with his dog “till death if reality would allow me to do that—ha.”

A woman student had a more positive opinion of leisure that was rather philosophical: “The leisure might be good to create art. [But even] without money and time, if you have an open mind, you can live a leisurely life. Without an open mind, you cannot enjoy life or see anything leisurely.” Another woman was quite clear with her negative opinion: “I don’t like this kind of lifestyle. I would like my life to have a purpose, have a goal, which will encourage me to continue my life. The goals are my energy.” Another conscientiously said, “It would be great to have the money and time, but I still want to do something so I wouldn’t lose myself.” Another commented on the relative freedom enjoyed by men: “The leisurely life for women is mostly in the house, a chamber. Men can take the outside as a place of leisure.” Referring to the characters in *Portrait*, another woman student made a comparison between Mme Merle, who is a Jamesian *flâneuse*, and Isabel: “Mme Merle is a woman who travels around to escape her emptiness in her heart. She is not the legal wife, so she cannot stay with her daughter. Travelling is her way to run away, not to enjoy life. [On the other hand] Isabel is using her wealth to support her husband and be a housewife. So Isabel is doing something far more meaningful than Mme. Merle”. The modernist aspect of *flânerie* led to another insight from the students. “The flaneur lifestyle might focus more on the individual matters. The artistic idea needs to exist not to make a difference in the social situation, but make a statement about identity.” This attitude toward life is a “force against the mainstream. An alternative lifestyle, like the stay-at-home geeks today.” Today “young people are just trying to escape, they don’t know the reality or are afraid to face it.”

The 21st-century Taiwanese readers’ sentiments about leisure parallel rather closely those of James’s characters on their first encounter with the leisure class in 19th-century Europe. James seems to view leisure as an affliction, even at times a disease, and the cosmopolitan man or woman of many parts must negotiate between the extremes of being responsible in a puritanical way or of living the role of the

European flâneur, be it a fetishistic art collector, or an idle expatriate reverse colonist.

Evaluating the Independence of Women

Sara Blair reasons that James learned to reject a masculine, aggressive approach to foreign cultures while developing his ethnographic style of writing with the result that he changed his protagonists from male to female travelers (Blair 1996, pp. 15-39). In *Portrait* several women characters demonstrate a range of attitudes toward travel and independence for women. In this section, I will focus upon the students' reactions to the characters of Mrs. Touchett, Isabel Archer, and Henrietta Stackpole. James allows each of these women to have a different view of the roles of women; however, as one student perceived, they "still have neither social powers or voices." Although "they had liberal thinking, they did not expand their social world to the other [European] world."

One of the most interesting characters for the student readers in the class was the character of Mrs. Touchett, the aunt who brings the orphaned Isabel to Europe. Their opinions were highly divergent, however, and revealed family problems that James himself does not emphasize in *Portrait*. In fact, she became for the older women students an object of criticism with interpretations that reveal a concern for her role as wife and mother. On the contrary, the younger students, and especially one male student, appreciated her independent style. Mrs. Touchett is a prime example of a modern woman. In her freedom of movement she represents a cosmopolitan woman of the period. She has chosen to live separately from her banker husband in her villa in Florence and spends time in travel between her relatives in America, her husband and son in England, and her house in Florence. Her use of the telegram in Chapter I brings up concepts of women's independence of speech and action. The topic of conversation of the male characters—her son Ralph, his father Mr. Touchett, and Ralph's neighbor and friend Lord Warburton—is about Mrs. Touchett and her use of telegrams to communicate with her family about what has happened to her on her recent visit to America. The interlocutors are concerned

about the interpretation of the cryptic language in the telegram and the fact that they cannot assume anything about her plans from such a telegram, which reads: "Changed hotel, very bad, impudent clerk, address here. Taken sister's girl, died last year, go to Europe, two sisters, quite independent" (James 1991, p. 40). The three men interpret her telegram thus:

[Ralph] "She chiefly communicates with us by means of telegrams, and her telegrams are rather inscrutable. They say women don't know how to write them, but my mother has thoroughly mastered the art of condensation"

....

"You'll see for yourself," said Lord Warburton. "When does Mrs. Touchett arrive?"

[Ralph] "We're quite in the dark; as soon as she can find a decent cabin. She may be waiting for it yet; on the other hand she may already have disembarked in England."

....

[Lord Warburton] "In that case she would probably have telegraphed to you."

....

[Mr. Touchett] "She never telegraphs when you would expect it—only when you don't," said the old man. "She likes to drop on me suddenly; she thinks she'll find me doing something wrong. She has never done so yet, but she's not discouraged."

....

[Ralph] "It's her share in the family trait, the independence she speaks of."

....

[Mr. Touchett] "Whatever the high spirit of those young ladies may be, her own is a match for it. She likes to do everything for herself and has no belief in any one's power to help her. She thinks me of no more use than a postage-stamp without gum, and she would never forgive me if I should presume to go to Liverpool to meet her." (James 1991, pp. 39-40)

Whereas throughout the novel James uncharacteristically suspends a possible negative judgment of Mrs. Touchett, the readers in Taiwan saw her exercise of freedom quite clearly and had distinctive judgments about it. Two female students described her as “manly” because she prefers to do things by herself. They believed that she had an independence that from their own experience of life could be enjoyed only by men. She is, as one older woman student said, “delightfully free: free to express herself in her own way, free to live independently from her husband, and free to release a mother’s tight rein on her son.” Other comments attributed her independent power to her age. These students saw her as a “typical old woman” who has the right to make her own choices because of her age. The following comment from a married woman also sympathetically took into consideration the husband’s attitude toward his wife’s independence:

Mr. Touchett is such a kind old good man to his long absent wife. He does not argue that his wife should keep company with him and lets her be free and independent in such a great range that I want to say [I feel] sorry for him. He is indeed a nice person. Though woman’s free attitude at that time is not so high as [what] Mrs. Touchett has, her husband does a great deed for her compared to Mr. Osmond who does not give such freedom to Isabel to go to see her cousin when Ralph is sick at the edge of his life.

Rather than directly criticizing Mrs. Touchett, the student chose to praise the attitude of the husband who would allow his wife to travel widely. That is, he allows her to enjoy her freedom; in the student’s eyes, this freedom is not something she naturally has a right to.

Both Taiwanese and Korean older female readers with families saw Mrs. Touchett as inconsiderate of her husband and son. It would be more polite for her to “write a letter” as one of them put it. Their traditional and rather conservative view is that the family will suffer from such a travelling woman’s behavior. They are also concerned that she does not take good care of her ailing son. A younger male student, however, lauded Mrs. Touchett’s independence and appreciated her freedom to travel as she

wishes. He noticed that “her very strength and independence are represented in her laconic style in the telegram.” Although her son Ralph is facetiously saying that his mother is an expert at condensing her messages in the telegram when he claims that his “mother has mastered the art of condensation,” the reader holds that she is indeed quite successful in communicating “just what she wants to say.” He furthermore condemned the elder Mr. Touchett’s comments as “sexist.” He interpreted the situation to some depth as follows: “The telegram’s message concerns women’s feeling, and this is what men like Mr. Touchett usually overlook; otherwise they would understand Mrs. Touchett better.” The students thus expressed a wide range of sentiments about this figure of the older generation of women in James’s novel, ranging from their concepts of the traditional family under mother’s care to feminist theory.

With respect to the younger character of Isabel Archer, the “lady” in James novel’s title *Portrait of a Lady*, the concept of independence is even more problematic. The novel’s plot allows the orphaned Isabel to travel with Mrs. Touchett and subsequently to learn her own brand of independence. Isabel’s case shows that James’s female characters’ expression of freedom is often found in women’s rejection of the relationships others thrust upon her. In this international game of romance with the cards of gender, race and economics played out most adroitly in *Portrait*, freedom of choice is found when the more refined and largely self-educated American Isabel conquers an English Lord in Lord Warburton, only to reject him and the institutional role of “lady” for marriage with Gilbert Osmond, an effete American art collector who has no money. Although James allows the younger woman to choose her own husband, she later discovers that she was wrong in her estimation of Osmond. The horrible irony behind these seemingly free choices is that unbeknownst to her she has been reaping the benefits of her cousin, the terminally-ill Ralph, who asked that his father leave a large part of his own inheritance to Isabel. Ralph watches over her intensely to find out what happens to her as a result of this gift, and of course he is disillusioned when he sees that she has made a great mistake in her marriage choice. Here, in a kind way Isabel has been manipulated by her cousin Ralph.

The students sympathize with Isabel's predicament. One student says that she is a "butterfly that lost its freedom." Another noticed that Isabel has been an inveterate reader from childhood. This has made her overly "fond of her imaginary world and [she] intentionally avoids seeing the real world. Her romantic characteristic influences her whole life." The same student also writes that "Her confidence in life conflicts with reality. She thinks that she has the authority to make decisions and choices for her own life, including even about her husband, Osmond. But she is deceived [...] because of her lack of experience and the fortune given her by her cousin." Finally, when "she is shocked back from her imaginary life into reality, in this process she transforms from a girl into an adult woman." When I asked the students what the term "lady" meant in the novel, some thought that "lady" just indicated that she was an upper class woman; others thought that she was "becoming a lady" because she was in the process of developing into a grown woman.

As to whether or not Isabel is a cosmopolitan woman, as James envisions her, a student thought that "Isabel can be called a cosmopolitan woman because her unconventional desire for independence and freedom is quite distinguished compared to the traditional way of women's life." This comment uncovers the idea that when a woman remains tied to national traditions and convention, she has little independence. Even though cosmopolitanism of the day allowed women to develop themselves, there were still many restrictions upon their behavior, and some of those restrictions were strictly maintained by American males living in Europe. One example is that Osmond, after he has married Isabel and accessed her fortune, will not allow her to travel to England to attend to her dying cousin Ralph. Students agreed that Osmond is being very cruel. Isabel has a right to visit a dying relative. This is the proper behavior for family members in such a situation. Moreover, as a mature student reflects, Ralph is a loving person.

The other important woman character in *Portrait* is Isabel's friend Henrietta Stackpole, who serves as

a foil to Isabel and her development. She seems to be a radical feminist and a nationalist. She wants Isabel to marry the American entrepreneur Goodwood¹⁴ rather than let her assimilate to the European society. Both male and female students agreed with Stackpole that Isabel's practical-minded American suitor Goodwood would have been the best man for Isabel to marry. The student who interprets Isabel as an imaginative dreamer sees Henrietta as a realist, with a "clear point of view of reality." As a newspaper and magazine reporter, Henrietta, like James, travels with a definite purpose to investigate and report upon the European scene, finding her "specimens" in this foreign culture and in turn judging their behavior against her own standards. Orphaned like Isabel, Stackpole works hard at her job to earn money for her own life; she is what could be called today a career woman. She is praised by the Korean student for paying the school fees for the children of her widowed sister. She is just like a "man supporting his family."

Whereas the students hold a rather positive view of Stackpole's energetic life which they see as very meaningful, James has gone to great lengths to make her into a caricature of the inquisitive reporter and to criticize her narrow views of European culture. He introduces an irony in the fact that she becomes closely attached to an Englishman who keeps promising to introduce her to English nobility so that she can write about their life. Mrs Touchett pejoratively claims that such women belong to a "boarding-house civilization" that she highly detests (James 1991, p. 122). The students required explanations for such institutional terminology and generally did not pick up the humor in the inquisitive reporter stereotype and working-class connotation of the surname Stackpole.

The freedom of women is a dominant strain in *Portrait*. Most of the women in the novel are thinking

¹⁴ Goodwood, like Newman in *The American*, is a man who has made his fortune in American industry. In the students' experience, he is comparable to such Taiwanese entrepreneurs as Wang, Yung-ching, who made a fortune in plastics and whose company is now global, and the more recent tycoon Guo, Tai-Ming who through investment in electronics in Mainland China and elsewhere is now a billionaire. His company is the largest one of its kind in the world. Wang's daughter Cher, who founded HTC, is also a billionaire and the richest woman in Taiwan.

independently and want to experience life in travel, but they are still dependent upon the support of their husbands. Indeed, James was reluctant to give an entirely positive portrait of an independent woman, as evidenced Miss Chancellor in *The Bostonians* (1886), James's examination of turn of the 19th-century American feminist movement. One need only compare the comments of the early critics of *Portrait*, such as Morse (1881), Noble (1882) and Edgar Fawcett (1884), which focus only on Isabel's beauty and grace¹⁵ to realize that the contemporary Taiwanese readers have perceived Isabel's struggle for freedom more clearly than these early critics. Women's rights were only won in the mid-20th century in China and Taiwan. Many women today travel at their own expense, unlike Isabel, who travels on an inheritance, or Osmond's sister, who is unhappily dependent upon a wealthy husband.

Conclusion

The truly global identity, like the cosmopolitan one, as this study shows, is likely to remain an ideal. In James's reinvention of Europe, national traits prevail in his American travelers and reverse colonists, even as they become deeply involved in various aspects of European life. The protagonists communicate in a language of a third space where meanings and values are constantly shifting, and where both American and European values are often subverted. The reverse colonists, both those who assimilate more or less completely to European life, like Gilbert Osmond, and those who live abroad but keep their American values, like the Tristrams, are judged rather negatively in the negotiations for meaning in James's novels. In another age of globalization from that of James's era, as this study has demonstrated, contemporary reading of James's novels outside of the Western world also opens up further spaces for textual negotiation and production of meaning. For the readers in Taiwan involved in this study, many of their interpretations transpired in a third space in negotiations among and between their own values, especially on travel, work, leisure and gender roles, and those of European and American characters, the writer, and of their American teacher, who participated in the discussions.

¹⁵ Such platitudes about women are that Isabel "does what nearly every woman of her personal graces would do under the same conditions" (Fawcett 1884 in Gargano 1987, p. 51)

The travelling man and woman are important figures in James's works, with far-reaching resonance across time and space, as attested by these Taiwanese students' responses. In particular, newly empowered women in Asia have their own personal views on the strengths and weaknesses—even the morality—of James's colonists, explorers and "exploratresses."¹⁶ To travel widely on the one hand carries a measure of respect; however, on the other hand, under these readers' gaze the loafing behavior of James's quite distinctively *nouveau-riche* American renditions of the would-be flâneur figure invited criticism. On the issue of work versus leisure, national opinions favoring a work ethic dominated in the negotiation, in spite of the attraction to enjoy the fruits of idleness. On the issue of women's independence, traditional family values remained strong for some students while others held a modern concept of women's freedom. By contrast, there was consensus on James's condemnation of unfair manipulation.

Brooks notes that James liked the French writer Balzac precisely for the freedom that he gave to his characters to develop in a natural way without too much manipulation: the "liberty of the subject" in Balzac's romanticism is praised by James, and, contrarily, he criticizes "the manipulators of others" [who] tend to be morally stigmatized, and to impose fatal rigidities on life" (Brooks 2007, p. 60-61). James's critique of imperialist discourse and of ancient cultural traditions and hegemonies in Europe is associated with his support of the freedom of the individual to make choices and develop in one's own chosen way. This freedom also extends to readers of James's works. The ambiguities and partialities in the minds and hearts of the cosmopolitan men and women of James's world have been transformed into the experiences of people who find themselves involved in similar cultural exchanges in the globalism of the present.

¹⁶ Pratt borrows and translates the term from Marie-Claire Hooek-Demarle, ("Le Langage littéraire des femmes enquêtrices," in S Michaud 1985, ed. *Un fabuleux destin: Flora Tristan*, Editions Universitaires, Dijon), (Pratt 2008, p 158).

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