“Japanese Literary Studies in Depth and in Context: From Twofold Marginality toward Complementary Integrity”

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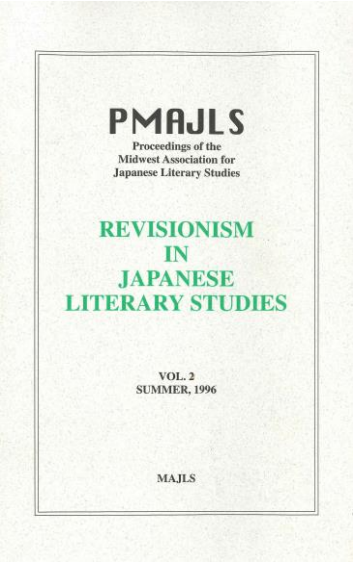

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JAPANESE LITERARY STUDIES IN DEPTH AND IN CONTEXT: FROM TWOFOLD MARGINALITY TOWARD COMPLEMENTARY INTEGRITY

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Does Theory have to be opposed to Practice in literary studies?

Though the title of my paper might sound abstract and vague, I would like to begin my paper with a personal note, hoping to account for the reasons that I am apprehensive about contrasting theory with practice, and the West with the East, and about somehow paralleling the two oppositional pairs so as to have theory correspond to the West and practice, to the East. [1]

I am one of the few native Japanese Japanologists professionally active in the United States who have done graduate work on Japanese literature both in Japan and abroad--though the number of such people is increasing--and I have been publishing and presenting works both in Japanese and English, and both on "theoretical" and "practical" topics. I have also been trying to bring a wide range of approaches to Japanese literature into the classroom. In a course which I have been asked to conduct in Japanese, in which I teach students how to read modern Japanese literary texts closely, I lecture on contemporary intellectual issues such as "en-gendered reading," "orality versus literacy," "narrative voice and context," and the like. Meanwhile, in a challenge graduate students by demanding of them textual evidence to

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[1] Here, I would like to acknowledge the prudent choice of the title of the conference: "Theory vs. Practice/ East vs. West"--rather than " (...)/ West vs. East." This chiasmic contrast suggests a possible destabilization of the conventional associations which I am trying to undo in this paper.

support their theoretical argument.

Personally I think that this split and yet intertwined scholarly background has benefited me in crucial ways. However, those who do not necessarily share my sense of the positive aspects of this "hybrid" approach seem to be perplexed at my identity--or lack of identity. They do not wish to speak to me, for example, in English if I employ it, and instead respond to me in Japanese, whether to suggest that they speak Japanese better than I speak English, or that my responsibility is confined to helping others practice their conversational skills in Japanese. Among the glorious titles that I have earned are: "the converted (from 'pragmatism' to 'theory')," "the only-half-enlightened," for believing in the significance of 'close-reading', "a native informant from Japan, who, strangely enough, likes to talk about 'theory'," "a comparatist, non-Kokubungaku specialist, hence dilettante, teaching not in Japan (as a Kokubungaku specialist should be) but in the United States (where Japanese Studies are presumably underdeveloped)." This perception of me as an undefinable have certainly affected my otherwise happy character. Whenever I give a paper, I feel I have to be an apologist, defending myself from possible criticism about lack of consistency, with a footnote such as: "while applying so-and-so's theory, I do read individual texts closely" or "though I am concerned with recent theoretical issues, and am aware of the problematic nature of complacently analyzing the text as if it were an autonomous artifact." Then, I stop and think: is the divide between theory and practice to be thus taken for granted?

Facing such suspicions about my dual identity, and presuppositions that one has to be either a pragmatist or a theorist, and either Japanese or North-American, and not both at the same

time, my efforts to establish myself as a scholar in Japanese studies in North America thus inevitably have involved two intellectual operations: to relate theory to practice, and the West to the East, two pairs of notions which apparently strike many scholars as unquestionably contrastive; and to question, if not undo, the pat associations between theory and the West, and practice and the East--associations, which seem to me to be accepted too unthinkingly.

Desire for theorizing in practice of reading, and contextuality of theory

I wonder if I am naive when I claim that practice resides in theory, and vice versa. One tries to reconfigure a given text by reading, or by writing on it. This means that one applies a certain theoretical mode of understanding to a new text. In other words, one applies what one has "theorized" from one's previous experience of reading to the unknown. Whether one would put it in such words or not, one always strives for "theorization" when engaged in the practice of reading. As D. N. Rodowick maintains in her article on teaching film theory for undergraduate students:

> [T]heory is not a thing--a group of ideas, an identity or an attitude--that can be acquired or discarded; rather, I would call theory that process of reaching self-consciousness about how we know what we know. Theory may be taught badly or well, but there is no classroom where it is wholly absent. By the same token, theory is ever present in our daily lives. Whenever we make judgments of knowledge or value, we invoke, consciously or not, a system of assumptions, definitions, concepts, and beliefs: in short, a theory. When this process is unconscious, we risk becoming slaves to habit or prejudice. Teaching theory as a process means encouraging students to liberate themselves from

> habits of thought, not only through self-criticism but also through a process of active creation and imagination. (255)

This is not to say, however, that one's preexisting theory of reading must always put the practice of reading under its control. In the process of reading an unknown text, one may be confused and frustrated if one's "theory" doesn't help one make sense of the text. In such a case, one tries to find ways of reconciling one's mode of reading (theory) with the text. In other words, one is compelled to write, or rewrite, one's theory according to one's reading experience. I have never seen any book "on" literary theory that dispensed altogether with readings of individual texts. Rather, it seems to me that the most common format of such books consists of a general introductory part followed by individual chapters on individual texts to demonstrate the particular type of reading practice based upon the proposed methodologies. It is a common understanding that any literary theory (I say this because there is no identical and homogeneous entity such as "Literary Theory") is sprung from a given type of practice of reading historically and politically conditioned.

"Foreign" Theory and Colonization of Japan

It is not unique to Japanese literary studies that theorists and pragmatists debate over which group possesses scholarly legitimacy. Many national literary studies, such as English, have witnessed disputes between the two--"Against Theory" and "Against 'Against-Theory'"--the mantle claimed by theorists, reaction to their "reign" by anti-theorists, and counter reaction thereto.

It is not unique to Japan, either, that when scholars dispute about whether or not it is "right" to apply to a non-Western

national literature a literary theory developed in a Western context, notions of ethnic diversity and national identity come into play. As Simon Gikandi points out:

> For the teacher of literary traditions that are defined as oppositional or noncanonical--postcolonial, ethnic, or marginal literatures--the deployment of critical theory is both inevitable and highly problematic. (...) It is problematic because critical theory is accompanied by what I consider to be the anxiety of cultural translation: how to use concepts developed within the Western tradition to explicate texts and cultures that have, in many instances, risen to resist this tradition. (233)

Though the essay including the above-cited passage deals primarily with the case of English-African literature, the dilemma between the "inevitable" and "problematic" aspects of the application of theory is not unfamiliar to specialists in Japanese literary studies. Opinions ranging from naive belief in the universality of theory to allergic repellence of "foreign" theory seem to be preconditioned by a formula equating theory with the West on the one hand, and practice with the Japanese on the other.

One of the significant problems that non-Western national literary studies have to face is, as Professor Ramirez-Christensen stated in her response to panelists, that studies of such a literature (say, Japanese) have been established so recently that scholars have had to go through the stages of "Formalism," "New Criticism," "Structuralism," and "Deconstruction" at a speed hardly comparable to that at which scholars in European literary studies themselves proceeded. Hence, the conflict between different types of criticism--in the guise of the polar opposites "practice and theory"--can become even more intense, the schism, enlarged, the wound, deepened. For example, I have produced

works which are neither "practice" (meaning here, annotated translation) nor deconstructive readings, which have not been paid much attention. There does seem little space left for publications of Formalist/New Critic/Structuralist reading of Japanese literature in English.

What seems to me strikingly, if not uniquely, specific to Japan is that Japan has not only become a marginalized nation as opposed to the hegemonic West, but was also historically peripheral to the hegemonic China. In other words, Japan has always already been marginalized vis-a-vis a hegemonic Other, be it the West or China. The other difference from the politically colonized Third World in which European languages have been legitimized as official languages--among these, English and French should be particularly relevant to our consideration of contemporary Euro-American theory-- [2], Japan has remained linguistically independent of the West. This leaves Japanese literary studies with a relative (though not an entire) lack of resistance to the "foreign" literary tradition itself, and, ironically, in a perhaps more ambiguous relation to Euro-American theory. If Japanese authors had written in English, Euro-American theory might have been considered more relevant to, if not at peace with, Japanese literary studies.

What does it take then to study Japanese literature in English and/or in the United States? Are there any irreducible differences between Japanese and English as scholarly languages? Does it make any significant difference if scholars' nationality is

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[2] Chinua Achebe looks at difficulties which face Brazilian authors, who are to write in Portuguese, the colonizer's language whose universal currency is considerably limited--a case different not only from Japan but also from former British colonies (431).

American?

To hit an autobiographical note again, I have occasionally been defined by some of my fellow scholars in this country as a native informant rather than an intellectual. I think that many Japanese-born scholars teaching and researching Japanese literature outside Japan may have shared my experience. The sense is that Japanese scholars may have "practical knowledge" but may not necessarily be expected to have "theoretical insight." That seems to be the subtext, and insofar as it is, it bothers me. If the Japanese were to be praised for being skilled and content in elaborating modes of practice, while this contentment is implicitly seen as accompanying a certain lack of intelligence, I would not feel privileged. I would, on the contrary, feel objectified, commodified and colonized. I do not intend to represent "Japan, the Beautiful."

At the same time, it is also problematic to regard Japanese scholars as the providers of the ultimate truth about Japan. How do we know that the Japanese understand themselves or their culture "better" than the non-Japanese? I would radically disagree with the assumption that Japanese studies in the United States must be "underdeveloped." No hierarchy should be assumed between Japanese studies inside and outside Japan; they simply present different perspectives. We are fortunate to have different perspectives from which to construct diversified views of Japan. And it is good that both camps, though perhaps to varied degrees, maintain communication, unlike the case, say, in English studies.[3]

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[3] I must mention here, however, the fact that an exceptional respect was paid recently by academe in the United Kingdom to the work of a Japanese scholar, Yamashita Hiroshi, on Spencer (*A Comprehensive Concordance to The Fairie Queene 1590*), which was published by a Japanese press (Kenkyū-sha). A textual critic, Yamashita

For the sake of preciseness, I am compelled to maintain here that it is not that there are two contrastive entities whose differences should be noted as unconditional or primary; there is no homogeneous or autonomous construct such as "Japanese studies in Japan" or "Japanese studies outside Japan." Perspectives are diverse even inside each hypothetical camp. However, if we replace the national boundary between these "two" with the linguistic distinction between Japanese and English--languages in either of which one might present one's scholarly work on Japan--then the discrepancy would be large enough to hypothesize such polarity for the time being. If this is the case, we are fortunate to have different perspectives from which to construct diversified views of Japan. It would be unwise to hierarchize diversified modes of scholarship based upon the assumption that the native language is the only authentic language in which to discuss Japanese, or any national literature, for that matter.

Now to come back to the dichotomy between "the native informant" and "the non-native intellectual." In fairness, I might add here that the Japanese are as responsible as the Americans for perpetuating this notion of intellectual "division of labour" which unreflectingly links Westerners with theory and the Japanese with practice (I will come back to another Asian nation, the

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turned to modern Japanese literature and produced a book on problematics of manuscripts, galleys, and printed versions of literary texts, entitled *Honmon no seitaigaku: Sōseki, Ōgai, Akutagawa* (Tokyo: Nihon Editor School shuppan-kyoku, 1993). He touches upon the extent to which Sōseki was expected to be informed of editorial work by W. J. Craig (4). A wheel comes a full circle here, from the time when Sōseki expressed the irredeemable lack of universality in literary studies in his renunciation of his career as a scholar in English, to the time when a native Japanese scholar in English analyses his work in "marginalized" Japanese.

Chinese, later).[4] Not to mention that Japan has undergone radical changes in technology, political and economic institutions, and so on under Western influence, the Japanese have persistently invited Westerners to theorize their culture. The desire to be theorized has been strong to the extent that such "theoretical" works (Nihon-jin ron) themselves have constituted an area of scholarly exploration, as has been noted by many. The Japanese have loved to hear praises for their aesthetic refinement and their innocence of "mechanical" logic, for they have themselves believed that these are qualities representative of Japan. Under the guise of admiration is of course hidden the Western objectifying gaze, which is, importantly to note, desired by the object of the gaze. This aestheticization of Japan could thus be described as a collaboration of the Western connoisseurs and Japanese, the invited and the host, sadistically and masochistically colonizing Japan.

It is a myth, however, that the Japanese are practical and to be theorized by the Westerners. It is also a myth that Japanese literature has itself dispensed with theory in the first place. In fact, there has been a persistent desire to theorize the practice of writing and reading throughout the literary history of Japan. Ki no Tsurayuki's Japanese Preface to *Kokin waka shū* (905), to which I will come back shortly in another context, Kūkai's *Bunkyō hifu ron* (820), Fujiwara no Kintō's *Waka kuhon* (1009), Minamoto no Toshiyori's *Shunrai zuinō* (1115), Fujiwara no Shunzei's *Korai fūtei shō* (1197), Fujiwara no Teika's several treatises on waka composition, including *Kindai shūka* (1209), Kyōgoku

[4] Another side-note I feel I need to add here is that many, if not all, U.S. students seem to have experienced being "used" as "native informant of English language" by Japanese people while they stay in Japan not necessarily to teach English as a second language. The Japanese colonizes the Americans in this case.

Tamekanu's *Tamekanu kyō waka shō* (1285-7), Nijō Yoshimoto's *Renga shinshiki* (1337), Zeami Kiyotsugu's treatises on sarugaku composition, including *Sandō* (1423), are examples of literary theory written in Japanese prior to the arrival of Euro-American literary theory. If you argue that these are theories of how to write and not of how to read, and thus differ from our notion of "literary theory," then I would respond by saying that readers in classical times consisted of writers, and that these writers were aware that their act of writing was at the same time one of rereading. Further, we have the famous monogatari-ron in *The Tale of Genji* (c. 1005), *Mumyō zōshi* (1201), and a long history of commentaries from Kamakura to medieval to Edo. We cannot but call these theoretical works, though the area their theory covers is largely confined to that of philology. Whether or not philologists like to hear this, philology IS theory in a wider sense. Moreover, as has been discussed by many Kokubungaku scholars, Hagiwara Hiromichi's methodology strikes us with its proximity to formalist/structuralist narrative studies.

I am not suggesting in the above that the Japanese stopped to think theoretically upon the arrival of Euro-American literary theory. It is one thing to observe that Japan has voraciously translated works of literary criticism from the West, which became a matter especially of journalistic interest and led many "traditional" scholars to frown upon the fetishism of the "foreign," but it is quite another to note as well that many conscientious scholars in Japan have produced valuable works on what it takes to study Japanese literature when, like it or not, conscious of it or not, we have learned to think in the context of Euro-American critical concepts.

Now I would like to examine the question whether or

not it is problematic to apply "foreign" theories to studies of Japanese literature. It is true that any outright imposition of a contemporary Euro-American framework upon Japanese literature is nothing but imperialist; contemporary Euro-American theory is a product of an ethnically and historically different context from that of Japan. If and when theorists assume that Japan is a "dark" territory, theoretically unexplored, then all that they are engaged in is a colonizing act. At the same time, however, if we are to read any work of Japanese literature and discuss it--and this is especially true when one discusses in English and for an English-speaking audience, though the difference is simply one of degree--we have to admit that we cannot help seeing the work through a glass of our own, and that no one can complacently claim a neutral, ideology-free, and thus authentic approach to it. We are--again, just as even the author of the text is--historically and/or linguistically (i.e., intellectually) distanced from this "object" of our reading, and we have to remain aware of the fact. Otherwise, we will be making the same mistake as the New Critics or Structuralists made, namely, believing that our approach is "scientific" and thus reaches an objective "truth."

Theoretical thoughts on the ethics of reading aside, I might raise a practical and historical question to further problematize the notion of the "application of foreign theory." Has there ever been indigenous Japanese literary theory?

My answer is in the negative. Translation of and annotation to Chinese literary theory constituted the most important area of literary criticism in classical Japan. Even Tsurayuki's "Preface," which is often cited as a highly nationalistic manifesto of the autonomy of Japanese poetry as opposed to Chinese, is indispensably indebted to the *Shijing Daxu* [The Great Preface to *The Book of Odes*], in terms of his understanding of rhetoric, the

roles of the poet, and the goals of poetry. The Preface to the *Kojiki*, for another example, is written in classical Chinese, and is thus inescapably "caught up in" Chinese rhetoric, even as it manifests Japan's cultural and political autonomy.

Though the Japanese since the rise of Nativism in the seventeenth Century have liked to propose the formula: "Japanese Spirit, Chinese Craft" (wakon kansai) [5], and thus to "degrade" their own Chineseness to the level of technique or material, it is an undeniable fact that Chinese elements had long since become an intrinsic part of Japanese culture. As Naoki Sakai notes,

> Since the introduction of the Chinese writing system, the so-called Japanese language had so extensively assimilated Chinese elements that to reject wakun as an amalgam of two different languages was of necessity to abandon all the Japanese writings then available. (. . .) Paradoxically, the distinctive trait of the Japanese language is its capacity to absorb foreign elements so thoroughly as to obliterate the distinction between itself and Chinese; heterogeneity--the absence of a coherent writing system and the copresence of different inscriptional principles--defined the identity of the Japanese language. (166)

The Japanese language is always already heterogeneous, and when the Japanese think, they cannot afford to think somewhere out of the Chinese framework. Whether in accepting it or trying to reject it, the Japanese have had to formulate their own position(s) in relation to the hegemonic Other, that is, primarily China--and since the 1850's, more predominantly, the West, as David Pollack

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[5] As is well known, a Chinese version of this is "Zhongti xiyong" --"Chinese essence, Western applications"--does nationalism always have to be essentialist? Does cosmopolitanism always have to be viewed as formalist?

discusses.

While it is true that translation of contemporary Euro-American theory into Japanese has been contributing to construction and reinforcement of the formula: the West for Theory, the East for Practice, this enthusiasm also only reinforces Japan's "traditional" mode of intellectual growth: borrowing "foreign" theory to appropriate and accommodate it into a Japanese mode of literary criticism that is not indigenous, but typically hybrid.

Thus, if you reject contemporary Euro-American literary theory only because it is "foreign" to Japan, you will have to dismiss all the classical heritage of Japanese literary theory for the reason that it wouldn't have existed without Chinese literary theory.

The hybrid nature of culture is, however, not unique to Japan. As Sakai occasionally reminds us, and as Said sums up below, no national culture can claim pure-ness in its current situation or in its origin.

> There is in all nationally defined cultures, I believe, an aspiration to sovereignty, to sway, and to dominance. In this, French and British, Indian and Japanese cultures concur. At the same time, paradoxically, we have never been as aware as we now are of how oddly hybrid historical and cultural experiences are, of how they partake of many often contradictory experiences and domains, cross national boundaries, defy the police action of simple dogma and loud patriotism. Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more "foreign" elements, alterities differences, than they consciously exclude. (*Culture and Imperialism*, 15)

What is different in the case of Japan is the lack of counter-response

from the hegemonic Other. As Said goes on to say after the quotation above, Indian culture is already part of British culture, and so is Algerian for French. It doesn't seem to me, however, that Japanese cultural elements have grown as intrinsic for Chinese or Euro-American cultures in the same sense or to the same degree. Am I alone in having felt marginalized at the indifference to Japanese literature shown by colleagues in other national literatures, or at MLA conferences? "They" do not seem to care what is going on in Japanese literary studies. Perhaps major theorists might, like Said, Barthes, and Kristeva, but those who apply their theories to studies of English, French, and American literatures do not seem to be concerned about how the same theories might be employed in the study of Japanese literature.

I am thus as concerned with the marginality of Japanese literary studies within literary studies as a whole, as with the disparity between theorists and non-theorists, universalists and nativists inside Japanese literary studies. Is the West the West, and the East, the East? And is there any irreducible gap between theory and practice? I have been responding negatively to these questions throughout this paper, but do have to admit that for many of our colleagues, responding to such questions is not easy, nor, apparently, is it considered necessary.[6]

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[6] I must quote Mary Louise Pratt's suggestion to the Modern Language Association, made in 1993, as an invaluable exception to the pessimistic observation that I make here:

> I wish to suggest in the strongest possible terms that comparatists take the lead in expunging the term foreign to refer to languages other than English. Nothing is more repugnant to someone working in Spanish in this country than to hear it referred to as a "foreign language." Its history here, after all, predates that of English. "Foreignness" equally misapplies to

Perhaps I may be more intoxicated than disappointed with the marginality of Japanese studies in the United States. As Said
says in his recent book, *Representations of the Intellectual*:

> The intellectual as exile tends to be happy with the idea of unhappiness, so that dissatisfaction bordering on dyspepsia, a kind of curmudgeonly disagreeableness, can become not only a style of thought, but also a new, if temporary, habitation. (53)

I may have fallen in the state of mind described here as typical of the intellectual. Said goes on to say how attached the intellectual can be to the sense of being detached from any position:

> In other words, there is no real escape, even for the exile who tries to remain suspended, since that state of inbetweenness can itself become a rigid ideological position, a sort of dwelling whose falseness is covered over in time, and to which one can all too easily become accustomed. (...) So while it is true to say that exile is the condition that characterizes the intellectual as someone who stands as a marginal figure outside the comforts of privilege, power, being-at-homeness (so to speak), it is also very important to stress that that condition carries with it certain rewards and, yes, even privileges. (*Representations of the Intellectual*, 58-9)

Further, Said manifests that marginality is a prerequisite of the intellectual, with which one has to live, and which enables one to be intellectually active:

> French, Cantonese, Italian, or Japanese- to say nothing of Lakota, Navajo, or Cree. (64)

Incidentally, the MLA still uses the term "Foreign Languages" to officially describe a division, as of 1995.

> For the intellectual an exilic displacement means being liberated from the usual career, in which "doing well" and following in time-honored footsteps are the main milestones. Exile means that you are always going to be marginal, and that what you do as an intellectual has to be made up because you cannot follow a prescribed path. If you can experience that fate not as a deprivation and as something to be bewailed, but as a sort of freedom, a process of discovery in which you do things according to your own pattern, as various interests seize your attention, and as the particular goal you set yourself dictates: that is a unique pleasure. (*Representations of the Intellectual*, 62)

Instead of viewing ourselves as victims of Euro-centricism, the marginalized, or the ignored, we may as well take a positive view, as Professor Phyllis Lyons suggested in her response to the panel "East vs. West/Theory vs. Practice." We are not "torn and made vulnerable"--we are doubled, and are thus strengthened.

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