"Furui Yoshikichi: Travel and Liminality"

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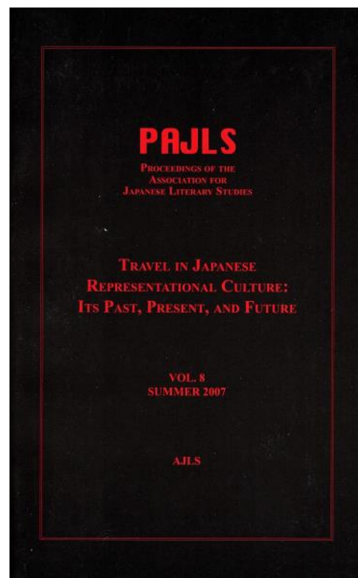

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FURUI YOSHIKICHI—TRAVEL AND LIMINALITY

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Furui Yoshikichi's writing could be categorised as a 'literature of the liminal', so extensive is the author's use of the betwixt-and-between, border-straddling condition to explore the intricacy and irrationality of the various life crisis situations, such as psychological disturbance, illness, death, ageing and workplace stress, in which his protagonists find themselves.

LIMINALITY

My interpretation is based on the socio-anthropological analysis of the structure of rites of passage, as defined by Arnold van Gennep. Victor Turner's further detailed investigation of the transitional state of liminality, where subjects are relatively unbound by usual social norms and expectations, provides a useful interpretive perspective which can be effectively applied to a literary study.

However, my approach is aimed at understanding more about Furui's use of liminal features in style and content, which in turn contribute to the reader's understanding of the psychological states of Furui's protagonists. My use of the term liminality in this investigation concentrates on its "betwixt-and-betweenness", its ambiguity which allows liminars to move freely in the transitional regions, crossing and recrossing the border zone between states or social position. This means that those in a liminal condition are located on the border between two social categories, and in the sense that they belong to neither of those categories, they possess characteristics of both.[1]

Turner writes that liminal entities are "neither here nor there,"[2] and yet their ambiguous position means that they are, paradoxically, here *and* there. Matsuoka Etsuko points out that in their liminal state they are unrecognised by the usual social structures, and in this respect their liminality can be compared with (social) death. She goes on to say that the process of destroying their previous identity is simultaneous to the beginning of their (social) rebirth.[3]

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[1] Muratake and Sasaki: 176.
[2] Turner (1995): 95.
[3] Matsuoka: 32.

Turner has identified three common characteristics of liminal entities: "they are persons of principles that (1) fall in the interstices of social structure, (2) are on its margins, or (3) occupy its lowest rungs".[4] He has further differentiated between those in a marginal, betwixt and between liminality and those permanently in a "state of outsiderhood". This refers to "the condition of being either permanently and by ascription set outside the structural arrangements of a given social system, or being situationally or temporarily set apart, or voluntarily setting oneself apart from the behavior of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system".[5] Examples of outsiders include itinerant beggars, wandering monks, and mediums. Marginals, on the other hand, straddle the border, as it were, and exist simultaneously as part of two different groups, as is the case with those who have migrated from the country to the city.

THE TRAVEL MOTIF

Travel is an important motif in many of Furui's works, and constitutes a liminal space and time which allows the author to add further layers of complexity. Not only is travel itself a liminal state which allows the protagonists some respite from their daily grind and stress, and offers the opportunity for reflection and reminiscence, but it often also provides the impetus for the protagonist's occupation of liminal time and space, freely crossing and re-crossing the borders between the past and the present, between the ordinary and the extraordinary, or between reality and fantasy.

Furui's protagonists' travel experiences can be loosely grouped into: daily commuter travel, for example by train or taxi; business trips; hiking in the mountains; travel for pleasure—whether in Japan or abroad. He also looks at pilgrimages and religiously-motivated journeys in his works —particularly *Sansōfu,*[6] and *Kariōjōdenshibun,*[7] which draws on the tradition of religious texts, interspersed with twentieth century travel diary interludes. The complex and specific nature of these works merit a more detailed investigation than is possible in this paper.

Furui uses travel as a motif representing escape and relief. Travel sequences appear in many Furui stories and represent a liminal interlude for the protagonists, during which they are outside the restrictions of their

[4] Turner (1995): 125.
[5] Turner (1974): 233.
[6] Furui (1982).
[7] Furui (1989).

everyday lives and pressures. In one example, the protagonist's disorientation during a business trip represents a period outside his ordinary routine, and is symbolised by his ability to sleep better in a hotel than at home.

In addition, the motif of travel is an element present in the Noh drama in the form of the *michiyuki,* or travel sequence, in which the *waki* informs the audience of the circumstances of the story. It is a transitional region in which the normal temporal references are suspended. Time may be sped up, slowed down or reversed. This also happens in Furui's use of journeys, whether on a mountain trek, during a train or plane journey or while going for a walk. This technique allows the insertion of scenes out of chronological sequence, and depictions of the thoughts that pass seemingly at random through the minds of his protagonists.

MOUNTAIN TRAVEL

Furui began mountain climbing and hiking in his student days, and the resulting experiences of the mountains and travel to remoter parts of Japan find their reflection in his writing. He has also travelled extensively, including visits to Europe and China, and the echoes of these journeys, too, find their place in his work. He is extremely well informed over a wide range of issues and maintains a lively interest in the arts.

In Furui's 1971 Akutagawa Prize winning novella, *Yōko*,[8] a young man comes across the title character as she sits motionless in a mountain valley, apparently suffering from some kind of attack. After assisting her back to the city, the two meet a number of times and slowly their relationship develops. It is through this process that the circumstances surrounding Yōko's problems become clearer. Her greatest fear is that her symptoms of mental disturbance will develop into an illness identical to that suffered by her sister some years earlier.

In her analysis of *Yōko*, Donna Storey has pointed out the indefinable nature of the border between sanity and insanity. She states that it is a border which can be "crossed and recrossed in an instant."[9] It is the two protagonists' meeting in the liminal space of the mountains which delineates the fluidity of their following relationship and Yōko's mental state. The mountain valley is a place apart, between the heights and dangers of the mountain peaks themselves, that is nature, and the everyday world of the city, where nature is dominated by the manifestations of human civilisation. It is because their initial encounter

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[8] Furui (1971).
[9] Storey: 142.

is in such an unbounded liminal space, that the young man is able to first accept, and then, act to alleviate Yōko's suffering. She has been overcome by a panic attack and is unable to move. Yōko's motionlessness corresponds to the close-up shot of cinematography, with the purpose of focusing the audience's attention on the character and allowing them to enter the scene.[10] The reader is certainly made aware of Yōko's state of "otherness" by Furui's emphasis on her motionlessness and lack of reaction to the approach of the young man.

Whenever Yōko tries to behave to correspond to the world outside, either physically or spiritually, there is always a divergence between her actions and intentions and the 'norms' of that world. She is constantly reminded of her place as one who, despite her best efforts, does not quite fit in. She has lost her 'place', and can only feel at ease in nature, in liminal spaces, such as the mountains or the beach. The young man is also between the physical challenge and emotional rewards of mountain climbing, and his return to his life in the city. His liminal persona as traveler allows him to be receptive to Yōko's suffering.

During her attacks, Yōko is as if another person. At the height of her attack, when she is unable to move in the ravine, she appears to achieve a rare communion with the natural forces around her. She is acutely aware of the equilibrium in the forces of nature—much more so than one would normally be as a modern-day urban dweller. In fact, she is more in tune with nature than the young man, who, despite his apparent familiarity with the mountains, really perceives them in terms of a challenge to be conquered, of something to brag about to his friends. It is only later, through his association with Yōko's illness that the young man becomes more attuned to nature, and to himself.

The infinite and ambiguous nature of the boundary between life and death is explored by Furui in "Mago no miyage ni" (The Grandson's Present), the second chapter of the episodic *Rakutenki.*[11] This episode takes place in November, on a wintry day when the wind conditions provide clear views of the mountains in the distance. The protagonist, Kakihara, is keenly aware of the weather as he goes for a walk near his apartment. A keen mountain climber when he was younger, he is reminded of an incident which happened at the beginning of the previous month, in which a group of older mountain climbers froze to death in a snowstorm. He read more about it in the morning newspaper, and in a news magazine, using his own mountaineering experience to put all the

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[10] Dōmoto Masaki, "Dialogue and Monologue in *Nō*." In Brandon: 148.
[11] Furui (1992).

details into perspective and recreate in his mind what might have happened.

> On the morning of a cold rainy Sunday they set off climbing from Murodō, already at a height of nearly 2,500 metres. When they reached the ridge at Ichi-no-koshi, snow was falling. "Why didn't they turn back then?" a well-informed person will ask, quite justifiably. But they began to walk along the wind-swept ridge, and by the time they reached the summit of Oyama at over 3,000 metres at midday, it had turned into a snowstorm. "Why didn't they turn back before that?" people will criticise, with even more justification. They ended up climbing as far as the highest peak, the 3,500 metre Ōnanjisan. Kakihara knew that from here they could no longer turn back. They descended afresh, and then headed for the next peak, and by the time they arrived at the saddle between Fuji-no-oritate and Masagodake, it seemed that they could no longer go on at all. Two of the group - at under fifty among the youngest - were sent to a hut for help, and after losing their way in the snow overnight, these two were rescued, but the remaining eight people were discovered the next day, lying dead above the ridge. ... Hadn't they sensed the danger to their bodies and the fear on their skin when they first stood on the rocky ridge in the driving, sub-freezing rain? This was something that took precedence over prudent judgement. Hadn't their bodies refused? He didn't even want to consider the image of them recklessly continuing from this point onwards to death. Granted that they had been blinded by a group mentality, to suppose they'd overcome a dangerous spot with great perseverance and been able to struggle to the hut ahead right away would have been unthinkably optimistic. In any case, even if everyone was ruthlessly obsessed after the onset of exhaustion, by the time they had crawled up to the first peak after having been exposed to the wind for two hours, their bodies were unlikely to have been in any condition to proceed further. The blizzard had already started.[12]
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> "Why didn't they turn back, at least from the top of Oyama?" ... [H]owever, if at that point their survival instincts had been working at all, they would probably have turned back well this

[12] Furui (1992): 21–22.

> side of the boundary... .
> In the course of retracing their movements to this point, to Kakihara the borderline from which that group was no longer able to turn back slid back, until finally it had receded to a time before those present met up. Didn't its finely separated strands reach right inside the lives of each and every person concerned? ... He thought that the border, too, was probably something that partially belonged to a large number of people and had finally been brought together into one.[13]

The boundary between life and death is here a fluid area, not a strictly defined linear binary. It is seen to move depending on the perspective from which it is considered. The biological point of death is contrasted with the "point of no return" as an equivalent to death. Using the example of the demise of a mountain climbing group provides an apt metaphor for the ambiguous nature of death. The members of the group are doomed, but unaware and very much alive, still functioning normally. Furui poses the question of how far back one can push the border between life and death, advancing the possibility of separating it out into individual strands which reach far back and can be traced into individual lives and fates. Is it possible to extrapolate the point of death back to when each member left home, even as far back as the individual's decision to join the trip?

When the group members pass the point of no return, wherever that may be, they have entered a liminal condition straddling the fluid border between life and biological death. This liminal area is indefinable, unique to each individual.

Another aspect raised here is the group's failure to heed their bodies' natural instincts, the implication being that they were unaware of the signals because of a predominating group psychology. Would they have been more susceptible to the warning instincts as individuals rather than as a group? Here is an inherent juxtaposition of society and the individual, urban and natural and which indicates the loss of man's ability to first perceive, and then rely on, his instincts for survival.

This conforms to the traditional concept of mountains as liminal spaces between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Their very altitude caused them to be regarded as places from where entry to the other world was relatively easily gained. Burial sites were often located in the mountains, and it is not surprising that mountains were

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[13] Furui (1992): 23–24.

thought of as the home of spirits and of gods. As a result, there are strong associations between death and mountains in Japanese folklore.

In the short story "Senaka bakari ga kurenokoru" from the collection *Yōkina yomawari*,[14] he narrator is deep in reminiscences from his youth, and recalls his own lack of material goods when he began university studies. He expressly draws attention to his position outside the mainstream work-a-day world of the salaryman, the ubiquitous company employee who has come to represent the Japanese society during the long period of economic growth. While the mainstream was able to hope for increased salaries, and enjoying a consumption and leisure boom, the narrator was insulated from this.

As a university student, the narrator is in a liminal position relative to the past world of childhood and the future adult world of work. However, it seems that his feeling of isolation and difference stems from something deeper than just a liminal social stage. It seems that he is suggesting the existence of a feeling of social difference from his more consumption-oriented peers on a much more fundamental level.

As if to emphasise his outsider status, the narrator recounts an episode from one of his mountain climbing trips. Here we have a compounding of liminal symbolism, both spatial and temporal: the mountains themselves, a symbol of the liminal region between this world and the next, and traditionally the region where the spiritual was most accessible to humans; and the gathering gloom of dusk, the period of temporal liminality between the brightness of day and the darkness of night, with its mystery and ambiguity.

While waiting at the bus stop after descending the mountain, the narrator chances to meet another climber who presents a stark contrast to himself. The other climber is four or five years his senior, and his climbing equipment is first-rate, in contrast to the hand-me-downs the narrator has managed to scrape together. His conversation revolves around economic conditions and the construction industry. He is altogether more self-assured and confident than the narrator. The narrator finds himself again marginalised, after he somewhat romantically likens the lights on the mountainside to a castle of the night. "A college student is what I was, even though at my age I certainly should have been out in the world and receiving a salary."[15] All in all, this man seems to indicate

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[14] Furui (1994): 205. [English translation: "His Back Alone in the Afterglow." Michael Hoffman, Yuriko Takahashi, trans. *Japanese Literature Today,* 20 (1995): 50.]

[15] Furui (1994): 210. [Trans. 52]

a vision of what the narrator himself may be like four of five years down the track, if he follows the usual employment path after graduation. This impression is confirmed with the narrator's later recollection of having lost his way after taking the wrong fork in the path. The forked path may be interpreted as symbolizing an upcoming life-defining decision.

However, the man's confidence and position comes at a price. He likens himself to a soldier. "We're soldiers thrown into battle – today here, tomorrow there."[16] This is indicative of the conditions typically experienced by workers, under pressure to increase output and performance. He sums up his experiences thus:

> "It's getting on for nine years since I left university and joined the company. And during that time, more than once, the word would go round: "This is it, this is the end!" – and every time that happened, all of us, from the top people on down, would rouse ourselves and give it everything we had. When I look back on it now, even to a young guy like me it seemed we'd climbed to terrifyingly dizzying heights. Maybe it was all like some fleeting dream …. A dream? That's not for us to say. "This is it, this is the end!" – the same refrain time and time again, but you know something? If it really did come to that, we'd probably think: "Well it's finally happened. So it was all just a nice dream, was it? That's how I've felt all along. It's how I feel now. Every time a veteran manages to overcome a crisis he's beside himself with joy. For a greenhorn it's no big deal at all. But some of us wonder if we can get over that sense of wasted effort. I've surprised you, haven't I?"[17]

This is a strong indictment of the economic miracle. The downside to the glittering surface achievement of economic success is disillusionment and never-ending pressure. This is bound to have a detrimental effect of those who exist under such a rigid regime and the manager-type is an example of the attempt to escape from the everyday pressures he experience by walking in the mountains. However, he is unable to cast off his role as a professional in the construction industry, and cannot resist a belittling comment in response to the student/narrator's idealistic view of the lights as a castle, rather than what they actually are—the lights of a round-the-clock construction site.

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[16] Furui (1994): 209. [Trans. 53.]

[17] Furui (1994): 209–210. [Trans. 53.]

The narrator goes on to recall how this man has remained in his mind over the decades, and this memory has become inextricably linked to the memory of the man he'd met in the mountains. However, this does little to clarify the identity of the solitary man in relation to the narrator himself, and the reader is still confronted by the conundrum of who he really is and if he represents the narrator in any way. Through this ambiguity and shifting interpretation by the narrator of the image in his own imagination, the reader also find herself unsure of the connections in the story. In this way, Furui is able to communicate his protagonist's feeling of uncertainty and changing perspectives. While the narrator in one sentence refutes the idea that the figure is his alter ego, only to later entertain the idea that the figure could well be an image of himself, the reader is also forced to re-evaluate her own interpretation. This is a very effective means of communicating the sense of ambiguity and liminal experience to the reader.

The narrator abruptly remembers long-forgotten details of that day in the mountains. At a fork in the path, he goes the wrong way, although his instincts tell him he is on the wrong track. His reluctance to give instinct precedence over the apparent logic of his decision to follow a path with sign of footprints leads to a conflict of feelings.

> Doubts must have arisen before I had gone fifty paces, though. Through my feet I seemed to sense the fresh warmth of the logging path – I had enough hiking experience to tell. But the stronger my doubts grew, the more stubbornly I convinced myself that the path bore signs of a mountain trail, though in fact there weren't any. … A feeling of emptiness descended upon me, and in response I felt the first stirrings of panic welling up.[18]

What the narrator initially thought was a trail leads nowhere but further into the mountains. It is possible to equate this path with the outcome of following a company employee lifestyle- it has no particular destination, and leads the traveller further and further into unknown territory. Fortunately, the narrator is able to halt and gather his thoughts, and realising his error, he retraces his steps. As he does so, he becomes aware of a human odour, which he realises is the smell of his own fear and uncertainty.

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[18] Furui (1994): 215. [Trans. 56.]

BUSINESS TRAVEL

The short story, "Kuru hi mo", was initially published in the magazine *Bungakkai* in January 1987 and subsequently collected in *Yoru wa ima*.[19] It revolves around one of the major hazards of modern (Japanese) society: that of stress-induced fatigue and burnout in the workplace.

One section of the story takes place during a business trip, when the protagonist, Ishida, recalls the differing perceptions that he and his colleague Yamanaka have of a particular situation. Ishida's sleep disorders are not a recent, isolated occurrence. They are ongoing problems which have caused disruption to his life and necessitated a coming to terms with what seems the inevitable.

> Time had become strange. He had arrived from Tokyo yesterday on the morning flight. With such a pace, his work had been completed during the course of the day. In his room, with less than an hour until sundown, he stared through the window at a sky which reminded him of the rainy season, and then, in the early evening, he ate in town. Afterwards he went to just three bars, returned to the hotel, and stood around in the late-night atmosphere of the corridor with the colleague he was travelling with. Because they were pretty tired, they agreed not to worry about breakfast the next day, to just bring their luggage down and meet with the aim of nine-thirty. When he went to his room, the night in the regional town was still young - it was not yet ten thirty.[20]

The business trip described here is, on the surface, nothing out of the ordinary. It contains the expected elements: pressure to get the work done as quickly as possible, eating out and drinking copious amounts of alcohol, and the hint of underlying fatigue.

The full extent of Ishida's stress becomes clear from his description of his unexpectedly long and deep sleep and the resulting confusion the next morning.

> Still, he showered and went to sleep after eleven. Then, indeed, he awoke. Recently, after he'd been asleep for four or five hours, he always woke up once. "Can't I even get out of this habit on

[19] Furui (1987):117–140.
[20] Furui (1987): 125.

> trips?" he thought, a bit sick of it. He raised his head and when he glanced at his wristwatch beside the bed with the intention of smoking a cigarette, it had turned nine. Between the curtains, the interior of the room had become bright. He'd slept for ten hours straight. He hadn't even set his alarm. In a rush he dressed and flew out of the room. When he got down to the lobby, he couldn't see his travelling companion. He asked the reception desk as a precaution, but was told that he hadn't yet appeared. Come to think of it, when he had run out the corridor, he had a recollection that seemed to be behind him of having heard the persistent call of a ringing telephone. What he heard were two or more voices, with no patience at all. Had he misheard? Even if he left here at eleven he would be in plenty of time for his return flight.[21]

Ishida's perceptions of sleep disturbances are intertwined with the realisation, or perhaps excuse, that he is getting older. He describes feelings of floating, of what could be called hallucinations, and it is apparent that he is at those times in a liminal condition between consciousness and sleep. This corresponds to his liminal position as a man on the verge of old age, yet still feeling himself to be young and able. The changes in his sleep patterns are an indication of the changes he has undergone over the years: unrelenting work pressure combined with the natural effects of growing older.

> When you get close to fifty, you no longer sleep as much as when you were younger. Occasionally when I sleep too long and deeply at home, I wake up and the feeling of my soul floating continues until nearly dawn. Sleep was put off until late at night, and when I hit the bed, there was another thing that amazed me - the tiredness of that day - this mingled with the next sleep, and I wondered fleetingly what would happen.
> I tend to sleep well in hotels at my destination. Especially since entering middle age, going to sleep in a different place is no longer hard. From when I hit the mattress at midnight until waking up in the morning, the passing of time is not within my body. When I wake, I feel light. An almost unreasonable transparency pursues me until the sun rises high. I've never known the flow to stagnate. And when the sun begins to go

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[21] Furui (1987): 126.

> down, sleepiness is on the rise. I wander around the town like that. This continues for several nights, and while I sleep and sleep, something resembling weakness collects in my depths.[22]

Here we can see the link between middle age and work-related stress, with its resultant sleep disturbances and distortion of the "reality" normally experienced in the unchanging everyday routine of the company lifestyle. His body is so fatigued that the normal difficulties of getting to sleep in unfamiliar surroundings have disappeared. This is a chance to catch up on some of that missing sleep and as a result of the unusually long sleep periods, he feels a certain lightness, or even something resembling sleep-drunkenness. However, this lasts only as long as he is outside his normal workaday routine.

> And then I returned home, feeling as if I'd returned totally worn out from a trip where I hadn't slept well. I slept without consciousness for several nights more. During this time, there were days when I woke with a bodily sensation that I'd slept enough and had suddenly grown old. "And yet, although it had been little over one day since I'd left the house, it felt like the last half-day of the month-long period of travelling around," said Ishida, turning his head a little. "During one night, something had become terribly thin. Around the middle of the long trip, although I should have been already used to staying in hotels, when I woke, I floated up lightly into an illusion of sleeping in my own home."[23]

The impression of Ishida's desolation and depression is very apparent from Furui's text. It seems that when Ishida is away from his everyday environment, even if the stress of a business trip is involved, he is able to sleep more soundly and for longer than when he is at home. This points to the level of pressure inherent in his everyday life. If a business trip in unfamiliar surroundings brings relief, then daily life must be totally laden with stress.

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[22] Furui (1987): 126–127.
[23] Furui (1987): 127.

TRAVEL FOR PLEASURE

The 1985 short story "Kabe no kao", from the collection *Yoru wa ima* 24 reads as a combination of flow of consciousness, the fantastic, and impressions of travel to a distant and unfamiliar location. It begins as the narrator recounts a woman acquaintance's experience of being observed through opening for the ventilation fan on the wall. She is disturbed by the voyeuristic intruder, and can't get it out of her mind. She and the narrator discuss the varying perspectives—the faceless body which must have been visible form outside the room, and the body-less face which had intruded into her space until she had blocked the fan opening. Nevertheless the feeling of being observed remain strong, and although she feels reasonably sure that she would be able to recognise the intruder if she saw him on the street, she suddenly loses her assurance and begins to doubt that she would actually recognise him in the light of day.

The narrator returns home. He immediately feels the presence of a face on the wall, not watching him, but staring at the desk where he usually sits. His thoughts again return to the woman's experience, recalling that it had started while he had been away, and continued for the two weeks of his absence.

At first, he seems to settle back into his daily routine, but shortly afterwards wakes with the strong impression he is still in the hotel room at his destination:

> From the bed my hand reached out to stop the alarm clock, and I awoke in my own room to the same sound as at my destination, but even so, while my gaze passed over the inside of the room, my body didn't try to slip out of the illusion. I saw my own face. It wasn't inside the wall.[25]

Here liminality and travel are closely and ambiguously bound, giving rise to an incursion of the irrational. In fact it is difficult to say exactly whether the suggestivity of the woman's experience of being observed through the fan space leads to his illusion, or whether the illusion of travel is the cause of the incursion of the irrational.

Whatever the case, the narrator now recalls scenes and impressions from his recent trip as if they were a series of photographic slides. He is

[24] Furui (1987): 54–75.
[25] Furui (1987): 64.

acutely aware of himself as observer. He seems to feel that by being an observer, he is able to leave a shadow of his presence:

> Here and there, on land which had become unfamiliar, on street corners, near wastelands and in front of strange stone images, I left traces of my own shadow, which lingered, merely gazing.[26]

He is clearly a traveler, a liminar who does not belong to his destination, yet who feels that fleetingly, as a shadow and as a result of his gaze, he does belong—he can become a part of his surroundings. He observes his surroundings in minute detail, from the way the horse carts are driven past, to the details of daily life seen briefly through courtyard entrances as his car speeds by. The strength of his gaze alone seems to make him a participant, although from a physical perspective he is clearly not.

In fact the scenery described in the travel sequences is based on Furui's own two-week visit to the Central Asian regions of China in October 1984. The author recalls travelling by car from Ürümchi on the eastern edge of the Tien Shan Mountains to Turfan.[27] In the story, the narrator recollects a visit to a city museum where several very tall mummies were on display in glass cases. This is would have been the Ürümchi museum, where several very well preserved mummified human bodies are housed.[28]

These mummies are in their own way liminal entities, dead, but in such a state of preservation that they appear almost alive:

> Luckily, the revealed face wasn't that of a dead person. I couldn't absolutely say that it was the living person as he had been, but its facial expression, however, was fixed like that. It wasn't that it was a face in the final stages of death. It had probably been enshrined in a temporary coffin for several days. It had been sealed airtight, deep in a tomb and down there, dehydration proceeded quickly. There was no doubt that those features had been fixed since that transformation. They were features with no connection whatever to a person, either during his lifetime or in the final stages of death. Nevertheless, it

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[26] Furui (1987): 64–65.
[27] Wada (1999): 317.
[28] Detailed information about the mummies themselves and the history and culture of the region, including an account of the display conditions of the mummies as Furui would have seen them in 1984, can be found in: Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *The Mummies of Ürümchi.* London: Pan Books, 1999: 19.

> resembled a facial expression. It continued to look as it had for thousands of years.[29]

Told that it was said that they were the family of a military commander of an outlying fort, Furui's narrator speculates on whether those faces had gazed out over the vast desert from a high tower rising from the tamped-down soil of the ramparts. It is not unreasonable to assume that this fort is also one of those along the Silk Route in the Gobi desert.

The narrator's liminal experience as a traveler, one who is physically present at his destination, but not really of it, allow him the freedom to roam through time and space, to imagine the past and those who inhabited the ruins so long ago, and also to be attuned to the varied interpretations and perspectives offered by the irrational and fantastic when it intrudes into everyday life. He is easily able to make the transition from listener, hearing the woman's story and feeling her fear and confusion, to participant, watching his own face observing him, and in turn observing others with an amazing power and focus. Finally, the women tells that the voyeur had been caught in the act, peering in through the venitilator shaft. When challenged he had fled, and the face on the wall appeared no more.

CONCLUSION

Furui's view is that the liminal states on which he focuses are a vital part of the human condition, irrespective of place or time. This is his fundamental message in a society and a world where such states are considered peripheral and unnecessary to modern rationality, and as such are to be avoided and obliterated as quickly as possible. At the very least, they are to be ignored. These states represent the incursion of uncontrollable, wild, and other-worldly aspects into a society that values rationalism above all else and in which order and control are highly estimated. Using the travel motif allows him to explore liminalities of time and space, and illustrate the betwixt-and-betweenness of the traveller.

The complexity of the liminalities which Furui explores in his writing is indicative of the many layers of meaning he has been able to incorporate. His concentration on the vividness of the instant locates the reader in one moment at a time and gives rise to the sensation of slow motion. Each moment is a snapshot of the universe as it is now. Like a pack of cards where only the face of the uppermost card is visible at any

[29] Furui (1987): 69.

one time, one can only live in that moment, not in the moment before or the moment after. Furui tries to convey the moment to his readers. His approach to the critical states of his protagonists distils their predicaments to their essence and allows the reader a better understanding of living in the late twentieth century.

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