Response

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I. The Pertinence of Modern Japan

Before I specifically address the ideas Dr. Wong presented in his paper, I wish first to introduce into our dialogue another cultural perspective from East Asia drawn primarily from the literary experience of modern Japan. I hope that this additional dimension will at once sensitize us to and enrich our understanding of the complexity of the issues we are attempting to examine.

While centrifugal forces and cross-cultural tendencies have continued the historical process in the breakdown of national boundaries on an unprecedented global scale, it is important to remember that until the middle of the nineteenth century, the writer, the poet, or the political thinker in East Asia still found that the best or perhaps the only way of learning about foreign cultures, social ideologies, and political systems was to be physically abroad. The modern Japanese political reformer Iwakura Tomomi (1825–83) and the novelist Mori Ōgai (1862–1922) could not have acquired their intimate knowledge of the systems of government in Europe or the principles of Western aesthetics by staying at home in early Meiji Japan. Likewise, the *bakumatsu* samurai after the arrival of Commodore Perry in Japan in 1853 were not just casual travelers to the treaty ports on the Chinese coast after the Opium War. Without their firsthand experience with the devastating effects of European colonial imperialism on an ancient East Asian civilization, they most certainly would not have appreciated so acutely the dire gravity of Japan's own political situation.

Less than fifty years later, however, a very different situation emerged. During the years between the two world wars, the bookstores of Tokyo, Yokohama, and Osaka were flooded with translations of Western literature and philosophy; the art galleries were filled with reprints of French impressionist and postimpressionist works; and in a few cafés in downtown Tokyo, curious university students could spend hours listening

to the music of the German romantics.[1] During the late 1910s and 1920s, a Tokyo writer such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927) could manage to acquire an extraordinary range of learning from other non-Japanese literary traditions—China's as well as Europe's—without ever physically embarking on a cross-cultural journey across the seas. With a passion rarely seen even among today's young Japanese writers, Akutagawa devoured Japanese translations of Flaubert, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Shaw, Strindberg, Ibsen, Hauptmann, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky—these are just a few examples indicative of the range of his readings.[2] I highlight the experience of Akutagawa and his generation because I think it is telling also, on a different level, as we consider the effects of the globalization of the literary imagination in that part of the world. The irrepressible desire to study the West seldom translates into any significant disruption of the cultural or intellectual continuity of Japan's indigenous traditions. The intellectual makeup and the creative imagination of a large number of Taishō and early Shōwa men of letters—Akutagawa, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Satō Haruo, Shiga Naoya, and Nagai Kafū, for example — were inspired as much by their Western counterparts as by Japan's classical and early modern literary and cultural legacies. For Akutagawa, Western works such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* provided the main inspiration for his work *Kappa*, perhaps the most trenchant social satire ever written on Japanese society in the 1920s.[3] At the same time, he also successfully completed chillingly modern parodies based on classical Japanese sources such as the *Konjaku monogatari*, a twelfth-century anthology of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Buddhist stories.[4] What we must note here is the dynamics of his intellectual cultivation and his imaginative vision. They were as splendidly anchored *within* his own cultural tradition as they were inspired by broad cross-cultural tendencies.

But, of course, the cross-cultural fertilization between East Asian and Western literatures during the nineteenth century and the earlier decades of the twentieth represents a predominantly one-way traffic, as it does today. And no one needs to be reminded in which direction that traffic flows. In this connection, I wish to quote a deeply touching passage from the memoir of the late-nineteenth-century Meiji writer and essayist Uchida Roan (1868–1929), as he reminisced on the electrifying impact

Russian literature had on his intellectual growth as a writer. Roan managed to obtain one of the only three copies of *Crime and Punishment* in English translation from Maruzen, a leading Tokyo bookseller, and he likened his experience reading Dostoyevsky in the early summer of 1889 to

> encountering a strike of thunder in the wide, open field, dazzling my eyes and deafening my ears . . . . I could not recall that I had ever been so deeply moved in my life. This solemn and awe-inspiring power could not possibly have derived from art alone. I believe that [Dostoyevsky's] faith and beliefs directly struck a chord deep inside me, and I could profoundly appreciate the greatness of his power.[5]

One can easily be reminded of the enormous stimulus Western literature had on the imagination of virtually every major modern Japanese novelist and poet;[6] and as Dr. Wong has noted in his paper, a similar situation can also be observed among modern Chinese writers, ranging from essayists and novelists such as Hu Shi and Lu Xun to poets such as Xu Zhi-mo and Wen Yi-duo.

It is not, therefore, particularly surprising to learn that prewar Japanese writers were often driven by a powerful obsession, both cultural and psychological, to imitate and transplant every major Western literary movement to Japanese soil, whether it was romanticism, naturalism, modernism, socialist realism, or surrealism. Likewise, the great admiration many Japanese critics held for the latest Western literary technique or the most trendy literary theory sometimes seems to have bordered on the extreme, however culturally awkward or intellectually incongruous the current Western fashion might have been to indigenous conditions.

Nearly half a century later, beginning in the late 1950s, we see again the emergence of a very different cultural and literary landscape. No longer was the postwar Japanese intelligentsia besieged with the kind of critical self-skepticism and debilitating inferiority complex vis-à-vis the West. To be sure, many Western writers were still highly respected; but they were no longer so uncritically enshrined as awe-inspiring literary gods with unquestioned authority. Increasingly, they have been perceived

as fellow contemporaries and humanists who share common and fundamental human anxieties and collective literary concerns. The growing similitude of the human condition in industrialized democracies within the postwar milieu, the isolation and loneliness of the modern person, the meaninglessness and absurdity of everyday living, the growing alienation of the artist in society, and the increasing awareness of the fragility of the inner self—these were sentiments felt not only in London, Paris, and New York, but in Tokyo, Seoul, and perhaps in New Delhi and many other East Asian cities as well. Existentialist novels appeared in France and Japan almost concurrently, even though existentialist philosophy itself did not make its mark on the Japanese intellectual landscape in the 1930s and 1940s as it did in Western Europe. The Angry Young Men of England had their soul brothers in Japan immediately, not ten or fifteen years later. The quest for the moral and political burdens of war responsibility, for the psychological origins of ultranationalism and the effects of fascism on the human mind, similarly inspired writers and critics as diverse as Germany's Günter Grass and Japan's Ōoka Shōhei, Oda Makoto, and Yoshimoto Takaaki. Political allegiances and other broadly defined social concerns have drawn writers such as Jean Paul Sartre and Kato Shūichi together into a sort of intellectual communion. And in his recent acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature in Stockholm, Ōe Kenzaburō might have surprised his Western audience by proclaiming his "profound spiritual affinity" (*tamashii no shinkin*) not with his fellow Japanese Nobel laureate Kawabata Yasunari, but with the Irish poet William Butler Yeats, with the Korean poet Kim Chiha, and the Chinese writers Zheng Yi and Mo Yan.[7] Writing in 1923, T. S. Eliot in his essay "The Function of Criticism" spoke of an "unconscious community of true artists," "a common inheritance and a common cause" that "unite artists consciously or unconsciously,"[8] but it seems that no one could have anticipated that this "organic" community could have evolved into its present state with all its tantalizing possibilities as well as serious limitations.

II. Chinese Literary Imagination and Globalization

In dealing with the question of globalization as it relates to Chinese literature, Dr. Wong draws our attention to the ideas of the third-century writer Lu Ji and the late-fifth- and early-sixth-century critic Liu Xie and the affinity their critical discourse on imagination had with the views of Samuel T. Coleridge. A poem by Qu Yuan and the famous image of the Tang poet Li Bo (Li Po) dancing with the moon and his own shadow are evoked as examples of Chinese poetic imagination. While one is not entirely sure what critical criteria have led to these particular choices, in his brief discussions on the examples themselves, Dr. Wong shows himself to be an austere critic who can write with unpretentious intelligence. On the other hand, the reader, not totally satisfied with those random illustrations alone, cannot help but wonder what Dr. Wong's critical thoughts are about the defining character of Chinese literary imagination through the ages, how culturally and politically conditioned its many manifestations have evolved, and how these questions relate to broader issues of cross-cultural tendencies in other parts of the world. Admittedly, any one of these considerations is too complicated to discuss in a paper of this nature, but even a concise summary of one's thoughts is welcome. It would be illuminating to consider, for example, the parallels between Tang poetry and the Japanese poetic expression during the Heian period from the eighth to the end of the twelfth centuries, or to speculate why a Tang poet such as Bai Ju-Yi (Po Chü-i) had such a great impact on the imagination of classical Japanese poets and writers. It would also be relevant to note the striking impact that the philosophy of Zhuang Zi (Chuang Tzu) and Lao Zi (Lao Tzu) had on the Japanese imagination, from the Zen monk-poets during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods to Matsuo Basō in the Edo period.

The major part of Dr. Wong's paper deals with the dynamics of twentieth-century Chinese literature vis-à-vis the West, or, more precisely, the reception and assimilation of Western paradigms and methods by Chinese writers. He correctly identifies the three great waves of Western influence on the Chinese imagination — the May Fourth Movement in the 1910s and beyond; the Western craze in Taiwan in the fifties and sixties, whose

effects show little signs of diminishing; and the enormous Western impact on the Chinese mainland after the Cultural Revolution from the late seventies until this day. In assessing this impact and in offering us a shopping list of Western authors with lasting or temporary appeal, Dr. Wong's succinct exposition offers few surprises. Most foreign impact, we are told, was or has been carried by the West wind, though he is careful to note, without commentary, the Chinese receptiveness to Indian and Japanese literature. The obvious question to ask at this juncture is, of course, why. What made Indian or Japanese literature less competitive than Shakespeare or Zola or T. S. Eliot despite the fact that they all shared some aspects of a common Asian cultural heritage? Has the situation changed in the last decade or so and, if so, how? I for one would like to know what Dr. Wong has to say about these questions and what he anticipates to be the future tendencies.

To demonstrate the cultural cosmopolitanism and broad linguistic competence of Chinese writer-scholars, Dr. Wong gives us the examples of Qian Zhong-shu, Yu Guang-zhong, and Huang Guo-bin, and, of course, the list can go on much longer if one chooses. While it is highly debatable whether Hong Kong can legitimately be characterized as "a truly bilingual city"—I, for one, have very serious doubts about this bold assertion—few except the most culturally xenophobic would argue with Dr. Wong's observation that "[n]o Chinese intellectual nowadays is bold or stupid enough to reject all the Western influences."[9] But he then goes on to assert that "[t]o qualify as an intellectual in China in the twentieth century, one has to have, apart from Chinese learning, a considerable amount of knowledge of Western culture; some years of study in Europe or the United States," he recommends, "is beneficial to his qualifications as such." Then, with a remarkable leap of faith, he concludes that "[t]herefore, modern Chinese intellectuals think more or less multiculturally."[10]

I must confess that I am less optimistic than Dr. Wong is about the possibility of anyone automatically acquiring "multicultural thinking" simply by spending several years on university campuses in the West. One might, but there is no money-back guarantee, for I do not believe that there is any compelling internal logic establishing causality in these attrib-

utes. It seems to me that multicultural awareness is a state of mind, an internalized intellectual habit in perceiving and interpreting experience, not something one can easily pick up from the shelf at a neighborhood Kmart store. I am far more disturbed by Dr. Wong's apparent readiness to bestow his intellectual license through what appear to be mainly Eurocentric or U.S.-centric criteria. No one in his/her right mind would dispute the great desirability of Western learning for the modern Chinese intellectual, just as no one in his/her right mind would dispute that non-Western learning is highly desirable for the French, German, British, or American intellectual. But are we to expunge the names of writers, scholars, and critics from the grand register of Chinese intellectuals if these people had committed the folly of having studied in universities in India, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Africa, Latin America, or the Middle East? What are we to make of Chinese writers and poets whose creative imaginations are primarily anchored in the classical or indigenous traditions and who have never entered Harvard, Stanford, or Oxford? Speaking from another cultural perspective, who among respectable or self-respecting modern Japanese critics would even contemplate challenging the intellectual qualifications of such distinguished writers as Ishikawa Jun, for example, whose creative imagination was so quintessentially rooted in the Japanese literary traditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?

I am also perplexed by the manner in which Dr. Wong identifies tendencies that are driving the engine of globalization today. To qualify, in his own words, "to be reckoned with," Dr. Wong appears to suggest that a geographical region needs to have growing economic or political power, the more formidable the better. Having "superbillionaires" like Bill Gates as its card-carrying member or having its factories churning out Pierre Cardin goods, expensive cars, and computers won't hurt. Can his underlying assumption, then, be that countries or cultures that cannot, have not, or simply choose not to deliver these things are unworthy of the world's attention? I wonder what his thoughts are about the cultures of Third World countries, about ancient Indian philosophy, or about the livelihood of the indigenous Australian population in relation to this grand scheme of globalization. Or perhaps I have misread Dr. Wong's intentions.

Perhaps he is merely describing or even lamenting the reality of the situation today, not articulating what is desirable. Still, one can't help but wonder.

Dr. Wong goes on to tell us that "[a]ll cultures cherish peace and harmony, regardless of nationalities and race, and we denounce hatred and war."[11] Leaving that gloriously sanguine assessment of human nature aside, it seems to me that the question to ask is not what we as human beings cherish or do not cherish in the abstract, but what our collective empirical experience in its dynamic social, political, and intellectual context has taught us about the effects of conflicting national self-definitions, aspirations, ideologies, and systems of perception. When we talk about common human values and concerns, I personally wish that American soldiers during the Gulf War would have chosen to read a novel by an Iraqi novelist rather than an ancient Chinese classic about the art of warfare.

III. Final Thoughts

Now, some final thoughts inspired by Dr. Wong's paper. First, when we talk about the globalization of literature and literary imagination, the central question we need to ask is not how many foreign languages our writers and poets can speak, or how many names of foreign literary luminaries our critics or playwrights could summon in a scholarly paper. Instead, we need to ask what broad commonalities of humanistic concern—literary, aesthetic, social, political, and intellectual—have drawn international novelists, poets, and dramatists together in a shared attempt to represent the human condition, to reimagine and interpret experience.

Second, globalization of the creative imagination as it relates to Chinese literature cannot, and indeed must not, be premised on a narrowly defined East-West axis alone. China, Western Europe, and the United States together do not constitute the world. As I recall the words of Ōe Kenzaburō and Oda Makoto about the unmistakable sense of solidarity they have established with writers and poets from other parts of Asia, I wonder how well informed contemporary Chinese novelists or playwrights are with the works of their Latin American or other Asian counterparts or with the problematic they cherish. I also wonder

whether any significant number of Chinese writers have genuinely forged the kind of profound, intimate sense of solidarity with their colleagues in the Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil, Iran, Romania, or Egypt, as they might have achieved with literary artists in Paris and London. In another part of the world, Adam Smith, writing an article published in the *New York Times Book Review* not long ago, underscores the anachronism of the Madame Butterfly image for Japan and concludes that "we can't go on humming Puccini."[12] Lamenting that "American ignorance of Asia remains a greater problem than ever," another writer for the *New York Times* suggests that most Americans think about Indonesia, a country with 190 million people, for only approximately fifteen seconds a year.[13] I don't know how many seconds most Chinese think about Indonesia a year, but I doubt if it can be many more. Globalization has just begun, and there is still a very long way to go.

Notes

1. See Kat̄o Shūichi, *Hitsuji no uta* (*A Sheep's Song*), vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1968): 134–35. Kat̄o's autobiography provides one of the most intimate insights into the excitement and confusion of modern Japanese intellectual life during the interwar years and into the postwar decades. A full and annotated translation of Kat̄o's work with a critical study by Chia-ning Chang is forthcoming from the University of California Press.

2. We learn about his reading habits and, more significantly, the range of his readings from his largely autobiographical novel, *Aru aho no isshō* (*Life of a Fool*, 1927). A month after finishing this work, he committed suicide at the age of thirty-five by taking an overdose of sleeping pills, leaving a will confessing only to "a vague sense of anxiety" about his future.

3. *Kappa* was first published in *Kaizō* in 1927.

4. *Konjaku monogatari* has been translated by Marian Ury as *Tales of Times Now Past: Sixty-two Stories from a Medieval Japanese Collection* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

5. Uchida Roan, "Futabatei yodan" (August 1915), collected in the section called "Futabatei Shimei no isshō" in *Meiji no sakka* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1941): 211–12.

6. Shakespeare on Tsubouchi Shōyō; Wordsworth, Byron, and Heine on Ishikawa Takuboku; Maupassant on Tayama Katai; Nietzsche on Takayama Chogyū; Meredith on Natsume Sōseki; Baudelaire and Oscar Wilde on Tanizaki Jun'ichirō; Whitman on Arishima Takeo; the French symbolic poets on Nakahara Chūya, Nakamura Shin'ichirō and Fukunaga Takehiko; Rilke on Abe Kōbō; T. S. Eliot and Joyce on Nishiwaki Junzaburō; and the list is virtually endless. See

Fukuda Mitsuharu, Kenmochi Takehiko, and Kodama Kōichi, eds. *Ō-Bei sakka to Nihon Kindai bungaku*, 5 vols., (Tokyo: Kyōiku Shuppan Sentā, 1974–76).

7. See Ōe's "Aimai na Nihon to watakushi" in *Aimai na Nihon to watakushi* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1995): 6 and 14–15.

8. Quoted in David Galloway, *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): 3.

9. Wai-leung Wong, "Chinese Literature, the Creative Imagination, and Globalization," *Macalester International* 3 (Spring 1996): 44.

10. Ibid., 49.

11. Ibid., 51.

12. Adam Smith, "Japan Inc. Is Still in Business," *New York Times Book Review*, 19 March 1995.

13. Nicholas D. Kristof, "Fortune Cookie: Your Ignorance Clouds Asian Joy," *New York Times*, 13 August 1995. The Indonesian population was estimated at 199,700,000 in mid-1994 according to *Information Please Almanac 1995* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1994): 204.