

How Should We Read Literature from a Certain Area from the Viewpoints of Other Language-speaking Areas?¹

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Abstract

The concept of “world literature” can be viewed as insisting on returning to reading a text without the mechanical use of literary theory. This means, as Zhang Longxi notes, referring to Kermode, “tak[ing] whatever theoretical help you fancy, but follow[ing] your nose” (Zhang 2010, 7; Kermode 2004, 85)² and reading literature through multidimensional interpretations. If I can regard the reading of a text put in the framework of literary theory as a kind of paternalistic and dogmatic “check-up,” then I will label the alternative, reading literature in a kind of follow-your-nose way, Rogerian empathy—the understanding of the “voice” of a text from its internal framework of references. However, this raises a simple question: How should we read literature from a certain area from the viewpoints of other language-speaking areas? “The deconstruction,” Paul de Man says, “constituted the text in the first place” (1979, 17), but if so, meanings of sentences are defined on the basis of a reader’s socio-cultural background—such as traditions, ways of thinking, and laws—and emotion. A person’s reading of literature in another language might always result in misreading in a sense. However, we cannot simply call it misreading, because “I feel, therefore I am.” From a neurological perspective, intelligence and emotion are united. Intelligence and feeling link to the faculty of reason, and emotion has a critical role in enhancing one’s faculties. As brain

¹ This study was supported by [JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 25370672](#). This paper is based on the manuscript

² The page number in Zhang comes from the Japanese translation.

scientist Antonio R. Damasio mentions, “Emotion, feeling and biological regulation all play a role in human reasoning” (2005, 8). In our global society, we should empathize with and understand voices, or *interpretations*, in the world, and discuss them together on a world scale in order to cross-culturally understand each other and promote peace.

Keywords: world literature, comparative literature, literary theory, cross-cultural

1. Introduction

Currently, as scholars of world literature, such as Zhang Longxi, Haun Saussy, and David Damrosch, insist, critics should not just put a framework of literary theory onto a literary text and make a rigid distinction between a good text and a bad text, or an oppressive and a non-oppressive one. First, we should read a text, and then, if there is some problem we cannot overlook, we should use theory. Otherwise, we do not need to read or think or have our own viewpoints: We just blindly follow a theoretical hegemony.

Still, how can we read literature from the viewpoint of another language-speaking area? Also, what is the significance of such an act? In this paper, I develop my current answer to the questions by referring to readings and studies of English and Japanese literature for Japanese readers, which I hope can be applied to the cases of readers in other areas.

To this end, let me start by referring to Miyazaki Yoshizō, a famous Japanese scholar of literature in English. He says in the conclusion of his book *The Pacific War and Anglicists*:

In my mind, academic research has to do with a scholar's own way of life. I want to be who I am in my life. As long as one is who one is, naturally one's own viewpoint will be born. I say that the mind without one's own viewpoint is in a preceding stage of thinking. So is the mind of the author of *The History of British Literature*. (1999, 145)³

The History of British Literature was written by Saitō Takeshi, who is known as a pioneer of academic research on literature in English in Japan. The reason for Saitō's being in a "preceding stage of thinking," according to Miyazaki, is that "the methods used in research on British literature in Japan were clearly different before and after the publication of the book in the sense that Saitō used the same methods in his book as British scholars did" (ibid., 42–3). This means that Saitō simply imported the methods used in the United Kingdom. From

³ All the quotations from Japanese books including Miyazaki's are translated by the author.

Miyazaki's viewpoint, Saitō merely imitated British scholars, and hence, he and his book are in a preceding stage of thinking. Miyazaki thinks that at the core of academic research on literature in English, there should be an individual way of thinking and behaving born from the tensions between oneself and a situation that one is put in—for instance, the particular region of Japan, the times of war, or individual experiences one goes through. Miyazaki continues,

[i]f a scholar cleanly cuts off himself or herself from the world, closing his or her eyes to tensions in the world, thinking “This is this, that is that,” he or she will lose himself or herself as a whole, split off. As a familiar case, a scholar who has lost him- or herself faithfully attends to the introduction of research in foreign countries, or to stretch the point, is led by a general trend, without stopping and thinking. (Ibid., 143)

Yoshio Nakano, another famous Japanese scholar of English literature, asserts that when one is who one is, “no matter what the government authorities and the society say, he or she never loses himself or herself, or anything” (ibid., 102). This means, of course, not completely cutting oneself off from the world, but fighting against conformism. He wrote this during World War II under very unusual circumstances. English teachers and scholars of literature in English were branded as public enemies who taught the language and literature of hostile countries. In order for scholars to maintain their integrity under the scrutiny and urging of government authorities and the world, says Miyazaki, individual thinking power is critical (ibid., 120).

There are no thought police or days when people are frightened about aerial bombing in contemporary Japan. However, Japanese government authorities and society are insistent, intoning “Practical English! A good TOEIC score! Abandon literature!” or, more subtly, “Do not interpret literature. With a brand-new western literary theory, censor the representation of a text or analyze the mechanism of the text!” In such a situation, Miyazaki, Nakano, and

Fukuhara would still say that a scholar should “not lose himself or herself” and “has his or her own viewpoint,” which “has to do with his or her own way of life” (ibid., 145).

However, here a question arises about reading literature. When the Japanese—who live their lives immersed in a Japanese socio-cultural background, social reality, ways of thinking, habits, traditions, religion, language, and so on—read English literature or literature based on other socio-cultural backgrounds, how can they do so while “not losing oneself” and “having one’s own viewpoint,” which “has to do with one’s own way of life”? If people immersed in a Japanese socio-cultural setting read English literature by aligning their “eyes” with those of people living in English-speaking countries, then does it not mean “cleanly cutting off oneself from the world” and “thinking ‘This is this, that is that’”? On the other hand, if Japanese readers read English literature without any assimilation to the perspectives of English-speaking countries, their reading might always result in misreading. If Japanese readers did assume the perspectives of English-speaking countries, however, their study of English literature would be reduced to orientalism. At what point do Japanese perspectives and ways of life chime with the reading of English literature? In short, the question is quite simple: what should we do when we read literature in a language from the perspectives of other languages and their cultures, and what is the significance of this act?

2. The Japanese Literary World and Western Centricism⁴

Now, let me confirm that Japanese literature and concepts of literature in Japan have been strongly influenced by the West, and that western thought has been on the horizon of writing,

⁴ For convenience, I will use the term *the West* repeatedly, but *the West* means areas and people that have economic and political power in the international world: in other words, a kind of hegemony. As a result, *the West* means here Europe and America. When I use the phrases “literature in English” or “English literature,” they mean literature written in English-speaking areas, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

reading, and interpretation of literature since the Meiji era (1868–1912).

Modern Japanese novels originated with the importation of western novels, and with the prevalence of these translated versions in Japanese, the Japanese modern novel also established its position.⁵ According to Hirata Yumi, the circulation figures of translated western novels and those of Japanese modern novels increased in tandem. On the other hand, those of Japanese traditional fiction—taking the form of a “factual story” that described an incident, especially a juicy story such as adultery—decreased.⁶ A major reason is that intellectuals and newspapers insisted on revolutionizing fiction in Japan after the importation of western novels. Additionally, newspaper writers strove for “improvement” in their readers and emphasized the “benefit” of reading western novels, including those of Charles Dickens, which “can abolish evils in this world” (*Eiri Asano Shinbun*, Jan. 10, 1884. Hirata 1996, 176–7). Another newspaper, *The Yomiuri Shinbun*, echoes this insistence with the following:

Recently, we read a few Western novels. All of the authors of the novels are genuine scholars who represent their countries; they have high scholastic abilities. Hence, their novels are totally different from our novels in their contents and qualities. Western novels are philosophically fruitful, but our novels are not. The reason lies in the difference of scholastic abilities of the authors. (Nov. 9, 1884. Hirata 1996, 177)

Thus, translated western novels became popular in Japan because of their emphasis on scholarship and philosophy. With their popularity, Japanese authors, readers, and critics also started thinking seriously about scholarship and philosophy in literature. Following the view of Franco Moretti, who has a bird’s-eye view of literature in the world with reference to Immanuel Wallerstein’s World-Systems Theory and Frederic Jameson’s law of literary

⁵ With regard to the material in the succeeding paragraphs, see Suzuki 2013, “Cross-Cultural Reading of Doll-Love Novels in Japan and the West,” 110.

⁶ Cf. the chart in Hirata 1996, 179.

evolution, it can be said that Japanese literature and concepts of literature have been developed as a compromise between the local styles of peripheral countries and the metropolitan culture of core countries in Europe (Moretti 2000, 54).⁷

Since then, the scholarly emphasis on western literature has remained unchanged. After World War II, scholars in Japan, primarily those of western literature, have written numerous literary surveys. Japanese literature has always been dismissed by conventional literary standards, especially in English, with critics citing its shortcomings and calling it “less advanced” and “wonky” (Satō 2005, 43–4).

Had Japanese literature and its reading been developed with an emphasis on the aspect of philosophy under the influence of western literature, Susan Sontag’s insistence in her book *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* to cease the interpretation of philosophy and thought in a text could have liberated Japanese and Japanese literature from western standards of literature. Sontag’s opinion was, however, connected to post-structuralism, and the situation produced literary theory where literary works came to be called literary texts, and the dynamics and representation in the text started being evaluated, with denial of the very acts of reading and interpretation.

What we should pay attention to is that what we now call “literary theory” was mainly born in western countries. Whether Japanese use literary theory or not, the study of literature in Japan has been based on western concepts of literature. It is not by accident that literary theory was linked to post-structuralism. Tracing back the history of western literary theory, we will arrive at the literary perspectives of Plato and Aristotle: namely, mimesis. As Jacques

⁷ Still, in my mind, such a view is Euro-centric. Jameson’s “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” is its prime example. In addition, the influence of literature does not move in a single direction. We cannot decide which areas comprise metropolitan and peripheral cultures. In fact, in France, or what Moretti calls “metropolitan” culture, the Impressionist school, post-impressionism, and Pablo Picasso were strongly influenced by Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and *shunga* pornographic paintings. Picasso drew his inspiration from African art as well, and had an impact on American authors such as John Dos Passos.

Derrida used literature in his study of the general theory of language, he focused on the issue of mimesis in the world of language. However, the view that the basic question in literature stems from mimesis is itself a western perspective. There is no such perspective, at least, in China, as Ming Dong Gu points out (2006, 3–4), and neither does it hold in Japan. Additionally, it would be strange for literary theory to be synonymous with western literary theory. Literary theory has been developed in China, as well, for a long time. As long as we think of it as reasonable to examine Japanese literature using western literary theory, it is also logical that we examine western literature using Chinese literary theory. In addition, both before and after the westernization of Japan, Japan has represented itself in Chinese characters.⁸ Japan is a hybrid area between the West and China, and hence Japanese literature should be analyzed by western and Chinese literary theories, equally. As far as I know, however, nobody has argued for Japanese literary texts in such a way. Furthermore, I have not read any fruitful and serious comparative discussion on western and Chinese literary theories by Japanese scholars. If, without such discussion, Japanese literature is examined just with western literary theory, it follows that a prejudice holds that western literary theory is a universal tool, a prejudice without any discussion of whether western literary theory is much more progressive than Chinese, or a firm conviction that Japan is a western country. However, this amounts to orientalism.⁹

Is it the case, then, that we can read literature in English only using western literary theory,

⁸ Some say that *hiragana*, Japanese syllabary characters and one of three scripts used in Japan, was created by the Japanese around the end of the 8th century, but some *hiragana* can be recognized on the cover of *Dàbào tiē*, allegedly written by Wang Xizhi in the 4th century. Hence it is doubtful that *hiragana* was created by the Japanese. It is true that Japan adopted much from China: calligraphy, the tea ceremony, martial arts, drama, music, instruments, annual events, law, religion, certain habits, and other things that many people see as Japanese traditions.

⁹ Scholars recently have been noting concrete problems born from the results of western literary theory being used for non-western literature. See Damrosch (ed.) 2003, *Teaching World Literature*, and Suzuki 2013, “Cross-Cultural Reading of Doll-Love Novels in Japan and the West.”

literature in Chinese only with Chinese literary theory, literature in Japanese only with Japanese literary theory, and so on? In order to consider this matter, I shall start by addressing several issues related to applying (western) literary theory to literature.

3. Theoretical Suppression

In Japan, when western literary theory became popular, there was much criticism that no matter who discusses a literary text, their viewpoints resemble each other too much. People opposed to the theory seemed to support Miyazaki's view that "a scholar should 'not lose himself or herself' and 'has his or her own viewpoint' which 'has to do with his or her own way of life'." Certainly, it sometimes happens that someone reaches the same conclusion as others. The criticism was not directed to the same conclusion itself, but to the point that the scholars make rigid distinctions between a good and a bad text just by employing a theory created by another scholar and not reading and discussing the text well from their own perspective. Moreover, such scholars insist that only such theoretical analyses are correct. In other words, the criticism was directed at the notion that only some types of thoughts can dominate in the academic world. This criticism reflects the framework of reference of Zhang Longxi, a leading scholar of world literature. Zhang opposes the supremacy of politics in criticism of literature, in contrast to John Guillory's insistence that a literary work is a cultural work and that "our new cultural critic" talks about or engages in "progressive politics," where "the encounter with a cultural work becomes an occasion for confirming or contesting the belief systems expressed in the work" (Zhang 2010, 5; Kermode 2004, 67), and Frederic Jameson's argument that "*ideological analysis*" (emphasis in Zhang) is "the appropriate designation for the critical 'method' specific to Marxism" and "political interpretation" is not just one interpretive method among many, but "the absolute horizon of all reading and all

interpretation” (Zhang 2010, 6; Jameson 1981, 12, 17). Drawing on his own experience during the Cultural Revolution, Zhang points out that in times of the supremacy of politics, a literary work “is useful insofar as it can be seen as a document that houses certain ‘belief systems’” (ibid., 6). In times such as these, the work of *litterateurs* is to “endorse or condemn in a political interpretation,” and a literary text “can ... express ‘belief systems’ that are either with us, or against us” (ibid., 5–6). Literary works such as texts that only can express political belief systems are approbated, and then free and intellectual activities disappear (ibid., 6). This was not only true at the time of the Cultural Revolution in China, however. Zhang was echoing a sentiment of George Orwell’s during the “political season” in Europe in the 1930s. Mentioning the similarities between Communists and Catholics, Orwell states:

The Catholic and the Communist are alike in assuming that an opponent cannot be both honest and intelligent. Each of them tacitly claims that “the truth” has already been revealed, and that the heretic, if he is not simply a fool, is secretly aware of “the truth” and merely resists it out of selfish motives. In Communist literature, the attack on intellectual liberty is usually masked by oratory about “petty-bourgeois individualism,” “the illusions of nineteenth-century liberalism,” etc., and backed up by words of abuse such as “romantic” and “sentimental,” which, since they do not have any agreed meaning, are difficult to answer. ... [T]he Communist party is itself aiming at the establishment of the classless society.... But meanwhile, the real point has been dodged. Freedom of intellect means the freedom to report what one has seen, heard, and felt, and not to be obliged to fabricate imaginary facts and feelings. (1961, 312)

The point to keep in mind is that Orwell and Zhang do not take a hostile view toward politics itself, nor toward Marxism or Catholicism. Rather, what they criticize lies in that in the beginning there is the truth, and reading from the truth, as if it were self-evident, makes too sharp a distinction within a literary text between “this side” and “the other side” in politics and deprives readers of free, intellectual activities.¹⁰ As Paul de Man noted, if “[t]he

¹⁰ See: Suzuki 2012, “In the Times of Supremacy of Politics.”

deconstruction ... constituted the text in the first place” (1979, 17), it means that intelligent freedom to decide on a meaning must be guaranteed in order to avoid aporia, where the meaning is not defined. Even if so, as J. Hillis Miller cautioned in his book *The Ethics of Reading*, reading requires readers’ all-the-more-responsible responses to a text as an ethic for freedom, but not carefree interpretation (1987).

Of course, there has not been an innocent moment without literary theory, including New Criticism and formalism. In addition, certainly, a theory gives us fresh eyes. However, if a certain theory created by another person is simply blindly accepted as absolutely correct and good practice of that theory is praised, this would be equivalent to worshipping the theory, as pointed out by Japanese scholar Mishima Ken’ichi, since such an attitude is exactly like devotion to a religion (2006, 4–5). This view is based on the assumption that a theory is neutral and universal. In addition, as Ueno Chizuko, a leading Japanese scholar on feminism, argues, “Theory is a tool, and a tool is something we use. But we should not be used by theory, and hence, when a theory does not correspond successfully to a reality, it is not the reality but the theory that we should adjust or change” (2005, 324). All theories—not only theories of literature but also theories of education, psychology, and other fields—have merits and shortcomings in principle. As long as a theory has its merits, we cannot deny the theory itself. As Ueno says, “Any theories were, have been, and will be created by the efforts of people who have a motivational condition to need them” (ibid., 318–9).

On the other hand, as long as any theory has shortcomings in principle, it cannot be good for everything. For example, Walter Benn Michaels points out that postmodern theory, which takes notice of identity, criticizes oppressive definitions of the agency of “I,” the reader, in society, where everybody should have a right to achieve self-actualization without any oppression, but it overlooks the problem of poverty because the poor are not victims of

oppressed cultural identity but rather of capitalism (2004, 180–1). From a similar perspective, Miura Reiichi also argues that postcolonialism, trauma theory, and Queer theory contribute to neo-liberalism and oppress the working class (2013, 124). Theories, as Heidee Kruger argues, cannot be transferred to different contexts as if they were neutral “instruments” that can simply be “applied” to a given object of study, regardless of whether this object of study is part of the same temporal, spatial, and cultural configurations as the theory or whether it is instead far removed in time or space from the original context of that theory (Kruger 2012, 93). It is natural logic that theory is also generated with the various background features of each area. As Ueno says, “Any theory is born in a socio-historic context” (2005, 34). If a theory is mechanically imposed on a literary text in the world as a framework, it becomes a kind of dogma, and the reader tends to easily overlook various things, or alienate the text. Edward Said also made the following observation:

It is the critic’s job to provide resistance to theory, to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests, to point up those concrete instances drawn from everyday reality that lie outside or just beyond the interpretive area necessarily designated in advance and thereafter circumscribed by every theory. (1983, 242)

What Said and others request is not so difficult. They insist that we should first listen to the real “voice.” We should not analyze or judge others from some theoretical framework, but listen to their “voices” and analyze them from their internal framework of reference or from the perspective of their own logic, emotion, socio-cultural background, and so on, multi-dimensionally. When I say “let’s listen to the ‘voice’ in a literary text,” some might insist that the “voice” in a literary text is just a fiction and hence it is not worth listening to. Still, in my mind, a literary text is nonfiction in a sense, while mass media, such as newspapers and television, is fiction. If someone is brutally honest to the media, the media

edits, bashes, or ignores what that person says, or sometimes even suppresses him or her. When what one really feels and thinks is written as a fiction and read in a private space, it can be communicated to others.¹¹ Such a *fiction* includes bias and ideology, of course, but the voice of the fiction is nonfiction.¹² Otherwise, for example, there is even a possibility that the voices of suppressed females and minorities, which appear in various literary texts of various eras and countries, would not yet have been heard. Reading literature is not to learn something lofty, noble, or elegant, but to address matters touching the Earth.

Certainly, we cannot deny that literature is a system supporting a nation. It is needless to recapitulate British literature's use in governing India, or that Japanese traditional thirty-one-syllabled verse is rooted in the annual New Year's poetry reading held by the Japanese emperor. However, if the poetry is regarded just as "a product of the system supporting a nation" (Murai 1999, 66) and as something whose voice is unworthy of close listening, the voice of Japan's poor in the poem "Dialogue on Poverty" edited by Hiedanoarei in the 8th century, for example, would be politically ignored.

As another example, Henry Miller was strongly attacked in feminist criticism. Indeed, we can point out that his descriptions of female characters are malicious, but if we simply make a theoretical judgment on Miller's text, we will overlook an important point: Almost all of the protagonists in Miller's texts are poor. They oppose capitalism and do not care about identity. In other words, they are indifferent to wealth or class. They oppose the fetishism of capitalism and hate to identify themselves with something because they believe that identity is an essential part of capitalism and commodity fetishism (Marx), and feel happy to consider

¹¹ Cf. Wright 1988, *Theology and Literature*. Wright argues that literature is the most powerful means to describe the actual world.

¹² In this point, I agree with Beauvoir's argument on literature. See Moi's comments on Simone de Beauvoir in Moi 2009, "What Can Literature Do?"

themselves a “non-identity” (Adorno).¹³ Miller’s literary texts tend to be considered unorthodox in American literature, in part because the protagonists are unconcerned about wealth or class. They diverge from the protagonists in *The Great Gatsby*, *Sister Carrie*, *American Tragedy*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and so forth. Gatsby and the others are obsessed with class and identity.¹⁴

Of course, the “voice” in a literary text has a socio-cultural background. Thus, if we use others’ perspectives as a framework of reference for a text, we will suppress the “voice.” For instance, Patricia Meyer Spacks, who analyzes much literature in English, insists that writing a story and a diary with correct and detailed dates stems from the intention to free oneself from boredom (1995). Spacks’s opinion may be correct, because it is a result of her listening to many voices in literary texts in English. The blind acceptance of such a view would misinterpret Chinese texts, however. Chinese culture has a traditional tendency to see a person in a historical context, and thus writes histories with detailed dates of events to describe that person. Moreover, Donald Keene argued that diaries as literature are peculiar to Japan (2003, 73).¹⁵

It is hence important to read a text, listen to the “voice” there, and interpret it from multidimensional viewpoints, such as culture, tradition, language, law, social reality, way of thinking, and region. On the other hand, when we say western literature, the West itself is varied and cannot be identified; hence, we need to think of a literary text along with its local background. Literary theory is not a neutral or universal tool. It sometimes overlooks or distorts “voice,” which reveals a true problem: What “voice” has been overlooked or distorted

¹³ Cf. Suzuki 2010, “Understanding Henry Miller’s Literary Text as ‘the Poor’s’.”

¹⁴ Cf. Suzuki 2011, “Putting Identity into the Gap between the Rich and the Poor.”

¹⁵ For another example, see Suzuki 2013, “Cross-Cultural Reading of Doll-Love Novels in Japan and the West.”

by theory? Let us consider this now by returning to reading literary texts themselves.

In fact, if we do not read a literary text or listen to the voice in the text, but rather censor the representation in the text and make too sharp a distinction between “good” and “bad,” then it means that we contribute to paternalism, contrary to the insistence of some literary theories. As for the significance of reading literature, Cristina Bruns calls it an interactive change of the agency of “I” the reader from the viewpoint of Gestalt psychology on the basis of Winnicott’s theory (2011, 26–36). Rather, however, when we confirm the goal of a reading of literature from multidimensional viewpoints, it reminds us of criticism of Freudian psychoanalysts by American psychologist and educator Carl Rogers, who levels two critiques against them: One is their dogmatization of Freudian theory, and the other is, consequently, their tendency to try to understand a patient within the framework of the theory.

Rogers, who valued clinical practice more than theory, thought “blind adoration of theory could lead to the distortion of the reality of a patient by adjusting this reality to the theory without any review of the problems in its theoretical disadvantages in principle” (Kuwamura 2010, 15). Rogers hence insisted on listening to the patient’s voice and empathizing with the patient from the perspective of his or her own feelings and logic—in other words, from his or her internal framework of reference. By doing so, one can understand the facts of the patient’s suffering, instead of judging mental condition by imposing a theoretical framework. At the same time, “Rogers did not want anybody to dogmatize his own counseling theory in the same way as the Freudian theory; he believed his own theory has some problems in principle and some points that could be misunderstood by others, and hence it should continue being improved” (ibid., 15).

According to Teresa Kuwamura, a scholar of humanistic English education, Rogerian hearkening to others’ voice—empathic understanding of others—and its practice have a social

meaning of counter-argument to traditional authority, or authoritarian paternalism of secular Protestantism (ibid., 264). “Paternalism,” Kuwamura continues,

is a protective stance for others: On a benevolent basis, someone intervenes in a situation that a person cannot handle for himself or herself, in the same way parents approach their child. The reason why paternalism is sometimes criticized is that it authoritatively appropriates a right of self-decision. ... Against authoritative paternalism and for a democratic society, Rogers insisted on sharing authority and making an individual decision autonomously and proactively. (Ibid., 264)

In order to practice this, Rogers emphasized empathic understanding of others’ internal framework of reference.

Evaluation of others’ “voice” from the perspective of a dogmatized theory is itself a structure of paternalistic society. On the other hand, listening to others’ “voice” and empathizing and understanding the voice from others’ internal framework of reference reflects opposition to paternalism. Estimation of others’ “voice,” or literary texts with a dogmatized theory, hence contributes to the strengthening of the paternalistic structure of a society and that of the academic world. If critics follow an authoritative theory just because it is considered authoritative, without imposing any of their own viewpoints or thoughts, it follows that what they practice reinforces paternalism. Miyazaki asserted that reading and studying literature by “not losing oneself” and “having one’s own viewpoint,” which “has to do with one’s own way of life” or individual reading of literature as current world literature suggests, is a Rogerian hearkening to others’ voice and for democracy in academia. Naturally, readers sometimes face a literary text in which they do not feel anything. But this is a phenomenon from reading a text with readers’ own “nose,” as Zhang says, referring to Frank Kermode:

“My present answer to the question how to be a critic is one I borrowed long ago from William Empson: take whatever theoretical help you fancy, but follow your nose,” says Kermode. The analogy is to wine

connoisseurship—“Not everybody has a nose in this sense—there is an enological analogy—and in either case, if you do not have one, you should seek some other form of employment”. (2010, 7)

4. Is It Possible to Read Western Literature from a Japanese Perspective?

However, if we read literature in other areas, following our noses, how should we handle misreading? If we seek correct reading, does it not follow that only Japanese can correctly read Japanese literature, only Chinese can correctly read Chinese literature, and only English native speakers can correctly read English literature?

Regarding this question, Miyazaki argues the following:

In my mind, an effort to pursue academic research on literature in English is an effort to yield a research which passes for authentic British scholarship, and naturally Japaneseness in the research is destined for elimination. Of course, academic research goes beyond national borders: it possesses properties in essence to take that direction. The reason for this is that the job done by a researcher who is enthusiastic about his or her own work moves in a direction in which its national border finally disappears. (1999, 46)

However, is what Miyazaki claims possible in a literal sense? Miyazaki recommends that Japanese critics should make their Japaneseness disappear from their reading of literature. What Miyazaki finally concludes is the paradox that the Japanese can study literature in English when they become native English speakers, and thus only an English speaker can read literature in English.

Why must literature in English be read only from the perspectives of English-speaking cultures? Is it meaningless for the Japanese to read literature in English from their own perspectives? Is it possible for the Japanese to become English-speaking westerners? Is it really possible to make the “Japaneseness in their research” disappear and ensure their “own work moves in a direction in which its national border finally disappears”?

People in Japan tend to regard everything in this world as having life like they do. They

celebrate the girls' festival on March 3rd and the boys' festival on May 5th, and return to their hometowns during a period called *Obon* to visit their ancestral graves. They even perceive themselves to be living in this world with the souls of the dead. In the Japanese psyche, the border between living organisms and inorganic substances is ambiguous.¹⁶ For this reason, they issue residence certifications to *manga* or animated characters as if to humans,¹⁷ and even hold funerals for dolls, figures, needles, and so on.¹⁸ In addition, they tend to consider themselves simply part of nature, rather than as having dominion over the Earth and all its creatures; they do not have a disposition to accept that reason was specially gifted to human beings, as Descartes and other western philosophers insist (Kida 2010, 45). Additionally, Japanese Buddhism is a philosophy based on the idea that everything, even each plant, *is* Buddha. No matter when and in what area the Japanese read literature, they must unconsciously do so with an attendant Japaneseness.

Nonetheless, if, as Miyazaki insists, Japanese scholars should “get rid of Japaneseness in their research” and that their “own work moves in a direction in which its national border finally disappears,” then the Japanese must abandon their own language. The Japanese sense of language and the configuration of the Japanese language are very idiosyncratic. They do not care so much about the connection between Chinese characters and pronunciation. The most important point for the Japanese is the image. For example, the name of one of my

¹⁶ This is a kind of animism. Jean Piaget regarded animism as a tendency of the infant mind, but this is also a Euro-centric viewpoint.

¹⁷ Note that some animals living in Japan also have residence certifications.

¹⁸ Through the funeral rite for needles, the Japanese express their appreciation when discarding them, because in their minds the needles helped and supported them. Some Japanese simply discard needles and other objects, but they are looked down upon. In Japan, traditionally speaking, a kind and warm person not only cherishes people but also appreciates every creature and thing. Funeral rites for a doll stem from the Japanese belief that discarding a doll without a rite or any feeling of appreciation may cause the doll to curse them. See Suzuki 2013, “Cross-Cultural Reading of Doll-Love Novels in Japan and the West,” 113–7.

friends is “陽.” Japanese dictionaries say that it means “the Sun” and “bright,” and that it must be pronounced “yō” or “hi.” However, the pronunciation of his name is “kiyoshi.” Nobody can read it so. The pronunciation “kiyoshi” usually reminds Japanese of the Chinese character “清,” meaning “clean” or “cool.” I asked his parents why they chose such a strange combination of Chinese characters and pronunciation. They replied that they wanted him to become a bright person like the Sun, who always laughs. If he simply always laughs, however, he will look stupid. That is why they decided on the combination of the Chinese character “陽” and pronunciation of “kiyoshi,” which is associated with “clean” and “cool.” The Japanese language often employs such double images.

Japanese words evoke various meanings and images that are not easy to decode. Additionally, the Japanese prefer images to consistency in pronunciation and characters. Such a culture and a sense of language has to influence the Japanese way of thinking. Indeed, according to Jacques Lacan, the agency of “I” is structured by *le symbolique*. In addition, as brain scientist Antonio R. Damasio asserts, “Emotion, feeling and biological regulation all play a role in human reasoning” (2005, 8). Humankind can feel something and thus think of it, and can think of something and thus feel it, and they express it in language; I feel, therefore I am. J. Hillis Miller, in his book *The Ethics of Reading*, also considered “sensibility” as an obligatory requirement for the criticism of literature in the times of groundlessness of episteme.

Regarding sensibility, some feelings do not transcend national borders and times, but some do. We can hence share feelings with others in this world. When we read a poem about a beloved person’s death (for example, Edger Allan Poe’s “Annabel Lee”), it evokes sadness, not laughter. This is why literature transcends national borders: We can share problems. Goethe was impressed by a Chinese novel, and he left us his famous compound word,

Weltliteratur, “world literature,” even though he might not have responded to the novel in the same way as a Chinese reader, because the translation from Chinese to German could not fully capture the original form. Nonetheless, it is wrong to say that only readers completely integrated into the society where a literary text was born can feel, understand, and share anything in the text.

Let me take another example. I have read *The Great Gatsby* with students from China, Korea, the U.S., and Japan. American students read the novel as a story of the American dream or one of the oppressed identity of the female gender. Japanese students read the novel as a story of pure love. On the other hand, Chinese and Korean students criticize the novel for its portrayal of illicit love and say that they could not accept the novel. The Chinese and Korean students are strongly shaped by Confucian thought; for them, *Gatsby* is a story of ethics. The Japanese students, who live in a society where Confucian thought is not as influential as before, take notice of Gatsby’s single-minded passion for Daisy. The Americans, who value self-actualization in a capitalistic world, pay attention to class identity and liberation from gender oppression. One cannot say which is right and which is not. As David Damrosch relates, “when a text goes beyond a national border, the text itself transforms” (2003, 281). However, there are opportunities for a text to transcend borders without any transformation. All of the students, despite having developed their discussion about the text from multidimensional viewpoints, empathize with Gatsby’s loss of love and criticize those who benefited from Gatsby but failed to attend his funeral.

Incidentally, the argument that I have been developing does not deny Walter Benn Michaels’ criticism: “When differences in interpretation are both explained and defended by reference to the differences between readers, the very idea of an interpretive dispute disappears” (2004, 116). My point affirms supporting the interpretation of authors’ intentions,

along the lines of what Michaels endorses: “If you think that differences in belief cannot be described as differences in identity, you must also think that texts mean what their authors intend” (ibid., 10–1). Naturally, even if we neither defend readers’ standpoints nor tolerate any variation in interpretations, none of the readings of literature will ever come to only one conclusion, as Michaels also admits. Rather, Michaels advocates that, rather than ascribing the differences in interpretation to the reader’s identity, we should develop arguments on the basis of the differences. Otherwise, we are only saying, “This is your story and this is my story, but they do not affect each other.” This will mean a failure in mutual understanding.

In conclusion, we should cultivate differences in interpretation as a world-wide discussion, with empathy and understanding of the text’s and readers’ internal framework of reference. To my mind, Michaels’s insistence on complete denial of the reader’s identity is only intended for readers in English-speaking areas who read literature in English. But if we fail to accept any differences in readers’ socio-cultural backgrounds, non-English speakers’ readings of literature in English will always be a misreading in a sense.

The point is that there is no such law that literature in English must be read only from the perspective of English-speaking cultures. This does not mean that I recommend that Japanese or Asian readers should avoid western perspectives. Nor do I mean that Japanese readers should ignore the social reality, laws, culture, or regional characteristics of the West and always follow the thinking unique to Japan. However, even if we defend not readers’ experience but their intelligence and interpretation, readers feel something before interpreting a text from their own socio-cultural perspectives, and hence it is unrealistic to defend the opinion that reading literature in English can only be correctly done from the perspective of English-speaking cultures. The Japanese can read a literary text in English because they can respond emotionally to it from their own socio-cultural background, even if they cannot

completely assimilate a western reader's perspective. Feeling something in a text precedes thinking about it. Readers from every part of the world may respond similarly or differently. Regarding the latter, if someone says that a particular reading is a misreading or close to subjectivity, he or she should give up his or her native language and culture, first of all, and adopt the language and culture of the area where the text they read was born. This is a matter of bravery rather than realism; and if the person cannot commit to such bravery, he or she cannot assert misreading or subjectivity in a certain reading.

Does this mean there are no misreadings? From the viewpoint of Derrida, all readings are misreadings, and hence the significance of interpretation and reading itself must be discarded, though such a logic itself is a misreading of Derrida's theory (cf. Miller 1987, Chapter 1). As noted earlier, "[t]he deconstruction [...] constituted the text in the first place" (de Man 1979, 17), and metaphorical thinking such as metonymy decides the meaning of a text. If so, a text is based on differences between readers' socio-cultural backgrounds and individual emotions as well as those among humankind in general. In this sense, misreading must be regarded not as an opportunity for readers to separate themselves from the text but as one of the differences in readings that contribute to international understanding among the people of the world. Of course, it is not enough for readers to read literature only according to their feelings. Intelligence requires, as argued by Yamauchi Shirō, in his fascinating study of philosophy as the history of misreading, "feeling a little bit strange about Japanese scholars studying philosophy in Japan, because philosophy is the ideology for the formation of western culture" (2013, 15).

5. Global Response to the "Voice" of Literature

Now, let me take an example of a Japanese critic writing on the standard of western

intelligence, from a review of Tsutsui Masaaki's *Seeking a True Self*. The book develops the discussion that American novels after World War II describe states of mind, such as loss of self, seeking of self, and self-actualization, and that their fundamental theme is human existence, which is fused into the life of the universe and thus never dies, since it is unified with it. For his discussion, Tsutsui employed transpersonal psychology, but Japanese scholars dismissed his book as irrational because of his commitment to mystical experiences in Buddhism.

What we should take notice of is that such criticism is based on western epistemology, or Freudian theory and rationalism. Sigmund Freud dismissed Buddhism's mystical experiences as "primary narcissism" (Tanaka 2010, 222). For Freud, Buddhism's mysticism is synonymous with the state of a baby's mind just before the cutting of the psychological umbilical cord. It thus indicates immaturity. Some Japanese scholars have noted similarities between Freudian theory and Buddhism, but as long as Freudian theory disregards the legitimacy of Buddhism's mystical experiences, a large gap remains between them.

On the other hand, transpersonal psychology was influenced by eastern thought, and criticizes western rationalism. Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, who established humanistic psychology, which is based on transpersonal psychology, view Buddhism positively. Other psychologists, including William James, Carl Jung, Karen Horney, and Erich Fromm, also view Buddhism favorably (Tanaka 2010, 223–5). They affirm mystical experiences in Buddhism, which Freud dismissed as primary narcissism, as supreme experiences (Tanaka 2010, 225). However, Jacques Lacan endorsed a "Return to Freud," and his theory became as popular as a scientific one. At the time when psychoanalysis returned to Freudian theory, it became anti-Buddhism or anti-East. Some critics in Japan note the similarity between Lacan's theory and Buddhism, but since Lacan prefers the Freudian theory, which dismisses both the

state of mind Buddhism affirms and its mystical experiences, their view is problematic.

In Japan, psychologists insisted before that the Oedipus complex was not applicable to the Japanese, favoring instead the Ajase complex, or feelings of guilt towards one's mother. Some Japanese critics have even articulated a difficulty in understanding Lacan's theory. On the other hand, Japanese tend to be comfortable with the theories of Maslow, Rogers, Jung, and Fromm. The reason is that theories of psychoanalysis divorced from Freud affirm the state of mind that Buddhism affirms. Murakami Haruki's fiction is also sometimes read from the perspective of Jungian theory. Of course, we cannot say that Freud's and Lacan's theories are wrong. Their theories are, however, oriented toward western cultures to the extent that they fail to accept the state of mind Buddhism affirms. The dominant state of mind seems to equate to primary narcissism for westerners; on the other hand, it seems to be the best state for those living in a Buddhist culture, and Japanese readers can easily evoke the latter when reading literary texts. As long as an English literary text is born in the West, it is appropriate to employ the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Lacan to interpret it. Maslow, Rogers, Jung, and Fromm are, however, also products of western cultures, and hence employing their theories in reading literature in English is also relevant. Further, when a Japanese reader approaches a literary work while "not losing oneself," it is not unnatural that this reader hear a "voice" containing Buddhist elements.

One may still want to dismiss Buddhist mysticism as irrational; however, the idea that being rational is always right is western-centric. The idea of the "rational" itself is a western epistemology. As Alfred W. Crosby notes, western epistemology is characterized by breaking down an object perceived as a continuous phenomenon into elements and units, and then describing them in the form of a quantitative model based on measurement of "ration" (amount). Division into quanta and the possibility of measurement by "ratio" form the basis

of western epistemology, and being “rational” is highly valued.

From this perspective, it would be too hasty to conclude that Tsutsui’s argument is irrational. Western culture, including rationalism, was criticized in the U.S. after World War II, especially within the counter-culture, New Age, and anti-war movements. Assuming a literary text reflects the time in which it is born, American literature after World War II must echo the “voices” in movements running counter to western culture. No matter how irrational some American literary texts appear, they simply can be said to contain non-western elements as long as rationalism forms the basis of western epistemology, as referred to in Crosby. Furthermore, we cannot simply deny Tsutsui’s work because of his perspective from Buddhist mystic experiences. His work can be said to historicize American literature after World War II. From this perspective, if we seek standards for reading and interpreting literature in English only through the ways of thinking of English-speaking cultures, we will misread literary texts.

Now it is important to read a text with one’s own “nose,” and then, as necessary, criticize the oppression of the agency of “I” in a text, and discuss interpretations and criticisms on a world-wide scale, as Michaels suggests, to overcome problems in theoretical reading. For example, many westerners and information sources assert that *The Great Gatsby* is a story about the American dream. We should note, however, that such a reading and definition is born in a context in which nobody critically thinks about what American capitalism itself is. We should accept the readings of cultures under the socialist systems and other socio-cultural backgrounds, especially in a globalized world, for, as Legendre and Nancy note, globalization is global westernization, and the West’s occupation of the world expropriates the means of counter-argument in such a world (Legendre 2004, 16–22; Nancy 2007, 34).

Therefore, we do not have to think that the western way of thinking is the absolute

horizon of all reading and interpretation of literature in English. We should read a literary text from each perspective and then fashion an overview of readings from around the world. Each reader in China, Korea, the U.S.A., the U.K., Australia, France, Brazil, Russia, India, and all other regions reads a literary text following his or her own nose, interprets it from multidimensional viewpoints, and discusses it with others, listening to others from his or her internal framework of references. In doing so, readers hold a global discussion to cross-culturally understand both literary texts and each other, and, I hope, to promote peace as long as the study of humanities should contribute to peace in the world.

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