

Hybridities in a Metropolitan Diasporic Space – Weng Nao's Literary Tokyo

Tzu-yu Lin

This paper explores hybridities in the early twentieth century metropolitan diasporic literary space in Tokyo. It presents a different perspective on Tokyo, based on the viewpoint of an author from colonial Taiwan, and engages with Homi K. Bhabha's theoretical thinking in relation to "hybridity" and "ambivalence" in a metropolitan diasporic space, where locates a complex tension between colonial modernity and the resistance of the author from a colonized background.

Like many other Taiwanese writers, Weng Nao 翁鬧 (1908–1940) set off on a journey to his dream destination, Tokyo, in 1934, with the intention of pursuing a literary career, and it was during this period that his literary achievement reached a peak. Almost all of his works were published during the years when he lived in Tokyo, a city which offered him a platform as a novelist, a poet and an artist. In addition to his childhood memories from central Taiwan, his experience of living in Tokyo contributed significantly to his modernist practice in works such as "Musical Clock" (Uta tokei 歌時計, 1935), "Remaining Snow" (Zansetsu 殘雪, 1935) and "A Love Story Before Dawn" (Yoakemae no koimonogatari 夜明け前の恋物語, 1937). Tokyo was so important to him that it is almost impossible to understand his works without exploring his reconceptualization of the city. His writing style also owes much to metropolitan writing. Rather than following Marxist proletarian literary methods, which most Taiwanese authors employed at the time, Weng Nao was one of the few followers of *Shin-kankakuha* (the Neosensualist School).¹ His new

¹ Influenced by European modernism, the Japanese modernist school *Shin-kankakuha* led by many Japanese major modernist writers such as Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 (1899–1972), Tanizaki Jun'ichiro 谷崎潤一郎 (1889–1965), Yokomitsu Riichi 横光利一 (1889–1947), Hayashi Fumiko 林芙美子 (1901–1947) and Sato Waruo 佐藤春夫 (1892–1964), insisted on presenting literary writing through reference to the "primacy of aesthetics over politics or any other 'extra-literary' considerations." The magazine *Bungei jidai* (*Literary Age*, 1924–27) played an important role in offering the *Shin-kankakuha* group the opportunity to prevail their ideals of producing literary works. Their works were actually poles apart from the Marxist "proletarian literature" school, which also appeared at that time. This group of young writers considered themselves as artists and sought to present their own works in the form of pure aesthetics, untainted by political interference. Like other 1920s modernist artists, their ambition was also to develop new aesthetic means to depict the typical modern urban life experience and to capture the special sensory, emotional and cognitive experiences

and modernist experimental techniques of literary representation and sophisticated descriptions of the loneliness of urban life and the inner desires of the human mind made his works distinct from those of other Taiwanese diasporic authors in the 1930s. However, Weng received quite a significant amount of negative criticism from his peers, such as Yang Yizhou (1909–1987) with regard to his specific writing style and his detailed descriptions of innermost sexual desires² because these elements were far beyond what was deemed acceptable by East Asian or Taiwanese literary communities in the early twentieth century.³ This paper argues that Weng Nao's literary status is in fact far more important than Taiwanese literati could have imagined during his lifetime. Furthermore, I will argue that he was not merely a follower of the Japanese Neosensualist School, but was in fact a pioneering artist, since his modified modernist writing presents a Taiwanese literary identity that is unique to 1930s Japanophone literature.

This paper consists of three main sections, which offer three particular scopes for reading Weng Nao's literary Tokyo. It begins by exploring the significance of the city of Tokyo as a literary and cultural capital in early-twentieth-century East Asia, and seeks to foreground its articulation within Weng's diasporic experience and his literary world, which I will further explore in later sections. Next, I will discuss the adaptations made by Weng Nao to Japanese Neosensualist writing, which, I argue, can be considered as an expression of his resistance to colonial modernist values. Finally, I propose to utilize the sense of translation in order to understand how diasporic literature as an act of writing across cultures and nations can be seen as a process of code-switching between different cultural/linguistic systems, which is similar to the task performed by translators. In the terms of form, context and themes, Weng's modified modernist Tokyo writing reveals his uniqueness as a Taiwanese diasporic writer rather than as merely a follower of Japanese Neosensualist literature.

living in such a space. An ever-accelerating pace of life and many other new elements that constructed modern urban life, such as factories, cafes, night clubs, modern transport, jazz music, department stores, and etc. have changed the ways that Japanese used to be. See Roy Starrs, *Modernism and Japanese Culture*, 105, 117, 153–54. See Edward Putzar, *Japanese Literature: A Historical Outline*, 208.

² It is a genre of Japanese modern literature, written as *watakushi shosetsu* or *shi-shosetsu* 私小説, which “designates an autobiographical narrative in which the author is thought to recount faithfully the details of his or her personal life relating to sexual desire in a thin guise of fiction.” See Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*, 1.

³ For example, Shu-mei Shih's *The Lure of the Modern* (2001) points out that in Republican China, modernism was criticized as “morally corrupt, decadent and escapist, unfit and useless for the Chinese, a degenerate version and unworthy imitator of Western modernism, shallow and unsophisticated.” See Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 43.

Traveling to the Colonial Metropolis and Writing Back

In the 1930s, the Japanese Empire provided the inhabitants of Tokyo and its colonized people with a powerful sense of the modernized world that was encased in the city. Thus, literary works produced by Taiwanese or Chinese writers were accused of endorsing Japanese imperial ideologies.⁴ Tokyo city, as the most modern metropolis in East Asia from the late nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century, resisted all the so-called “backward and non-modern associations of the colonies” and served as an indicator of how the capital city of a colonial empire should (as defined by Western values) encapsulate itself in order to show off both the glory and the changing status of the Japanese Empire. Tokyo’s significance as a major East Asian metropolis of modernist artistic output had been consistently outflanked by European metropolitan cities like London or Paris such that it has remained marginal to the world’s literary capitals. However, the concept of Tokyo, especially in the colonies of the Japanese Empire, was usually combined with a distinct colonial identity predicated on its pan-Asian reach, which was constructed, translated and transmitted by Japanese colonial administrators, educators and Japanese writers. To be more specific, Tokyo’s modernity was constructed as a central role in the creation of an empire in its image, and for many Taiwanese writers during the period of colonial rule it was a destination for those pursuing writing careers and looking to realize “great expectations.”

In the early twentieth century Tokyo was also an East Asian hub for the importation of the latest ideas and thoughts from European countries. Lü Zhenghui points out that Tokyo was the main destination for intellectuals from the colonies who wished to further their studies as Japan was considered as the most modernized country in East Asia and a synonym for “modernity,” with China being viewed as being less modernized/Westernized than Japan at that time.⁵ Thus, heading for Tokyo to follow the latest literary trends and writing techniques in Japan was believed to be the most fashionable destination for Taiwanese writers in the 1930s.

During the 1930s Tokyo became a contact zone for international literature(s) and a hub for literati encounters – not only for Japanese authors from different parts of Japan, but also for authors from its colonies. During that time, Taiwanese writers also travelled from their homeland to the colonial capital Tokyo to establish magazines, journals and to publish books. According to Yang Ziqiao, Tokyo was the place that offered artistic inspiration for Taiwanese intellectuals because there were few opportunities in colonized Taiwan.⁶ As the imperial capital of the Japanese Empire, Tokyo became a literary destination for would-be writers from the colonies. Pursuing a literary career in Tokyo provided the possibility of having their works

⁴ Ibid., 231.

⁵ Zhenghui Lü, *Zhimindi de shanheng—Taiwan wenxue wenti*, 35.

⁶ Ziqiao Yang, “Piaofu zai 1930 niandai Dongjing jietou de huanyin,” 164.

read by the Japanophone world that existed outside colonial Taiwan.⁷ Therefore, imperial Tokyo through the representation of non-*Yamato* (Non-Japanese) authors, was discursively re-generated and re-invented as a lively metropolitan space. When Weng arrived in Tokyo, there were already quite a number of literary societies and meetings organized by Taiwanese writers and artists:

In 1934, when Weng Nao came to Tokyo, the Taiwanese Art Society, which was established in 1932, had ceased to operate. In the same year, led by Wu Kunhuang, Lin Tui, Wang Baiyuan, Zhang Wenhuan and Ye Qiumu, the Tokyo Taiwan Culture Association was established as part of a left-wing campaign [...] In 1935 it was transformed into the Taiwan Art and Culture Association, Tokyo branch. Wu Kunhuang was the leading figure at that time, and he introduced Weng Nao to the association. This was the means by which Weng Nao was able to establish a connection with the association in 1935.⁸

However, the contrast between the material conditions in colonial Taiwan and the industrial capitalism that characterized Japan enabled the opposing narratives to come to prominence in the literary sphere of the imperial cosmopolis. It is very likely that multi-layered versions of life-experience co-existed in this multiple space of the imperial centre. In the 1930s, Taiwanese writing initially gained access to Japanese literary communities, and in the summer of 1931, the Taiwanese writer Wang Baiyuan 王白淵 (1905–1965) had his collection of poems *Thorn Road* (Kyoku no wataru 蕨の道) published by the Japanese publisher, Kubojou Bookstore in Morioka.⁹ In 1934 another famous writer, Yang Kui 楊逵 (1905–1985) published the complete version of his short story, “Newspaper Boy” (Shimbun haitatsuotto 新聞配達夫), in Japan, which had been banned by the Japanese colonial authorities with the result that Taiwanese readers could only access parts of the work published in *The Taiwanese New People’s Newspaper* (Taiwan xin minbao 台灣新民報) from the 19th to 27th of May 1932.¹⁰ The editor of the *Taiwanese New People’s Newspaper*, Lai He 賴和 (1894–1943), therefore, sent the “controversial” works to Japanese publishers, and with the help of Lai, many works by young Taiwanese writers, such as “Newspaper Boy,” were published in Japan.¹¹

Ironically, for Taiwanese writers in such cases, Japan became a liberal destination for pursuing a literary career as their works did not have to be closely examined by the colonial authorities on the island.¹² In 1897, the colonial authorities in

⁷ It refers not to the entire world but the Japanese speaking zone within the Japanese Empire.

⁸ Ziqiao Yang, “Piaofu zai 1930 niandai Dongjing jietou de huanyin,” 164–65. If not stated otherwise, all translations are mine.

⁹ Known as 盛岡：久保庄書店 in Japan.

¹⁰ Isao Kawahala, *Taiwan shin bungaku undou no tenkai*, 212.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 124.

Taiwan were authorized to make laws according to the “specific” needs associated with ruling the Taiwanese people in order to prevent anti-colonial activities on the island.¹³ People on the island lived in fear of being arrested and punished if the colonial authorities suspected that they were working against the colonial government. Consequently, many anti-colonial societies and literary magazines were established in Tokyo in order to escape from and resist the colonial laws on the island. Literary magazines, such as *The Taiwanese New People’s Newspaper*, were published in Tokyo and later took a detour back to the Taiwanese audience.¹⁴

Significantly influenced by Japanese modernist writing in the 1910s to 1930s, Taiwanese New Literature became ingrained in the writings by both revolutionary Taiwanese socio-political and aesthetic intellectuals from two main schools—Marxist Proletarian literature, which portrays the suffering and social inequalities experienced by people, and Neosensualist writing, which pursues pure aesthetics without political interference. Among the first category, Yang Kui’s “Newspaper Boy” (1932) and Yang Shouyu’s 楊守愚 (1905–1959) “A Group of Unemployed People” (Yi qun shiye de ren 一群失業的人, 1931) and “The Inevitable Death in the Year of Crop Failure” (Xiong nian bu mian siwang 凶年不免於死亡, 1929), for example, tell the miserable stories of crofters under the repressive colonial authority. On the other hand, the second category, Neosensualism, featuring works such as Weng Nao’s “Musical Clock,” “A Love Story before Dawn” and “Remaining Snow” as well as Wu Yongfu (1913–2008)’s “Soul and Body” (Kobi to tai 首と體, 1933) and Wang Changxiong’s 王昶雄 (1916–2000), *A Torrent* (Honryuu 奔流, 1943), on the other hand, focus on the sophisticated and subtle inner emotions of human minds with experimental new techniques of literary representation – in particular, a new kind of literary representation that more directly or concretely expresses the author’s sensory experience in order to “write back” to the imperial metropolis.

Weng Nao was one of a limited number of Taiwanese Neosensualist writers as the themes and writing techniques of Neosensualist writings were far ahead of what was acceptable by the vast majority of Taiwanese readers in the 1930s. Unlike most of the Taiwanese diasporic writers at the time, who focused more on socio-political issues, Neosensualist writers such as Weng were not readily accepted in the Taiwanese literary field and were considered instead to be the followers of Diabolism.¹⁵ However, I would argue that Weng’s contribution is far more important than the Taiwanese literati might have imagined at the time since his experimental Neosensualist writing focuses mainly on the decadence of urban life and the subtle self-narrations provide a unique literary representation, which is singular amongst Japanophone Taiwanese literature of the 1930s.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Isao Kawahala, *Taiwan shin bungaku undou no tenkai*, 129.

¹⁵ Shu Shi, *Riju shidai Taiwan xiaoshuo xuan*, 206.

The Neosensualist movement, which focused significantly on providing detailed descriptions of sensual and sexual experience in literature, posed a challenge to traditional values in East Asian societies, including Japan. Weng's schoolmate, Yang Yizhou, describes Weng as a sexual fetishist who adored modern Japanese girls and lived a life of decadence, and says that it is unsurprising that he died within five years of relocating to Tokyo.¹⁶ Another writer, the artist and filmmaker Liu Na'ou 劉訥鷗 (1905–1940), also died young, shot dead in Shanghai at the peak of his literary and film career. With little support from his Taiwanese fellow writers, Weng himself saw himself as a *flâneur*, wandering the streets of Tokyo city as one who would never return to his homeland, Taiwan. He writes in the essay “The Border of Kōenji – Tokyo Suburb Streets for the *Flâneur*” (Tōkyō kōgai rōnin machi – Kōenji kawai 東京郊外浪人街—高圓寺界限, 1935):

The young literati in Kōenji!
Why are you lingering at the border of Kōenji?
Though you are starving,
are you still stubborn about not leaving here?¹⁷

He also comments on his personality, stating that it exactly fits with life in Kōenji,¹⁸ where many writers and artists lived since it was a suburb of Tokyo where the rent was cheaper. He says:

Since I came to Tokyo, I have been restlessly moving from one place to another. So far the only suitable place for me is Kōenji. Probably this wretched place is exactly right for a person like me. I do not have to worry about moving to other places again from now on.¹⁹

The Tokyo suburbs near Kōenji provided observers with simultaneously intriguing and repellent scenes of poverty and chaos that needed to be kept at a distance from the centre of the imperial city. Weng writes:

Heading west after passing through the expensive and high living-standard neighbourhoods of Shinjuku, Ohkubo, and Higashinakano, Nakano is a totally different place for this is already a suburban area of Greater Tokyo. First, the construction of the streets is completely different from it in Tokyo city. The lanes are quite narrow, and there are no pavements. While walking, pedestrians have to be careful of the automobiles passing by. Unlike the wealthy neighbourhoods of Asagaya, Ogikubo,

¹⁶ Yizhou Yang, “Yi yaozhe de juncai Weng Nao,” 139–42.

¹⁷ Nao Weng, “Tōkyō kōgai rōnin machi,” 17.

¹⁸ Now it has become a part of Greater Tokyo.

¹⁹ Nao Weng, “Tōkyō kōgai rōnin machi,” 13.

Nishiogikubo and Kichijoji (located in the west of Nakano), Kōenji appears to be a noisy and lousy area, but still quite popular with the working-class as they cannot afford expensive housing near Shinjuku. Living in Kōenji, they only need to pay 10 yen for transport to travel to Shinjuku.²⁰

As Tokyo’s population grew, the Tokyo council incorporated the Kōenji area into Greater Tokyo. The working-class and the poor immigrants, who could not afford high rents and transport costs, inhabited this marginal area. The area near Kōenji had become a dwelling space for immigrants and a base for left-wing activities.²¹ In the middle-class imagination, these marginal spaces of the city were often pathologized as epitomizing the rottenness of civilization within the imperial metropolis. However, many writers also inhabited these places and they allied themselves with left-wing artists and activists and much of modern Japanese literature emerged from this area.²² Socialist and feminist groups also gained ground in this area.²³ For Weng, Tokyo was therefore a space of self-fashioning where he could transform into a bourgeois individual. The writing from this metropolitan space presents the life styles, the multiple layers of cultural experience, along with the vicissitudes of the writer’s imaginations and the dark side of industrialization and modernization.²⁴ Through Weng’s writing, an alternative version of Tokyo and Japanese Neosensualist writing emerges.

Weng Nao’s Sensational Tokyo

Weng’s Tokyo is created from a colonized and immigrant’s point of view in the hope of searching for a postcolonial and postmodern “exotic” way to re-discover the world. The relation of migrant experience and metropolis is often one of the core focuses in colonial and postcolonial diasporic writing. Those that are now considered as “global” cities or “metropolitan” cities or “core primary cities” of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been changing significantly and their links with their former colonies can be seen as a consequence of their colonial history.²⁵ Cosmopolitan cities of the modern world are like giant magnets that attract millions of people gathering into. The expansion of a city owes much to the endless newcomers who have been nurtured in distant lands and who are keen to be employed and find a home in the city. Varma, in this regard, interprets urbanization as an “outcome of development of the productive forces of capitalism” which embodies “the potential for a new cosmopolitanism and

²⁰ Nao Weng, “Tōkyō kōgai rōnin machi,” 13.

²¹ Yuting Huang, “Dongjing jiaowai langrenjie,” 182, 188.

²² Ai Sugimori, “Weng Nao shenpin ji qi wenxue huodong,” 43–44; Liu, *Jingji zhi dao*, 68.

²³ Ai Sugimori, “Weng Nao shenpin ji qi wenxue huodong,” 43–44.

²⁴ Ai Maeida, *Interview with Maeida Ai II: Literature of City*, 151.

²⁵ Rashmi Varma, *The Postcolonial City and Its Subjects: London, Nairobi, Bombay*, 15.

cultural exchange.”²⁶ The cosmopolitan cities provide an incredible opportunity for world cultural exchange, and they become centers where various diasporic/migrant communities meet one another and remold their worlds. Such spaces become potential sites for “the formation of a world literature, or a literature that would travel across national and cultural borders and boundaries.”²⁷ Therefore, metropolitan cities can be seen as “world literary spaces” that provide the ground for the emergence of “world literature.”²⁸

The modernized Tokyo provided a platform for Weng to acquire the latest literary works from the West as Tokyo had become a cultural capital in East Asia, receiving the newest Western cultural ideas and literary works. Born in Taiwan, Weng attended colonial school at the age of eight, and after finishing compulsory service at a public school, he set off for Tokyo in order to pursue a career in writing. While living in Tokyo, Weng was also able to access original texts from English literature. In addition, he also translated William Butler Yeats and the work of ten other poets²⁹ from English to Japanese, with his linguistic skills in both Japanese and English gaining him access to the latest literary trends from Japan as well as from Western countries. His intention was to become a writer who imported avant-garde ideas from European countries in order to view the world through his own eyes rather than through the lens of the colonizer. His friend Zhang Henghao therefore comments:

Weng Nao was a typical “literary drifter,” staying in Tokyo after graduation and not going home in order to remain in the Tokyo literary field. His literature followed Japanese New Sensationalism, and a belief in “Art for art’s sake.” Japanese literature from the 1934–1935 period was significantly influenced by classic Russian literature and French literature. Weng himself was also influenced by the Russian thinker Dostoyevsky. His stories were taken from episodes occurring in daily life [...] If he had not passed away at such a young age, he might have made a significant contribution to Japanese literature.³⁰

However, it was generally believed that only Japanese modernist writers had the ability to understand, reproduce and re-introduce Western cultures to Japan and its East Asian colonies, and that Taiwanese writers were only the recipients

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* In her book, Varma refers to Anglophone world literature, while here I borrow the term to refer to different literatures from the Japanophone world of the early twentieth century.

²⁹ Including Joseph Campbell, Richard Aldington, Padraic Calum, John Gloud Fletcher, Alfred Perceval Graves, Sarojini Naidu, Amy Lowell, Thomas Macdonagh, George W. Russell (A. E.). With the exception of Richard Aldington from England, Amy Lowell and John Gloud Fletcher from the United States, and Sarojini Naidu from India, all the writers were from Ireland.

³⁰ Henghao Zhang, “Huayin zhi ren—Weng Nao ji shu,” 14–15.

of previously digested information by Japanese writers. Weng, nevertheless, is an exception in this respect. Indeed, in order to be a writer, he had to be aware of the latest developments in the Japanese literary field and to be familiar with and conversant with the styles of Japanese authors from the Shōwa period, especially Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972) and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1889–1965), who were regarded as leading figures of contemporary Japanese literature.³¹ According to the Japanese scholar Sugimori Ai, Weng Nao often actively attended literary seminars and exchanged ideas with Japanese authors.³² As a writer, he was very aware of the latest development in Japanese literary field, and familiar with the Japanese Neosensualist writers in Shōwa period, such as Kawabata Yasunari and Tanizaki Jun’ichiro.³³ For example, Weng’s model of protagonist as orphan in his fiction *Streets with a Port* (1939)³⁴ was believed to have been influenced by Kawabata’s short fictions, such as “The Dancing Girl of Izu” (Izu no odoriko 伊豆の踊子, 1927), “Diary of My Sixteenth Year” (Juurokusai no nikki 十六歳の日記, 1925) and “Orphan’s Love” (*Minashigo no kanjou* or *Koji no kanjou* 孤児の感情, 1925).

Indeed, in terms of style and the use of some literary metaphors, Weng learnt a lot from Kawabata and Tanizaki. In “Musical Clock,” for example, Weng demonstrates the influence of Kawabata’s early writing. In terms of literary form, this piece follows Kawabata’s “palm-of-the-hand stories” style of writing in his short story collection *The Dancing Girl of Izu* (1927).³⁵ Most of these stories are just two or three pages in length; in terms of content, they are inspired by the principles of aesthetic writing. Though following the principles of Japanese writing, Weng also tries to create something new in his works. For example his works reveal elements of hybridity and creates a space of multiple memories from both colonial Taiwan and Tokyo from the perspective of the colonized diasporic subject. This aspect is neglected in the works of Tokyo-based Japanese writers.

In “A Love Story before Dawn,” Weng demonstrates his ability to master the experimental literary techniques of the early twentieth century, including stream-of-consciousness, symbolism and surrealist prose poems—techniques also used by the Japanese writer Kawabata Yasunari in *Suishō gensō* 水晶幻想 (translated as *Crystal Fantasies* or *The Crystal Illusion*, 1931). As Weng’s experimental writing techniques are not typical in any of other Taiwanese or Chinese literature, the literary critic Gu Jitang severely criticizes this text as “a Westernized work but not one which is fully Westernized yet” and argues that it is “not Chinese literature at all.”³⁶

³¹ Jinyi Li, “Weng Nao duanpian xiaoshuo lun,” 143.

³² Ai Sugimori, “Weng Nao shenpin ji qi wenxue huodong,” 46–52.

³³ Jinyi Li, “Weng Nao duanpian xiaoshuo lun,” 143.

³⁴ The Japanese title is *Minato no a ru machi* 港のある街.

³⁵ The title of the volume is the same as the short story “The Dancing Girl of Izu.”

³⁶ Jitang Gu, *Taiwan xiaoshuo fazhanshi*, 108.

Diasporic Literary Writing and Cultural Translation

Weng's experimental writing of sensual experiences and exotic fantasy owes much to the Japanese modernist writing, called *Tanbi-ha* 耽美派, or the Aesthetic school, which follows the core principle of "l'art pour l'art," as elaborated by Gautier and Flaubert. His modernist writing brings a sense of foreignness and exoticness into the Japanese literary field, but on the other hand, his writing techniques have seldom been seen in any other Taiwanese or Chinese literature in the early twentieth century. The following passage is singled out by Gu as an example that can be used to criticize Weng. It expresses the narrator's inner desire to pursue love, which is linked with the scenes from his adolescent experiences in rural Taiwan:

One day – yes, I think it was probably when I was ten – I saw a cock with a bloody red comb in the yard of my childhood home. Suddenly, the cock spread out one side of its wings, holding the mud with his claws in the yard. With this pose, he was approaching a white docile hen that had its head down. It was not intended that I should see this. This was because I caught sight of the scene inadvertently. But that doesn't matter at all. This cock was showing off his masculinity in approaching the hen [...] What happened afterwards is not necessary to relate. Why say it, you know it already. It's the moment!³⁷

Gu comments as follows:

There is no specific location and character mentioned at the beginning of the work. Not only are the time and characters unknown, but the content of the conversation is very strange. No further explanation for the passage is provided as to why the author makes reference to scenes involving chickens and geese [sic] having sex as a metaphor for love, and it is a short story without a plot. Until the end of the novel, the relationship between the narrator and the audience is not clearly explained yet. ...I think Weng's "A Love Story before Dawn" is not Chinese literature at all in terms of either its content or its form. This is a westernized work but not yet totally westernized.³⁸

Gu claims this work is not Chinese literature at all, and I would argue that this is not only because it is written in Japanese, but also because it was inspired by the Japanese/western modernist writing techniques, and uses childhood memories from rural Taiwan as metaphors. It was also influenced by Kawabata's *Crystal Fantasies*, which was one of the most successful early experiments in Joycean stream-of-consciousness narrative in Japanese literature. The narrator's monologue in "A Love Story before Dawn" adapts the "quick of the mind" approach to recall his childhood memories and his experience of pursuing love during his teenage

³⁷ Nao Weng, "Yoakemae no koimonogatari," 151–52.

³⁸ Jitang Gu, *Taiwan xiaoshuo fazhanshi*, 108.

years. In sudden lightning flashes, the scenes in this text switch from the present to the past, from dream to reality, and this technique successfully creates the sense of transforming real into surreal scenes. Like much of western modernist writing, the discontinuities within the narrative convey a sense of destabilization and spatio-temporal discontinuity. The logic system of this work has been reconstructed through recourse to the fragmented and mosaic-like patches of time and space in order to present the discontinuity between the homeland of the author’s imagination and diasporic displacement experience in Tokyo.

The two main characters in the story – an unnamed male narrator from a southern country and an unnamed Japanese girl (probably a prostitute or a geisha) from a northern country,³⁹ remain vague images in the story as they are simply metaphors for the narrator’s essential self. The narrator’s inner existence, so to speak, becomes an extended metaphor of a dreamlike and poetic self, expressing his particular anxieties with regard to modernity. The monologue of the narrator and the vague image of the Japanese woman reflect the author’s inner anxieties and desire for sensual experience with a Japanese woman. However, the unnamed and silent Japanese woman in the story also raises another issue, i.e., a woman’s social burden and oppressed status in modern Tokyo. From the following passage, we can see that in this work the female character is not only without a name but also without a voice:

Ah, I want to embrace you tightly with my two arms! But no, I can’t. I don’t have the courage to do so. Ah, no, no! Please hand me the hat. [...] Why? You are crying? Why are you crying? What’s the matter? Please don’t cry. For me, please don’t cry. If you cry, next time when I come, my heart will be heavy and my feet will become dull. [...] Dawn is about to break. I have to go. Please bid me goodbye at the door. I’m sorry. You are so kind! Please let me see your smile. Thanks. This makes me feel much relieved about leaving. Goodbye. Goodbye.⁴⁰

The female character in this work is an unnamed Other as the short story mainly takes the form of a monologue and relates the narrator’s own childhood memories and love story. The unnamed female character is mainly a silent listener without a voice. However, her existence is a necessity for the male protagonist as he is eager to have a “Japanese” woman to listen to his stories in order to feel that he can “conquer” the feminized Japan in spite of being a young man from the southern island colony. As Varma suggests, female characters in modernist writing are usually accompanied by a corresponding discourse on commerce that attempts to create an equivalence between commodities and sexually exchangeable women.⁴¹ The figure of the Japanese woman here is also transformed into a stereotypical image of “the sensual geisha girl” or “the devoted woman” (without a voice).

³⁹ A similar character appears in Weng’s another work, “Remaining Snow.”

⁴⁰ Nao Weng, “Yoakemae no koimonogatari,” 169.

⁴¹ Rashmi Varma, *The Postcolonial City and Its Subjects: London, Nairobi, Bombay*, 46.

Traise Yamamoto points out that the Japanese woman has long been configured as being “mysterious and sexually available” to men – especially to white Western men, as the Japanese woman has long been fetishized as a feminized exotic object in whom the soul of the geisha resides.⁴² It has also been long mistakenly suggested that “geisha” is synonymous with “prostitute,” as they both offer “services” that are exchangeable for money.⁴³ I would argue that Weng’s representation of Japanese female characters also reflects his adaption of the racial stereotypes of the unrestrained sexuality and lasciviousness of the Oriental Other, as inherited from European colonial discourse. Here, the Japanese female also become a doubly-oppressed character in Weng’s work. The purpose here is to silence and objectify Japanese women, which can be seen as a form of resistance to the colonial patriarchal values constructed in European Modernism and the Japanese Neosensualist School.

Nevertheless, the way that Weng genders Japan as female is even more complicated, since his affection for Japanese women also engages with the Japanese colonial discourse. In this work, Weng seems to unconsciously elevate the bodies of Japanese women to a metonymic representation of Japan. The image of the Japanese female characters in Weng’s texts in a way combines with the concept of the feminized Colonizer/Japan. Therefore, their images are always “white” and “pure” as snow even though most of them are prostitutes or sex workers. In Weng’s works, the Japanese female body is also projected onto the (feminized) colonizer as well as the fetishistic projection for the “mock” Western female body.

The protagonist’s desire to make love to a “whitened” Japanese woman is also revealed in “Remaining Snow.” The female character Kimiko, is from the “snow country,” the far north part of Japan and hails from a remote town in Hokkaido. The protagonist tends to show his masculinity to this young Japanese girl with the intention to fashion himself as a proper subject in Tokyo, and to imagine himself living a lifestyle as a privileged man. In a similar way to the issue that Fanon raises in *Black Skin, White Masks*, having intimate sensual experiences with Japanese women reflects the male character’s (from colonial Taiwan) fetishism of Japanese women (with lighter skin or white make-up), which makes him believe that he is with a “made-up” western/modern woman.

The male protagonist, Lin Chuansheng, from Taiwan, dreams that the young Japanese girl, Kimiko, has become the goddess of Scandinavian myth and he chases her and worships her as in reality he does not dare to express his love to her because he knows that it is impossible for him to have a Japanese woman as a girlfriend or a wife. Therefore, in Lin’s dream, no matter how fast he runs, he can never catch up with his goddess, Kimiko.⁴⁴ In his later work “A Love Story before

⁴² Traise Yamamoto, “As Natural as the Partnership of Sun and Moon,” 29, 322.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁴ Nao Weng, “Canxue,” 58.

Dawn,” Weng uses the fragments of memory of the protagonist watching chickens and butterflies mating as a metaphor to imply what has happened between him and the Japanese girl “before dawn.”⁴⁵ The relationship between them is left ambiguous and Weng never makes it clear as it could also have been just a dream – a dream that the protagonist from the southern island or the author from Taiwan could never have experienced in reality. We can see that the desire to pursue Japanese girls as the metaphor of becoming more equal to Japanese intensifies from “Remaining Snow” to “A Love Story before Dawn.” What Weng’s works reflect is not merely the protagonists’ fetishization of Japanese women, but also their deepest desire to “whiten” themselves by having an affair with a westernized Japanese girl, which therefore suggests the ambiguous relationship between European imperialism, Japanese imperialism and the colonized of the Japanese colonial empire. Such ambivalence of Japanocentrism might make it possible for Japan to escape from the post-war dispute or blame its colonialism as it has been widely considered as an act of “revolt against the West.”⁴⁶ As Ching argues, the ambivalence of Japanocentrism firstly variegates the complexity of linking the revolution of Japan with the revival of Asia, and secondly it also constitutes a critique of the West.⁴⁷ Emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Japanocentrism, therefore, can be seen as a non-European response to Eurocentrism or European imperialism. By transforming itself in these tumultuous times, Japan has gained itself a unique role poised between East and West (Fukuzawa 1885; Okakura 1903). However, on the other hand this further serves to construct another hierarchical system of nations within Asia, which was never intended to challenge the world view of Eurocentric mapping in terms of race and development.⁴⁸ Instead, Japan became involved in the machinations of “the ubiquitous West,” and the archipelago therefore became a stage for Japan in pursuit of its new role as the largest marine empire in East Asia.⁴⁹ As Taiwanese-American scholar Leo Ching puts it in his famous essay, “Yellow Skin, White Mask: Race, Class and Identification in Japanese Colonial Discourse,” Western imperial and colonial discourse is framed and firmly inscribed in the familiar duality of West and non-West, “white” and “non-white,” self and other, but interestingly Japan’s modernization program transformed itself into an Asian superpower before the start of the Second World War.⁵⁰ Ching therefore calls the Japanese Empire a “made-up” colonial power, which demands a mode of

⁴⁵ The girl might be a prostitute as by the end of the story the narrator says “you must have heard the same topic from hundreds of men.”

⁴⁶ Leo Ching, “Taiwan in Modernity/Coloniality: Orphan of Asia and the Colonial Difference,” 198–99.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 200–203.

⁵⁰ Leo Ching, “Yellow Skin, White Masks: Race, Class and Identification in Japanese Colonial Discourse,” 66.

analysis that is not restricted to the kinds of binarisms (centered on skin colour and race) that inflect the European colonial discourse.⁵¹ Due to its Westernization and modernization, Japan, as the only non-white/non-European imperial power in Asia, established a different colonial theatre (Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria and Okinawa).⁵² What made Japan even more of a distinguished colonial power, as Ching points out, was its imperial sovereignty and the fact that its colonies were populated with peoples not entirely different from themselves in terms of skin color, a prominent topic in European postcolonial discourses.⁵³ It was Japan's controversial historical position, located inbetween the margins of "white" and "black," colonizer and colonized, along with the status of the Japanese Empire – not white, not like and yet-alike – that always successfully and invariably redirected its arrogant colonial gaze towards its colonial subjects, yet the articulation of racism still took place in Japanese colonial discourse.⁵⁴ In fact, the colonized people of the Japanese Empire were also forced to accept the idea that the "whiteness" and "westernization" of Japan, for at least a period of time, allowed Japanese citizens to be granted the status of "honorary whites" or "honorary Westerners" and to join the ranks of their fellow European colonial regimes.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it was rarely recognized that resistance to Japanese colonialism could consequently be linked to the idea of resisting European colonialism.

It seems to be impossible to criticize Japanese imperialism without engaging in a critique of European imperialism as the critique of Japan's "whiteness" entails a radical analysis of the issue of racism in the West. Through the proper "make-up," the Japanese race can cover its yellowness to whiteness.⁵⁶ In Taguchi's (1990) view, yellowness contextualizes Asia as one monolithic entity, as this context has been long constructed within the assumption of Chinese as the most superior "yellow" race, and only when Japan decontextualizes itself as a "mock white" race, can it be distinguished from other "yellow" races in Asia. The Japanese colonizer therefore projected yellowness as an inherent inferiority status, which was evident in the backward-looking Chinese society, and indicated that modern Japan should identify itself with the white race rather than the yellow race.⁵⁷

In Weng's works, for example, he appears to have detached himself from his Chinese ancestral bloodline, and this might indicate that he was convinced by the Japanese colonizer that Chineseness was synonymous with backwardness. The Chinese critic Gu, mentioned earlier in this paper, criticizes Weng's writing for this reason. However, Weng Nao's strategy of resisting Japanese colonialism was to show that his literary achievements were equal to those of his Japanese role models.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ching's usage specifically involves the context of cosmetics, i.e., "make-up." Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 66–67.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 72.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 75.

⁵⁷ Ukichi Taguchi, *Teiken taguchi ukichi zenshū 2*.

In addition, he attempted to represent the diasporic Taiwanese literary identity in order to distinguish himself from other Japanese Neosensualist writers of the early twentieth century. His resistance is actually directed toward Japanocentrism as well as toward Eurocentrism. He chose to write in Japanese and “spoke” to his Japanese audience directly rather than foregrounding the putative connection to his ancestral homeland or writing in Chinese, as if claiming Chineseness is a means of resistance. Writing in the language that the colonizer can understand, Weng therefore speaks and so can he resist the colonialism. This also distinguishes him from writers such as Lai He and Zhong Lihe 鍾理和 (1915–1960), who opted to write in Chinese during Japanese colonial rule, and from Liu Na’ou, who “returned” to his “ancestral” homeland – China.⁵⁸ Postcolonial Taiwanese identity, as Weng illustrates in his works, is never a “return” – either geographically or “literally” – to the pre-colonial Chinese nationalist ideology. Weng was never a nostalgic man, but rather, a man who kept moving forward. As a rebellious writer, Weng chose the most difficult way to resist, and believed that only when his works could compete with those of the best Japanese writers, could he be truly free from the domination of Japanese colonialism.

Conclusion

In the 1930s, aspiring Taiwanese authors headed for Tokyo, a city which not only provided them with a more liberated space to publish their works, but which also granted them access to Western cultures and modernity. Two main categories of Taiwanese modernist writing – Marxist Proletarian literature and Neosensualist literature – were mainly developed in Tokyo. Taiwanese diasporic writer Weng is categorised as belonging to the latter literary movement, which was inspired by the pure aesthetics in Japanese modernist writing and which challenged the traditional values of Taiwanese literature. His cutting-edge writing skills were in fact far ahead of other Taiwanese writers of his time. Through its subtle exploration of the desire to pursue sensual pleasure, Weng’s literature deploys the multiple complexities of a fetishization of the Japanese female body. In order to gain equality with male Japanese writers, Weng’s works also project his imaginary “conquest” of Japanese women by depicting sensual experiences between Taiwanese men and Japanese women, who are usually hybrid Euro-Asian creatures, blending aspects of whiteness and of “authentic” Japan. However, unlike the gender relations between the colonized men and white women in Anglophone postcolonial novels, the Japanese female characters in Weng’s works are doubly constructed as “imagined”

⁵⁸ Shih in the chapter “Gender, Race, and Semicolonialism: Liu Na’ou’s Urban Shanghai Landscape” points out that Liu’s descendants claim that he was “purely ethnic Chinese” though some scholars suspect that he had Japanese blood. Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937*, 276.

or “mock” white women as well as obedient Oriental women who ambiguously represent both the colonizer and the oppressed Oriental woman. This, therefore, makes Weng’s narratives distinct from the predominant discourses that address the power relations between the colonized man and the colonizing woman.⁵⁹ Through projecting his inner desire of becoming a subject in Japan’s capital, the male protagonists in his works are in fact figurations of himself, an urban bohemian, a sensationalist aesthete and a Japanocized male writer. His literature is frequently misinterpreted by Taiwanese Marxist writers/critics as embodying extreme frivolity and describing the empty pleasures of modern life in Tokyo, as well as controversial subjects such as eroticism, death and corruption. It might begin by mimicking European/Japanese imperialist modernist writing, but Weng’s works do not share the same values as imperialist writing since one of the central purposes of the former is to write back to and resist the latter. Therefore, such re-writing is an act of moving forward and inscribes the possibility of considering Weng’s works as innovative pieces of creative writing rather than as representative of a copy of European/Japanese modernist writing and in fact reveals a strong resistance to the patriarchal and colonial values of both Japanocentrism and Eurocentricism.

References

- Ching, Leo T. S. “Taiwan in Modernity/Coloniality: Orphan of Asia and the Colonial Difference.” In *The Creolization of Theory*, edited by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, 193–206. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.
- . “Yellow Skin, White Masks: Race, Class and Identification in Japanese Colonial Discourse.” In *Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, edited by Kuan-hsing Chen, 65–86. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Gu, Jitang 古繼堂. *Taiwan xiaoshuo fazhanshi*. 台灣小說發展史 [Literary History of Taiwanese Novels]. Taipei: Wen shi zhe, 1996.
- Huang, Yuting 黃毓婷. “Dongjing jiaowai langrenjie—Weng Nao yu yijiusanling niandai de Gaoyuansi jiewei” 東京郊外浪人街—翁鬧與一九三〇年代的高圓寺界限 [Tokyo Suburban Streets for the *Flâneur*: Weng Nao and the Border of Koenji in the 1930]. In *Taiwan wenxue xuekan* 台灣文學學刊 10 (2007): 163–96.
- Jaggi, Maya. “World Literature.” *Wasafiri* (London) 24, no. 3 (2009): 12–17.
- Kawahala, Isao 河原功. *Taiwan shin bungaku undou no tenkai: nihon bungaku to no setten*. 台灣新文學運動の展開：日本文学との接点 [Taiwan New Literature Movements: Bridging to Japanese Literature]. Tokyo: Kenbun Shuppan, 1997.
- Li, Jinyi 李進益. “Weng Nao duanpian xiaoshuo lun” 翁鬧短篇小說論 [On Weng Nao’s Short Fictions]. In *Weng Nao de shijie* 翁鬧的世界, edited by Xiao Xiao 蕭蕭 and Xianren Chen 陳憲仁, 141–61. Taizhong: Chenxing, 2009.
- Liu, Shuqin 柳書琴. *Jingji zhi dao: lü Ri qingnian de wenxue huodong yu wenhua kangzheng* 荆棘之道：旅日青年的文學活動與文化抗爭 [Thorns in the Way: Literary Activities and Cultural Resistance of Taiwanese Youth in Japan]. Taipei: Linking Publishing, 2009.

⁵⁹ Here I refer her to Japanese women as members of the “colonizing Japanese culture.”

- Lü, Zhenghui 呂正惠. *Zhimindi de shanheng—Taiwan wenxue wenti* 殖民地的傷痕—台灣文學問題 [The Trauma of the Colony: Issues in Taiwanese Literature], 31–40. Taipei: Renjian chubanshe, 2002.
- Maeeda, Ai 前田愛. *Maeeda Ai taiwa shuusei II: toshi to bungaku* 前田愛對話集成II：都市と文学 [Interview with Maeeda Ai II: Literature of City]. Tokyo: Misuzu Bookshop, 2005.
- Putzar, Edward. *Japanese Literature: A Historical Outline*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1973.
- Shi, Shu 施淑. *Riju shidai Taiwan xiaoshuo xuan* 日據時代台灣小說選 [Selection of Taiwanese Fictions during Japanese Colonial Rule]. Taipei: Qianwei, 1992.
- Shih, Shu-mei. *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001.
- Starrs, Roy. *Modernism and Japanese Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Sugimori, Ai 杉森藍. “Weng Nao shenpin ji qi wenxue huodong” 翁鬧及其文學活動 [Weng Nao and His Literary Activity]. In *You gangkou de jieshi* 《有港口的街市》, translated by Sugimori Ai, 12–61. Taizhong: Chenxing, 2009.
- . “*You gangkou de jieshi daodu*.” 《有港口的街市》導讀 [Introduction to *Street with a Port*]. In *Street with a Port*, translated by Sugimori Ai, 62–91. Taizhong: Morningstar, 2009.
- Suzuki, Tomi. *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Taguchi, Ukichi 田口卯吉. *Teiken taguchi ukichi zenshū 2* 鼎軒田口卯吉全集2 [Collected works of Teiken Taguchi Ukichi, vols. 2]. Tokyo: Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1990.
- Varma, Rashmi. *The Postcolonial City and Its Subjects: London, Nairobi, Bombay*. New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2012.
- Weng, Nao 翁鬧. *Minato no a ru machi* 港のある街 [Street with a Port]. 1939. Translated by Sugimori Ai. Taizhong: Chenxing, 2009.
- . “Tōkyō kōgai rōnin machi—Kōenji kaiwai” 東京郊外浪人街—高圓寺界限 [The Border of Kōenji—Tokyo Suburban Streets for the *Flâneur*]. *Taiwan Wenyi* 4, no. 2 (1935): 13–17.
- . “Yoakemae no koimonogatari” 夜明け前の恋物語 [A Love Story before Dawn]. In *Nippon touchi ki Taiwan bungaku Taiwanjin sakka sakuhinshuu vol. 5*, edited by Nakajima Toshiro and Kawahara Isao, 151–169. Tokyo: Ryokuin shobō, 1999.
- . “Zanxue” 殘雪 [Remaining Snow]. In *Weng Nao, Wu Yongfu and Wang Changxiong heji*, edited by Henghao Zhang 張恒豪, 51–75. Taipei: Qianwei, 1991.
- Yamamoto, Traise. “As Natural as the Partnership of Sun and Moon: The Logic of Sexualised Metonymy in Pictures from the Water Trade and The Lady and The Monk.” *Positions* 4, no. 2 (1996): 321–41.
- Yang, Ziqiao 羊子喬. “Piaofu zai 1930 niandai Dongjing jietou de huanyin—Weng Nao zhuopinzhong de ziwo shuxie yu xiandaixin xushu” 漂浮在一九三〇年代東京街頭的幻影—翁鬧作品中的自我書寫與現代性敘述 [The Phantom Drifting on the Streets of the 1930s Tokyo]. In *Weng Nao de shijie* 翁鬧的世界, edited by Xiao Xiao 蕭蕭 and Xianren Chen 陳憲仁, 162–77. Taizhong: Chenxing, 2009.
- Yang, Yizhou 楊逸舟. “Yi yaozhe de juncai Weng Nao.” 憶夭折的俊才翁鬧 [Remembering Talented Weng Nao]. In *Weng Nao, Wu Yongfu and Wang Changxiong heji*, edited by Henghao Zhang 張恒豪, 139–42. Taipei: Qianwei, 1991.
- Zhang, Henghao 張恒豪. “Huanyin zhi ren—Weng Nao ji shu” 幻影之人—翁鬧集序 [The Phantom: An Introduction to Collection of Weng Nao’s Works]. In *Weng Nao, Wu Yongfu and Wang Changxiong heji*, edited by Henghao Zhang 張恒豪, 13–15. Taipei: Qianwei, 1991.