

LITERARY RESONANCES AGAINST IDEOLOGICAL ECHO CHAMBERS: WU ZHUOLIU'S *ORPHAN OF ASIA* AND THE NECESSITY OF WORLD LITERATURE

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552 ACOUSTIC METAPHORS AND THE POST-CRITICAL

In a meeting report delivered at Menlo Park, California in 1989, Stephen Greenblatt reiterated his influential ideas on New Historicism and offered two key concepts with regards to the effects of artworks upon their audiences. Highlighted in the title of the report, "Resonance and Wonder," these two concepts may correspond to different modes of critique dominating the studies of literature and culture today:

By "resonance" I mean the power of the object displayed to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which, as metaphor or more simply, as metonymy, it may be taken by a viewer to stand. By "wonder" I mean the power of the object displayed to stop the viewer in his tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention. (Greenblatt 19-20)

In the specific case he is discussing, Greenblatt perceives the contextual matters framing an artwork in an exhibition as catalysts for resonance and would rather do away with them so as to give way to the more organic reactions of wonder it can induce upon its audiences. In other words, he thinks that the spontaneity of the audience's appreciation of art is more effectively activated and better preserved without them reading any background or explanatory information on the works on display. However, to take these terms more abstractly or metaphorically, we can observe that "resonance" leans towards the more conventional investigation of the contexts in which a given text or artwork has been conceived, produced, and received, and the methods used to enable the investigation of such enabling structures are usually rationalist, empiricist, or analytical, constituting an intellectual tradition from

the times of René Descartes that can be called the critical (Cohen 172). By contrast, “wonder” is immediate, reactive, and emotional, which, in a new-historicist fashion, approximates the affective turn in critical theory and tends to aspects of the reception of a given text or artwork that are less formal, calculated, or dialectical. As such, “wonder” seems to approach what Rita Felski terms “the post-critical,” a way of reading with an emphasis on “the transtemporal movement of texts and their lively agency” (173).

For Greenblatt, the concept of resonance has affinities with the school of New Historicism, because the latter’s main concern with literary texts “has been to recover as far as possible the historical circumstances of their original production and consumption and to analyze the relationship between these circumstances and our own” (20). Between critique and appreciation, Greenblatt advocates for the latter and makes it clear that an *a priori* preoccupation with contexts and structures in New Historicism hinders the act of interpretation since “the impact of most exhibitions is likely to be greater if the initial appeal is wonder—a wonder that then leads to the desire for resonance for it is easier to pass from wonder to resonance than from resonance to wonder” (34). Notably, in Greenblatt’s ideal interpretative paradigm, wonder and resonance are not mutually exclusive but should better come into effect in that exact order: wonder first, resonance second.

553

However, by dictating this ideal order of things, Greenblatt does assume that wonder and resonance are always separate entities or processes that share no temporal or operative overlaps. That is why I would argue that his conceptualization of wonder only *seems* to approach Felski’s formulation of the post-critical. Felski’s focus on “the transtemporal movement of texts” stresses qualities of sustained relevance and broad appeal but does not necessarily ignore the significance of contexts and their impact on the ontological and phenomenological conditions surrounding the texts in question. The “post-” in “post-critical” does not mark a total departure from the convention of text-context investigation. Instead, it is an opposition to the ideological rigidity with which critique is often carried out: a “hermeneutics of suspicion” seeking to uncover “a text’s oppressive effects” and “gesturing toward the hidden forces that explain everything” (Felski 171). To be more specific, the postcritical is not concerned with the dyad of text and context *per se*, but is rather dissatisfied with the dominant ways in which they are pitted against each other: colonial masterpieces versus postcolonial reevaluations, patriarchal characters versus feminist criticisms, heteronormative plotlines versus queer radical ideals, ableist attitudes versus critical disability studies; the list of such binaries of resistances can go on. The hermeneutics of suspicion in much conventional critique demands that the critic “stand back” and “dig down,” and treat the texts at hand dispassionately and take as his/her mission the discovery of their complicities with oppressive sociocultural forces (Felski 52). Against this demand, and inspired by Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, Felski therefore defines postcritical reading as “the process of tracing the interconnections, attachments, and conflicts among actors and mediators as they come into view”

(171). In other words, post-critical reading does not separate wonder and resonance as such and asserts that contextual matters can be approached in tandem with the positive affects of identification, amazement, or appreciation that come *with*, rather than *against*, resonances.

554

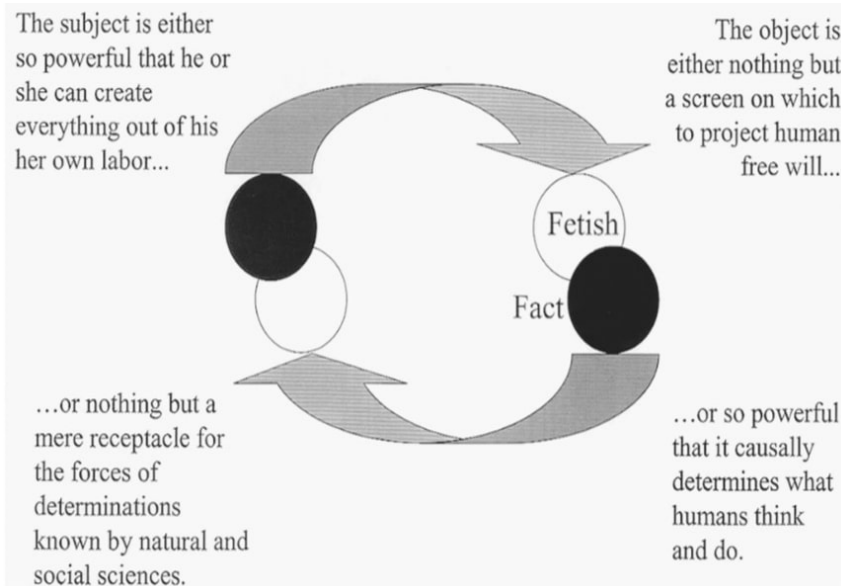


Figure 1. "The Critical Trick" as conceptualized by Bruno Latour (241).

Indeed, a combination of wonder and resonance is needed because the practice of cultural critique has often been caught up in what Latour calls "the critical trick" (see Figure 1). As the image above demonstrates, the critical trick is a kind of performance of analysis used by the critic that involves diagnostical totalizations of both the object's (the literary text) constructedness and the subject's (the reader) inability to escape contextual determinations. As such, the subject's free will is only acknowledged in order to dismiss the agency or affective power of the object as a kind of fetish, and then this free will is in turn denied when the object's power to deliver and effect sociocultural forces becomes the emphasis. The critical trick thus forms a tautological circle based on an overwhelmingly deterministic logic with regard to the agency of all the participants of culture put under the critical gaze, leading Latour to make the sarcastic declaration that "the critic is always right!" (240). Therefore, in order to break away from such circular and deterministic logic, the postcritical approach must draw on other elements of analysis that transcend the prioritization of contextual matters as well as the condescending self-positioning of the critic as objective, from the outside, and thus almost omniscient. In other words, it is against the predominance of this critical trick that wonder and resonance come together

to actualize and bond with each other. On the one hand, to intermix wonder and resonance is to refuse to approach texts from some preconceived utopian politics based on categories of identity and the universal desirability of equality. On the other hand, to synchronize wonder and resonance in integrative acts of interpretation does not mean the complete abandonment of political awareness, but rather the ability to read both politically and affirmatively without reducing texts to passive products of determining structures or judging their readers with negative sentiments against their naïvetés or complicities.

The necessity of such intermixing and syncing is also the key idea outlined in Wai Chee Dimock's essay "A Theory of Resonance." In this essay, Dimock takes up the acoustic metaphor in Greenblatt's report and argues against his "assumption that noise is distracting, distorting, disruptive of the fragile artifact" (1062). For Dimock, resonances, or "background noises," are desirable. They constitute "not [...] the text's timeless strength but [...] its *timeful* unwieldiness" (1062; emphasis in original), and as a result, literature always remains incomplete when read diachronically, because a given text's existence and relevance are made possible only through an ongoing process of being read differently under different sociohistorical circumstances. According to her, noise, resonance, and effects of wonder, are all but blended together:

555

Noise includes all those circumstances that complicate readers' relations to a text: circumstances that, filling their heads and ringing in their ears, make them uninnocent readers, who encroach on the text with assumptions, expectations, convictions. Noise includes all those circumstances that so quicken the pulse, so sensitize the interpretive faculties, as to call forth unexpected nuances from words composed long ago. An effect of historical change, noise is a necessary feature of a reader's meaning-making process. And even as it impinges on texts, even as it reverberates through them, it thickens their tonality, multiplies their hearable echoes, makes them significant in unexpected ways. Noise is the condition for the enduring resonance of texts, not a nuisance that endangers them. (1063)

The main idea of this article so far is clear: wonder and resonance are not only inseparable but work in tandem and in relation to each other. Even for an art object marked with no textual details or other contextual cues, its visual referentiality is likely to be multiplied at the moment of encounter with a spectator, who may instantaneously link it to similar works in memory or seek to explain its style with existing terminologies and categories. For the same reason, the difficulty to separate and regulate the order of wonder and resonance becomes most apparent in the reading of a text informed by historical events and lived experiences. Although the text does not have to be a strictly historical novel in the sense of actively imagining and reconstructing a lost past, the historical events incorporated into that text require the reader to have some knowledge of the contexts it is addressing, and in this process the text contributes to the reader's acquirement of this very knowledge. Therefore, such texts can serve as apt examples of how a post-critical reading works. To demonstrate this, the second half of this article focuses on the Taiwanese author Wu Zhuoliu's novel *Orphan of*

Asia as a text rich in literary resonances. This text is also deliberately chosen in order to counter the entrenched hierarchical division between Western critical theory and non-Western local materials, in which the latter tend to be reduced to passive objects of ideological critique rather than active agents of paradigmatic change that can challenge and revise the assumed wisdom of the former. Despite, or perhaps owing to, its canonical status in Taiwanese literature, extant scholarship on Wu's novel has rarely explored its analytical dimensions and their meta-critical implications beyond the minor geocultural context of Taiwan and the tireless questioning of identity with regards to not only categorical but often tautological conceptualizations of "Japaneseness," "Chineseness," or "Taiwaneseeness." Although these allegorical and identitarian aspects of *Orphan of Asia* cannot be ignored, it is how the novel necessarily escapes and thus calls for meta-academic reflections on such established criticisms that is worthy of note and further theorization. However, before embarking on a close reading of Wu's novel informed by the post-critical, it is necessary to

556 explore possible conceptual differences between resonances and echoes, which both Dimock and Felski have largely been using interchangeably.

RESONANCES AND ECHOES: CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES

Although phrases such as "hearable echoes" repeatedly feature in her article, Dimock does not attempt any conceptual differentiation between resonances and echoes in her metaphorical envisioning of literary studies as a "field of sensitized hearing [...] transposed into an aural phenomenon, a narrative voice; the way certain overtones are taken as significant overtones, certain echoes as significant echoes" (1066). For her, "every language resembles an echo chamber, the tones and accents of former users interacting with those of subsequent ones" (1062), and Felski repeats this view by describing the work of resonance as a means "to trigger unexpected echoes in unexpected places" (160). In both Dimock's and Felski's theoretical formulations, the acoustic metaphor of the echo chamber is a totality of the ways in which language works or the processes through which literary or artistic resonances sustain and regenerate themselves across space and time. Not only does this conflation of resonances and echoes revert to the risks of diagnostical totalization mentioned above, it also misses an opportunity to further clarify how theorizations of resonance can perform both critical and post-critical readings, and, more importantly, how the subtle differences between resonances and echoes can be used conceptually and in more concrete practices of literary analysis.

First of all, even the most straightforward linguistic definitions of these two terms would not warrant the equivalence of resonances to echoes. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the foremost definition of resonance is "the reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection or by the synchronous vibration of a surrounding space or a neighboring object," and its more metaphorical usage related to human

communication points towards “sympathetic response” (*OED.com*). By contrast, an echo, as a noun, is defined as “a repetition of sounds, which is produced by the reflexion of the sound-waves” (*OED.com*). When used more figuratively, the crux of its meaning remains in the keyword “repetition”: “a repetition or close imitation, chiefly of things that can be compared to speech, voice, or sound (e.g. a writer’s thoughts or style), but occasionally with wider meaning; an enfeebled reproduction” (*OED.com*). The difference should be clear: resonances are “synchronous” and “sympathetic,” while echoes are “repetitive” and “enfeebled.” Taking these concepts as acoustic metaphors for the modes of communication between different cultures or between Self and Other, we must note that resonance carries positive connotations and should be mutually transformative for both parties involved, whereas echoes are merely more of the same, which inevitably decline in volume and strength. This difference is also apparent in the fact that *resonance* as a noun can be both countable and uncountable, so that it can denote both a series of phenomena and a *modus operandi*, whereas the word *echo*, when used as a noun, is almost always countable and thus has to be read as a reactive action or a series of such actions only. Moreover, the negative connotations of echoing are made even clearer in the phrase “echo chamber,” which literally means a confined space in which echoes are reproduced and trapped, and this combination of acoustic repetition and spatial enclosure makes its figurative usage quite common when referring to entrenched beliefs: effects of categorical thinking driven by socioeconomic, political, and ideological divisions. Therefore, I would propose that further conceptual differentiations between resonances and echoes can help us clarify and tease out what may be easily confused in Dimock’s and Felski’s paradigms of reading.

557

This differentiation between resonances and echoes as separate modes of communication is also a key idea in Hartmut Rosa’s seminal work *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (2019), and he adopts these concepts to discuss, in much more abstract terms, how the subject relates to the world: “resonance is not an echo, but a responsive relationship, requiring that both sides *speak with their own voice*” (174; emphasis in original). It is essential in a resonant relationship that “subject and world are mutually affected and transformed” (174). Similarly, to practice Felski’s proposal of the post-critical requires the capturing of these resonant relationships as well as an alertness against echoes both within and outside a certain text.

Combining these ideas from semantics and social theory, what I want to suggest is that, because the post-critical approach to literary resonances does not, and admittedly cannot, do away with the contextual awareness of conventional modes of critique and operate with Greenblatt’s “wonder” only, the post-critical only ceases to be when literary resonances are reduced to discursive echoes confined within disciplinary boundaries that can be called ideological echo chambers. The resemblances or links between ideological repetitions and echo chambers here are more than just metaphorical: the former is often built into the latter through the power of discourse, which, in Michel Foucault’s well-known discussions, refers to “ways of constituting

knowledge [...] and forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them" (Weedon 108). That is to say, discourse, as forms of speech or speech acts recorded and represented in writing, has an inherent quality pertaining to sound, or what Dimock calls "noise," which materializes ideological repetitiveness and circularity in spatial terms, in echo chambers of knowledge production governed by power relations.

558 Nowhere is this constitution and production of knowledge more direct and prominent than the making of academic discourses, and it is when academic discourses form certain *a priori* paradigms of knowledge production that the effects of ideological echo chambers become most manifest. For instance, a postcolonial reinterpretation of *The Tempest* based on the identification of Caliban as the ultimate colonial victim is a form of critical reading that affirms the resonant qualities of the text in, for example, activating practices of New Historicist sympathy. However, when this critical reading poses itself as the *only* legitimate or even correct mode of analysis with regard to this specific character, is repeated and reinforced as a given by subsequent readings in the same discipline, such as postcolonial studies, and then forecloses alternative angles of interpreting this precolonial text in a confined field of study, this discipline or field of study becomes an echo chamber in which the practitioners of criticism (the postcolonialists?) always already agree with one another and thus fall into a circular logic of repetition resembling Latour's chart. In other words, *The Tempest*, like most canonical literature, is a text full of resonances, and if the postcolonial school cannot offer a way of reading that goes beyond the predetermined use of the binary allegory of Prospero/colonizer versus Caliban/colonial victim, it becomes an ideological echo chamber, with repetitive academic discourses trapped inside and gradually losing their critical urgency and purchase. Most importantly, it must be stressed that what makes up echo chambers are usually entrenched ways of reading, but not the texts being read. Most creative works generate literary resonances open to interpretation, and to sustain their critical power and theoretical relevance, academic disciplines and their corresponding methods of critique themselves should be wary of the rigidity of echoes.

Resonances and echoes can manifest as practices of interpretation and communication not only in the comments made by readers and literary critics, but also in the events and human interactions depicted in the texts. As such, the post-critical is not entirely free from "the hermeneutics of suspicion" or "symptomatic reading" that picks up negative elements in a text, since the alertness against echoes necessarily demands this suspicion (Felski 67). However, the post-critical can retain the literary resonance and wonder generated by a text via more complex differentiations between what it *is* and what it *does*. In other words, literary content matters more than the evaluative labels of critical judgement applied to a text's conditions of production and reception. For example, the post-critical approach is not interested in whether a creative work can be called "racist" simply because it features racist characters, is published in a racist sociocultural environment, or is written by an author with a

confirmed history of racist actions and views. Instead, it may seek to uncover the text's own uneasiness or suspicion against racialized worldviews as echoes, or use it as a case study to reflect on the hermeneutic causes and academic effects of ideological reductionism in the deterministic usages of labels such as "racist." As a method of reading that focuses on the complex content of a text rather than the qualifying categories around it, the post-critical resonates strongly with ideas of circulation, creativity, and openness expressed in much of the ongoing debates in world literature, and as the final section of this article contends, world literature as a revived concept will find its new *raison d'être* in offering an open disciplinary space for minor texts with strong literary resonances.

ORPHAN OF ASIA: FOUR MOMENTS OF ALIENATION AND THE ECHO CHAMBERS OF READING

559

Orphan of Asia is a canonical text that has generated a diverse range of readings in Taiwanese academia, as well as Chinese literary studies in Anglophone academia, and yet remains much lesser known in the wider field of world literature. Wu Zhuoliu wrote this autobiographical novel in Japanese, and he had to do so in secret since the Second World War was becoming intense in East Asia in the early 1940s. To be more specific, as Japan was tightening its control on colonies such as Taiwan on all fronts, a novel written in the colonizer's language depicting colonial injustices and anticolonial struggles would put its author in a very dangerous position. It is thus understandable that *Orphan of Asia* was not published in full in Japan until 1956, and the first Chinese translation appeared only in 1959.¹ Such colonial and oppressive contexts of writing and publication directly render it a piece of minor literature in relation to both Japanese and Chinese literary traditions. In their discussion of Kafka, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define minor literature as "minority constructs within a major language" (16-17) characterized by being political and collective at the same time. *Orphan of Asia* certainly fits into this definition, as a Japanese-language novel written by a Taiwanese author. Furthermore, it is exactly the novel's political observations that have given it such collective value for the Taiwanese people, resulting in its canonization in the various constructions of Taiwanese literary history, itself a minor cultural and academic field marginalized in East Asian studies or Euro-American-dominated concepts of world literature.

The novel narrates the life journey of its protagonist Hu Taiming, which spans almost the entire period of Japan's colonial occupation of Taiwan between 1895 and 1945. Born into an ethnically Han family of the old gentility class just a few years after Taiwan was ceded by the Qing dynasty of China to Japan, Taiming experiences both classical Chinese education and modern Japanese education. Without a strong ambition of his own, his encounters with various forms of discrimination and forces of historical circumstances bring him to Japan, mainland China, and back to the

island of Taiwan. Despite the confusion caused by a series of geopolitical displacements, Taiming has many chances to shift his loyalty towards specific ideologies and struggles, including Chinese nationalism, Taiwanese nativism, and collaboration with Japanese imperialism, and yet he is unable to remain fully committed to any of them. The novel also depicts his family's gradual decline as they are increasingly victimized by the exploitative policies of the colonial government. Wu ends the story with a short and ambiguous chapter, in which a mad Taiming is rumoured to have gone to mainland China again to participate in the anti-Japanese war there.

560 Realist in tone and rich in descriptions of historical events of its time, Wu's novel is a strong counterexample against Greenblatt's ideal of separating resonance from wonder. Even readers unfamiliar with modern East Asian history will have gained much knowledge of the region during the Second World War upon finishing it. More importantly, the novel's affective dimensions are woven into the plot developments to such an extent that readers may identify with Taiming's experiences of alienation even though these experiences are highly historically specific. In other words, knowledge, identification, and universalizable reactions against alienation take place in no particular order as they make up this text's moments of wonder for the readers. If resonance must be, as Rosa emphasizes, "mutually transformative," then alienation may be described as its "antithesis" (184). Rosa characterizes alienation as negative affects such as "repulsion," "indifference," and "hostility" (184). It indicates "a state in which the world cannot be 'adaptively transformed' and so always appears cold, rigid, repulsive, and non-responsive" (184). As such, alienation often results from, or manifests as, communication failures, and is thus concomitant with Rosa's idea of echoes: when two individuals are trapped in two different echo chambers, their voices are alienated from each other. In fact, it is not possible for anyone outside of the echo chamber to resonate with the individual trapped within, because as Rosa emphasizes, resonance must be mutually transformative. It is also important to recognize that the concepts of resonance, alienation, and echoes are applicable to both the fictional world depicted in a novel and the actual world in which it exists as an object for critique, or across these worlds when we are examining existing readings of a novel. *Orphan of Asia* provides a good example of such crossings, because it is precisely Wu's depiction of the moments of alienation in Taiming's life that has connected and resonated with readers and critics.

To start with the fictional world depicted in the novel, we can identify four key moments of alienation when Taiming's attempts to resonate with other characters fail, in the sense that no mutually transformative effects take place as a result of these communication efforts. The first moment occurs in Taiming's unsuccessful pursuit of interracial romance. On his first job teaching in a middle school, he becomes enamored by Naito Hisako, a fellow teacher from Japan, but her casual racist remarks often remind him of "the unbridgeable abyss that separated them, he Taiwanese and she Japanese" (Wu, *Orphan* 29). He is eventually rejected by Naito on the basis of racial difference. Taiming's attempt to resonate with her via the transformative power of

romantic love is therefore flawed from the very beginning; his attraction to her is intertwined with the colonial attraction towards Japanese culture:

The plump and fragrant legs of a Japanese woman—and how like a butterfly, how charmingly her hands hopped from breeze to breeze! [...] And on those rare occasions when she was walking around in her beautiful kimono, her obi puffing out at her back, Hisako's inexpressible allure also was not to be underestimated...Taiming washed Naito Hisako in his pool of ideals. She was the spotless gown of the celestial nymph, the perfect woman, almost an idol. (Wu, *Orphan* 29)

Wu often employs free indirect discourse to present Taiming's inner thoughts and mixes them with the third person omniscient narrative. Taiming characterizes Naito's beauty according to bodily features explicitly marked as "Japanese" and cultural objects such as the kimono and obi. Taiming's obsession with Naito's "Japaneseness" is more obvious when he appears nonchalant towards the affection expressed by a Taiwanese colleague, Rui'e. As such, his desire for resonance with Naito is tainted by colonial contradictions, since any demand for Naito to transform herself and resonate with Taiming as lovers would necessarily dissolve the sense of superiority Taiming associates with her and thus destroy the very foundation of his obsession. This may also explain why, upon realizing the self-contradictory aspects of Naito's superiority complex vis-à-vis the Taiwanese, Taiming internalizes his sense of racial and cultural inferiority even more:

561

Naito Hisako said things like, "I bet you've never taken a bath in your whole life, Mr. Hu, people on this island just don't," and complained that he stank of garlic. But Taiming never ate garlic. She never tired of saying, "What can you expect of these people?" [...] she could not help but acknowledge her sense of superiority [...] When a whole roasted chicken appeared on the table [at a local party], Hisako leaned toward Taiming and whispered, "Are we barbarians or what?" Once she had a bite, she declared it delicious and started chewing like a pig, succumbing to the exquisite, artless taste born of that people's wisdom that she had just now ridiculed as barbaric. She never noticed the contradiction, namely, that her arrogance fed on ignorance. The heedless stupidity with which she gorged herself showed that she was just another woman.

Taiming was not unaware of this. It was just that her faults tended to fuel his passion rather than dampen it. "Then my blood is," he thought, "polluted after all. It's my karma I must overcome..." (Wu, *Orphan* 29-30)

Taiming and Naito are alienated from each other as both of them have internalized the colonial hierarchy to the extent that any attempt at building a resonant, or mutually transformative, relationship would only end up producing more entrapped echoes reflecting their fixed identity positions in this hierarchy. Indeed, as long as Taiming must identify himself through essentialist notions of race and blood, he cannot truly overcome the oppressive force of alienation maintained by Japanese imperialism. His coping mechanism is to escape from the colonial society of Taiwan so that he can be free from the various forms of discrimination Taiwanese teachers would face in a school system dominated by Japanese headmasters and officials. He chooses to go to Japan for further studies. Ironically, but not surprisingly, the sense

of alienation he suffered only intensifies during his stay in Japan. Perhaps for fear of unnecessary trouble and discrimination, soon after Taiming arrives in Tokyo his friend Lan asks him “not to tell anyone you’re from Taiwan. They say our Japanese sounds like Kyushu dialect, so tell them you’re from Fukuoka or Kumamoto” (Wu, *Orphan* 55). When, during dinner, a Japanese servant girl asks them where they are from, Lan quickly answers for Taiming and lies about their place of origin, causing Taiming to feel “shame” and “self-hatred” (Wu, *Orphan* 56). Needless to say, this self-defensive, almost compulsory, erasure of their Taiwanese-ness in Japan only confirms the inferior status of the colonized.

562 However, this binary hierarchy of colonizer and colonized is soon complicated by Taiming’s encounter with mainland Chinese students in Japan, and this encounter can be taken as Taiming’s second significant moment of alienation. While attending an anti-imperialist lecture organized by the Academic Association of China in Tokyo, Taiming breaks the rule of compulsory erasure and tells the Chinese students that he is Taiwanese. He does so not only because he wants to shed his sense of inferiority to start anew in Japan, but also because he is moved by the Chinese students’ “sincerity (*shuaizhi* 率直)” (Wu, *Yaxiya* 96). It is thus possible that Taiming feels the potential for resonance in the anti-imperialist spirit of these Chinese students and assumes that he could build solidarity with them. However, upon learning that Taiming is from Taiwan, the Chinese student he was talking to then “sneered in disgust and, with obvious contempt, quickly strode away,” and the others also murmured, “He might be a spy” (Wu, *Orphan* 62). Interestingly, before Taiming revealed his Taiwanese identity, the Chinese students, upon hearing his Taiwanese dialect, had mistaken him for “Hakka Cantonese” and even introduced several other Cantonese “compatriots” to Taiming (Wu, *Orphan* 61). These details reveal that ethnic and linguistic differences are taken superficially and do not necessarily exclude the Taiwanese from the anti-imperialist vision of the Chinese students; it is, rather, their preconceived ideas about Taiwanese disloyalty that make them suspicious of people such as Taiming.

It is thus understandable that from the perspective of ordinary Taiwanese people such as Taiming, the colonial oppression from the Japanese they face in Taiwan and the anticolonial suspicion from the Chinese they face when abroad are not that different after all. Both operate within preformulated discursive boundaries of identity and solidarity that always already exclude the Taiwanese as colonized, and thus inferior, subjects. These discursive boundaries produce ideological echo chambers and leave the Taiwanese in a liminal space of alienation, unable to participate in, let alone transform, these exclusory systems. In other words, Taiming’s second moment of alienation embodies and reifies the triangulation of (anti)colonial ideologies of Japan, China, and Taiwan, in which both Japanese imperialism and Chinese nationalism are exclusionary forces with which the Taiwanese cannot fully resonate, as they only demand the Taiwanese to be coopted into lesser positions without any reforms in the *a priori* constructions of Japanese and Chinese identities in the respective pro-

cesses. Trapped in the intersectional limbo created by these forces, Taiming's sense of alienation gradually develops into a kind of self-recognition, which may be called his orphan consciousness:

Taiming is not born an orphan, he as a migrant is made to feel like an orphan. In the story, "orphan" is not so much a being, but an existence, as it is an emotional realization, a sense of abandonment that originates from a series of overdetermined historical factors that lead to migratory movements. (Tsai 35)

Notably, as the story develops, Taiming's sense of abandonment is worsened not just by more physical displacements but also by a kind of mental and cultural immobility with regard to his imaginary pursuit of an eternal past. As Xiaojue Wang points out, readers and critics alike tend to focus too much on the political triangulation of Taiwan, Japan, and China in the story and ignore the temporal dimension of Taiming's identity formation. Throughout the story, the influence of the classical Chinese education he received in his childhood is always present, and his grandfather's "transcendentalist (*chaoran* 超然)" (Wu, *Yaxiya* 7) attitude to politics and reality was also rooted in Taiming via the naturalist or Taoist figures he read, such as Tao Yuanming, Laozi, and Mozi. However, what his life experiences ultimately confirm is "the very arrival of the modern age that relentlessly destroys his dream imagery of classical Chinese civilization" (Wang 191). After he finishes his studies in Japan, Taiming returns to Taiwan to work on a farm for a while, but he soon realizes that the idyllic hermit lifestyle depicted in Tao Yuanming's poems is not achievable, as the Japanese government started to implement more exploitative agricultural policies and would constantly send officials to disrupt farm life with their didactic speeches. Taiming's mother is also beaten by Japanese workers as she tries to prevent them from turning the Hu family's ancestral cemetery into a sugarcane field. These incidents at home propel him to consider leaving again, and this time his desire for escape is directed towards mainland China, where he imagines he will be free to search for concrete embodiments of the ideas he read in classical literature:

Across the study flew the book he was reading, followed by the cry: "And Tao Yuanming doesn't help!" The questions that Taiming had pondered on and off since his earliest days, the questions that seemed to appear when he could not answer them, were in fact always there, submerged in his memory, lying there calmly, waiting to be stirred up by fresh information, new turbulence. He began to dream of a place where he might breathe more freely: across the sea a continent beckoned wildly. (Wu, *Orphan* 86-87)

Considering his negative experiences with the Chinese students in Japan, it may appear strange that Taiming still associates China with freedom at this point. However, if we take the temporal dimension of his imaginary view of China into account, it becomes clear that this view pertains to a kind of willful ignorance, a romanticized fantasy about a frozen past, which conveniently overlooks China's rapid modernization under the pressure of both Western and Japanese imperialisms. The shattering of this romantic view constitutes the third important moment of

alienation for Taiming. At the beginning of his time in Nanking—then the capital of mainland China controlled by a collaborationist government under strong Japanese influence—Taiming seems to have built many meaningful relationships. His Taiwanese colleague Zeng, who brought him to work on the mainland, is helpful, encouraging him to learn Mandarin and integrate himself into the struggle against Japanese imperialism in China. He then marries Shuchun, a student at the school at which he taught, and has a daughter with her. However, things soon fall apart, when Taiming finds out that marital life is not as peaceful as he imagined. The force of modernity is actively absorbed by the urban Chinese in movements advocating the creation of “New Women” and “New Culture,” which challenge the traditional patriarchal structure of Chinese society. Shuchun becomes interested in these movements and often uses progressive ideas about female independence and modernization of culture as excuses for her gambling and dancing, to the point that Taiming has to take care of the family in the role of a traditional woman. Moreover,

564 Taiming’s inability to indulge in Shuchun’s materialist pursuit of Chinese modernity is contrasted by his neighbour Lai, an overseas Chinese from Malaya who graduated from the prestigious Fudan University in Shanghai. Despite Taiming’s disapproval of the game, Lai’s quasi-addictive passion for mahjong seems to have helped him integrate into Chinese society much better than Taiming could. Later, Taiming is greatly annoyed when Lai buys Shuchun a pair of fashionable shoes from Shanghai. He is disgusted not only by Lai, but also with Shuchun: “Targeted at women who fell for the newfangled, the gaudy design was exactly what Shuchun liked. Taiming did not say anything but saw the smug expression on Lai’s face and wanted to kill him” (Wu, *Orphan* 125). As such, his dream to resonate with the traditional China he saw as a place of freedom leads to a profound sense of disillusionment. His experiences in Nanking prove that the discursive power classical Chinese literature had on him cannot be mobilized in any effective way to fit into the contemporary developments of Chinese society. Taiming’s China dream is thus mere wishful thinking that cannot transform the people with whom he interacts, and ends up as echoes ringing in his own head. With Zeng’s arrest for his patriotic activities against the collaborationist government, Taiming has no choice but to abandon his family on the mainland and return to Taiwan as a Japanese subject.

Taiming’s return to Taiwan coincides with the intensification of the *Kōminka* (Japanization) movement on the island. As Japan was conquering more and more territories in East and Southeast Asia in preparation for an all-out war with the Allied Forces, its colonial policies shifted from benign cooptation to drastic assimilation, and once again Taiming is unable to keep up with the social changes and gradually drifts towards his final moment of alienation. Taiming finds that many people in his hometown have abandoned their Chinese names and adopted new Japanese names to become “distinguished Japanese” (Wu, *Orphan* 180). What is worse, many Taiwanese have also become “pawns of the Japanese” and are “extorting exorbitant taxes from other Taiwanese, all under the guise of a national emergency” (Wu,

Orphan 184). Meanwhile, the Japanese colonial government in Taiwan is becoming increasingly suspicious against Taiwanese who have been to China. As someone who had worked in Nanking, Taiming finds himself facing accusations of being a spy once again, and instead of a Taiwanese spy working for Japanese imperialism, this time the Japanese colonizers and their Taiwanese collaborationists on the island label Taiming a Taiwanese spy working for the Chinese anti-imperial movement. Ironically, such suspicions actually turned those Taiwanese with lived experiences in mainland China into a specific and isolated group, for whom Taiwan could feel like a foreign place instead of home. This explains why Taiming becomes “nostalgic, as if he had bumped into an old friend in a foreign country” (Wu, *Orphan* 205), when he meets a young man who has also recently returned from China.

Moreover, Taiming’s own family has also split up: his cousin Daxiong was working for the Japanese government while his half-brother Zhinan died performing forced labour for a Japanese official. Indeed, if Taiming’s experiences of discrimination and disillusionment in Tokyo and Nanking had driven him back to Taiwan to ponder over possibilities for an united Taiwanese identity that does not depend on either Japan or China, the social divisions and disruptions generated by the *Kōminka* movement in the Taiwanese “homeland” have more or less made such hopes unrealizable, leaving him to feel that “his presence in Taiwan [...] was utterly meaningless” (Wu, *Orphan* 213). The last rational human interaction he has before going mad is to persuade Daxiong to stop bullying the locals on behalf of the Japanese. The speech he gives Daxiong reveals a more fundamental process of alienation characterized by historical nihilism and a strong distrust of ideologies of the nation, and here Wu employs free indirect discourse again to mix up Taiming’s, the omniscient narrator’s, and his own voices:

565

The mass murder that had taken place during the war had been rationalized and even made heroic in the name of “the nation.” Every possible contradiction had originated in the belly of “the nation.” Taking “the nation” as a presupposition had distorted the study of history; textbooks were nothing more than propaganda meant to justify the nation and to protect its power [...]. This education had accustomed people to the idea of nationhood until it became a custom and then finally a system unto itself. The purpose of such a system is to cast human beings into one identical mold. Those who refuse to be made over in such fashion are labeled heretics and troublemakers [...] He declared that if society progressed to the point that those confrontations disappeared, the need for war would disappear along with them. If that time came, war would become nothing more than a barbaric practice existing only in history books. (Wu, *Orphan* 240)

To this point, Taiming’s suspicion and defiance were no longer directed at any particular nation but against the very utility of concepts of nation, education, and history. Projecting his hope onto an abstract future in which all current events would become mere items in history books, Taiming seems to have given up any efforts to resonate with the world as it is. Even though in this speech, he still holds a clear goal of dissuading Daxiong from continuing his bad deeds, he does not base his reasoning on

a moralistic divide between good and evil, but on a deep cynicism against individual agency vis-à-vis the oppressive structures he deemed all-encompassing. In a way, this cynicism anticipates his madness, because he has alienated himself from the world.

All these failed attempts at resonance in the fictional world constructed by Wu Zhuoliu demonstrate the novel's complexity, which is why it generates so many different interpretations by critics from different ideological positions. These interpretations and academic discourses are the extratextual echoes and resonances of this text, and compared to those that are internal to the text, they often appear simplistic and reductive.²

566 The most influential Taiwanese interpretations of *Orphan of Asia* are those of novelist Chen Yingzhen and literary critic Chen Fangming, who are widely known for their sustained disputes about the position of Taiwanese literature and its role in politics. Chen Yingzhen reads the story as a “tragedy [...] of those intellectuals who hesitated and dithered in the great era of Chinese revolution and anti-revolution” (161). He praises the patriotic characters, such as Lan and Zeng, and believes that by returning to the Chinese mainland at the end of the story, Taiming gains a “final victory” and made the right choice in a time of historical turbulence (160). This reading conveniently ignores the ambiguity of the ending and imposes its own political evaluations upon Wu's treatment of the characters, which is not surprising as Chen Yingzhen is known for his leftist, pro-reunification/Chinese nationalist views on Taiwan. By contrast, Chen Fangming, a prominent figure in Taiwan's independence movement, argues that Wu's novel reveals a strong desire for Taiwanese self-determination (qtd. in Wang 182). Similar to Chen Yingzhen's ideological biases that he criticizes, Chen Fangming's reading also prioritizes his own political beliefs and ignores the fact that Taiming's interactions with other Taiwanese in the story are equally disheartening and disillusioning, if not more so. Taiming's madness and supposed abandonment of Taiwan towards the end of the story offer no signs of a strong Taiwanese collective either. As such, the different readings of the same text by the two Chens are in fact echo chambers separated along ideological lines, and later scholars who follow their lines of inquiry are merely repeating their basic ideas without fully acknowledging the text's anticategorical resonance and its potential to transform such political divisions and reductionisms. Their critiques are both preconceived and prescriptive, and their politics overwhelm the complex routes of resonance that the text offers.

As mentioned above, it is against such ideological rigidity that Felski's proposal of the post-critical was conceived. A post-critical approach to a complex text like *Orphan of Asia* does not lament whether it performs enough Chinese nationalism or Taiwanese nativism. Instead, it treats these criticisms as part of the discursive network the text generates, and affirms its irreducible power to resonate with a diverse range of readers and reflect on dominant ways of reading. Apart from the Chens' interpretations, other critics who focus more on the novel's redemptive potentials across political divisions produce less oppositional readings that tend to be more

wary of echo chambers but are not entirely free from ideological advancement, albeit of a more subtle and nuanced sort. For example, Chien-heng Wu reads the ending of the novel as Taiming's pursuit towards "a universal maxim that presupposes equality of humanity regardless of their differences [...] a universal emancipatory politics" (53). In a slightly different fashion, Leo Ching reads Taiming's distrust of the very process of identity formation as a "radical consciousness" that struggles for "a space of hope—a liminal space, an intimation of the antistructure, of what lives in the in-between zone of the personal and the historical" (210).

Combining the insights of these readings, the radical universalism of Wu's novel offers us an opportunity to reflect on established paradigms of interpretation, especially the debate around the allegorical nature of Third World literature. As Margaret Hillenbrand has noted, contemporary Taiwanese cultural production often breaks the assumption held by many critics, including Fredric Jameson and his discontents, that "postcolonial allegory (which strives to subject the imperial past to alternative interpretation) and its postmodern counterpart (which is wary of any attempt at truth)" are incompatible (634). As the case of *Orphan of Asia* shows, her argument can be pushed further to include Taiwanese literatures of the colonial era as well. The novel displays features of the postmodern, as shown in Taiming's speech to Daxiong, and yet Wu's condemnation against Japanese colonialism via descriptions of the people's suffering remains palpable and wholehearted throughout the text. From a post-critical perspective, the novel's wonder and resonance are inseparable from this ability to disrupt established boundaries that define literary genres and methods of investigation. In other words, to be post-critical in this case is to see beyond the echo chambers created by existing ways of reading and acknowledge the text's discursive complexity as the generative core of its wonder and resonance.

567

THE NECESSITY OF "WORLD LITERATURE" FOR THE MINOR

With *Orphan of Asia* as a specific example, this article has sought to demonstrate how the post-critical approach takes more seriously the intricate production and flow of resonance and wonder of the text and explores its potential to challenge pre-conceived and reductive readings. The diverse political and affective responses of readers and critics toward Taiming's constant spatial and temporal displacements, together with Wu's autobiographical employment of actual historical events in the novel, serve to illustrate my key arguments with regards to the concept of resonance in literary and cultural studies: Wonder and resonance cannot be separated; it is productive for resonances and echoes to be conceptually differentiated, and such differentiations can take place at both textual and extra-textual levels; and post-critical reading is not against contextual matters, but instead aims to do justice to a text's wonder and resonance and remains alert against ideological echo chambers created

by the discursive power of reductive interpretations. With these key ideas in mind, I wish to end this article with a brief proposition that the method of post-critical reading and the disciplinary discourse of world literature can work well together to promote the wonder and resonance of minor literatures, especially minority literatures written in dominant languages that reflect political and collective struggles of groups marginalized by both regional (Chinese, Japanese, or East Asian) formations of literary history and Eurocentric selections of international canons.

The post-critical is wary of categories. Indeed, even though *Orphan of Asia* is regarded as one of the most important and representative works of Taiwanese literature, the visibility and influence this geocultural category affords it are very limited. To put it simply, framing its importance this way would not attract readers who do not already pay particular attention to Taiwanese literature, which is itself a minor field of interest both in scholarship and in the global literary marketplace. Similarly, to categorize it as Chinese, Japanese, or more subtly, “Sinophone” or “Japanophone” only emphasizes—and thus rhetorically reinforces—its “marginality” vis-à-vis larger geocultural formations (Shih 28; Workman 702). Though these categorizations may as well cast marginality as a virtue and use it to justify why such works are important for the establishment of more antihegemonic literary canons, the emphasis on linguistic and national parameters would inevitably push them into the “periphery within the periphery” of world literature (Zhang 5). This is especially true if we take on board Franco Moretti’s conceptualization of world literature as “a law of literary evolution” (58) realized by the spread of European literary forms.

However, if we shift our attention to the literary content of the text and what it *does* instead of what it *is* in terms of linguistic, ethnic, or national taxonomies, we may argue that the multilingual features and circulations of *Orphan of Asia*, together with its ability to resonate across political and ideological divides, put it at the center of world literature, not the margins. First, if world literature is literature that circulates beyond its original context and “gains in translation” (Damrosch 281), *Orphan of Asia* definitely qualifies as such. Its complex routes of translation and publication have made it difficult to locate ontologically. The Japanese versions, the Chinese versions, and the English version come together to influence how it will be read, and each version resonates with its readers so differently that it is no longer a singular and unified text, let alone one that can be fully absorbed into national categories. Second, the translational aspect of such novels is not limited to the concrete acts of cross-linguistic remaking. If we take up Rebecca Walkowitz’s idea of “native reading” and approach translation as “medium and origin rather than as afterthought” (4), we can observe that Taiming’s story cannot be read without readers reflecting on their own linguistic distance from what is happening to him during his stays in all those different cultural environments. That is to say, a Chinese reader has to actively imagine how Taiming talks to Hisako in Japanese and how he worries about his Taiwanese accent in Japan, whereas a Japanese reader has to do the same with regard to the scenes in which he is discriminated against by the Chinese students in Japan or quar-

relling with his wife in Nanking, and readers of the English translation have to carry their imagination about these scenes happening in different languages throughout the text. What this means is that *Orphan of Asia* is a multilingual, multiversion set of texts that no monolingual reader can read natively, as it demands that each reader recognize his/her own limits as reflected by the texts' "worldliness"—their "sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency" (Said 39). Therefore, if we take such antinative functionalities as the essential features of world literature, *Orphan of Asia* would actually be more qualified and representative than many monolingual classics.

Last, and most importantly, despite the various ways it has been defined and disputed, the most legitimate reason for world literature to exist as a disciplinary space is the pragmatic benefits it can offer minor literatures that are rich in literary resonances, like *Orphan of Asia*, which would otherwise be marginalized under other disciplines such as Japanese literature, Chinese literature, or postcolonial literatures. This inclusion of the minor must be selective. Namely, not all Taiwanese literature can be categorized as world literature simply by being Taiwanese; instead, world literature performs its pragmatic disciplinary functions by highlighting qualities of resonance and wonder in particular texts that have not been included or discussed in major paradigms of literary history or studies. With an emphasis on texts' "world-making" powers, a more philosophical, as opposed to political, take on world literature shares many affinities with post-critical reading in its attention to textual resonances and in its caution against echo chambers that limit the power of literature to transform (Cheah 2). Equipped with the post-critical opposition to confining categories and ideological echoes, world literature may as well become an emancipatory force of "semantic democracy" (Dimock 1068), in which the textual and the extratextual can resonate with wonder.

569

NOTES

1. For the novel's complicated publication history, see Chu Yuzhi (236-37). As this article is written in English, I use Ioannis Mentzas's 2006 English translation from the original Japanese text for most of my quotations from this novel. However, where appropriate, I will also compare the English text to the widely-used Chinese translation, which at times offers important nuances that are crucial to some of the points under discussion. Rather than Gu Fan and Yang Zhaoqi's 1959 translation, the Chinese version I refer to in this article is Fu Enrong's 1962 translation (republished in 1995), which is still in circulation and thus much more influential. For the sake of clarity, the English translation is cited as *Orphan* while the Chinese version is cited as *Yaxiya*. This multilingual reading process is part of the post-critical approach, which acknowledges the multifaceted literary resonances the novel generates across languages and contexts and recognizes that all these different versions are mutually constitutive in making up its wonder. Ideally, I would also consult the Japanese original more thoroughly, but the Japanese version has not been reprinted and remains largely inaccessible. A more detailed trilingual reading could be undertaken by researchers fluent in Japanese.
2. As the focus of this article is on the limits of critique with regards to a more theoretical usage of resonance, I have left out more conventional discussions of the novel's crosstextual influences. For example, many critics have noted its similarities with Yu Dafu's short stories about Chinese student

life in Japan. The singer Luo Dayou has also adapted the novel's title for his song about the precarious position of Taiwan in the 1970s. See Wang (200) for the relevant discussions.

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571

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