

# Ethno Literary Identity and Geographical Displacement: Liu Na'ou's Chinese Modernist Writing in the East Asian Context

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## Abstract

In the course of his short literary life, Liu Na'ou travelled across four geographical areas: Taiwan, Japan, Shanghai and Beijing, as well as five cultural domains: Taiwanese, Japanese, French, English and Chinese. The transnational facet of Liu's modernist writing is not merely literary or cultural but political and historical. The earliest modernist writing in China was initiated on the basis of the colonial experience of Taiwan and the semi-colonial modernity of Shanghai. It became a "contact zone" in which various cultural and political influences to contest with each other, signaling a process of power shifting in East Asia in the early 20th century. This article aims to reflect on theoretical issues ranging from nationalism, cosmopolitanism, colonialism and semi-colonialism, to the colonial modernity of East Asia, drawing upon Liu's modernist writings in 1928.

**Keywords:** Liu Na'ou, Chinese modernist writing, Semi-colonialism, Intertwined colonization

## 1. Introduction

In 1926, a young Taiwanese man named Liu Na'ou (1905–1940) travelled to Shanghai to study the French language at the Jesuit *Université L'Aurore* (Note 1), having earlier graduated from the English department at Aoyama Gakuin University (Note 2) in Tokyo (Peng, 1998, p.134). Influenced by French writer Paul Morand (1888–1976) and by Japanese Neo-Sensationalism, this young Taiwanese was later to become one of the founders of Chinese modernist literature (Note 3).

Liu, who was born in Taiwan in 1905, moved to Tokyo in 1920 to pursue his high school and university education. After his proposal to study in France after his graduation had been rejected by his mother, Liu travelled to Shanghai to learn French where, in 1930, he published a collection of short stories titled *City Scenery*. The ensuing popularity made him one of China's first modernist writers. In his short life, Liu travelled across four geographical areas: Taiwan, Japan, Shanghai and Beijing; as well, he traversed five cultural domains: Taiwanese, Japanese, French, English and Chinese. In addition, he worked in camps supporting various ideologies. During the early period of his stay in Shanghai, Liu worked closely with Feng Xuefeng (1903–1976), who later became a significant member of the Chinese Communist Party, and with other leftist writers. In later years he became involved in movie production and propaganda work for the Japanese-sponsored Wang Jingwei Regime and was mysteriously assassinated in 1940. From his formal settlement in Shanghai in 1927 to the time of his assassination in 1940, Liu supervised the publication of many literary journals including *Trackless Train*, *La Nouvelle Littérature*, *Modern Cinemas*, *Six Arts* and *Women's Pictorial*. He also managed two publishing houses: Frontline Bookstore and Water Foam Publishing House. His contribution saw him recognized as the beacon of Chinese modernist writing (Lee, 1999, p.313).

## 2. Reconfiguring Chinese Modernist Writing

The complexity and controversy surrounding Liu's identity makes evaluating his writing a thorny task. The various readings of his modernist writings differ dramatically from each other, according to the ideology each reading applied to. Liu's writing is accordingly subject to narrative that is variously national, cosmopolitan or non-national.

Most researchers in China support the notion that Liu's modernist writing was neither threatened by colonialism nor did it unsettle Chinese nationalism. If there is one point that requires clarification it is the writing's intimacy with capitalism, which essentially symbolizes Liu's corruption. In Chinese scholarly opinion, Liu's Neo-Sensationalism was an "absent presence" in literary history: it was deliberately kept low key due to its ambiguous stance vis-à-vis the capitalism of Shanghai. In literary critique in Mainland China, Liu's writing has

been portrayed as that of a "betrayor" of the Chinese realist tradition and as capitulation to "decadent Western capitalism". His widely perceived "right" capitalist stance kept him out of Chinese literary history, a circumstance that prevailed until 2001 when urban study found new popularity in China. However, whether Liu was a leftist write or not, and whether his writing is realistic or not, are not issues external to the narrative of Chinese literary history. The interpretation of Chinese scholarship vis-à-vis Liu's literature remains obstinately Chinese national. Somewhat, ironically, although Chinese scholarship demonstrated an interest in unifying Taiwan, Chinese national literary history seldom made an effort to address Taiwanese elements and the associated colonial elements in Liu's writing. Many features, including Liu's use of language, invoke elements not confined to the Chinese national border, elements that have been narrowly imagined by Chinese scholarship.

While Chinese scholarship was still preoccupied with whether Liu belonged to the left or to the right, criticism coming from Taiwan was more engaged with issues of whether he belonged to Taiwan or not. For a long time, irrespective of Liu's contribution, Taiwanese modernist writing was believed to have had its genesis in Ji Xuan's modernist poetry and Yang Chichang's surrealist literature. However, due to the broad "Root-searching movement" which originated in Taiwan in the 1990s, Liu and his modernist writings became the focus of modern Taiwanese literature. The late 1990s saw the emergence in Taiwan of a variety of literary and artistic genres that were marked by their search into Taiwan's local history (Liu, 2000, p.5). Against this background, Liu's diary was discovered and published in 1998. In 2001, under the auspices of the Cultural Affairs Department of Tai-nan, a six volume collection of his works was published, with a preface declaring that Liu was indisputably a write of Tai-nan (Note 5). In 2010, under the supervisor of the Council for Cultural Affairs, a complimentary volume of Liu's works was published, demonstrating that "Liu was a part of Taiwanese literary history" (Note 6). The rediscovery of Liu's individual history became part of the re-writing of Taiwanese local history, propelled by the advancement of the Taiwanization movement that had gained momentum since the 1990s. However, as Liu Jihui notes, the Taiwanization movement was paradoxical: the multi-identities that were resulted from Taiwanese modern history, while on the one hand make an anti-Chinese narrative possible, on the other they make the demarcation of Taiwanese impossible (Liu, 2000, p.5),

In contrast to the logic of locking Liu into the national, Chinese or Taiwanese, narrative, driven by the academic interest in surpassing the limitations of nation, there emerged an opposite trend in academia, one that sought to explore Liu's writing at the turn of the century. In the United States, for example, Shu-mei Shih's study claimed that: "Shanghai modernists expressed an ambivalent, and at best oscillating, allegiance to nationalism and critique of the colonial presence" (Shih, 2001, p.232). Shih argued to the effect that: "cosmopolitanism was nowhere as explicit as in the work of the self-styled modernists and decadentists" who refused to "be dictated to by the ideological left or right" (Shih, 2001, p.237). Similarly, Leo Ou-fan Lee (1999) saw Chinese cosmopolitanism as a facet of Chinese modernity of Shanghai. Although this stance seemed to underscore the cosmopolitan feature of Liu's writing, it nevertheless largely confined his writing to the geopolitical site of Shanghai, the local history of which, in the early 20th century virtually constituted Chinese national history.

Different from this approach of underscoring the capitalist cosmopolitanism of Shanghai, Japanese researcher Misawa Mamie developed "a narrative beyond national borders" by focusing on Liu's frequent crossings of the national borders of Japan, China and Taiwan. Rather than processing a cosmopolitan characteristic, Misawa claims that, due to his experience of colonization, Liu was too vulnerable to have any national identification and was doomed to become "a man who did not have a national flag" (Misawa, 2005, p.399).

However, any denial of nationalism in his work results in limited understanding of the multiplicity of nationalism, which "is rarely the nationalism of the nation, but rather marks the site where different representations of the nation contest and negotiate with each other" (Duara, 1995, pp.7-8). What is termed "nationalism" is not a predetermined concept but a historical configuration always subject to reconciliation and renegotiation. These "non-national" or "cosmopolitan" approaches are equally unwarranted because they take concepts of nation or nationalism as self-evident premises from which to "surpass" rather than taking the national unit as a historical question to examine. The key question does not lie in that whether to abandon the national framework. What really matters is how to problematize the national, and how to historicize the internal historical relationship between the national and the cosmopolitan.

As argued by many scholars, China was never totally occupied, nor was it occupied by a single power. This historical formulation directs contemporary scholarship to the concept of "semi-colonialism", which was originally used by Lenin to describe countries such as Persia (Iran), China, and Turkey (Lenin, 1916, p.85). This concept was adopted by the Chinese Communist Party in the 1920s and used by Mao Zedong to analyze Chinese social relations. In contemporary scholarship on China, it was reinvented by Shu-mei Shih to describe the "multiple imperialist presences in China and their fragmentary colonial geography and control, as well as the

resulting social and cultural formation” (Shih, 2001, p.31). By "the colonial reality of China", she was interested in studying coastal cities such as Shanghai.

However, Tani E. Barlow suggests that, “historical context is not a matter of positively defined, elemental, or discrete units—nation states, stages or development, or civilizations, for instance—but rather a complex field of relationships or threads of matter that connect multiply in space-time and can be surveyed from specific sites” (Barlow, 1997, p.6). By no means does each case of colonization or colonial modernity conform to a single paradigm, and nor should the modern European imperialism and colonialism be regarded as the only model (Said, 1990, pp.70–71). Thus, the legitimacy of “semi” that defines China’s history of foreign colonization by a European parameter of “colonialism” should be challenged (Note 7).

The fragmentary configuration of “semi-colonial China” can be further complicated by Japan's total colonization of Taiwan. In her discussion, Shu-mei Shih contends that semi-colonialism as a social formation was of "fractured, informal and indirect" colonization and thus was distinct from formal colonialism" (Shih, p.x, p.35). Her "semi-colonialism" theory can be traced back to a conceptual module of informal colonialism, informal empire, and the new imperialism of 20th century China that gained currency in the late 1980s. Jürgen Osterhammel, expressing his dissatisfaction with "the notion of 'semi-colonialism', a label that has been applied to China ever since without much regard for its potential theoretical implications", offered another model of "informal empire in modern China" to describe the mode of expansion based on free trade. As well, he notes the forcible opening up of a secluded agrarian society in the "twenty years between the collapse of the monarchy in 1911 and Japan's take-over of the north-eastern provinces in 1931" (Osterhammel, 1986, pp.296–200). The informal empire model was conceptualized from both economical and social perspectives. In his "Japan's Informal Empire in China, 1895-1937", Peter Duus applied this conceptual model to his study of Japanese imperialism in China before the Manchurian Incident (Duus, 1989, pp.xi–xxix). Both Duus and Osterhammel declare that their models were defined by the treaty system and the associated free trade: neither forget to exclude the colonial reality of Taiwan from their frameworks. However, theories of "semi-colonialism" or "informal colonialism" are not adequate for studying Liu's writing because he was born in Taiwan and had experienced formal colonialism; thus, Taiwanese elements and its formal colonization can by no means be avoided. In fact, as I will suggest later in this article, what was previously considered the cosmopolitan influence of semi-colonial Shanghai on Liu's writing can actually be read as resulting from Japan's colonization of Taiwan.

Liu's modernist writing not only challenges the boundaries of semi-colonialism and colonialism but also defies an antithesis of national and cosmopolitan. Although heavily dependent on the cultural resources of Shanghai, and adopting modern scenes typical of capital cosmopolitan as the theme of his writing, Liu drew from the national resources of Chinese society and culture in the 1930s.

Based on the above, in this article, I propose the notion of “intertwined colonization”, which indicates the colonial reality of modern China that was defined by Japan's formal colonization of Taiwan and the informal colonization of the rest of China based on the treaty system from 1895 to 1937. "Intertwined colonization" defines the historical context from which Liu's modernist writings derived. Accordingly, Liu's subject formation, as Shih argues, was not only fragmented as a result of the informal and indirect colonization of Shanghai but was marked by the intertwined experience of the formal colonization of Taiwan and the informal colonization of the rest of China.

In line with what I term “intertwined colonization”, the conceptual triangle of China, the West and Japan was no longer viable: it proposed a more detailed conceptual frame of East Asia. The rediscovery of “colonial modernity in East Asia” occurred through a theoretical process that can be roughly divided into three stages: 1) disclosing the cultural imperialism of the West through what Said calls “Orientalism”, and revealing how regenerated Western modernism was possible only when imperialism was included in the economic equation, 2) the rise of non-Western modernism from the strength of mimicry or the subaltern as proposed by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and 3) the collapse of the binary platitudes of East and West by unearthing the “Japanese connection” (Lee, 1999, p.316) or the “mediating role of Japanese modernism” (Shih, 2001, p.16) in the scission. The ensuing question remains: how to remap modernist writings within East Asia? As I will demonstrate in section two, the East Asian circulation of the cultural and literary resources of Shanghai, Beijing, Taiwan, and Japan all contributed to the molding of Liu's writing.

In short, “intertwined colonization” opens up an understanding of Chinese modernist writing by taking care of the complicity of China's multi-layered colonial past, attending to the intersecting relationship of cosmopolitan Shanghai and colonial Taiwan, and offering a conceptual framework for inner East Asia. This opens up a new understanding of Liu's writing that remains obscured in the traditionally national or "non-national" perspectives.

In the next sections, I will present a detailed analysis of the birth and contradictory features of Liu's writing and demonstrate how it was marked by the intertwined colonization of modern China.

### 3. The Birth of Chinese Modernist Writing Within East Asia

The focus of this section is on the origins of Liu's modernist writing and how East Asia provided the necessary intellectual resources for Liu's writing. To this end, I aim to enlist the mobility and flexibility of modernism in the East Asian triangle of China, Taiwan and Japan in an attempt to trace the trajectory of Liu's mobilization.

#### 3.1 From Taiwan to China via Japan

Around 1928, Liu Na'ou shuttled back and forth between various different territories. Unsure of where he should stay, Liu finally decided to settle in Shanghai. His determination to stay in Shanghai had two dimensions: the economic and cultural advancement of Shanghai and, in sharp contrast, the cultural backwardness of Taiwan. Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s was among the top ten cities in the world, a center that could lay claim to modern industry, burgeoning finance, and extremely busy ports (Li, 2000, p.8). As early as 1896, a year after the inception of film in France, westerns film appeared in Shanghai, bringing the earliest practice of the movie to China. From that time on, the development of Shanghai was inscribed with the growth of the Chinese film industry. In 1927, the year Liu arrived in Shanghai, the city witnessed the debut of the early talking film, only one year after its debut in Hollywood. The maturity of cultural capitalism not only lured Liu from Tokyo but also laid the foundations for his later career.

However, in sharp contrast, at the time, Taiwan was under the colonial government of Japan. Native Taiwanese were denied proper education due to the imperial education system introduced by the Japanese colonial government. Colonial discrimination worked to block the advancement of the native Taiwanese. For this reason, many opted to study in either Japan or China. Against this background, Liu went to Japan in search of educational opportunities. Most of the pages in the newspapers in Taiwan were printed in Japanese: only a quarter of the space was allocated to Chinese (Note 7). Chinese journals at the time were preoccupied with classical poetry (Li, 2000, p.8).

It is not surprising that Liu chose to go to Shanghai rather than return to Taiwan. "Go back home! Go back to the warm south" and "The banyan trees are the origin of our happiness, reflecting the strength of people living in the South" were the two most cited of Liu's utterances made by Taiwanese researchers in their attempts to emphasize Liu's Taiwanese nationalism. However, as Wang Juanru notes, these two quotations represent the only two occasions upon which Liu explicitly expressed his love for Taiwan. The former was written when his career in Shanghai was in jeopardy while the latter when he returned Taiwan for his grandmother's funeral (Wang, 2005, p.467). In general, Liu stayed in Shanghai for pragmatic reasons. His attachment to Taiwan in 1928, which has been overwhelmingly stressed in current Taiwanese narratives, risks the overlooking of other elements that effectively shaped his career.

#### 3.2 From "National Beijing" to "Cosmopolitan Shanghai"

In contemporary scholarship addressing Liu's modernist writings, there has been a trend to associate his work exclusively with semi-colonial Shanghai, stressing the overwhelming effect of Shanghai on his writings. However, Beijing, as a part of the Chinese influence, exerted a significant influence on Liu's writing, not only providing him with a personal relationship upon which to forge his later career but also offering his writing the direct Chinese experience. Liu's literary career encapsulated the social and political changes from Beijing to Shanghai in China in the late 1920s. Its widely held cosmopolitanism was actually nurtured by Chinese national sources.

Prior to the beginning of his literary career in Shanghai, Liu embarked on a pilgrimage to Beijing. This seldom mentioned experience was carefully recorded in Liu's diary in 1927. On September 28 1927, Liu set out by sea, and arrived in Tianjin on the 1st of October. From Tianjin, Liu took a train to Beijing where he spent the next two months. It was not until the 3rd of December that Liu returned to Shanghai. The days spent in Beijing offered him a chance to experience first hand contact with Chinese culture and Chinese literature for the very first time. The cultural atmosphere in Beijing made Liu realize that the reason he could not get a feeling of the real China from the literary texts he used to study was because he had not physically been to Beijing (Liu, 1927, p.700). In other words, the trip to Beijing signalled the start of Liu's understanding of China.

Liu's trip to Beijing contributed directly to his writing material. According to his diary, when living in Beijing Liu frequently visited a prostitute named Lü Xia. This girl may have inspired Liu's story *Etiquette and Hygiene*, which depicts a similar experience of visiting a prostitute named Lü Di, whose name is similar to the protagonist Lü Xia in Liu's diary. Liu's visit to Lü Xia in Beijing ended in failure due to a disagreement over prices. The

writer's nasty mood in Beijing was reflected in the male protagonist Yao Qiming's evaluation of modern prostitution in *Etiquette and Hygiene*. Yao Qiming insisted: "there should be a thorough reformation, since they [prostitutes] are not professional in dealing business, demanding improvements on simplicity and efficiency. They seem to deliberately decorate their occupations with unnecessary rituals and trivialities, lacking efficiency" (Liu, 1928a, p.109).

The significance of his trip to Beijing is also evident in the fact that during this trip, Liu established the personal connections necessary for his later career in Shanghai. In Beijing, Liu encountered Feng Xuefeng, who later became a pillar figure of the Chinese Communist Party. After settling in Shanghai, Feng published many books through Liu's Publishing House, at one time working there as a main editor. Many members of Liu's Publishing House, including Feng, Yao Pengzi (1891–1969) and Xu Xiacun (1907–1986) all fled Beijing for Shanghai when the political and cultural situation in Beijing deteriorated. Post-1927, Beijing, the cultural center of China, was under the political control of the Kuomintang. The year Liu settled in Shanghai saw a large number of writers depart Beijing and other regions for Shanghai in order to avoid political persecution (Kuang, 1998, p.24). Lu Xun, Hu Shi, Guo Moruo, Mao Dun, Jiang Guangci, and many other significant figures of Chinese modern literature all arrived in Shanghai in 1927. Liu's Publishing House caught the trend of the intellectual mobility of China in 1927. The advancement of the cultural market in Shanghai, which was largely held as the enzyme for Liu's literary career, should not be separated from the cultural accumulation in Beijing. Rather than being isolated from the rest of China, Shanghai's cultural exuberance was formed in part as a result of political struggle as well as social change in China (Meng, 2006; Kuang, 1998). In her book *Shanghai and the Edges of Empire*, Meng claims that rather than being built up by Western imperialism, Shanghai, as the center of China in the early 20th century, was constructed by inner-China social and economic mobility that could be traced back to the Qing and early Republican eras.

In 1929 in Shanghai, supervised by Lu Xun and supported by friends who were fleeing Beijing, Liu's Water Foam Publishing House intended to publish twelve books on Marxist theory, but only five were realized. From September 1928 when Liu first set up his literary journal *Trackless Train*, to early 1930 when the Water Foam Publishing House was forced to close due to its suspected involvement in publishing communist literature, Liu was at the peak of his literary career. As a modernist writer, Liu frequently engaged with left-leaning intellectuals. Cosmopolitanism for him at this time was more defined by communism than by imperialist capitalism.

As such, the birth of Liu's writing should be located in the historical background of East Asia in the 1920s and 30s, fully taking into account its cultural mobility. Liu's writing was initially propelled by two cultural and geographical torrents, one flowing from Taiwan to China via Japan, the other from Beijing to Shanghai.

#### 4. The Modernist Writing of "Intertwined Colonization"

The modernization of language played a significant role in the establishment of nationalism. As some contemporary studies maintain: "In spite of their reading knowledge of foreign literatures, modern Chinese writers did not use any foreign languages to write their work and continued to use the Chinese language as their only language" (Lee, 1999, p.312). Reading foreign literature and practicing foreign languages only acted as a means through which the writers could acquire new knowledge. It was thus an instrument that served nationalism. Leo Ou-fan Lee declares that unlike some African writers, who were forced to write in the language of the colonizer, Chinese writers were never confronted with such a threat (Lee, 1999, p.312). Therefore, he concludes, Chinese modernist writers' Chinese identity was never in question. The "Chinese modernist writers" to whom Leo Ou-fan Lee refers included Liu Na'ou, who was one of the core writers of "modern Shanghai". However, inside China, or even in Shanghai, intellectuals' circumstances differed in countless ways. For Liu, the strategy of language not only reflected his connection with Chinese culture and literary history but also revealed the colonial reality of Japan and Taiwan.

##### 4.1 *Heritage of May Fourth Spirit*

Through his use of Chinese language, Liu proved that he was historically positioned on the spectrum of the Chinese May Fourth Movement (Note 8). All of Liu's works were written in Chinese. There is no denying that his choice to write in Chinese was related to the objective requirement for him to publish novels in China. But there were more reasons hidden deep in his cultural background. Despite the fact that Liu's Japanese was more fluent than his Chinese, and that most of his diary was written in Japanese, he did not publish his works in Japanese. This was a common strategy adopted by many Taiwanese writers during the Japanese colonization. Liu insisted on writing his stories in what his friend termed "awkward Chinese".

According to Liu's diary, by 1927 he had received Japanese education for more than ten years; but, this did not essentially hinder his Chinese writing. Without the special attention he paid to Chinese writing and besides his

normal education in Japanese he could not have published his first Chinese collection shortly after he finished his overseas study in Japan (Lin, 2005, p.89). Liu also actively encouraged people around him to learn Chinese. For example, he subscribed to *Short Story Monthly* for a whole year so that he could help “A’Jin”, his peer from Taiwan, to study modern Chinese (Liu, 1927, p.218). As regards domestic communication, according to Liu’s children, Liu taught them the Shanghai dialect and Taiwanese instead of Japanese when Liu’s wife and children moved to Shanghai in 1934 (Cutivet, 2005, pp.114–115).

Given the relations between Taiwan and Japan at the time, I suggest that Liu’s modernist writing can be regarded as an escape from Japan’s assimilative colonial policy and Japanese literature, or a protest of the colonized against the colonizer. By creating Chinese modernism in China’s Mainland via Japanese modernist writings, Liu conquered the double challenge of Japan’s colonial language policy and Taiwan’s old literature, finally converging into the tradition of China’s modern literature. Liu’s insistence on writing in Chinese, and his persistent interest in participating in the modern Chinese literary arena formed the based of his national identification with China. This is the aspect that has been exclusively stressed in contemporary literature reviews in Mainland China.

#### 4.2 *The Fragility of Modernist Writing*

Somewhat ironically, Liu’s writing of Chinese also reveals the ambiguity of his identity. The novelty of Liu’s modernism was largely achieved by borrowing from Japanese at various grammar and vocabulary levels. This fully demonstrated Japan’s colonial influence on Taiwan and also, in turn, upon Chinese modernist writing, the formation of which, as well as being forged by the colonial relationship between Japan and Taiwan, left remarkable colonial scars on the two languages.

On the pages of short stories translated by Liu, Japanese characters could be found everywhere. Some can be comprehended given that the Japanese and Chinese use a similar character system; some were even grammatically modified, exotically embellished with a “foreign tone”. For example, when studying Liu’s translation of Japanese Neo-Sensationalists’ writings, it is easy to find that in the original Japanese versions, the “foreign tone” was not necessarily evident from beginning to end. However, once translated by Liu, the proportion increased dramatically (Wang, 2002, p. 59). In other words, Liu introduced an exotic flavour that could not be found in the original Japanese versions.

For example, the Chinese term “葬礼” (*zang li*), which means funeral, was expressed by Liu in the Japanese term “葬式” (*sōshiki*), and the Chinese term “一分钟” (*yi fen zhong*), the meaning of which is one minute, was expressed as the Japanese term “一分间” (*ippunkan*). As such, “葬式” and “一分间”, both Japanese characters were preserved by Liu without differentiation. In Liu’s short story *Erotological Culture*, there is a translation that literally reads “to take out the words about food” (把关于食物的话拿出来). This is actually another example of translating Japanese in an “exotic” way. The corresponding Japanese compound word for “拿出来” (to take out) is “持ち出す” (*mochidasu*) which has many meanings, including “to take out” and “to start talking”. In this context, it should be translated into “to start talking” rather than “to take out”.

However, this extraordinarily exotic usage was not only confined to translations: it was scattered throughout his own short stories. Take the following: “The Russian who is selling newspapers brings out a page of foreign language in front of him. The front page is a foreign emperor’s coronation ceremony. However, what is the relation between the coronation ceremony of a foreign emperor and the life of people in this country? Jing Qin wonders whether it deserves such a huge report.”(卖报的俄人在他的脸前提出一页的外国文来了。头号活字的标题报的是外国的皇帝即位祝贺式的盛况，但是外国的皇帝即位跟这国的这些人们有什么关系呢，镜秋想，那用得到这么大的报告吗) (Liu, 1928b, p.52) In this short quotation, in four places the Chinese words have been replaced with Japanese words. “提出” (*teishutsu*, bring out), “外国文” (*gaikokubun*, foreign language), 祝贺式 (*shukugashiki*, ceremony) and “报告” (*hōkoku*, report) are all Japanese words. Although similar in appearance to the Chinese characters and imbued with almost the same meaning, these Japanese words provoke a feeling of alienation in the Chinese context. Examples like this can be easily found in Liu’s works.

Even the titles of articles were imbued with Liu’s particular tone of writing. In the August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1935 issue of *Women’s Pictorial*, of which Liu was editor-in-chief, an article appeared titled “Problems Confronted by Chinese Cinema” (中国电影当面的问题). “当面的问题” (“danmian de wenti”, Problems Confronted) is a transplantation of a typical Japanese expression “当面的問題” (*tōmen no mondai*). Analysis suggests that the Chinese modernist writing of Liu was mostly realized by substituting Chinese with Japanese. This borrowing of Japanese expressions rendered Liu’s texts as exotic as foreign writings.

However, the linguistic borrowing and transplantation reflected in Liu’s works was not his voluntary choice but resulted from his particular cultural identity of being born and growing to adulthood in colonial Taiwan.

Growing up in colonial Taiwan and the experience of studying in Japan affected Liu's acquisition of Mandarin. Liu's close friend Shi Zhecun recalled that Liu's Chinese was so awkwardly bad it was as if he were writing Japanese (Shi, 1984, p.51). As such, the influence of the Japanese language, an element from beyond China's national border, penetrated Liu's writings based on semi-colonial Shanghai via the experience of the formal colonization of Taiwan.

However, this experience of writing in the Chinese language also affected the plots in Liu's writing, which can be read as a reflection of his bewilderment over his own national identity. Liu kept oscillating between different cultural and geographical boundaries, a disjunction reflected in the heroes and heroines in his stories, who tend to be single and have no connection with their families. They are strangers: they have no knowledge of each other's pasts and futures; they simply encounter each other at a specific time. What they care about is "Now". Day and night they haunt the public consumption space in the city, possibly "walking on an insensible road", "from the race club to the teahouse", or "from the tea house to the busy street". "Five minutes later", they may appear "in one corner of the dim ball hall" (Liu, 1928c, pp.84-99).

The segments quoted above from Liu's short stories have been widely read by previous scholars as a reflection of the capitalistic decadence of semi-colonial Shanghai or of the cosmopolitan nature of his writing. However, considering Liu's personal experience and the linguistic ambiguity demonstrated in his works, these segments also capture the essence of Liu's life as a colonial writer, reflecting the experience of the formal colonization he had experienced before he entered Shanghai and the deterioration of the identity crisis he experienced when he was in Shanghai. In the case of Liu, who travelled constantly between different cultural terrains, the disjointed imago and a writing experience coloured by dichotomous national boundaries, further deepened his personal alienation and sense of homelessness. Once embodied in writing, this feeling of exile constitutes a view of some fragile semiotics morphing together. This apparent lack of coherency and consistency, which is regarded as one of the hallmarks of modernist writing, was not merely a novice's literary experiment related to cultural importation from Japanese Neo-Sensationalism but the result of the cultural and psychological influence of colonialism and semi-colonialism within East Asia.

According to his diary entries in July and August 1927, he was stricken by successive bouts of indulgence accompanied by strain. Liu was plagued by neurasthenia and insomnia to such an extent that he mentioned committing suicide in his diary. Half of the space in his diary of 1927 was consumed by his ongoing complaints about his neurological disorders, which deteriorated even further following news of the famous Japanese writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's suicide. Yu Dafu, a renowned Chinese writer of the Creation Society that Liu endorsed, stated that his life "was a pursuit of sensory pleasure when he was too depressed to feel the happiness of life" (Yu, 1983, p.288). This mode of living, which was spiritually decadent and preoccupied with the seeking of sensory pleasure, was described by Yu as aestheticism of fin-de-siècle in China, a type of Chinese modernism similar to its European counterpart. Liu, along with other writers of the Creation Society, shared the same processes of sinking into doubt and anguish, of China's modernity based on Shanghai, and of a trend towards seeking sensory pleasure when their hearts were steeped in gloom (Qian, 1982, p.340). The difference is that Liu also had to contend with a rootless feeling engendered by his colonial experience in Taiwan, a fact beyond the understanding of Chinese native intellectuals living in Shanghai.

The male protagonists in Liu's stories were characterized by the same amount of melancholy and frailty as Liu himself exhibited. This, in turn, revealed Liu's own psychological state. They were abandoned by "modern" girls because they still observed the outdated morality of patriarchy (Shih, 2000, p.219). Some, like the protagonist Bu Qing in *Games*, were too preposterous, too sentimental and too romantic (Liu, 1928d, p.7). Others, like Jing Qiu in *Flow*, sank into immeasurable melancholy, speaking as though they were composing a poem. The protagonists were pursuing not only the modern girls but also a time beyond their capability. Rather than looking at Liu's stories as reflections of a kind of total moral decadence in capitalist societies, I suggest regarding these protagonists, who seemed unable to catch up with the future, as incarnations of Liu's anxiety concerning a sense of time, a failure to connect the past with the future. In a word, the figures under Liu's pen, such as the modern girls who were out of reach and the male protagonists who suffered from incomprehensible sentimentality, reflect Liu's uneasy soul and unrestrained anxiety. Similar to Japanese Neo-Sensationalism, which emerged after the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, Chinese modernist writings were also generated in an atmosphere of decadence. The difference was that the decadent atmosphere that permeated Chinese modernistic writing in part resulted from Japan's colonization of Taiwan.

In the above discussion, I have dealt with several issues that are closely related to the linguistic features of Liu's work. These included an analysis of Liu's borrowing from Japanese vocabulary, the historical and social reasons that underpinned his language use, and the relation between Liu's linguistic ideology and the specific

embodiment of his literary impulse. The writing style of imago juxtaposition not only indicated Liu's innovative form but also his psychological status. The vagueness and rupturing of his use of language would probably have influenced his recognition of national identity. Identities are negotiable, subject to mutation and change. For the natives of Taiwan, a peripheral island that was transferred from the Qing Empire to the Japanese empire after 1905, the sentiment of nationality accompanied the changing political landscape of Asia. As a component of national identity, language can both affirm and deny certain national identification, not necessarily generating an imagined community.

Liu Na'ou's short stories were mainly written in the two years from 1928 to 1929 when he first sojourned in Shanghai. Except for his sporadic writings between 1932 and 1934, no new literary works appeared after 1934; as well, almost no movie reviews or journal publication appeared after 1935. It may have been that with the further strengthening of the imperialist aggression against China, and the deepening of Liu's awareness of his own situation, his persistence in China or rather in modernism disappeared along with his initial arguable Chinese national sentiment. It is not that the national frame, which is still effective when reading Liu's writing, should be abandoned. Rather, it should be historically re-imagined to address colonial issues.

### 5. Concluding Remarks: The Flexibility of Modern Chinese Literature

The variations in Liu's Chinese language and the popularity of his writing in modern China lead to reflection on how to demarcate Chinese modernist writing and how to imagine modern Chinese literature. Although Shi Zhecun, Liu's close friend, indicated that Liu wrote in the way of writing foreign languages, was the novelty associated with his linguistic performance the only reason the reading market accepted his work? The situation could prove even more complex if the development of new literature and language reformation in China is taken into account. The fact that Liu's writing was tolerated—even embraced—by China around 1928 may be attributed to the immaturity of the Chinese national language and Chinese modern literature which only started to fledge after the late 1920s.

Many scholars, such as Geller, Hobsbawm and Anderson, have highlighted the role that language plays in nation building. For example, Benedict Anderson highlights the role the “revolutionary vernacularising thrust of capitalism” played in constructing “an imagined political community”, one that is inherently limited (Anderson, 1991, p.37). “Being Chinese” requires a device for producing “a palpable sentiment of nationality”, which further depends on the creation of “a mother tongue”, a native language, or a national language (Sakai, 2005, p.18). This argument is largely valid irrespective of whether it is applied to the case of Japan, that is, to Sakai Naoki's studies or to Anderson's work on Europe. The rule can also be applied to the process of Chinese modernity and the modernization of Chinese literature.

Rather than a given condition supporting nation building, the dynamic relation between language and nation building is far from resolved, for as Gal states: “not only communities but also Languages must be imagined before their unity can be socially accomplished”(Gal, 1998, p.325). Nation building in China entailed a process of reforming both modern Chinese language and Chinese literature.

The reformation of China's modern language can be traced back to 1887, when Huang Zunxian (1804–1905) highlighted the importance of the consistency between oral words and written words in his *Record of Japan*. Subsequent to his writing, the will among Chinese intellectuals to reform modern Chinese was sustained unwaveringly until the pinnacle of Chinese nationalism of the May Fourth Movement was reached. Yet, although the subject of national language entered the curricula of China's elementary schools in 1913, the setting up of a similar subject in middle schools was only realized as late as 1923. The textbooks used by the middle schools for teaching the national language in 1925 were replete with essays and short stories such as *Hometown* written by Lu Xun, whose works cannot be said to be written in exemplary modern Chinese (Wang, 2001, p.94). The modernization of the Chinese language undertaken over a period of several decades, even extended into the post-war period under the supervision of Mao Zedong. It is clear that amid the promotion of vernacular, many official documents and newspapers were still written in classical Chinese (Wang, 2001, p.94). The 1920s were located in the initial stage of this long process. In other words, the 1920s still saw a certain degree of flexibility and multiplicity in written Chinese. It is in this broadly experimental environment that the written language that Liu employed in his writings, albeit impure, found its place.

The paradox of modern Chinese is that while on the one hand “modern Standard Chinese, Putonghua Mandarin and Guoyu Mandarin have been set in opposition to local language as the signifier of the historical past”, on the other, the history of the standardization of the Chinese national language is unable to eliminate the local elements which were prevalent in literature and the media (Gunn, 2006, p.4). The paradox becomes further complicated if “locals” are historicized in a colonial context. Chinese modern literature contains various heterogeneous voices

serving as signifiers of various historical pasts, among which is the modernist literature engendered by Japanese colonization. Liu's writing involves variations that cannot be simply reduced to the Chinese written language: these deviations can only be understood in the context of historicizing Chinese modernist writings in "an intertwined colonization" of Taiwan and China.

Liu's Chinese writing, which was mixed with Japanese at various levels, transcended the function of communication and reached a symbolic realm, signifying a cultural and historical specificity, and thus should be understood in the cultural interchanges between China and Japan. His work bears the stamp not only the political and social influence of the colonial encounter between Japan and Taiwan but also of the influence of a rising Japan within Asia. In her *Translingual Practice*, Lydia H. Liu offers many fine examples of Japanese loanwords in modern Chinese to demonstrate how Chinese intellectuals managed to accelerate the process of Chinese modernization by introducing modern European concepts via Japan (Liu, 1995, p.18). Although initial interest in the phonetic writing of Lu Kanchang, the harbinger mentioned above, was aroused by the Romanizing activities of the missionaries, his later work was inspired by the Japanese linguistic system (Francis, 1950, p.52). However, centuries before Chinese nationalists reformed the Chinese language by emulating of Japan in line with their admiration for Japanese achievements, it was Japan that imported Chinese cultural and characters from China. As recorded in *Record of Ancient Matters* and *Chronicles of Japan*, the origin of Japanese writing derived from Chinese and Chinese books such as *Confucian Analects* and *Thousand-Character Classic* (Seeley, 1991, p.4). However, when it came to the Edo period (1603–1868), the school of national learning denounced the influence of Confucianism and tried to revive Japanese by rejecting the use of Chinese words and Chinese characters in Japanese texts (Habein, 1984, p.83). The attitude toward Chinese characters, and the corresponding confidence in the Japanese language, were further developed to an extreme degree, encapsulated by the idea of making Japanese the common Asian language in 1941 with the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere (Koyasu, 2004, pp. 204–216).

In modern Asia, the enthusiasm among Chinese nationalists for absorbing and borrowing Japanese words was diametrically opposite to the Japanese elaboration of getting rid of the influence of Chinese. Liu's modernist writing, a direct result of an output of Japanese influence onto China after 1895, can be read as the reification of the changed power structure of Asia, specifically, the diminishment of Chinese cultural power and the rise of the Japanese empire. Inspired by Arif Dirlik's articulation of the relations of power when studying the discourse of Orientalism (Dirlik, 1995, p.96), Liu's Chinese modernist writing was a product of the unfolding relationship between countries of Asia, signaling a process of power shifting. In sum, the issue was one of political and cultural interaction in East Asia rather than a problem peculiar to Chinese literature alone.

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#### Notes

Note 1. The English name of Jesuit Université L'Aurore is Shanghai Aurora University.

Note 2. I have used pinyin and Hepburn Romanization for Chinese and Japanese terms respectively. In both languages exceptions are made for words and place names that are familiarly used in English, such as Tokyo and Kuomintang.

Note 3. Literary modernism, a self-conscious movement in China, started in the middle 1920s and was initiated by two groups: the symbolism poetry of Li Jinfu (1900–1976) and Dai Wangshu (1905–1950) who learned from French symbolism and the Neo-Sensationalism of Liu Na'ou, Mu Shiyong (1912–1940), and Shi Zhecun (1905–2003). Due to the dominant communist ideology, research into Chinese modernist writing in contemporary China only started to gain attention in 1985 due to the efforts of Yan Jiayan in Peking University. Yan's study recognizes the Chinese Neo-Sensationalism led by Liu as the initial Chinese modernist stories and the first modernist literary school in modern China. In this article, I follow this acknowledgement, regarding Liu as one of the founders of Chinese modernist writing.

Note 4. According to Edward W. Said, modern European imperialism itself is a constitutively and radically different type of overseas domination from all of the earlier forms that had existed long before the scramble for Africa in the late 1870s.

Note 5. Tai-nan is an eastern coastal region of Taiwan.

Note 6. See news of the publication the Council for Cultural Affairs website of: <http://www.cca.gov.tw/artnews.do?method=findById&id=1222852532381>

Note 7. Newspapers printed in Chinese were entirely prohibited in Taiwan after 1937.

Note 8. The term May Fourth movement, which started on May 4, 1919 as a student demonstration against the Chinese government's weak response to the Treaty of Versailles, also refers to the New Culture Movement spanning from the 1910s almost to the 1930s. One significant cultural dimension of the May Fourth movement is the literary revolution that advocated the reformation of the Chinese written language.